

Smells sell, as hard-nosed traders discover

Speedo chose the tang of the coast and the Science Museum wanted cordite, writes Lucy Bannerman

Ever noticed that smell of freshly baked cookies that has you reaching for your wallet? Or the lily of the valley fragrance that gives a hint of luxury to a hotel lobby—or even the smell of oily machinery that gets petrolheads pumped up at a go-karting track?

Spoiler alert: more than likely, it comes from an office on the outskirts of Maidenhead. Scent is the branding industry's final frontier.

While pioneers such as Singapore Airlines have been spraying airline pillows with their stewardesses' signature perfume for decades, the high street has now caught a whiff of the cash potential of pleasing smells. Since starting up in 2008, ScentAir UK has supplied laboratory manufactured smells to 2,000 businesses in Britain and Ireland, including Oasis, Hamleys, Marriott Hotels, Juicy Couture and Karen Millen, as well as casinos, offices, nightclubs and theme parks.

Christopher Pratt, its managing director, says: "So much of marketing is based on the verbal and the visual but marketeers are missing a trick."

Opening a silver case, he offers a warning: "Here are the smellies." The case contains the nastier vials from his "scent library", with labels reading "urine", "faeces", "vomit" and "decaying flesh"—presumably not the fragrance of choice for a summer collection? No, says Mr Pratt. These are used on training sessions for the Armed Forces and to enliven exhibits at the London Dungeon.

"I'm going to have to open a window," he says, putting the lid back on "vomit" and discarding the dipstick in the next room. To clear the air, he opens up a "chocolate fudge cookies" scent, which he supplies to a bakery. One delicious sniff creates an impulse so strong it's like being led to the till by the nasal hair.

Synthesising the smell gives the retailer more control. "You might bake cookies in the morning but by 2pm, when more

A sense of history

Smell was the first of the human senses to develop in our ancestors. It is also the only sense that shoots straight to the sensitive hippocampus, deep inside the brain, rather than being bounced across the hemisphere of the brain first, making it, perhaps, the most primal sense.

Memories associated with the other senses are stored independently. However, the

customers are passing, the smell has gone," he says.

Is he concerned that some customers might feel cheated? No, he laughs. "People's reaction when you tell them is more 'Oh, that's interesting'. We're not trying to be sinister about it."

Smell is the sense most closely linked with memory and emotions. It is directly hard-wired to the limbic system, the part of the brain also responsible for motivation and decision-making.

A study in Las Vegas found that gamblers put 45 per cent more money into slot machines when the room smelt of something pleasant as opposed to the stale, default scent of broken dreams.

Another study, carried out by a neurologist in Chicago, found that customers were prepared to pay £6.25 more for a pair of Nike trainers in a scented shop than in an unscented one.

For about £100 a month, retailers can pump products from the ScentAir labs through their stores, via dispensers which have fan systems and controls to set timing and intensity. Happy clients include Legoland, which makes its lavatories smell of bubblegum, and the Science Museum,

The aroma of food is the real thing for Nigella Lawson



Scouse accent meant murder suspect was held by mistake

A murder suspect has been cleared after experts discovered that a supposed confession in a 999 call had been mis-heard because of her accent.

Teresa Rylands, 33, of Newton Abbot, Devon, has spent weeks in custody since being wrongly accused of killing an alcoholic friend who died after falling down stairs last August.

When Ms Rylands made a 999 call to the ambulance service, the operator thought she had said she pushed Neil Mitchell, 48, but acoustic tests revealed she actually said: "I don't care if you say I pushed him down the stairs, just get someone in here." The mistake was put down to her Liverpudlian accent.

Ms Rylands was arrested and accused of hitting Mr Mitchell over the

head with a bottle before pushing him down the stairs. She denied murder and was found not guilty by Judge Francis Gilbert, QC, at Exeter Crown Court after the prosecution offered no evidence.

She appeared by video link from Eastwood Park prison, Bristol, where she had been held for the past week after breaching bail conditions.

Social workers who knew Mr Mitchell said that he had repeatedly made false complaints of being assaulted to explain previous drunken falls.

Mr Mitchell had one leg shorter than the other. On the day of his death his blood was four times the drink-drive limit. Tests showed that a head injury was probably caused when he hit a radiator at the bottom of the stairs.

which sprayed a fine mist of cordite through its exhibition on the Apollo 11 landings because that's how the astronauts described the smell on the Moon. Pina Colada coconut and pineapple flavours are popular with Mahiki, the Polynesian-themed nightclub in Mayfair, and branches of the Flight Centre. Speedo wanted the smell of the Australian coast. Charles Tyrwhitt, the menswear retailer, requested a scent that evoked its old English heritage—they chose mahogany.

Some results have been achieved through trial and error, said Mr Pratt.

One builder tried out "hot apple pie" and "freshly ground coffee" for show-

homes but staff complained that they were overwhelming. Instead, the company opted for a clean and fresh fragrance "white tea and thyme". As head of the Crossmodal Research Lab at the University of Oxford, the sensory neuroscientist Professor Charles Spence led the research behind the campaign for the "Lynx Effect".

Some experiments have backfired. A campaign by Disaronno, the liqueur company, to waft the distinctive marzipan aroma of Amaretto through the London Underground was abandoned in 2002—it coincided with a scare over cyanide gas being used in a terrorist attack and highlighted the fact that

cyanide smells of almonds. Professor Spence said some companies had been slow to adopt smell branding for ethical reasons. Smells such as coffee in a bookshop, or flowers by the till, seem acceptable but a cheap hotel chain pumping out the smell of bacon and eggs to get you to buy breakfast might be considered more manipulative.

"Smell and taste have always been thought of as the lower-value senses, partly because we lack the rich vocabulary to describe them. It is only recently that scientists are realising how much of an impact smell can make on our judgments. Multisensory advertising is about to go big," he said.



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