



Enhancing an Environment With Fragrance

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Isn't it amazing how the olfactory sense can trigger brain patterns and instantaneously influence our mood? This sensor can manifest both pleasant and unpleasant reactions and quickly evoke memories—all through the sense of smell. The scent of freshly baked bread may summon memories of a happy childhood. Fragrant candles and soaps make their surroundings more pleasant. On the contrary, the scent of a skunk can ruin an otherwise wonderful outdoor experience. Yet, of all the senses, the sense of smell is the least understood and so easily stimulated.

History of Environmental Enhancers

Humans have been enhancing their immediate environment with fragrance for centuries. History consistently documents such occasions. Potpourri, mixtures of dried flowers, herbs, spices and leaves, date back to the time of the pharaohs. Homer mentioned sachets in *The Odyssey*. Pigeons in ancient Rome were doused routinely with perfumed water so they could carry fragrance throughout the city.

In medieval times, people carried pieces of scented spices and fixatives in ornate containers to ward off objectionable (evil) smells. All during the

middle ages, housewives developed unique floral blends in their still rooms. These scents became the home's calling card, the official greeter. Natural fixatives and essential oils like musk (from the deer), civet (from the civet cat), as well as lavender, myrrh and rose were used.

Napoleon's troops carried hundreds of gallons of fragrance with them into battle. Women wore sachets in the folds of their long, flowing dresses in the late 18th century. Incense, scented candles, room fresheners, fragrance diffusers, perfume lamps, drawer sachets and a myriad of olfactory delectables have been used since recorded time to enhance one's immediate environment. But the concept didn't really come into prominence in the United States until the past 30 to 40 years.

The Fall and Rise of Environmental Fragrances

Marketers and retailers in the US have extolled the sales of environmental fragrancing items—scented candles in the '50s, incense burning and potpourris in the '60s, and a broad range of hi-tech gadgets and unique delivery systems in the '70s.



By the early '80s, however, marketers realized the business was cyclical, a boom/bust syndrome. By 1984, most major retailers shunned the concept and said environmental fragrances were dead. They expanded personal fragrance selling space and virtually eliminated the cosmetic accessory area, where environmental fragrances had been housed.

I joined the Minnetonka Corporation in the late spring of 1985 to preside over the Fragrance Marketing Group, a small subsidiary whose major product line was Claire Burke Home Fragrances. Robert Taylor, founder and CEO, said to me, "From the time I first saw Claire Burke in Charlottesville, Virginia, many years ago and then bought her company, I have felt it could lead a renaissance in the entire category and become a formidable brand. Your job is to make it happen!"

As we delved into the project, we discovered all the ingredients for success were present: baby boomers were staying home in earnest; we were becoming a generation of nestors; single person households were on the rise; the immediate home environment was being enhanced with quality accessories; stress reduction and family values were taking precedence over personal agendas; and trend prognosticators like John Neisbitt, author of *Mega Trends*, were forecasting, "... a growing fondness to stay home and utilize this sanctuary as an oasis of sanity in a difficult and complex world."

The marketing challenges to exploit this opportunity were varied. How do we package the line? What scents do we use? How do we convince reluctant retailers to re-enter the category? What are we doing right currently?

First, we analyzed our strengths. A scent strip advertising campaign started the previous year, Applejack and Peel line, in Shelter/Home books was reaping healthy direct mail sales. Simmering potpourri sales were also increasing. Our upscaled Americana packaging was popular and small independent gift stores were consistently selling out the line.

Why were these independent retailers experiencing such success? We went into the field to visit these stores and noticed that these innovative, entrepreneurial retailers created an irresistible point-of-sale environment that often led to an impulse consumer purchase. Enticing displays used other store items (like large baskets to hold the potpourri). They had created a theme—Victorian, French country, or "folksy"—through the use of ancillary accessories. Also, delightful aromas permeated the entire store. Customers loved it and often remarked, "My, doesn't it smell nice and homey in here." Sales soared.

Our challenge was now defined and focused: to create the same point-of-sale impact area ambience

and excitement for large, upscale retailers. After all, the category was new and would only add sales, not erode other brands' existing bases.

We decided to try successful personal fragrance marketing strategies. Present each fragrance as a distinct entity to the consumer. Merchandise each line around a lifestyle or as a fashion statement. Use impact print advertising (adding a scent strip) and educate the consumer at the point-of-sale. In essence, we set out to pioneer an entire fragrance category. We were making products to make people feel better about themselves and their immediate home environment.

The marketing attack began. Each fragrance was given a packaging and color theme reflecting its own unique position and fashion statement. Colors were chosen to accessorize rather than detract from current home decorating trends. Each scent was thematic to reflect current decorating motifs—country, Victorian, or a celebration of a specific season. At no charge, each store was given a complete set of display materials that would translate into an easy to understand, direct statement to the consumer at point-of-sale. Beautiful, yet utilitarian products were offered at reasonable price points.

The selling structure was then redesigned to maximize a limited target distribution. The initial plan of attack included an initial palatable sales presentation to win over reluctant major retailers. A tight, impactful assortment of products was completed. This was done with an evident fashion presence for the store—one that would be effective either in their cosmetics department or in their bath/domestics area. The second and third phases concentrated on fragrance introductions to maximize a key season (Christmas memories, for example) and then to gain year-round shelf presence (such as summer morning).

All our efforts were successful for the Fragrance Marketing Group and eventually for the entire category. Business exploded in 1986 and 1987. By the beginning of 1988, over 100 other companies were competing for consumer dollars spent on environmental fragrances.

All individual concepts of environmental enhancement are experiencing growth as we enter the '90s.

- Sales of bath products are increasing.
- Aromatherapy themes are being used for salon, spa, and home bath additive products.
- Plug-in deodorizers and catalytic combustion devices are resurging.
- Auto air fresheners are in vogue.
- Innovative incense burning delivery systems are everywhere.



- Scented linens and towels for both the kitchen and bath are gaining popularity.
- Companies that fragrance commercial buildings through existing air movement systems (like heating and air conditioning ducts) are emerging.
- People are perfuming their pets.
- Jacuzzi and hot tub watercoloring fragrances are available.

How will all these growth areas lead us into the next decade and what new developments are on the horizon?

Future Growth Possibilities

Annette Green, executive director of The Fragrance Foundation, was quoted recently, as saying, "Environmental fragrancing always has been peripheral, but now it has an accepted place in the home and is selling like crazy." This echoes the desire of today's consumers for a return to romanticism, values and simplicity. These are all states of mind which, as stated previously, are strongly impacted by

the olfactory sense.

Think of fragrancing possibilities to reinforce the predicted trends of the '90s: quiet and privacy. The '90s will go where our dreamers and entrepreneurial thinkers take us. Pay attention to small innovative company requests. These are idea people. Do not discount them because they don't fit into a defined bureaucracy.

The renaissance of enhancing one's environment with fragrance is becoming more sophisticated and wide spread. We are headed to a place where the awareness of environmental fragrancing and the effects it can have on people and their well-being will be accepted as an integral part of a fulfilling life. Annette Green's concept that fragrance is an absolute necessity for personal well-being, rather than simply an uplifting, stimulating, glamorous adjunct to life, will become the reality of the '90s.

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