

Making shopping a feast for all five senses makes dollars and cents for struggling retailers

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(PhysOrg.com) -- Retailers need to make their stores a feast for all of their customers' five senses if they are to stave off online interlopers and gain an edge over their competitors, Deakin University's retail expert Stephen Ogden-Barnes says in the latest addition to the Retail Acumen Series.

Mr Ogden-Barnes, from the University's Graduate School of Business, said [retail stores](#) were essentially a sensory blank canvas upon which retailers could create their own picture and thus a place in customers' hearts and minds.

"While a lot of the focus has been on online [shopping](#), it is important to remember that the store experience is – and will be for the foreseeable future – a vital point of interaction between shoppers and retailers," he said.

"For a low margin industry like retail, with high bricks and mortar investment and operating costs, getting the best out of the physical stores is more important than ever.

"Understanding the subtleties of how the senses can be engaged through light, sound, touch, smell and taste, interwoven with brand architecture and intelligent promotion, will be essential if retailers are to make the most of their customers once they are in store."

Mr Ogden-Barnes said examples of the new sensory store could already be seen emerging around the world and in Melbourne.

"Harrods in London recently ran an exhibition of the senses, as an innovative way to increase the number of customers to the store.

"Each of the six store lifts was themed around a different sensory experience.

"The sound lift had a specially commissioned piece composed by Michael Nyman to demonstrate the impact of sound in a confined space: 'sight' micro lasers directed beams of light on Swarovski crystals.

"The taste lift provided customers with the opportunity to create their own ice cream flavours."

Mr Ogden-Barnes said Telstra used touch at its flagship store in Melbourne at Christmas by making its window display interactive.

"Shoppers could shake a gesture-based snow globe, or make a giant mobile video phone call to Santa," he said.

"More recently they have used sound to turn three metre high panels of glass into large speakers to convey audio messages which support the window's displays.

"Intel has also used the latest developments in sonar sound technology for one of its Australian retailers.

"It used a built in directional speaker to send the recognisable Intel brand sound toward the entrance of the electronics department to focus customers' attention on the branded display."

Mr Ogden-Barnes said smell was also another, but underutilised sense retailers could use to engage customers in their stores.

"Lush is a good example where the scents emanating from the store literally encourage customers to follow their nose inside," he said.

"With the average human able to identify over 10,000 individual smells and with our sense of smell being so vital to our environmental perception, it could be time for retailers to develop their own distinctive smell to capitalise on the advantage scent branding can offer.

"Sony went through months of research to find the right scent that would encourage more women to browse through its SonyStyle electronics department.

"In the end they settled on a mix of full-bodied orange, vanilla, with a dash of cedar wood.

"The cedar wood added a degree of masculinity so male shoppers weren't alienated."

Mr Ogden-Barnes said Coles had recently redesigned its stores to engage all the senses.

"Store layouts are open with a clear line of sight with well lit, attractive and engaging displays," he said.

"Products are placed in easy reach so customers can get to them easily and handle them.

"Fishmongers, bakers and butchers are encouraged to actively promote their wares and the aroma of products is emphasised via open displays.

"To create a market-like atmosphere customers can see produce staff at work and additionally they are encouraged to try samples of different products."

Provided by Deakin University

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