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soothing the senses



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Showing Off

Soothing

the senses

READER QUESTION: Help! People seem so stressed out these days. How do I create a soothing ambiance and calming atmosphere in my shop to relax and energize my customers?

BY LINDA MCKENDRY, VMPC

LINDA'S REPLY: We are creatures of "sense-ability." That means that we are constantly influenced by what is attacking or lulling our senses. Have you ever stepped into a mall and immediately been drawn to the aroma of fresh baked cinnamon buns? Or to fresh ground coffee?

And it isn't just the smell of it, it's the sight, the sound, the touch, and eventually the taste that brings it all together into a wonderful experience that helps the shopper to snatch a moment of luxury and enjoy a small indulgence!

Recently, I was shopping in a mall in North Carolina, and as I was trying on garments in the dressing room

of a clothing store, I was soothed by the mellow tones of wood flutes reminiscent of hillsides far in the mountains of Peru. When the clerk came to check on my progress, I asked about the source of the music. She explained that it wasn't in the shop, it was piped in from the mall. Suddenly, I realized that I had noticed the music earlier when I was trying on shoes a few doors down. I made a mental note of the music when I walked out into the mall and realized that contrary to having to make mental switches from the main mall to individual shops, I was being lulled by continuous sound as I "floated" from shop to shop. It suddenly reminded me of the craziness I sometimes feel when I am in the supermarket purchasing household food and sundry items to the strains of *Memories* or *To All The Girls I've Known Before*—where the tunes and lyrics are incongruent to my shopping purpose and, instead of calming me so I can concentrate on making good purchasing decisions, add to my mental distress.

Gift stores with CD and tape merchandisers have no excuse not to have relaxing (but not somber or morbid) music playing in the store. If you want to control the music throughout the shop and be free from the annoyance of customers "testing" different types of music out loud, then provide ear phones.

During the recent CGTA gift show, I gave a private workshop to a client from the Barbados. She revealed that she was very aware of the lack of music at the show and in fact, pointed out a booth that she and a fellow buyer had visited the day before after being attracted to it by upbeat, fun music. When I had previewed the videotape she had sent me of the shops she represented in the Barbados, I had noticed that the music filtering through the stores (which attract mostly tourists) added a great deal of "island" ambiance. As a result of her comment at the show, I made sure that I had the right music playing when she entered my studio for a "Prop Shop" workshop and she was delighted! It set the right tone for a wonderful day together and provided the right aural setting for the demonstration displays of her products that we created. Like good fixtures and props, your music should take its cue from the products you sell and the target market of your shop and location.

Scent is another issue. You can choose the right fragrance for your shop by paying attention to how your customers react to different scents when they enter your store. Do they comment to you or their shopping companions? Like new cars, new homes, leather and lemons, some fragrances are universal and easily identified with very positive and predictable responses. Aromatherapy is a *huge* evolving industry that you need to take advantage of. There are essential oil offerings that can put you and your customers at ease, that can relax as well as refresh. They evoke a sense of well-being and are even known to sooth and reduce tension. You should make a great effort to find just the right scent for places where you can control the aroma in your shop, especially at the doorway or in products being set outside the shop.

The saying, "Amuse...don't confuse," which as we already know applies to sounds and visual product presentations, also applies to scent and fragrance. On a recent trip to Streetsville, I was drawn into a store by its window displays, which featured an appealing selection of home decor accessories. I made a quick circle around the first fixture and then had to exit. As I left I explained to the owner that the odor was excessive and I just couldn't stay in the shop. It was too strong. It was overwhelming. I felt choked. It was more like an assault on my nose rather than a pleasant, delicate scent floating around me while I browsed. If you find your customers sneezing, wheezing, rubbing their noses, their eyes, or fanning their faces, then you know that you have a scent that is just too overwhelming and strong. It needs to be wrapped, covered, or placed in a well-ventilated area of your store. Many products placed under strong, incandescent lights will give off more fragrance than when placed in a cooler place. The exception here is fresh flowers. One of my clients, a small grocery chain, has purposely installed walk-in coolers for their fresh flowers because customers love the scents that greet them when they enter the coolers. Increased sales? You bet.

What do you do when you can't control the scents? When a mix of product lines produce a chaos of scents that make customers uncomfortable? First, keep them in their packages with just a few samplers opened. Or, if the scent is strong, even

(original ads replaced with illustrations suitable for the topic)

The shopper's "mood" begins outside your store. A well done window display puts the shopper's mind at ease. There's no visual chaos or confusion.



Once inside the experience just gets better as everything looks fresh, neat and tidy without being sterile! Each area is contained with separate themes to make selection easier.



Even multi-colored items or products that are hard to contain are on secured on their fixture.

This reduces visual chaos and keeps the aisles free for comfortable browsing.

Items that can be stacked or "cozied" up keep the store feeling fresh. The shopper can see all the departments.



through the packaging, place them inside glassed cabinets. You can keep them separated by positioning the fixtures and departments at opposite ends of your shop so each can be enjoyed independently of the other. I know of one woman who created beautiful miniature displays with props, signs, and samples lined up on a counter, each one under a cake dome. It was an added experience for the shopper to lift the dome, be greeted by an aromatic surprise and replace the cover before going on to the next one.

A few years ago, when I was helping make over a store in Ajax, I opened wrapped candles and cut the connected wicks in order to use them in some beautiful candlesticks and create themed venues based on different colors. By the time we got to the fourth venue, it was obvious that we had exposed too many scents and that they were stronger than we had anticipated. We re-wrapped the candles in tight sleeves of plastic wrap to expose the colors and minimize the scents. Because they had been wrapped as pairs, we couldn't just show the candle in the holder with its original wrapping and labeling. While it's true that some of the scent may lose its strength after a while—who knows if that's a few hours, days, weeks, or months—hopefully the product will have found its way into the hands of a purchaser by that time. This is something to think about when making purchases of scented products.

Gourmet foods like flavored tea, coffee, vinegar, candy, jam, etc. usually don't give off their aromas until opened, cooked, or tasted. This means that props, such as artificial peaches in front of a display of peach-scented or flavored items will indicate immediately that that aroma is a feature of the product. There are so many well-made and

beautiful fruits, flowers and natural props, like cinnamon sticks, available that there are ample opportunities to showoff fragrances, prop your displays and thus increase your sales. Body care products also benefit from the placement of props that represent their fragrances.

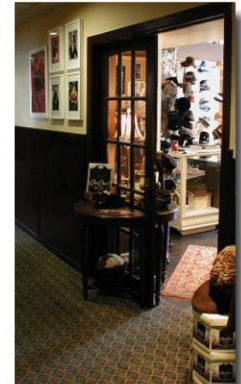
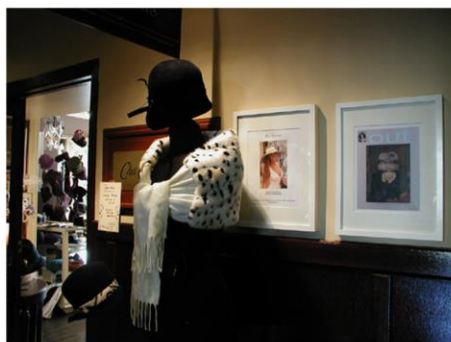
However, some products have to have signage or be demonstrated so customers know there's a fragrance connection. Examples of this are felt pens or plush toys that have scents. Magazines often carry a "scratch and sniff" strip that enables the subscriber to enjoy the scent and test their response to the perfume. As soon as there is an indication that there's a specific odor involved as a feature of the product, the buyer will want to inhale this for him or herself and use it as a factor in the purchasing decision.

Scents make sense when used to create an ambiance that will contribute to making the shopping experience memorable. When combined with the other senses, like sound and sight, there's nothing left for your customers to do but touch, taste and take the item home while talking about it to friends and family. By the way, are you worried about losing customers to Internet or television shopping? Seeing and hearing are still the only two senses through which these technologies influence. So expect prospects to keep coming into your shop as the only way to get the whole experience ... it's the "scents-able" thing to do! □

To book Linda's visit call 905-813-8725 or write to VMPC, Visual Merchandising Presentation Consulting, 100 Dennyway Drive, Mississauga, Ontario, L5V 1J6.

...There are essential oil offerings that can put you and your customers at ease, that can relax as well as refresh. They evoke a sense of well-being and are known to sooth and reduce tension.

(original ads replaced with illustrations suitable for topic)



From the approach to the shopping experience everything is inviting, welcoming, and interesting.



Open door and a lamp in the window say "Come In..."



Shoppers anticipation is increased when you give them all the right cues as they approach your store.

Let good focused lighting point the way to where all your merchandise is ready for them to see.

Their senses are heightened and they can relax in comfort surrounded by beautiful items close to touch and try. Add music and an appropriate fragrance to enhance the mood.

