

## **Sensory Branding: It Makes (Five) Senses**

by Martin Lindstrom.com, author of *BRAND child* and *BRAND sense*

Have you ever shaken someone's hand only to receive received one of those 'limp fish' grasps in return? What does that experience do to your impression of the person? Would you trust him? Maybe not. Somehow this tactile experience exerts a persuasive and negative influence on your view of the person.

Yet most brands send 'limp handshake' signals: a flimsy sound when lifting the shampoo cap; an unappealing and rotund bottle shape, implying the shape you may yourself become if you consumer enough of the mayonnaise bottle inside; the repugnant smell of stale oil in a fast food restaurant...

We are unconsciously controlled by the thousands of sensory inputs we receive every day as we see, hear, smell, touch and taste brands. So, when I first mentioned the idea of systematically leveraging our five senses (or as many senses as possible) when building brands, it seemed such an obvious and logical necessity, that no one raised an eyebrow. Yet back in 2004, despite this glaring need, there was very little evidence of the senses in branding. When I entered the search words 'sensory branding', a Google's search delivered barely one page of Google results. There were no studies. There were hardly any cases. And there were no recordings or no evidence of the effect of sensory branding. This vacuum characterized the destiny to which our senses were subject in the world of marketing. As a result, project BRANDsense took shape. Supported by the research institute, Millward Brown, I evaluated several thousand consumers across the world, gathering what would become the first research results of their kind. And what we learned about the five senses and brands was astounding.

It began in supermarkets in Northern Europe. As part of their strategies to generate traffic to their stores, they situated their bakeries up the back of the shops and connected them to the street using olfactory appeal. Hundreds of meters of pipeline carried the irresistible aroma of fresh bread to potential customers as they passed by the stores' entrances. Upon detection of the marvelous smell, passersby are instantly struck with hunger and drawn inside the shop, down the aisles filled with other goods they realize they need, towards the bakery for intended purchase. Even banks in United Kingdom introduced freshly-brewed coffee to branches with the intention of making customers feel at home when visiting the bank. The fragrance of fresh coffee induces relaxation, not an emotion you could normally associate with a bank.

Nokia wasn't aware of this when, almost eight years ago, they released the infamous Nokia ringtone. Originally installed as a default mistake in handsets, it quickly became the standard for all cell phones to carry. Such a standard, in fact that it has even made 'appearances' in mainstream movies, like 'Love Actually', at no expense to Nokia. The BRAND sense research revealed that Nokia's ringtone is recognized by an astounding 74% of Europeans and 46% of American consumers. And they associate the tone with the brand. Let's compare this with another famous sound signature. Intel spent over \$100

million promoting its brand and tune. The BRAND sense research revealed a 56% awareness of the Intel tune worldwide. Nokia didn't spend anything at all, but the brand enjoys about the same awareness. This is the difference between branding and smart branding.

The food industry has also realized the potential of sensory branding. Remember crunchy Kellogg's cornflakes? Well, that crunch is no accident. Kellogg's has invested in the power of auditory stimuli, apparently testing the crunching of cereals in a Danish sound laboratory in order to upgrade their product's 'sound quality' and link it with the brand signature. The crunch has created a powerful point of difference, being recognized as the Kellogg's crunch in 45% of cases in which the box has not been present.

But as plentiful as the great examples are, there are many more less impressive cases.

You'll probably know the Microsoft tune that plays every time you start Windows. And you're not alone. 60% of consumers across the world recognize that tune, according to the BRAND sense study. Day in, day out, close to one billion people hear it. You'd think that, with this global awareness, the tune would be leveraged across every possible touchpoint. Wrong! How come the tune only appears on your PC? What about on the cell phone, in computer games, on Microsoft TV or radio spots? When I asked Microsoft this question they replied, "Because that's another division's responsibility".

Microsoft isn't alone in beginning to explore new territory, and overlooking the obvious. A couple of years ago, a major European floor cleaner discovered for itself the power of the olfactory signature. The product had, for decades, been well known for its infamously nasty smell. The company's CMO decided to address this issue. Of course such a great brand mustn't be linked with such a nasty smell. Customers complained about the pungent odor, so something had to be done. A new smell was created: the scent of fresh roses. But, to everyone's surprise, customers did not respond as expected. As soon as the product had acquired the fresh, new, inoffensive scent of roses, sales dropped by 41%. No matter how unappealing that original smell had been, customers couldn't help but associate it with their notion of a powerfully effective cleaner. The rosy-smelling product just didn't seem to have the germ-eradicating power of the original, even though the product's active ingredients were identical. The floor cleaner shed its new personality and regained its nasty smell, as well as all its old customers.

The BRAND sense results were astounding, and they give fundamental understanding to why the cleaner needed to retain its characteristic scent, why Microsoft should capitalize on its well-known tune, and why Kellogg's investment in the sound lab was undoubtedly worthwhile. BRAND sense showed us that, just by adding one additional sense to your brand, you increase brand memorability and brand loyalty by one-third. If you introduce appeal to another sense, you double the brand memorability and loyalty.

Our sensory perceptions are unique to each of us, just as our memories are, and we experience powerful stimulation from them. So marketers ought to be appealing to our senses as entirely as they can. Without over-exaggerating, I can say that the opportunity

of brand-building by leveraging our five senses is wide open. Very few companies have integrated their brand-building strategies to appeal to all our senses. And this is probably for two reasons: not all media channels are able to connect with each of the five senses, and we really don't know to handle the phenomenon of total sensory appeal.

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

But let's not forget the other oft-neglected senses: hearing and touch. Sound, too, evokes memory and emotion. Familiar birdsong floods you with impressions of home; a hit song from the days of your youth recalls the anxieties and excitement of your teen years. AOL stepped up to this plate when they used a voice familiar to many young web users. Fans of Britney discovered that they heard voice, not only on her CDs and videos, but also when starting up AOL. It was Britney who let them know "You've got mail".

And of touch? One of the major reasons online clothes shopping never took off was because ... well, you guessed it: people couldn't *touch* the products. Amazon avoided this problem because people, on the whole, don't attach so much importance to the feel of a book as they do to its contents. Clothes, on the other hand, have to be felt and tried on for size, colour, texture, and so on. Physical proximity to products is elemental to our purchasing decisions and, so, our shopping behaviour depends on it.

If you agree with me so far then tell me why it's so difficult to find brands, anywhere in the world, that promote themselves by appealing to all five of our senses. In fact, the only example of integrated sensory marketing I know of comes from Singapore Airlines. Over the last many years, Singapore Airlines has demonstrated an understanding of the psychological importance of the senses in establishing and maintaining customer impressions. By appealing to all the senses (using music, fragrance, manner, personality which all combine in the Singapore Airlines' cabin to evoke the airline's preferred image) the airline has managed to create a branded flying experience.

By appealing to our five senses, brands create strong memories in consumers. And this leads to stronger bonds between consumers and brands. The question is, how long you can afford to wait knowing that the price of entry to this brand-building nirvana is relatively low, while its rewards can be enormous?

Visit [MartinLindstrom.com](http://MartinLindstrom.com) for more on sensory branding and up-to-the-minute news on brand building from around the world. Every week, Martin Lindstrom reports on innovative branding from that's happening on all scales, in all markets, and in communities of every size. For example, take a look at the sensory branding story inherent in Nespresso café

([http://www.martinlindstrom.com/site\\_files/main\\_content/blog\\_player.php/id\\_68](http://www.martinlindstrom.com/site_files/main_content/blog_player.php/id_68)) and Johnson's baby powder

([http://www.martinlindstrom.com/site\\_files/main\\_content/blog\\_player.php/id\\_48](http://www.martinlindstrom.com/site_files/main_content/blog_player.php/id_48)).

Martin Lindstrom also reports of the total sensory experience offered by Singapore Airlines, something they did first and something which continues to distinguish the airline from its competitors

([http://www.martinlindstrom.com/site\\_files/main\\_content/blog\\_player.php/id\\_14](http://www.martinlindstrom.com/site_files/main_content/blog_player.php/id_14)).

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