



FEEL THE DIFFERENCE

Competitive retailers need to connect with their customers at every sensory level to succeed. **Report: Anthony Sibillin**

● Michael Morrison is no ordinary shopping companion. The retailer-turned-researcher notices things that most shoppers don't, like the fact the television on the Boost Juice wall at Melbourne's Chadstone shopping centre is showing a surfing documentary – with the sound turned down. Music, unrelated, emanates from speakers elsewhere. "It used to be music videos," Morrison says. "But separating the two works better."

Although they avoid shoppers' direct attention, the Monash University academic is convinced these subtleties influence behaviour. Why else, he asks, pointing to the juice bar's lengthening queue, would all these people wait up to 10 minutes to shell out more than \$5 for squeezed fruit? "Boost is connecting with them emotionally," he says. "It's about colour, aroma, texture, music, taste – engaging all five senses."

Emotional or sensory branding is another blow to the idea of rational consumers coolly comparing the price and value of competing products. In their place, many businesses recognise emotional consumers whose feelings, more than thoughts, determine what they buy.

Tony Rice

Anita Jones

"Emotional branding ... focuses on the most compelling aspect of the human character; the desire to transcend material satisfaction and experience emotional fulfilment," co-founder Marc Gobé, of international design and brand consultancy Desrippes Gobé, wrote in *Emotional branding: The new paradigm for connecting brands to people* (Allworth Press, 2001).

Triggering emotional responses for commercial gain is, of course, not new. Muzak, the American company that became synonymous with background music in stores, started in 1934. And "Marlboro Man", who convinced a generation of men that filtered cigarettes were not just for women, began riding in 1954.

What is new, branding expert Martin Lindstrom says, is that companies are considering touch, taste and smell as well as sight and sound as part of a unified strategy.

"To a large extent, marketers have operated in a two-dimensional world, only occasionally venturing into a broader universe where they leverage all five senses," Lindstrom wrote in *Brand sense: Build powerful brands through touch, taste, smell, sight, and sound* (Simon & Schuster, 2005).

Boost Juice founder Janine Allis – who left the *BRW Young Rich* list this year after surpassing the age barrier – is one Australian retailer who has ventured there. She agrees a multi-sensory approach is critical. "We believe it's not one thing that makes it work," she says. "It's the smell of the orange juice as you walk past; the words, like 'love' and 'life' [on the signage]; the right music, but also the right music at the right time of day. We use the whole package."

Apart from music advice from husband Jeff, a former executive at commercial radio group Austereo, Allis insists that the "package" reflects her personal vision for the brand. "Sometimes people think it is more complicated than it is. It needs a single person with a vision – I'm a firm believer in not making decisions by committee."

Fortunately for the less-than-visionary, there are a growing number of consultants to call on for help. One of them is Monica Apostol, managing director of the Sydney-based John Doe Creative. Apostol believes that emotional branding, which is becoming common in Europe and North America, is only now coming to the attention of local businesses. "Most products today come across to consumers as interchangeable commodities," she says. "Brands that want to maintain customer loyalty have to appeal to all the senses."

It is not just retailers heeding the message. Sydney-headquartered International Conservation Services is an unlikely John Doe client and convert to emotional branding. "There is an emotional bond between a particular object and its owner," Apostol says.

Moreover, this bond can be made to resonate with others through story-telling, ICS founder

and managing director Julian Bickersteth says. "[Apostol] has helped us focus on the bigger issue of what we are about. We work right across the heritage and conservation field – from the original conservation of paintings through to creating exhibition plans and helping museums with collection management. But what we are doing is helping everything to tell its story. What we are doing is unlocking those stories."

Still, it is in shopping centres where businesses try hardest to engage consumers' senses – to the extent that retailers are beginning to give the five senses equal billing when fitting out new stores, Victoria Ruhan, business development manager for in-store fragrance supplier Ecomist, says. "We have been around for 15 years and had some customers for all of that time. But the trendiness of it has come from Europe and the United States, starting two or three years ago. It has quickly become a normal part of when you are putting together the design of a store."

While Ecomist's impressive roster of clients, which includes youth fashion chain Supré and City Beach surfwear stores, is enough for many in the extremely competitive world of retail, the Sydney-headquartered company is keen to highlight research linking satisfied noses and spendthrift shoppers.

A study by Swinburne University, An Investigation into the Effects of Fragrance on Retail Sales and Customer Perceptions, commissioned by Ecomist, found that introducing an ambient fragrance to a PaintRight store at Hoppers Crossing, western Melbourne, improved shoppers' perception of the quality of its products and services, making them more likely to buy something.

Other research shows a similar positive impact from engaging all the senses. An international study by market research agency Millward Brown for Lindstrom's book revealed that taste, smell, sound, touch and sight – in that order of importance – affected consumer loyalty to 10 well-recognised brands, including Coca-Cola, Mercedes-Benz and Nike.

Lindstrom and Millward Brown also looked at whether the world's most valuable 200 brands, as determined by branding consultancy Interbrand, were exploiting this link. They found that fewer than 10 per cent are (see table above right), suggesting there is an opportunity for local and international brands to use emotional branding to upset the market leaders.

And the cost of doing so is not necessarily prohibitive. For example, Ecomist charges about \$25 a month, plus \$100 for a dispenser, to install a fragrance across a 90 square-metre store.

However, Allis warns against simply copying what rivals are doing. "We've had dozens of competitors come into the Australian market," she says. "They would look at our colours, the fit-out, etc, and copy it. Most haven't made it. They didn't get that it is the whole package." **BRW.**

TOP 200 BEST AND WORST: SENSORY ENGAGEMENT OF THE WORLD'S MOST VALUABLE BRANDS

Rank %	Brand	Sensory Leverage
1	Singapore Airlines	96.3
2	Apple	91.3
3	Disney	87.6
4	Mercedes-Benz	78.8
5	Marlboro	75.0
6	Tiffany	73.8
7	Louis Vuitton	72.5
8	Bang & Olufsen	71.3
9	Nokia	70.0
10	Harley-Davidson	68.8
191	Microsoft	33.8
192	Kleenex	32.5
193	McDonald's	32.5
194	Burger King	31.3
195	Sony	31.3
196	Adidas	31.3
197	KFC	28.8
198	Virgin	26.3
199	Motorola	25.0
200	Ikea	23.8

Source: Martin Lindstrom, Millward Brown



Boost Juice bar: 'We use the whole package,' founder Janine Allis says

FOUR LESSONS IN EMOTIONAL BRANDING

01 Emotional branding dumps the idea of a calculating consumer in favour of feelings and senses. It's not new – but it has never unified all five senses before.

02 The strategy is spreading to Australia, where retailers have to battle with the idea that products are interchangeable.

03 The technique has been used on everything from art restoration services to surfware.

04 Fewer than one in 10 of the biggest brands use the technique so there is room for others to exploit it.