

Digitally Released Aroma and the Flavorist

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Many of the most pleasurable culinary experiences happen before you take the first bite or sip: think of the enticing scent of pizza just coming out of the oven that makes you stop in front of a pizza place when you hadn't even been aware that you were getting hungry; of the aroma of freshly brewed coffee that makes you forget the pain of having to get out of bed early; of the warm, subtle blend of spices and seafood and cream that makes your mouth water when the waitress puts a bowl of lobster bisque down in front of you. The aroma of foods and beverages can be a powerful message of pleasures to come. Its appeal, however, is a fragile thing. If it comes at the wrong time or the wrong place, or if it comes on too intensely or lingers too long, enticement turns to surfeit. Some of the finest gourmet scents, say, of a ripe cheese or of seafood, can be a dubious pleasure if you don't know precisely what it is you are smelling. Such limitations have, up until now, severely limited the application of food and beverage aroma in consumer communication. With the introduction of digital aroma release technology, this situation is changing dramatically.

The Technology

In this technology, an aroma, dispersed in a specially selected solvent system, is adsorbed on a chemically inert carrier material, again selected for its compatibility within the total system, and released in a stream of carrier gas at an electronically controlled moment for a brief and precisely controllable time span through an outlet ergonomically designed (taking the density and velocity of the carrier gas stream into account) to lead it to the consumer's nose with minimal spill-over to the environment. Thanks to this sophisticated delivery system, the consumer experiences a brief, tantalizing whiff of, say, fresh fruit, of aromatic coffee, of hot pizza. Combined with the message from the speakers and on the video screen that are part of some point-of-sale units, the experience becomes en-

veloping and enticingly vivid.

To make this happen, the appropriate aromas are obviously an essential part of the mix. Depending on the type of aroma desired, the task of providing such aromas ranges from simply selecting a few promising candidates from among existing formulations to challenging development projects. My experience with aerome — some five years — with many different aromas has taught me a great deal about which types of flavors work best and which ones require visual support to be enticing.

The Applications

The natural function of aroma is to stimulate the body for the ingestion of food or drink that is about to follow. Hence, prime sites for using electronic aroma release systems are at places of consumption like vending machines or beverage automats or at points of sale of ready-to-eat snacks or ready-to-drink beverages. However, some aromas carry emotional connotations that create intriguing opportunities for atmospheric use. Pumpkin pie and Christmas cookies evoke the spirit of festive family occasions, exotic spices make dreams of far-away places come alive, sparkling whiffs of citrus or cola spell refreshment and stimulation, the aroma of creamy hot chocolate or root beer can carry you back to the protected world of childhood. A recently developed promotional video for wine takes you from the warm scent of wooden vats and the cool musty notes of a wine cellar through to the glorious aroma of a great wine. The range of possibilities is as wide as imagination carries you.

We, as an industry, are now at the dawn of the era of digitally released aroma. Exciting potential lies ahead for all of us.

References

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The Problem
and the Promise