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# Merchandising & Display a Sensory Experience

By Linda McKendry

**O**ne of the things that keeps shoppers coming back again and again to a place of business is that the entire shopping experience exceeds their expectations. Repeat shoppers have a picture in their mind of what they will experience, a vision that is attached to many emotions and sensations which motivate the shopper to go back.

Since all marketing is based on perceptions more than on products, it's important to do whatever you can to increase a positive perception about your shop and services. In other words, consumers 'sense' what your business is all about based on how you appeal to their senses. The five senses are sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch. (SSSTT) Let's explore how these can be used in merchandising in a garden/flower shop.

## 1. SIGHT

"Amuse, don't confuse." Arrange your shop into departments and



categories that show shoppers where they can easily and quickly find what they might be looking for in the way of common purchases.

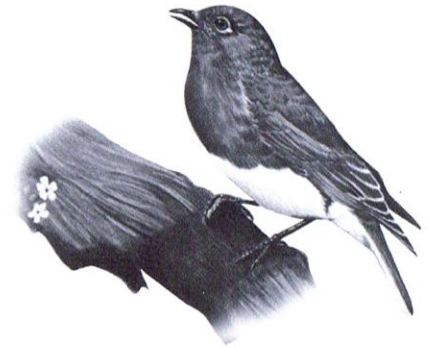
Pots, indoor plants, outdoor plants, tools, fertilizers, books, accessories, candles, ribbons, wedding, funeral, party... the list is based on the lines you are carrying and the fixtures you have assigned to these divisions. Critical to inform, direct, and promote are clearly written signs in a design and colours consistent with your image and logo.

Apart from your stocked shelves where each item is individually priced and stored for the shopper to make comparisons, you also want to designate feature display areas. These are typically in front of windows or aisles, at the end of aisles, at the tops of high fixtures out of reach, and against high perimeter walls. These are the areas where you want to grab attention by creating inspirational, themed displays, that are cross-merchandised, well lit, and complemented by appropriate props. When you show something a little outrageous or 'off the wall' as a feature display, it may not be what the shopper is looking for, but they may remember it and tell all their friends about it. This is free advertising and it can mean an increase in traffic.

## 2. SOUND

This is a must! And it can change from space to space if you have a large store and can safely plug in stereo equipment with speakers directing the sounds to the shopper closest to the merchandise. Water music, birds chirping, exotic Latin beats, even Gregorian chants in the wedding section can motivate, inspire, and draw the shopper into the mood immediately. It all helps

the shopper to focus on the moment as they are surrounded by beautiful water gardens, bird houses, tropical plants, bright flower arrangements, and wedding bouquets. It doesn't have to be loud and/or evasive to be effective. It also makes the shop



seem less vacant or empty if there are no other shoppers in the store when a single customer ventures in alone. It feels friendly. It also diminishes self-consciousness from shoppers who are discussing product options with each other and want a sense of privacy.

## 3. SMELL

Many hothouse-grown flowers

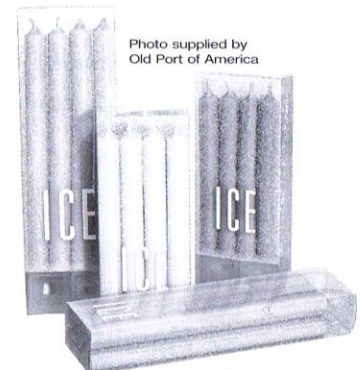


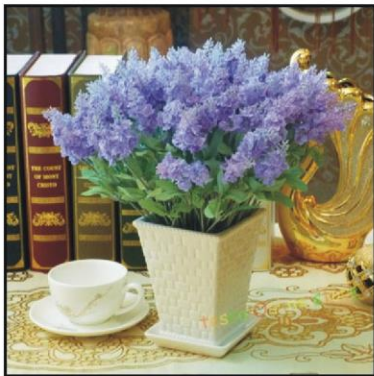
Photo supplied by  
Old Port of America

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lack that unique fragrance common to typical species of plants, so if you have to bring in other scented items, such as potpourri, candles or incense, and place them near the specific flower varieties to maximize the expected scent, then do it! It's all about the experience. If I smell rose, even if the actual flowers don't have a strong scent, and especially if I can see the source of the fragrance, then it satisfies my

(ad replaced by images suitable for topic)



The tea cup, linen, and books provide added sense of taste and enjoying a beautiful flower arrangement at home. The back drop items contrast with the white porcelain to sense a spring day.



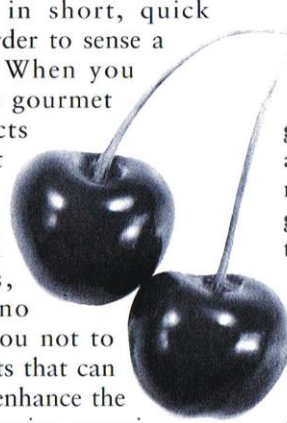
Pillar candles add a 'scent' to go with a seasonal display. The light places the eyes on the features.

expectation.

A word of caution: avoid excessive scents that compete with each other in an offensive way. Anything that is delicate and can only be sensed when you are close to the product is best. Even as we lean into a single bloom and inhale deeply in order to catch the essence of that flower's scent, the other products with the same scent should remain as subtle and mysterious.

#### 4. TASTE

The sense of taste is very connected to smell. When my grandmother lost her sense of smell, she used to open her mouth and inhale in short, quick breaths in order to sense a fragrance. When you consider the gourmet food products out there that are made from natural and herbal substances, there is no reason for you not to carry products that can be tasted to enhance the shopping experi-



ence of your buyers. Lemon, peppermint, jasmine, cherries... even as little candies in a dish by the till as the customer pays for their purchases will make a moment last longer even as the shopper leaves your store. If these items are for sale on a little shelf unit in the corner of your shop, or from a little display on a table in an aisle, you will be surprised at the add-on sales you can experience.

#### 5. TOUCH

Placing products in the prime selling space (which is from the eyes to the waist) or beyond that, from comfortable reach to just

above the knees is to make the majority of your products easy to touch. The velvet leaves of African violets, the petals of a gardenia, the smoothness of a velvet ribbon or



the texture of a clay pot with an exotic relief design are all begging to be caressed. As much as you can, use tables, shelves, risers, and stands to bring as many items as possible to waste level. Even if you have to restock frequently into this area, I guarantee your sales will increase and there will be more turns. The next time you are in your local grocery store, look closely at what they do in the fresh vegetable section? This is maximizing merchandising to touch!

#### WHERE YOU FIT IN

YOU and your staff. Everything about how you work with your customers and present yourself is also appealing to the senses. Dressing appropriately, with your name tag and company shirt or apron, having good hygiene, smiling, nodding, explaining in clear, friendly terms, and shaking your customer's hand in appreciation for the business—especially if they have just agreed to spend \$5,000 on their daughter's wedding flowers—all appeal to the customers' senses. Every detail adds up to a memorable experience and remains in the mind of the shopper long after they leave your store. ☐

Linda McKendry of VMPC offers onsite consulting and instruction for retailers, wholesalers, distributors, and manufacturers. Linda has presented display series at the CGTA Gift Show and the Alberta Gift Show. To order for VMPC & Display, call (905) 813-8725, fax (905) 819-8505, or e-mail lrmcke@attglobal.net

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