



Multi-Sensory Marketing: What is it, and is it right for me?

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Q: My tradeshow marketing team has implemented some great interactive engagements, but what can they do to shake things up?

A: It sounds as if you're ready to explore the world of "multi-sensory marketing."

"Engagement." "Experiential." "Interactive." Gamification."

Marketers everywhere encounter these buzz words on an hourly basis. Every marketing article, blog, seminar ... and practically every marketing conversation ... eventually works its way around to one of these topics.

I'm not saying this is a bad thing ... in fact, the importance of these types marketing strategies has grown exponentially over the past several years, and will continue to grow unabated now that Millennials are making a larger and larger footprint in the world, as both market**er** and market**ee**.

But considering the plethora of technologies, apps, games, and other cool marketing doo-dads out there vying for our collective "interactive" attention, it's becoming difficult to choose an approach that can will through the current "experiential" clutter.

What's a marketer to do? I say ... Go Multi.

What is Multi-Sensory Marketing? Multi-sensory marketing is exactly what the name implies; it is a style of experiential marketing that is designed to engage more than one of our five senses ... thus the prefix "multi." Here's the reality: watch TV, flip through a magazine, surf the web, or roam a tradeshow floor for that matter, and 99.999% of the marketing or advertising messages you encounter have been designed to appeal to your emotions using your SIGHT and/or HEARING.

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Smell, taste, and touch ... are the senses that evoke our strongest emotional responses.

However, the impact of this visual and auditory marketing onslaught is limited. Yes, we are a highly visual species ... our forward eye placement attests to that. We are also a highly *auditory* species, although 100s of other animals have us badly beaten in that department.

So what's left? Smell, taste, and touch ... and isn't it interesting that while these three senses are rarely employed in marketing programs (especially tradeshow marketing programs) **they are the senses that evoke our strongest emotional responses.**

Need I remind you of the last time you smelled bread baking, lilacs blooming, or the unique "aroma" of a carnival? If you're like most people, your mind was immediately hijacked by sense memories and powerful emotions. Of course, these memories may be positive, negative, or both, but they are **always** vivid and persuasive.

Even though this is a common fact, most modern marketing programs focus only on sight and sound, ignoring the other three.

This makes sense (no pun intended) because it's difficult to deliver a taste, touch, or aromatic experience through an iPad. (Although you better BELIEVE that Apple did a TON of research on how that iPad screen FELT to your touch.)

This bias has leached into tradeshows and event programs. It is extremely rare to see an exhibit on a show floor that engages an attendee's taste, smell, or touch. Yes, food-based shows certainly do this, and when show rules allow, drinks and snacks are often offered to attendees, but for the most part, food & drink is used merely an attract or a reward ... it is seldom part of the strategic marketing engagement experience.

This positions "multi-sensory marketing" as something of an outlier, and perhaps ... as a *secret weapon*; we KNOW about it, we can APPRECIATE its efficacy, but few have the gumption (or imagination) necessary to put it into play.

This article, therefore, will 1) remind readers to consider multi-sensory marketing for their next event (done), and 2) suggest some ways to do this.

Sound. I've started with this one because it's difficult to implement on a show floor even though it's our second-most-used sense in marketing. Tradeshows are inherently noisy places, and having impact with sound can be tricky. There's nothing more annoying than a loud booth. However, if sound is something that could help tell your solution story, you can control it.

For example:

Name that Tune: Attendees receive branded earbuds (still a popular giveaway), and plug them into a kiosk to hear a short snippet of music. They must identify it by choosing an answer from 3-4 multiple-choice answers.

The song titles could reflect common industry challenges, or, a company whose message details the challenge of performing a job or task with partial or sketchy information may find this activity illustrative. "*Acme Widgets enables you to get "The WHOLE Picture."*"

Sub-Woofers: A booth experience that integrates sub-woofers in a special room or booth space can create a deeply evocative and memorable environment. Metaphorically, this

experience could communicate a company's "deep-rooted" commitment to service, or a product's "profound impact" on the attendee's life, etc.

A Hearing Test: Attendees love to test themselves to see how they stack up against their peers. A controlled hearing test using noise-cancelling headphones can be fun, informative, and tell an evocative story, e.g. *"Some issues in your network are almost impossible to detect ... solutions from Acme Widgets CAN detect them, and in many cases FIX them before you ever knew they existed."*

Touch. Booth surfaces, print pieces, even flooring, can be interestingly tactile. Many exhibitors DO feature unusual flooring in their exhibits, often opting for a wood laminate or extra-cushioned carpet. But what if the displays or printed collateral also featured evocative, tactile surfaces?

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Touch Test 1: Dove Soap and Lubriderm both used this idea in direct mail campaigns that demonstrated to recipients how outside forces can damage their skin.

Touch Test 2: Attendees place their hands through holes in the side of a closed box and must identify what they "feel" inside. The items can be specific and metaphorical: a cue ball, a bottle opener, a small computer "mouse," the end of a USB cord, etc. You'd be surprised how difficult it is to identify something using NO visual cues. This could be an effective activity for a company whose products or services help clients identify challenges or opportunities when optics are limited ... or non-existent ... or something as simple and obvious as an eye-care company.

Thermo-dynamic Ink: This technology has been around for a long time as well, and it can be used in many interesting ways. If you don't know about it, this is ink that changes color, or becomes transparent, when it encounters the heat of the human touch.

A Quiz Card could be printed using this ink, and to learn the correct answers, you simply "touch" a small circle to reveal it. This ink can also increase the interactivity and memorability of a printed Infographic by revealing "little-known" or "special" factoids in "secret" places ... it transforms a simple Infographic into Treasure Hunt.

Smell. As mentioned earlier, smell is the most emotive of all senses, and it's surprising that it isn't used more in marketing.

Of course, "scratch & sniff" cards immediately come to mind, and they continue to enjoy a great deal of popularity, especially in the food sector. Of course, "scratch & sniff" cards are not appropriate for a great many tradeshow verticals. (Pharma, anyone?)

Match That Smell: Yes, you could create a game like this, although please don't use that name because ... ick. I could see this used at a Financial Show ... stay with me. Often, investments or fiduciary instruments are said to "not pass the smell test." An activity could be devised that had a person smell a special card, and then search amongst a series of other printed cards to find its match.

There are loads of other ideas as well ... edible cookbooks that combine touch, smell, AND taste. The list goes on.

This is harder than it sounds, especially if some of the cards are similar ... Lemon & Lime ... Spearmint & Peppermint, etc. Of course, the copy on these cards enable the booth facilitators to start conversations, qualify attendees, etc.

Conclusion. Of course, these are only a few ideas, limited only by your marketing imagination ... and budget ... although many are surprisingly cost-effective.

For example, I read about a great promotional campaign where prospects received a printed business card made from litmus paper. Copy on the card prompted recipients to dip it into their water supply (up to a special mark). They then compared the resulting color-change with a chart on the back to test their water's pH balance. This simple interaction **PROVED** to the recipient that they needed this company's services.

Of course, people with pools do this all the time, but a promotion like this for the average business ... ingenious.

The list goes on ... edible cookbooks that combine touch, smell, AND taste ... you get the picture.

Marketers are becoming increasingly savvy when it comes to creating and implementing experiential marketing program in their exhibits. But like everything else in the world, nothing is "new" forever, and eventually, user fatigue sets in.

This doesn't mean that experiential engagement programs are a thing of the past or no longer effective... quite the contrary. But if you're looking to do something unique, that no one has ever done before (or at least is **PERCIEVED** as having never been done before), then "multi-sensory marketing" may be for you.

Just start looking at your product or services in a new, **TACTILE** way, and you may be surprised at the ideas that assault your senses.