

# Engage All Five Senses @ Retail

By Nicole Leinbach Reyhle

**T**hink about the last store you visited that you recall “smelling” something. Was it the scent of coffee? Maybe a signature candle? Or possibly the smell – good or bad – of the perfume a sales associate was wearing. Now imagine the last store you visited that left you visually pleased.

Were you inspired by displays? Did you see products that were memorable? Possibly you saw something for the first time that you have never seen before?

Customers have five natural responses to everything in their lives, and that includes shopping. While there are exceptions, the majority of customers have five ways to be engaged — or disenchanted — by the stores they visit. Looking at sight, touch, sound, smell and taste, consider how you can better support your customers in all five areas of their senses.

## Sight

While lawn and garden retailers have no shortage of visually appealing products to capture their customer's attention, product alone doesn't always do the trick in making a memorable, visually appealing experience. Research shows that customers prefer open store layouts that allow for easy movement and visibility. To help achieve this, identify if your store is comfortable for anyone to walk around. Now imagine if they have a stroller, wheelchair, cane or other walking aid.

Additionally, having well-lit, very attractive displays will engage customers to want to shop more. Your goal through sight should be to capture their visual attention, keep them visually engaged and encourage their desire to use other senses — including touch — beyond their sense of sight.

Additionally, do not neglect the power of store signage. This is a fantastic way to engage customers through sight, also offering your store a chance to communicate product news, upcoming events, promotions and more.

## Touch

Customers instinctively want to touch things. Creating an environment that encourages touch will allow your customers to get more engaged and ultimately, more likely to buy.

By experiencing products through touch, they will have a more personal connection. An example of this may be a bird feeder that you make available for demonstration on how to refill bird seed, or demoing a new water feature product that encourages customers to see how easy it is to set-up. Keeping products at eye level

is also a good idea, allowing your customers to embrace the products with their own two hands. For those things that demand restriction from touching, identify how customers should learn more about them — such as with an “ask an associate for assistance” sign — which combines sight and sound in their shopping experience.

Another thought to consider is if your customers may have kids in tow. If this is a common occurrence, determine how you can keep the kids touching things other than your inventory.

Who needs a sand box when you have bird seed? Fill a designated container with bird seed and put some plastic shovels in it for a fun, hands-on kid experience.

## Sound

Whether it's the sound of an employee chatting with her friend on the phone, birds chirping in the background or nearby customers discussing what they want to buy, what consumers hear makes an impression. For all things you can control — such as store music or conversations employees may have — make sure it's respectful, responsible and generally pleasing to all ears. Encourage you and your team to avoid discussing gossip or other frowned upon topics, and keep everything upbeat and positive. The music you choose should be neutrally accommodating to your customers as well, so consider the range of customers that come through your doors. If you can connect your store music to your store product, that is even better.

## Smell

Aroma can be good ... or bad. For garden retailers, consumers typically embrace the smell of flowers, pine or other seasonal foliage. Yet some customers can find the blend of flowers overwhelming. When possible, consider your display space and how you merchandise products.

Stronger scented products next to other stronger scented products isn't as ideal as strong-scented products next to more neutral-scented products, letting your bold scent stand out on its own.

Creating a space that allows specific products to stand out in their distinct smells, such as lilies, can offer customers a more impactful experience through their sense of smell. If your store has enough space to separate scents or changes throughout the year in scents that may be shared in your store, consider how one signature scent can impact your business.

Introducing a signature scent is a great way to connect your store with a scent customers

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may smell somewhere outside of your store as well. For example, if lavender is your preferred scent, then offer candles with this smell that are private-labeled with your store name on them. These could also make great giveaway gifts for select occasions. Next time your customers smell lavender, they will be sure to think of you.

## Taste

Not every store has opportunities to engage the taste buds of their customers. But for those that do, your opportunities are endless. Have samples, provide more formal tastings and welcome vendors to come and have “bites” and more of their products for customers to enjoy.

If you are a store without food to offer on a daily basis, consider having beverages available for your customers. There are many edible flowers that would make great additions to a seasonal beverage for special events, or it could be as simple as offering water everyday that is garnished with an edible flower. For retailers who sell birdseed, consider what seeds are also used for human consumption. Offering samples of these seeds is a fun way to get your customers engaged, and it is likely a welcomed surprise. Note: it's not necessary to only sample what you sell.

It's the experience that you should aim for here.

Using our five senses as a checklist can help you achieve stronger customer experiences. And remember — you are a customer yourself. What do you enjoy from the stores you visit? **LGR**



*Nicole Leinbach Reyhle is an experienced retail and wholesale professional. After years of working for respected retailers and wholesalers that included Nordstrom, Adidas America, Sears Corp. and Franco Sarto Footwear, Reyhle founded Retail Minded in 2007 to support boutique style businesses throughout the world.*

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