

Sensory Branding

Most marketing plans appeal to only two senses: sight and hearing. Why so limited? How come almost all marketing and brand building concentrate on two senses when we know appealing to all five is likely to double brand awareness and strengthen the impression a brand leaves on its audience?

Several surveys document our olfactory sense as probably the most impressionable and responsive of the five senses. Smells invoke memories and appeal directly to feelings without first being filtered and analysed by the brain, which is how the remaining four senses are processed. We all recognize and are emotionally stimulated by, say, the scent of freshly cut grass, brackish sea air, or the perfume of roses. I'm convinced any car lover drinks in the smell of a new car.

Some are getting the hang of sensory appeal. Some supermarkets in Northern Europe are connected to bakeries by hundreds of meters of pipeline. The pipes carry the aroma of fresh bread to the stores' entrances. The strategy works. Passers-by are struck with hunger and drawn inside the shop. A major British bank introduced freshly brewed coffee to its branches with the intention of making customers feel at home. The familiar smell relaxes the bank's customers, not an emotion you'd normally

associate with such an establishment.

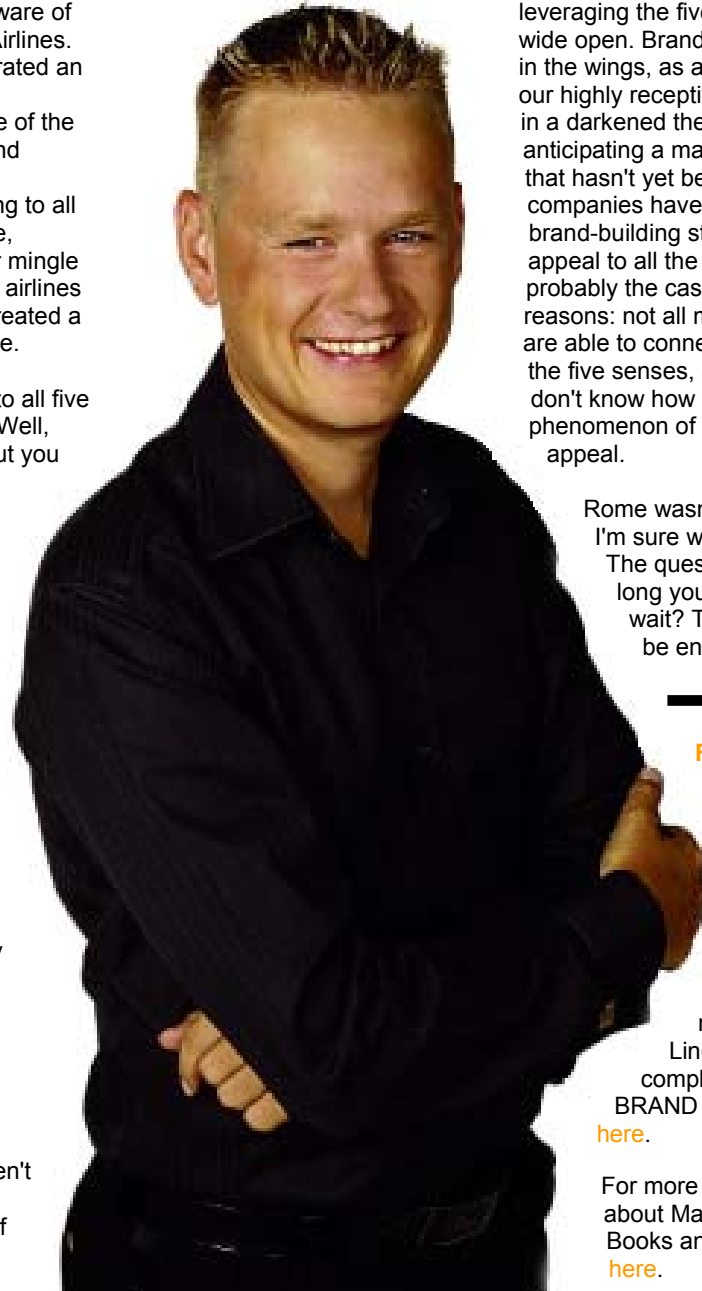
Let's not forget hearing and touch. Sound evokes memory and emotion. A familiar birdsong floods you with impressions of home; a hit song from your youth brings back the excitement and anxiety of your teens. AOL stepped up to the plate by using a voice familiar to many young Web users. Britney fans discovered they could hear their idol not only when experiencing CDs and videos but also when launching AOL. Britney lets you know, "You've got mail." Kellogg's has also invested in the power of auditory stimulus, testing the crunching of cereals in a Danish sound lab to upgrade their product's "sound quality."

Touch? One major reason online clothes shopping never took off is -- you guessed it -- people couldn't touch the product. Amazon avoided this problem because people don't attach so much importance to the feel of a book as they do to its content. Clothes, on the other hand, must be felt and tried on for size, colour, texture, and so on. Physical proximity to product is elemental to purchase decisions. Shopping behaviour depends on it.

If you agree so far, then tell me why it's so difficult to find brands that promote themselves by appealing to all five senses. The only example of integrated

sensory marketing I'm aware of comes from Singapore Airlines. The airline has demonstrated an understanding of the psychological importance of the senses in establishing and maintaining customer impressions. By appealing to all senses (music, fragrance, manner, and demeanour mingle in the cabin to evoke the airlines image), the airline has created a branded flying experience.

So how can you appeal to all five senses on the Internet? Well, you can't get them all. But you can optimize the tools available to you, one of the most neglected being sound. Why do you reckon you hear that familiar sound of fizzing Coke being poured into an ice-filled glass when you visit the Coca-Cola site and the sound of brewing coffee on the Starbucks site? Meaningful sound is a cheap but very effective way of appealing to another of your visitor's senses and of powerfully enhancing your brand's message. Sensory perceptions are unique to each of us, as memories are. We experience powerful stimulations from them. How come marketers aren't appealing to our senses more? The opportunity of brand building by



leveraging the five senses is wide open. Brands are hovering in the wings, as an audience of our highly receptive senses sits in a darkened theatre, anticipating a marketing show that hasn't yet begun. Few companies have integrated their brand-building strategies to appeal to all the senses. This is probably the case for two reasons: not all media channels are able to connect with each of the five senses, and we really don't know how to handle the phenomenon of total sensory appeal.

Rome wasn't built in a day. I'm sure we'll get there. The question is how long you can afford to wait? The rewards can be enormous.

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