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# Sensory Branding

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# Sensory Branding:

## LIVING ON THE LEASH OF OUR SENSES

Businesses will go to interesting lengths to imbue their brands with emotional pulling power.

One trend gaining momentum is the use of multi-sensory stimulation. Not that this is entirely new. The 'pace and grace' Jaguar auto brand has traded on it for years. Step close to a Jaguar and your eyes take in the graceful lines. Open the door and catch a waft of the Connolly leather. Trace your fingers over the sleek walnut dashboard. Hear that special, barely audible click as you close the Jaguar door. Short of actually licking the seats, every sense has been engaged.

Singapore Airlines has also been a long time, astute user of sensory triggers. While the lithely styled 'Singapore Girls' have taken the visual spotlight, a patented perfume with the unlikely name of 'Stefan Floridian Waters,' has subtly infused the hot towels, cabin air and flight attendants' perfumes. The instantly recognisable aroma is an essential ingredient in their well manicured brand.

**Researchers tell us that 75% of our daily emotions are sparked by smell, whereas over 80% of commercial communication is targeted solely at our eyes.** This would seem to suggest that we are going to see more innovation on the olfactory front.

Joining a growing list of retailers who permeate their stores with more sophisticated scented triggers is London shirt maker Thomas Pink who has the aroma of 'line-dried linen' wafting throughout his stores. Not surprisingly, the trend has spawned a number of businesses with impressive sounding names who specialise in nothing but developing brand-friendly signature scents.

The world's great perfume houses, of course, have always been avid users of the full sensory vocabulary. Patrick Suskind's novel "Perfume: The Story of a Murderer" contains an evocative description of one of the grand perfumeries in 17th Century Paris. "The owner, Baldini, an ageing perfumer, stands behind the counter wearing a silver, powdered wig and a blue and gold embroidered coat. A cloud of frangipane, that mysterious smell of the tropical isles, envelops him and he stands quite still as if in trance. It is only when the door chimes ring and the silver herons in the entrance spout violet-scented water that he springs into life, the cloud of frangipani barely keeping pace with him, and regales his customers with the costliest perfumes." The techniques may have changed since those heady days but the desire to weave a little magic hasn't.

Sound also constitutes an important selling ingredient. Boys, as we all know, like noise and some manage a smattering of discernment. The special throaty roar of Harley Davidsons, for instance, has countless

baby boomers in salt and pepper beards doing Homer Simpson drooling impressions. Kellogg's cornflakes are trying to register the sound of their apparently distinctive crunch. And the intro tunes of Microsoft, Nokia and Intel Inside are the inescapable melodies of our daily business lives.

**In the touch and feel domain, marketers are inclined to adopt sneaky tactics.** In supermarkets, long regarded as the front-runners in merchandising inducement techniques, they have clever ways of modifying your speed. For instance, they place slightly smaller tiles in the more expensive aisles so when you push your trolley over them, they click faster, making you think that you are going faster than you are. So you slow down and spend more time there.

As you can see, the line between encouragement and manipulation is getting blurred and it's likely to become more so. When you hear of casinos getting big lifts in pokie profits from their gambling (sorry, gaming) patrons by exposing them to a particular musical diet, you wonder if the line's been crossed. When you learn that grapefruit juice suppliers in the States now have to alter the taste of their juice to match the more familiar genetically-altered taste of supermarket grapefruit, you wonder where some of this is headed.

To be fair, there are many legitimate businesses looking for a sensory edge. But if they're looking for a piece of sensory real estate they can claim as their own rather than a whiff of fresh bread outside the bakery, there are some hurdles to leap over.

**From a registration perspective, the exponential growth of global competitors seeking trademark protection means the traditional methods of distinguishing your brand are now constrained.** It's scarcely surprising then that companies are looking to sensory branding as a way of protecting their identity. The sensory components – how the product smells, is shaped, sounds, feels and tastes – are known as 'trade dress'. To be trademarkable, you need to have clear proof that your trade dress is distinct and legitimately yours. No easy feat.

So like it or lump it, sensory selling is here to stay. As American poet Diane Ackerman succinctly puts it – "We live on the leash of our senses."