
CHAPTER
1

Fighting the Battle

How to Make the Case for the New Marketing Paradigm

Marketing departments have a huge problem. (By “marketing,” I also mean advertising, sales, and other departments involved in consumer outreach or contact either within the company or as a vendor.)

A problem for all marketers is the need to provide proof that what they do actually matters and advances the company's fortunes.

Look at the situation from the chief executive officer's (CEO's) point of view. He or she has only so many resources, and stockholders to reassure and pacify. The CEO wants return on investment of significant dollars, which is critical to protect and enhance the value of the company. That's fair enough. It's up to you to get the CEO the needed information.

Remember retail guru John Wannamaker's classic nineteenth-century lament that he knew that half his advertising money was wasted, but he didn't know which half? Today, we have Lee Clow, TBWA/Chiat/Day's creator of the legendary "1984" commercial for Apple Computers, upping the ante. He contends that 90 percent of advertising has always been terrible.¹

Why shouldn't the CEO be worried? Why shouldn't the CEO be hesitant about spending lots of cash on marketing that may not be helping the company?

As Ken Kaess, CEO of DDB Worldwide, pointed out to his colleagues when he was the incoming chairman of the American Association of Advertising Agencies, there's a need for a new way to quantify the effectiveness of advertising. He wanted something far and above the status quo client copy testing often so anachronistic that it "would almost be hilarious if it weren't still being employed by the people who actually make brand and advertising decisions based on the results."²

The proof that vivid sensory stimuli can make a difference is evident everywhere. For example, I was six years old when my father's job took our family to Italy. Landing in Naples on our way to Genoa, near the port area during shore leave, I saw a baby octopus hanging from a meat hook. Right then, I knew I was in a new world.

The change caught me by surprise. The new "old" world snuck up on me. I was jarred by my senses, and they followed their own logic.

Every CEO needs an equally strong experience, something to convince or remind him or her that a great skill at reading numbers and developing strategies must not blind a person to the value of making a sensory-emotive as well as rational connection with consumers.

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In this chapter, I provide the justification for why the new marketing paradigms matter—because they connect companies to consumers more intimately—and I show how appealing to consumers' senses makes marketing plans far more effective.

CEOs can be reluctant to listen to projected benefits, but in my experience, they will listen to science and how scientific findings can be relevant to business, as I will explain. I'll start with why the new scientific understanding of how our senses work is especially important in today's hectic, overstimulated world. I'll show how the senses offer an immediate inroad to consumers' hearts and minds.

The Role of the Senses in Our Era

Should you want one simple reason why consumers' sensory responses matter so much to business today, look no further than the role of television. TV's emergence during the 1950s has threatened the supremacy of the written word for the first time since the invention of the printing press in the fifteenth century.³

Say goodbye to the rational age; it is now buried beneath entertainment and its half-sibling, infotainment. The average citizen in the developed world now watches TV for three to four hours a day. As a result, there's been a fundamental shift regarding how we receive information; to an ever-increasing degree, we're now living in a visual, postliterate society.

Why do we watch so much TV? Surely, much of the reason we want entertaining diversion is that we're burned out, starved for fun, and physically exhausted. We're overloaded, and we're seeking a way out. We want visual stimulation, and we also respond to other sensory information that breaks through the clutter.

Companies must recognize that although consumers may appear to tune out certain amounts of sensory data, they still fundamentally crave stimulation. In addition, sensory stimulation and escapism can go hand in hand, as I'll explain shortly.

Companies able to appeal to consumers' perceptual processes are in touch with the era we inhabit.

Breaking through the clutter is a cliché that nobody in marketing can escape. It's a well-known fact that people now typically experience over three thousand advertising messages daily.⁴

I've found that the key to winning over consumers is to get on their sensory bandwidth. Part of the reason senses are so powerful is because they offer instant gratification. However, companies miss the sensory mark all the time.

Consumers won't be able to tell you which ads will or will not work, but they can feel it. For example, at my company, Sensory Logic, we test consumer reactions to multiple stimuli. We line up various related advertising pieces and evaluate how people react on a gut level. Sometimes we compare competitive brands, like jeans from the Gap versus those from Levi's. We also compare different versions of ads for client companies. In one case, we lined up a pair of TV spots, a 30-second version versus a 60-second effort for the same product.

We found that the 60-second spot soon grew tiresome to viewers. In contrast, the 30-second spot captivated viewers for about 20 seconds. Our findings were confirmed by the testing and also at a pitch meeting.

I was once in the office of an executive for a potential client. A computer repairman was there, too, trying to get the executive's desktop functional again.

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I started to play the 30-second spot. The commercial was running on top of the screen, with the second-by-second biofeedback scores unfolding below it. There came a point when the main actor left the scene. By then the music track was growing stale, and the actor had his back to the viewing audience. (Ask yourself: How often does seeing people turn their back to you generate warm feelings? Rarely.)

Just then—as the scores were beginning to tumble—the repair guy cut in. “I know that commercial,” he said.

The executive and I looked at him, across the room. “Yeah, I know that commercial,” the repairman repeated, before adding, “And at first I like it. But then it starts to annoy me.”

The executive looked back down at the screen, then at me. The biofeedback verified that the commercial took a definite downturn after a promising beginning. “You guys are good,” he said, smiling and nodding.

The lesson is the following: Imagery that appeals to our senses has a powerful effect on consumers, and it can lead to an emotional reaction. Although they may not be able to articulate the reasons why one ad appeals to them more than another, they nevertheless make split-second decisions based on sensory input.

Imagery processing is like microwave cooking. The brain cooks the equivalent of ready-made meals. In other words, the senses cause us to have an immediate reaction to stimuli.

I'll discuss these concepts in further detail in the next chapter. In addition, appealing to consumers' senses is the right strategy for our harried times. For example, cell phone companies besiege us

with complicated monthly plans, whereas Apple Computers gives us simple “Think different” advertising, a single strong image, and plenty of white space that lets us catch our mental breath rather than encouraging us to flee.

There is no better way to generate clutter-busting impact (and appeal, too) than by creating vivid, immediate sensory stimulation. Companies that can provide adaptable, flexible, responsive interactivity will succeed in this environment.

To be successful at stimulating sensations within your customer is really the ultimate in customized relationship marketing. It’s also a reminder that the senses can provide a “wow.” Our media-driven society has made consumers accustomed to high production values. They’re aware of such a wealth of product choices that they now fully expect to be wowed.

Leveraging the sensory bandwidth can help you avoid or get out of the commodity trap by offering your customers extra, unexpected value. Think of OXO GoodGrips kitchen utensils, which have grown market share by adding a component of visual and tactile delight to tools that otherwise serve a functional utility. With their oversized, supple handles and bright colors, these products appeal to consumers’ senses and come across as fun and different, as well as easier to use by everyone, including especially people suffering from arthritis.

Forget about people’s consciousness; more than articulated needs must be met. As science shows us, what’s verbally known and shared is only the tip of the iceberg.

An offer that delights the senses is less likely to be passed over. It establishes a greater value that you can price accordingly to enhance profit margins—something your CEO will love.

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The Senses Are Tangible and They Provide Information

The second strategic reason why the senses matter so much to business is that they build trust. They capture information that lets us make the case for why we respect or choose one company over another. To understand how we handle our investigations, think of the old *Columbo* detective episodes. Peter Falk shows up in his battered, barely running car, wearing an old, stained raincoat, and figures out what nobody else can apparently see.

How did he do it? Usually by noticing the small but crucial sensory clues that went unnoticed by the regular cops. It wouldn't occur to them to crouch down to find the subtle, telltale sign that would belie the accepted theory about who committed the crime.

Columbo's instincts are relevant because they illustrate the second strategic reason why the senses matter so much to business. Whether on purpose or by chance, companies inevitably disclose a multitude of sensory clues to consumers. For consumers, these clues are a weathervane or a barometer; in other words, they provide a way to gauge the situation. They can be felt by the consumer on either a conscious or an unconscious level. Regardless of how consumers register them, these clues either build or erode the trust on which brand equity relies.

Like good detectives, we assemble sensory impressions that give us information about our surroundings. Sight, sound, touch, taste, and smell: Where would we be without them? Sayings like "seeing is believing," "listen up," and "follow your nose" reflect society's beliefs in the power of the senses. Our sensory clues give us an idea about which companies care about us. The senses provide touch

points with consumers, and they represent consumers' most innate means of judging the situations they encounter.

Today more than ever before, we live in a world of "spin," which is often politically motivated distortions of the basic facts. Although sensory data can also be manipulated, it is generally easier to be disingenuous with abstract, verbal information. We rely on our senses to "sniff out the situation" and determine who's trustworthy.

The sensory clues that both delight and reassure offer the ideal means of solving the case of long-lost customer loyalty.

The Senses Are Universal

The third and final strategic reason why the senses matter so much to business is because they help us reach across borders in an age of globalism. With globalization, tapping into international commerce has become more of a priority for many brands, and clearly there are enormous opportunities available. Of course, responding to the call for globalization can be a challenge, and reaching the world economy also means multiple markets that have multiple languages and potentially a host of communication barriers.

Fortunately, the language of the senses is nonverbal, and when used effectively, sensory marketing can transcend the inherent gaps between diverse target audiences.

Sensory marketing on an international scale also creates the following benefits:

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- *Internationally.* Visual and other sensory clues provide an easy, quick way to differentiate your offer while simplifying the consumer's decision-making process. Many large brands have now taken on the status of cultural icon, reaching across borders. Do Tokyo consumers know anything about colonels or where Kentucky is located? Probably not. But they know Colonel Sanders's bow tie because KFC is a major chain in Japan.

Companies able to identify and understand the sensory clues that suit us as a species can hope to span continents by tapping into psychological truths. Ruggedness? Youth? Mobility? In overseas markets, Levi's epitomizes America's promise to let you shape your own life. I discuss these universal emotional desires in Chapter 5, which examines tapping into consumers' innate desires.

- *Domestically.* America's recent large-scale immigration doesn't always lead to the kind of melting pot assimilation that took place during earlier waves of immigration. These days, a "salad bowl" analogy is often more appropriate, because many nationalities have retained their own cultural traditions within the larger American community. Without sensory clues, today's more fractured ethnic markets are not always easy for major corporations to reach. Sensory clues can overcome communication barriers.

To return to the international benefits, my company's testing in Europe and Asia has revealed cultural subtleties. To draw some generalizations, the French are concerned with beauty, and the Germans focus on integrity. The English seem to gravitate toward marketing efforts that reflect deference, whereas the Japanese seek appropriateness.

However, if we look at the international products that work, many offer sensory gratification that transcends cultural barriers. Consider, for example, the universal appeal of Hollywood block-

buster movies. Entertainment in all of its forms now represents one of America's largest, most successful export categories; action films, in which the words are secondary, often lead the way.⁵ The sensory information and visual stimulation available in these films gives them a profound universal appeal. The adrenaline rush they elicit through their powerful use of visual effects also contributes to this universal appeal.

The Senses Rule the Decision-Making Processes

So far in this chapter, I've focused on the senses from a scientific and a strategic marketing perspective, showing how to justify sensory marketing to even the most skeptical CEO. However, the CEO might need a final push to be convinced, and in this final section and in the next chapter about cognition and communication, I offer some more hard, sustained evidence from the field. I'll show how a company can conceptualize, build, and conduct its daily business around a more intuitive, sensory approach.

The latest scientific information suggests that the consumer decision-making process originates in sensory impressions. Thus, a company's ability to enhance the frequency and quality of those impressions becomes the engine that drives profitability.

The old understanding about how consumers think was grounded in the belief that people make decisions on a conscious level. It started with need recognition and then passed to the gathering of information and the evaluation of alternatives. This model saw decision making as a mechanical, even predictable, process.⁶

The truth is that we don't buy a car by reading a manual about its engine. We kick the tires, sit behind the wheel, and go for a test drive. Trying to generate consideration through information is con-

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trary to the spirit of the age, with our desire for sensory stimulation. It also runs against human nature. Today the value proposition is more intimate and intuitive. In fact, a product's value isn't defined in the marketplace or on behalf of consumers. Instead, value is defined within consumers, through their unconscious reaction to a company's offer.

It was an artistic businessman who led the way in transforming this reality into gold.

The Sensory Magic of Walt Disney

Long before science got there, Walt Disney had already instinctively grasped the importance of replacing Descartes's "I think, therefore I am" with "I sense, therefore I am" as a means of attracting customers.

Walt began his career as a cartoonist. When he began to make animated films, he found new ways to expand the sensory bandwidth of visual images. As he pioneered the art of making cartoon films, he combined these visual images with innovations involving synchronized sound, color, three-dimensional backgrounds, and stereophonic sound.⁷ His goal was to give moviegoers the richest possible sensory experience, and he was able to achieve this through his movies.

But, with film Walt still found himself inherently limited to the senses of sight and sound. So when it came time to create Disneyland, he again pushed the limits by building the first of his theme parks on an even more complete sensory basis. In effect planned as a choreographed walk-through movie, this Disney theme park engages consumers through all five of the senses.

Inside the gates, guests experience Walt's scene-by-scene script. As they funnel through Main Street U.S.A. to the other areas, the



Figure 1.1 Long before science could validate his approach, Walt Disney understood the power of both the face and smiling. Mickey Mouse reflects Darwin's realization of links between humans and animals and that an oversized head with a big smile will draw people in. (Photo courtesy of Disney Enterprises, Inc. © Disney Enterprises, Inc.)

sensory signals they receive appear spontaneous. In fact, all of these triggers are carefully rehearsed, and they are plentiful. The Disneyland experience is like a living movie, with carefully designed sets (buildings), highly trained cast members (employees), and costumes (see Figure 1.1). Their scripts (words) and their stage movements (actions) are all rehearsed, but they appear fresh and spontaneous. Surely the most gripping aspect of this cinematic experience is the rides, some of which were planned in tight scenarios to be experienced in theater-like darkness.

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How on target was Walt? His instincts were good enough that his second park, Walt Disney World Resort, qualifies as the leading tourist destination on the planet. What the parks gave him was a venue for getting closer to his customers and maximizing the sense of playful interaction that we see in his films. In contrast to a movie theater, inside the Magic Kingdom, the experience is richer and of greater duration; therefore, it leads to powerful, even lifelong connections with consumers. Only now has the business world begun to catch up with Walt Disney's vision. His innovative ideas led the way by focusing on the customer's complete experience, starting with the crucial sensory realm.

Reason versus Passion

If there is any place where the cliché about the need to “think with your head, not with your heart” has advocates, it is probably in the corner offices of strategically oriented CEOs.

The new scientific discoveries about how people make decisions should change how they feel about reason and passion—because the verdict from the scientific community is in favor of passion.

I believe that most CEOs want to think of their customers as rational beings. This prevailing bias must change for companies to connect with customers on a deeper, more meaningful level. The payoff isn't just to make the marketing folks happy—it gets back to why a company is in business in the first place, to make money. In the end, sensory marketing is the key to financial success, rewarding both shareholders and employees. The payoff for winning customer loyalty is lucrative.

Remember, people decide emotionally, and I don't just mean the sensitive types who follow their hearts. Everyone does this. In the end, sensory marketing matters because it facilitates and locks

into place an emotional connection between a company and consumers, a connection that until formed, prevents a new product from succeeding in the marketplace. In the next chapter, I'll show exactly how the brain works, and how sensory data is the doorway into consumers' minds and hearts.

In summary, the main points in this chapter are as follows:

- Business today is oriented to a model of the consumer as a rational decision maker. In the next chapter, I'll explain the latest scientific understanding of how we actually make up our minds.
- Sensory marketing is a crucial tool that bridges cultural and international barriers. The senses are universal, and appealing to them through marketing efforts represents a potent method for tapping into the global marketplace.
- We unconsciously gather information about our surroundings through our senses. They paint a picture of our surroundings for us and guide us in our decision-making processes.
- Consumers process sensory information instantaneously, giving sensory marketing an immediacy that's lacking in methods that treat consumers as purely rational beings.
- Sensory marketing also appeals to domestic consumers because, again, the senses are universal. This type of marketing approach is perfect for harried, overstimulated consumers. In spite of their apparent elusiveness, appealing to their senses cuts through other stimuli and captures their attention.

Now that we've established the value of marketing to the senses, I turn to the second stage of the consumer decision-making process: emotional assessment.

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Notes

1. Lee Clow, quoted in Christine Canabou, "Advertising Under Review," *Fast Company* (April 2002): 62.
2. Ken Kaess, quoted in Stan Rapp, "Something New under the Advertising Sun," *DMA Insider* (Fall 2002): 10.
3. Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death* (New York: Viking, 1985).
4. David Schenk, *Data Smog: Surviving the Information Glut* (San Francisco: Harper, 1997), 27.
5. Benjamin R. Barber, *Jihad vs. McWorld: Terrorism's Challenge to Democracy* (New York: Ballantine, 1995), 307–309.
6. Philip Kotler, *Marketing Management: Analysis, Planning, Implementation, and Control*, 8th ed. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1994), 193–198.
7. B. Joseph Pine II and James H. Gilmore, *The Experience Economy: Work Is Theatre & Every Business a Stage* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 1999), 2.