

The sensual shopper

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We like to touch and feel a new product before we buy it, but we cannot do that when offered a product via an email. So how can email marketers get around the challenge of still encouraging a sale based on an email? How can they appeal to the senses via email?

Paco Underhill's *Why We Buy: The Science of Shopping* explores the behaviour of shoppers, revealing concrete research and laying out insightful conclusions about what makes the contemporary consumer tick. In chapter 12 of *The Sensual Shopper*, Underhill argues that "...virtually all unplanned purchases - and many planned ones, too - come as a result of the shopper seeing, touching, smelling or tasting something that promises pleasure, if not total fulfillment."

According to Underhill, shopping is a totally sensual experience. He argues that no new grocery product stands a chance unless its creators invest considerably in passing out samples for people to taste, and that stores should make all products readily available for customers to touch and try. He writes, "We are beasts like any other, and despite all our powers of imagination and conceptualisation and intellectualisation and cerebration and visualisation, we physical creatures experience the world only via our five senses."

For email marketers, Underhill's conclusions at first seem mildly disheartening. Very few products and services can actually be sensually experienced online. Even visually, there's a barrier: you can see the beautiful red coat, but you can't try it on to see how it makes YOU look. And yet we know that online sales often make up a large portion of profits.

In many cases, then, email marketers must be providing subscribers with enough of an experience to motivate buying decisions. Through creative use of imagery, video, sound clips and copy, email marketers can provide opportunities for subscribers to identify sensually with their products via email. Let's look at how retailers work at this:

Sight

Imagery can appeal to the sense of sight in a fairly straightforward way, showing products from every angle, zooming in on details, and even animating products' functionality. One of the challenges facing clothing retailers is bringing pieces to life in a way that rivals the dressing room experience. Urban Outfitters uses environmental shots to show their clothes in motion on attractive young adults. In this email, Saks appeals even further to the sense of sight by linking to video that lets you see the fashions in action.

Copy can also conjure an image in the mind's eye. Anthropologie's subject line: "Tangled lights, bits of glass, glitter everywhere..." creates the image of a whimsical holiday scene, so when we open the email to see the colourful glass ornaments, they fit into the idea that we already have.

Smell

There isn't any technology on the horizon that would allow marketers to send scents over email, and yet many retailers have soaps, lotions, and perfumes that offer fragrance as their primary benefit. To appeal to their subscribers' senses of smell, retailers often use imagery to convey familiar, tangible representations of the fragrance: flowers, fruit, herbs, spices, etc. The combination of descriptive copy and concrete imagery in this Williams-Sonoma email creates an impression that allows subscribers to imagine the effect of what they'd be ordering. Sephora also subtly exemplifies this with the orange slice complementing the Philosophy Microdelivery Peel.

Coach take a different approach, showing an aspirational shot of the sort of person who would wear their fragrance without

going to great lengths to describe the scent itself.

Taste

Retailers in the food world have a similar challenge to those trying to appeal to the sense of smell. But as they say, we eat with our eyes first - so images like the ones in this Food Network message are scrumptious in and of themselves. Betty Crocker also uses imagery, as well as colour, to appeal to taste buds. While a photo of the apple crumble juxtaposed with the colour apple green is not the same as tasting the delicious dessert, it sure makes us want to!

Touch

As the weather has turned colder, retailers have been taking measures to convey the cosiness of their winter apparel selections. This Neiman Marcus email puts the focus on the soft texture of the scarf and sweater, and Free People makes the warmth of the fuzzy sweater almost tangible by highlighting the model's rosy cheeks. Swinging back to summer, we get this refreshing imagery from Michael Kors, which evokes memories of the feeling of warm-weather tramping around barefoot. Using close-up fabric shots and swatches, as in this Ann Taylor message and this J. Crew message, also works towards replicating the in-store tactile shopping experience.

Texture can add depth to messaging even when it doesn't highlight fabric and clothing. Bringing the imagery of scraps of paper into messages adds a textural dimension to the message itself, and it's alluring whether a brand is actually selling stationary or is just conjuring the idea of personal "snail mail" messages and casual Post-It notes.

Sound

Marketers increasingly link to sound clips in messages when appropriate, now able to directly reach another sense besides just sight. REI has used its email to link to REI Go Play List.com, where subscribers can listen to and purchase work by artists sponsored by their favourite snow gear brands. The Icelandic band Sigur Ros also includes links to sound in many of their messages, demonstrating their unique music through audio clips accompanied by video.

Keep Underhill's research in mind when constructing your creative, and remember to try appealing to as many relevant senses as possible. We'll have to keep searching for creative methods of evoking sensual identification through imagery and use of sound - until that fragrance-delivering technology comes along, of course.

Article courtesy of [MediaPost](#)

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