

Scent Engineering for the Hotel Industry

By Ronald G. Fink

Do scents really sell? "Scent Engineers" believe you will buy if the smell is right.

Scent or odor engineering is nothing new. Many marketing plans have included aroma as a selling aid. Usually it is related to the food business concepts, such as opening cookie shops with baking ovens in direct access to passersby at malls. They use the smell of fresh-baked cookies to lure shoppers. Theaters have blown the smell of fresh popcorn through their air vents with good results. Of course, we have also had the perfume industry's never-ending search for the perfect aphrodisiac by offering scratch-and-sniff pullouts.

Recently the field of scent engineering has taken off in a new direction. Scent engineers have teamed up with Madison Avenue marketing groups to come up with "selling scents" - scents or odors that promote us to buy, use, or feel good about their services and/or products. A Chicago consultant has developed an "honesty" scent for car salespersons; a new-car scent that simulates the odors of vinyl, plastic and glues; and a scent that promotes the urge to gamble. Hotels use perfumed air fresheners to mask musty or smoky odors in their rooms.

Problems with Scent Engineering

A number of problems with scent engineering could give this latest marketing ploy a potentially short life. The first is liability - lawsuits from people allergic to the scents. Also, many people react differently to scents. For example, what may smell like "springtime roses" to one person might smell like a funeral home to the next, provoking a negative response. Realtors always tell you not to cook when showing your home. Some will argue that the smell of an apple pie in the oven will make the house seem homey. However, for every person that likes apple pie, there is one that doesn't. Another problem is byproduct odors. Various scents will react with naturally occurring, or pre-existing stronger odors to create unknown odors!

The point is, scents can work both ways, and humans are very sensitive and react uniquely to odors. Olfactory persuasion is a gamble at best.

A Clean Smell

Perhaps a better way is a lack of odor, which some people describe as a fresh, clean ambiance resembling the scent of freshly laundered bedsheets. No lawsuits are involved, and no one could have an aversion to it. Will it sell? It can't hurt, and it may be a large promotional factor in selling a timeshare unit, especially if the entire resort is smoke- and odor-free.

How can we safely eliminate all current odors in areas or products without adding a cover-up or new odor? Ozone is nature's deodorizer and sterilizer, which can now be reproduced commercially. Ozone, or O_3 , is an oxygen molecule with a loosely held third atom that has a strong tendency to break away and attach itself to other substances. This action changes the O_3 back to O_2 and adds a new atom to the host (odor causing substance). This can be the perfect scenario for odor destruction.

Ozone is produced by lightning, which is why the air smells so fresh and clean after a thunderstorm. The ozone works to oxidize or destroy all the air pollutants. Ozone also occurs naturally from solar-powered chemical reactions involving emission from trees and plants, more commonly known as byproducts of photosynthesis. Many scientists believe the fresh mountain air and forest haze come from this naturally produced ozone.

Ozone oxidizes and destroys all air pollutants, as well as airborne bacteria, mold, mildew, algae, and other odor-causing sources. For this reason, ozone is used in many industrial applications, including water and wastewater clean up and sterilization, indoor air pollution clean up, and odor control by smoke restoration companies, and food processing.

The only negative aspect of ozone to date has been the high cost of operating the equipment to generate artificial ozone. Technology has recently developed a highly effective, low-cost method of generating ozone. It involves creating a low level of ozone activated by rays of ultraviolet light striking oxygen molecules. This system can operate around the clock in occupied rooms without exceeding the recommended safe ozone limit of .04 parts per million, while reducing airborne bacteria and mold by 95%. Germicidal rooms are now a reality.

One ozone-generating device will suffice for an entire timeshare unit. It may be a freestanding device that sits on a square foot of tabletop or shelf, or built into the air-conditioning system. A fan circulates the ozone throughout the unit. While operating, the device consumes as much electricity as a 60-watt light bulb.

Even the best timeshare resorts may experience complaints from owners and guests because of units that retain offensive smoke or musty odors from the previous occupants. Perhaps odor-free accommodations could give vacation ownership resorts a marketing advantage. A plaque in each unit, stating that it has been "sterilizedTM" and is free of airborne mold, mildew, spores, smoke, pollen, bacteria, viruses, hydrocarbons, and volatile organics might even justify a higher purchase price!

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