



The Power of Smell in Brand Strategy

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A recent Bloomberg article highlighted Crayola's decision to trademark the distinctive "slightly earthy" smell of its crayons, illustrating how sensory branding can be a powerful tool in a brand's strategy. Sensory branding, particularly scent branding, involves engaging the sense of smell to forge a deeper emotional connection between a brand and its audience. This approach leverages the strong link between scent and memory, emotion, and perception, making it a highly effective strategy for enhancing brand identity and creating a memorable customer experience.

By developing a distinct olfactory identity, brands can set themselves apart from the competition. For businesses that offer physical customer experiences, understanding how environmental scents can improve the overall customer experience can be invaluable. Scents have a unique ability to create emotional connections because the sense of smell is directly linked to the brain's limbic system, which controls emotions and memory. When brands incorporate scent into their strategy, they can elicit specific emotional responses—such as comfort, nostalgia, or excitement—that strengthen the relationship with their customers. For example, bakeries often use the aroma of fresh bread to evoke feelings of warmth and home, fostering a sense of loyalty among customers.

Scent branding also plays a critical role in **brand differentiation**. A distinctive scent can serve as a brand's "scent logo," making it more memorable and easily recognizable. Luxury hotel chains often use signature fragrances to create a cohesive and branded sensory experience, ensuring that guests associate the scent with the luxury and comfort of the hotel. One well-known example is Singapore Airlines, which uses the signature scent "Stefan Floridian Waters" in its cabins, towels, and even in-flight attendants' perfume. This scent helps the airline create a unique and memorable sensory experience that reinforces its premium brand identity.



Source: Singapore Airlines

Scent also significantly enhances the **customer experience**. By selecting a scent that matches the desired mood or atmosphere—whether it is lavender to create calm in a spa or citrus to energize a fitness center—brands can elevate the physical experience for customers. Even companies like Scentsy use sensory branding by incorporating "scratch-and-sniff" stickers in their catalogs, allowing customers to smell the products before purchasing online. In this way, sensory branding adds value to the customer experience and enhances satisfaction.



Source: Scentsy

Once a brand establishes a unique customer experience through scent, it can further reinforce its brand identity. Scents can align with a brand's core values, reinforcing messaging and deepening the emotional connection with consumers. For instance, eco-friendly brands may choose natural or botanical scents to emphasize their commitment to sustainability, embedding these values in the minds of customers and influencing their purchasing decisions.

Scent branding also influences consumer behavior. Pleasant smells can affect mood, increase dwell time, and encourage purchases, as customers are more likely to buy in environments where they feel positive and comfortable. This can drive sales and improve customer satisfaction, making scent a subtle yet powerful tool in influencing consumer behavior.

Companies like Starbucks and Abercrombie & Fitch have successfully incorporated scent branding into their strategies. Starbucks ensures that the smell of freshly brewed coffee permeates its stores, creating a sensory association with quality and consistency. Abercrombie & Fitch famously used a signature fragrance throughout its stores, building strong brand recognition, particularly among younger consumers. Whether using a unique scent or a more familiar one, scent branding can be a valuable tool for any business offering a physical customer experience.



Source: Starbucks

Products/Services and Associated Smells

Here is a table highlighting various products or services along with their associated brand scents. This list represents how scent branding could be used to evoke specific emotions or align with a brand's identity.

Product/Service	Associated Brand Scent	Emotional or Brand Message
Luxury Hotel	Fresh linen with hints of sandalwood and jasmine	Relaxation, elegance, and comfort
Sports Apparel Store	A mix of citrus and fresh-cut grass	Energy, vitality, and performance
Coffee Shop	Rich espresso with subtle notes of vanilla and cinnamon	Warmth, comfort, and social connection
Automotive Showroom	Leather with a touch of cedarwood and bergamot	Power, luxury, and sophistication
Eco-Friendly Beauty Brand	Fresh lavender with hints of eucalyptus and rosemary	Natural, purity, and wellness
Tech Store	Crisp citrus and clean metallic notes	Innovation, efficiency, and modernity
High-End Retail Store	Rich amber with subtle floral undertones (like rose or peony)	Luxury, opulence, and exclusivity
Gym or Fitness Center	Energizing eucalyptus with peppermint and fresh citrus	Motivation, freshness, and rejuvenation
Organic Grocery Store	Earthy herbal scents like rosemary, basil, and fresh produce	Health, sustainability, and nature

Product/Service	Associated Brand Scent	Emotional or Brand Message
Bookstore	Leather-bound books with notes of sandalwood and vanilla	Comfort, nostalgia, and intellectual exploration
Day Spa	Calming chamomile with lavender and bergamot	Relaxation, peace, and rejuvenation
Bank or Financial Service	Subtle woody notes like cedar and pine, with a touch of vanilla	Stability, trust, and reliability
Luxury Perfume Brand	Rich floral bouquets with deep musk and amber	Sensuality, elegance, and personal expression
Airline First Class Cabin	Warm amber with vanilla and subtle florals like jasmine	Comfort, luxury, and a premium experience
Fast Food Chain	Savory grilled meat with subtle hints of smoky BBQ	Hunger, satisfaction, and indulgence
Laundry Soap	Fresh, clean, citrusy with floral and fruity undertones.	Joyful, fresh, uplifting, carefree and comforting.
Casinos	Bold, smoky, musky, with hints of leather and spice.	Exciting, indulgence, risk, thrill, stimulating, relaxing and hints of luxury

Each scent is designed to evoke a particular emotional response or align with a brand’s core identity, enhancing the customer experience and creating lasting associations.

Measures of Effectiveness

Developing a brand's olfactory identity involves research methods such as consumer behavior analysis, psychophysiological testing, sensory branding experiments, and market testing. These techniques help brands understand the emotional and behavioral impacts of scents on consumers, allowing them to craft distinctive olfactory identities that resonate with their target audience.

Analyzing the effectiveness of scent branding within a brand strategy involves a blend of sensory, psychological, and business performance metrics. One key metric is **brand recall and recognition**, which can be assessed through customer surveys that measure how well customers associate a specific scent with the brand after their experience. Surveys may evaluate both unaided and aided brand recall, tracking the percentage of consumers who can remember the brand linked to a scent either spontaneously or with cues. **Customer experience metrics** are also crucial, with tools like Customer Satisfaction Scores (CSAT) and Net Promoter Score (NPS) helping to gauge how a scent impacts overall satisfaction and the likelihood of customers recommending the brand.

The **emotional impact and engagement** of scent branding can be measured through emotion tracking, using biometric tools or post-experience surveys to assess emotional responses. Additionally, engagement metrics, such as foot traffic and dwell time in scent-branded spaces, offer insights into customer behavior, as does measuring how long customers spend on brand-related digital content in scent-enhanced environments. From a financial perspective, **sales performance** can be analyzed by tracking revenue growth in locations where scent branding is applied, as well as evaluating whether it leads to an increase in basket size—customers spending more per transaction.

Another critical area is **customer loyalty and retention**, where metrics like retention rates and repeat purchase behavior help brands understand if scent branding encourages customers to return or make repeat purchases. Similarly, **foot traffic and conversion** rates can be tracked to determine how scent influences the number of store visitors and the percentage of those visitors who make purchases. The amount of time (and money) customers spend in a store or branded location, known as **dwell time**, is another useful metric, as is the **engagement time** during digital or experiential events that integrate scent.

Brand perception and emotional association can be measured through surveys that assess customers' views of the brand before and after the introduction of scent branding. Brand sentiment analysis can also track shifts in how the brand is discussed on social media and other channels. Finally, **sensory feedback** is essential for understanding how customers respond to scent as part of a multisensory experience. Surveys may explore how scent complements other sensory elements like visuals and sound, while memory association testing can determine how well scent reinforces brand memories, leading to stronger emotional attachment. By combining these diverse metrics, brands can gain a comprehensive understanding of how scent branding influences customer behavior and perception, ensuring alignment with broader brand strategy goals.

At Communication Metrics, our branding management specialists routinely explore ways to match products and services with unique scents, helping brands leave a lasting impression on their customers through effective scent branding strategies.

Communication Metrics can assist your organization in integrating and implementing brand scents in your overall brand strategy. For additional information contact:

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