

Multi-Sensory Branding Improves Response, Retention

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The airwaves, cyber-highways, and mailboxes of consumers are congested and becoming more gridlocked, and marketers are increasingly challenged to cut through the clutter to set their brand apart from the rest. Direct marketers have long sought creative ways to break through this maze and create impact while also evoking strong emotional connection.

Sensory branding—the idea that humans are most receptive when all five senses are engaged—challenges the printing status quo. By incorporating touch, smell, and taste as a proven way to stand out and be remembered, brands create a stronger emotional connection with consumers. Thus multi-sensory branding, beyond the traditional use of sight and sound, will be more heavily utilized in the effective marketing communications of tomorrow.

Can You Sense It?

Called the Proustian Effect, after twentieth century French author Marcel Proust, who first linked the effect of scent as it unleashed a flood of memories in his classic *Remembrance of Things Past*, the senses have long held the key to creating lasting impressions. In his groundbreaking book *BRAND Sense*, Martin Lindstrom states that successful marketers will increasingly define their brands by leveraging all five senses to evoke a strong emotional connection.

“The presence of an ambient odor can influence our perception. If the odor is pleasant it can generate a more positive evaluation and improve the learning of what we are reading,” said Craig Warren, scientific affairs director of the Sense of Smell Institute, and visiting scholar, University of California at San Diego. “Odor can also generate expectation, which in turn can influence the experience.”

Stan Rapp, direct marketing icon and co-founder of Rapp Collins, now chairman of Engage, presented the iDirect movement in his 2009 Direct Marketing Association (DMA) keynote presentation. Rapp argued that iDirect, the confluence of digital and direct to

drive customer engagement at lower cost and higher ROI, will serve as the engine at the heart of acquiring and retaining customers in the digital era—converting all marketers into direct marketers. So how can direct marketers use the five senses to reach the consumer?

Sight is the most relied upon and important sense for most humans and often drives a first impression. For this reason, creative directors have long worked to create images, messages, and calls to action that are appealing and easily understood. Strong visual brand assets take advantage of a consumer’s immediate connection with the shape of the little blue pill, the golden arches, and the red that is obviously Coca-Cola. Print can help capitalize on these equities visually through Pantone Matching System colors, die-cut branded shapes, and unique constructions that enhance and support the brand and its experiential qualities. But truly leveraging all the senses takes more than just that.

Music lovers are aware that sound can be incredibly powerful in creating emotional connections and triggering memories. The snap, crackle, and pop of Rice Krispies; the ping of Intel; and the growl of a Harley-Davidson engine are all easily identifiable sounds that have become distinguishable symbols of their brands. Print has a growing ability to leverage sound and maximize auditory engagement through sound chips and physical construction. Printers can use the sound advantage to elevate their clients’ brands in presenting marketing solutions. Instead of a retailer’s gift card that plays a generic seasonal tune, why not create a Harley card that roars the unmistakable sound of a Harley engine? The potential is endless.

Feel the Difference

Print communications have strong intrinsic benefits of touch and are uniquely tangible when compared to digital media. However, much more can be done to leverage “touch” and the brand assets that it can communicate. The touch experience begins with the substrate. Plastic or paper, smooth or vellum, embossed or debossed,

uncoated or coated, flimsy or rigid—all of these qualities can link into brand attributes that connote quality and support brand continuity and identity. Bang & Olufsen is a super premium brand that often adds heft to their products to support the perceived value which weight can imply. It follows that their use of heavy stock in their print efforts supports that positioning and that a soft touch varnish finish might be in line with the sleek design of their products.

Touch can tap into imaginations and emotions through newer technologies appearing across printing platforms, including dimensional printing, foil printing, embossing, and glitter application on press, as well as in lamination. Recently, Specialty Print Communications (SPC) sent out a St. Patrick's Day mailer showcasing its new glitter capability. SPC combined the whimsy of the holiday with the sensory experience of glitter to showcase a new capability that helps to enhance response, evoke emotion, and create memorability. Sales teams reported that recall was high and response was good. Adding glitter to the marketing mix set the piece apart.

Sweet Smell of Victory

Relating back to the Proustian Effect, our sense of smell is closely linked with memory, and research has shown that school children increase performance when exposed to positive scents. Marketers have recognized this, and some have capitalized on the opportunity to utilize particular scents to identify their brand. Print enables the extension of this branded olfactory experience through scratch-n sniff and fragrance coatings.

Scratch and sniff has long been used, typically in a kitschy way, but if the Peninsula Hotel group matched their lobby smell on a printed offer sent to their most loyal customers, they would enrich their touch points as well as their brand. Newspaper inserts with fragrance coatings have been around for years, but going one step further in transitioning from transactional use of scent to brand building yields lifetime value and contributes to a consistent emotional connection between customers and brands.

Taste Success

Taste is the most difficult sense for marketers to own and use. Outside of the realm of food companies, few brands own tastes, but "taste" has been utilized in print communications to increase engagement. But when the U.K.'s Royal Mail was experiencing a dramatic reduction in the volume of letters being sent, they sought to use sensory integration to enhance the affinity to their brand. Royal Mail sent its customers a personalized letter with a piece of chocolate. The results were fantastic. People began sending letters again, inspired by the experiential depth of the chocolate mailing. For food companies, product sampling is an excellent application of taste integration. Other companies might also find application if they want to connect their brand with specific tastes, such as a charcoal company that might choose to be associated with the smell or taste of barbecue.

Our world is converging, and brands need to expand their experiential identities across multiple senses to enrich their brand, make it unique, and establish more emotional connections with customers. Print is largely a marketing communications service provider, and as such, the industry needs to be responsive to the emerging demands of marketers. It would be wise for printers to be forward-leaning and seek to invent and offer more ways to enable marketers to add sensory dimension to their branded communications. The best way to grow a business is to help customers grow theirs.

Dustin LeFebvre was recently awarded the Chicago Association of Direct Marketing (CADM) Emerging Leader Award, as well as Business Marketing Association's (BMA) Chicago Chapter's 2010 Rising Star Award. Dustin can be reached at dustinl@specialtyprintcomm.com, or by calling 847-600-5614. Specialty Print Communications (SPC) is a national print and direct marketing company in Niles, Illinois, and offers a wide range of product and service-based solutions, from loyalty, web, sheetfed, and digital printing with in-line capabilities, to a customized Web-based communication campaign program called Monogram. SPC can be found on the web at www.specialtyprintcomm.com.