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COLUMNISTS

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The smell of things to come

02 July 2009

[Of the five senses, the sense of smell is the most neglected by marketers. Technology is available to help change this and engage the consumer's senses even further, Charles Ash elaborates.](#)

I recently rented a quirky Hollywood movie called "Perfume". The subject of the movie was a rather odd and not oft dealt with subject, "the fleeting realm of 'scent'". It got me thinking about how, of all the senses, the sense of smell is possibly the most neglected facet of a product's make-up and almost never considered as part of a marketer's armoury when targeting or engaging with consumers.

How important is scent? Well, according to leading scent and taste technology company, [ScentSational Technologies](#):

- Of the five senses, smell is the only one that has a direct pathway to the brain.
- Smell is our only sense that's initially processed in the limbic lobe - the brain's emotional center.

I have my reservations about the first claim as when I drive past a KFC outlet, I swear my nose is connected to my stomach as I almost always feel an urge to pit-stop for a Streetwise Two after the pervasive, characteristic KFC aroma has wafted through my car and rendered me helpless.

While scenting technologies for packaging have been around for some time now, there seems to be a reluctance by marketers to use scent and taste technologies to further distinguish their brands in the market. For example, given two flyers advertising a new car, I think I'll most likely be drawn to the one that emits the subtle, powerful, addictive "new car smell" rather than the one that's boring and odourless. And wouldn't it be cool if the Apple iPhone actually came in packaging that smelt like freshly picked apples? How about movie tickets that had the faint smell of fresh popcorn, or travel agent brochures that give off a breezy seaside scent? These are just a few examples of how smell can be used to enhance a customer's contact experience with your product or service.

ScentSational Technologies seem to be leading the charge in this industry with a number of pre-packaged solutions for the FMCG and food industries. Companies can have scented cups, bottles, boxes, bags, lids and a number of other items imbued with a scent of their choice. Research also points to the way in which smell has a powerful effect on taste and the perception of taste, leading to even more possible variations to the scent formula.

Considering that much of what we taste is not processed by our mouths at all, but rather by our nose and olfactory system, ScentSational Technologies is working with some companies to enhance the traditional packaging model to capitalise on this. The company is working with a baby-food manufacturer to add an odour to the lid of the packaging so that when the jar is opened, the smell of "freshness" is released. The company is also working with a cereal manufacturer to add a sugary scent to its

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packaging as this will have the placebo effect of making the sugar-content-reduced cereal actually taste sweeter. Bland, malodoured health food items could be made to give off the scent of something more appealing and palatable and this will in turn influence how it tastes when it is consumed, which opens a plethora of possibilities for the health food sector ("pap and vleis" tofu anybody?)

The brain it seems is a wonderfully malleable thing with nothing quite as it seems. Perfume manufacturers have for years endeavoured to distill the essence of masculinity, femininity, success, power, status and other largely intangible human constructs into a quintessential scent that captures and conveys these olfactory encoded messages.

As consumer brand perceptions are often built from a variety of sensory inputs, when last did you consider scent as a factor when consumers come into contact with your product? What's the first scent which consumers are confronted with when they unwrap your company's product?

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scary stuff

can't food just be what it is naturally? everyone wonders why there is an increase in cancer and ms, between artificial colourants, flavourants, preservatives & now smells, what chance do consumers have, let's just say no!

by Sam on July 02 2009, 18:59

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new car smell

Ironically enough, "new car smell" is nothing more than a concoction of toxic chemicals. Depsite its iconic lure, i'd rather go for the one that's "boring and odourless".

by sarah on July 03 2009, 09:31

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iphone

A phone that smells like apples? hmm.... not sure if it'd work, but the power of smell cannot be underestimated even though a new car smell is a bunch of chemicals, a lot of people like the feeling that comes with it

by Max on July 04 2009, 12:11

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