



Fragrance Marketing:

Translating Creativity into Success

By Carmen Dubroc,
Calvin Klein Cosmetics Corporation, New York, NY

"Our next topic is a very intriguing one. Which is more important to the success of a fragrance?... The skills of the creative perfumer, the skills of the marketing department, or, are they equally important? Our next speaker is one who knows the answers to those questions. Before entering the cosmetics and fragrance industry, our speaker served as vice-president and general manager of Godiva Chocolatier, Inc. where she was responsible for sales and marketing. She also served three years as vice-president of marketing at Charles of the Ritz and four years at Avon Products where her duties were primarily in international marketing. Currently, she is senior vice-president, marketing at Calvin Klein Cosmetics. She oversaw the development and launch of 'Eternity,' in 1988 and 'Eternity for Men' in 1989. She is a native of New Orleans and earned a master's degree from the Sorbonne University in Paris."

The best products emerge from partnerships. They emerge from an amalgam of talents, experiences, and motivations which result, in this case, in an enormously creative end product known as a fragrance launch.

Let's focus on *our* partnership. There are three key areas:

Who are the players on both sides of this industry? What is this process that we create together? and How can we make the communications among us even better?

This partnership is critical for success in this industry. We all know that perfumers can create the most superb fragrances in the world. But if they are not supported by superior marketing plans and impactful advertising, they will not be a financial success.

The inverse is also true. With fabulous advertising and promotional plans, the marketer may be able to hook the customer *once* into purchasing a new fragrance, but if that fragrance isn't a wonderful scent, the customer will never come back for more.

So the perfumer and the marketer are locked together in this mission of delivering a superior total package to the consumer.

Who Are the Players?

To understand who the players are, let's take a few steps back in order to clearly focus on what it is we do for a living. Let's push away from our desks and computers in order to be a bit more philosophical about our mission in this business.

The fragrance industry is a repository of smart women and men who have chosen for themselves the responsibility of putting style, verve and sexiness into the lives of consumers. If you think about it, that's not such a bad line of work. It is, in all, totally creative. It starts, literally, from nothing. Let's imagine the beginning of any project. Our desks and labs are empty; our telephones are quiet, our buildings dark. We are in that limbo we know so well between projects. We tap our fingers nervously, waiting for the race to begin again.



And suddenly, the call comes. Out of nothing but an idea, a distant concept, the wheels of this marvelous industry begin to turn. A whole constellation of services is thrown into motion at the anticipation of yet another fragrance launch.

Sand from the beaches of Spain is scooped up to become the raw material for new fragrance bottles in the factories of France; pulp from German forests is gathered to be processed into folding cartons; advertising agencies around the world vie for winning product names and positioning statements to present to their clients.

And there is smile on the face of the perfumer in anticipation of the joys and frustrations to come, in the hopes that this fragrance submission will be the chosen one. It is a race in which many people compete, and yet there will be only one perfumer who will submit the winning scent. In this very subjective industry, there is no photo finish to prove who the winner is. The winner also does not win by a mile, although, you could say, he or she wins by a nose.

Winning in this business often has little to do with whatever a submission was; thin or round, classic or contemporary, good or bad. In this race, the single winning ingredient is creativity. A winning fragrance is *the* unique, irreplaceable element and guiding force behind a complex registry of the total creative mix which also includes the name, advertising, imagery, esthetics, packaging and pricing.

Creativity is important because the end product is an ethereal one which defies definition. All one can do is create the perfect scenario for the customer, she has to respond to what we do because it is her imagination which completes the fantasy.

There are guidelines, however, for creativity. First of all, the fragrance has to be commercially acceptable. It cannot be too strange, too green, too single note, or too light.

Secondly, it must be an original. There will always be room in the marketplace for another knockoff of Drakkar Noir or Oscar. But since these two scents have already been done exquisitely, our combined efforts should concentrate on creating something new. Recent successful launches have shown that the public has what appears to be an insatiable appetite for new fragrances. This need has to be fulfilled with truly new ideas.

And third, a scent should be distinctive. This should have nothing to do with price. Whether mass or class, a scent should make a statement about the wearer. One of the things it should say is style. It should complete the wearer's wardrobe, whatever the wardrobe is. It should not be mediocre. There is too much mediocrity out there already and our industry *exists* because people want to make a state-

ment about what they are wearing. Let's help them do that with pride.

The perfumer alone is not free to make these final choices for the customers. He/she should simply try to hear where the customers are coming from and then interpret those guidelines as creatively as possible.

The Creative Process

The second key area is understanding what we create together. To illustrate this process, I would like to share some behind the scenes work that went into the development of Eternity for Men, a fragrance that took just under a year to bring to market. Hopefully this will give some insights as to the kind of limits and constraints, albeit self-imposed, that the marketer has to face.

When the development of Eternity for Men had started in September 1988, several guidelines were already in place due to the marketing philosophy. At Calvin Klein, trademarks are referred to as "Masterbrands." It implies a philosophical approach to using the same strategy to market both a women's and men's fragrance as though they were two halves of one large masterbrand. Using this approach, women's and men's fragrances share the same name, imagery, advertising, packaging approach, in-store look and last but not least, fragrance type.

Eternity for Women had been launched during the summer of 1988 and was enjoying much success when the discussion began for the men's brand. All of its elements were revisited for Eternity for Men.

The Eternity name was given by Barry Schwartz, Calvin's business partner. The name was fresh in his mind, as he had been dispatched to London to purchase a wedding ring for Calvin's wife, Kelly. This wasn't just any ring; it was part of the Duchess of Windsor's jewelry collection auctioned by Sothebys: the Duchess' famous Eternity ring. So, the process began with a great name.

The advertising campaign for the women's fragrance features a Calvin and Kelly look alike couple, Christy Turlington and Lambert Wilson, with children, frolicking on the beach. The message of Eternity was clear: America was nesting again, and the air was filled with love, commitment, and the cycle of life.

So, for Eternity for Men, photographs were commissioned which extended the family scenes to include a man and his children, a new imaging concept in men's fragrance advertising. It is miles away from a macho man with a woman in every port. One particular photo was selected that demonstrates the pride that fathers feel for their sons. This is a wonderful advertising story.



Simultaneously, work was going on on a packaging story which also had to match the women's bottle. Eternity for Women packaging was clean, crisp, classic, typically understated as are all things which are designed by Calvin. And most importantly, it was composed of silver and crystal, time honored symbols of love and commitment. So to follow suit, an elegant, yet masculine look and feel was achieved for the men's packaging.

By far the most challenging area was to be the fragrance selection. While Eternity for Men had to compliment Eternity in imagery and positioning, we had two very different internal barriers to contend with: The first was how to make a men's fragrance fresh, floral, classic and sexy all at the same time. The second was how to create this new men's fragrance without cannibalizing an already existing and highly successful Obsession for Men. The answers to these questions were to be found in Calvin's fragrance profile.

The first step was to build a comprehensive profile which was revisited many times, but never rewritten. Since fragrance is Calvin Klein's only business, we are certain about what we want, and get the very best help. As with Obsession, Obsession for Men, and Eternity, Ann Gottlieb helped us to communicate Calvin's expectations at the profile meetings with seven essential oil houses. She explained what we wanted, and *especially* what we didn't want this new men's entry to be.

With its name and imagery, this new fragrance had to be sparkling and clean. It also needed to be romantic, not erotic. While it is difficult to describe what romantic smells like, it was important to use words which would inspire the perfumers to use certain ingredients and steer clear of others. Eternity for Men needed to be engaging but not overpowering, referring to the fragrance level, as well as to its character. It should be able to be used all the time, not only for special occasions. It should be as appropriate at a cocktail party as it is when snuggling with your children on the beach. The scent was to be identifiable but not invasive. In other words, it should have signature while not being too aggressive. A comfortable fragrance, a like/love rather than a love/hate one, was needed. And lastly, an original, not a knock-off fragrance was ordered.

During the eight months of meetings that followed, over 400 submissions were reviewed. Ann Gottlieb and Lisa Greenblatt, the senior marketing director, worked directly with all the fragrance houses. Klein's president at the time, Robin Burns, and I reviewed all of the submissions blind, labeled only with men's names.

Many submissions were discarded immediately.

Others we lived with for several days before having reworked or accepted as finalists. We smelled each others arms. It was tested on our doormen at Trump Tower, in the IBM Atrium, and on delivery men.

Market research for fragrance selection was not deemed necessary. We believe we are the best judges of our fragrances, and the best at deciphering both the positive and negative responses to our submissions and then knowing how to correct them. A very home grown and unsophisticated market research-type criteria was used: the "Nuzzle factor" and the "WOW factor." The nuzzle factor, or the "NF" as it came to be called, is that wonderful quality that makes you want to nuzzle right into the neck of the person who is wearing it. The WOW factor describes the person's gut reaction when first smelling the fragrance. If the fragrance can pass both of these user tests, it has the potential for being a winner.

After seven months of this, the search was narrowed down to three scents, and the veil of secrecy came off the process for one very important reason.



During the last phases of the selection, it is necessary to work *directly* with the perfumers to reach our goal. The search for Eternity for Men narrowed to three houses: Mane, IFF and Roure had the submissions which had scored the most points with us during the blind tests. In April 1989, our final phase began which was grueling, exhausting and soul searching. The drop-dead selection date was May 15 in order to make a ship date of October 1, and on May 17, only two days over deadline, the IFF submission by Carlos Beniam was selected.

Eternity for Men smells exactly like you would expect it to. It is fresh, tingling, exciting, warm, unusual, in a word, *creative*. It is a perfect marriage with its companion, Eternity for Women.

Communicating Better

What observations do marketers make during profile meetings? If a house shows up *without* a perfumer, we wonder what's wrong. If people don't have questions to ask, we are baffled. If people say they know precisely what we want, we are annoyed. And if people ask us what on the marketplace we would like our new fragrance to smell like, we are outraged.

The best profile meetings are those in which the participants are enthusiastic, inquisitive, confident, open, and expectant about the phenomenal process that's about to begin.

While the development of Eternity for Men went relatively smoothly, there were plenty of frustrations for some perfumers. Is there anything that can be done to lessen this frustration? As a marketer, I have some suggestions:

First, try to trust the marketer a little more. They are not always positive about what they want, but they have some good general ideas. It is just that often they have to fit a great fragrance into a complex strategy and end up taking a circuitous route to get there.

Second, do not try to second guess their intentions. If they say they want something risky or new or different, they probably do. Do not try to interpret what they mean or don't mean. The perfumer should just try his/her best to deliver the product as ordered, with his/her own particular creative twist.

Third, the perfumer should open up the doors of communication and get first-hand knowledge of what the marketer wants. If barriers exist between the perfumer and the sales rep, try to address them honestly and openly. Likewise, if the perfumer has not really understood the profile, say so. If not, it is going to be awfully quiet when the perfumer gets back to the isolation of the lab, totally confused about which direction to take.

Fourth, insist on getting feedback from customer

meetings if you haven't been in attendance. Particularly, if you have worked on a submission and you are counting on that feedback to progress further. This is your time to speak up. Otherwise, a waiting game ensues, which often leads to a loss of enthusiasm for the project.

And last, do not get caught up in the negativity of the "saturated market syndrome." So many people over-intellectualize this business. There is so much nay-saying lately about the ruination of the fragrance business. The concern is not the number of fragrances that are launched on an annual basis. This is an extremely dynamic business. Why shouldn't there be as many fragrances as there are breakfast cereals, car models, or movies? After all, we are in an entertainment business of sorts.

In the perfume industry, we create fantasy; we create dreams; we manufacture lifestyles. We make people feel better about what they wear and how they look. We make women feel more beautiful and sexier. We make men feel taller and more virile. We give people the opportunity to control their own private view of themselves as they take part in a larger, much less controllable universe. We should be proud of this industry where men and women of all nationalities work side by side to make the world a little more beautiful.

In closing, I would like to leave you with a poem I wrote for the ASP Symposium.

Ode de Toilette

Of the many things there are to do in
This world so filled with nothing new.
Aren't we lucky to have found such a place
Where our days are replete with fragrance and
grace?
Others it seems work on such dribble,
Like acid rain, flat tires, and writing newspaper
scribble.
But our work is lovely and satisfies needs,
Unlike finance and politics and mortgage deeds.
Yes, I've found my niche in the fragrance biz
And it's lots of fun being a marketing whiz.
For they pay me to toil with a passionate crowd
Of perfumers, sales reps, and marketers who
are proud.
In this our chosen field
Many profits do we yield
And it's not so superficial, you see
For we also contemplate Eternity.

Address correspondence to Carmen Dubroc, Senior Vice President of Marketing, Calvin Klein Cosmetic Corporation, Trump Tower, 725 Fifth Ave., New York, NY 10022 USA.

