

How stores get you to buy more this holiday season and all year long

December 12 2017, by Joanna Clay



Need a little help feeling the holiday spirit? Perhaps some festive scents and a little nostalgia can do the trick. Credit: Photo/Stocksy

With more and more shoppers doing their buying online, brick-and-mortar stores must find more creative ways to lure you in and keep you.

USC's Debbie MacInnis, a marketing professor at the USC Marshall School of Business, says that retailers can use everything from a store's background music to its layout to get you to spend.

The sounds of buying

You know it's officially the holidays when malls across the country put up wreaths and blast holiday cheer over the loudspeakers—say, Norah Jones' rendition of "Winter Wonderland."

But it's not just the holidays when music plays a role in shopping, MacInnis said. It's year-round.

"There's research that shows tempo or speed has impact on how much time people shop and spend in a [store](#)," she said. "Slow music encourages more browsing—and if they're in the store longer, they are likely to buy more."

Stores like Nordstrom, which employs pianists to play in its stores, are creating an ambiance that encourages you to linger. And if you're there all day, you are more likely to buy something.

Shoppers feel like it's not just a store, MacInnis said, but that "this is a special place."

There's also the nostalgia factor. Research shows that people have a fondness for music that was popular when they were young. Knowing this, retailers will often play the music of their target demographics.

And there's research showing that music lifts your mood—and if you're feeling good, you're more open to buying.

"When we're thinking positively, we tend to think more creatively," she

said. Shoppers "might see connections between products and people they might not have otherwise seen if not in a good mood."

In other words, maybe you went shopping for the kids, but spotted a gift for Uncle Jack ... and Fido ... and your neighbor Susan. You get the idea.

Smells like sales

Sly as it may sound, retailers have been tapping our senses for a while, especially the olfactory one—the sense of smell.

Think about it: Walking around the mall, you might get a whiff of freshly baked cookies and suddenly want to stop for a snack. That's no accident. MacInnis said the smell of cookies is nostalgic for many.

"We have a strong memory for scents," she said. "It's tied to our emotional memories."

The scent has to be congruent with the product, however. The smell of cookies works for cookie shop Mrs. Fields, but it would be confusing at a department store like Macy's. So perfume and fragrance are used in retailers. And that encourages visitors to tap into their other senses.

"Scent facilitates touch, and touch facilitates the act of trying to smell," she said.

But it can be tricky. If a retailer pumps up the cologne too high, shoppers might hold their nose and pass by.

A unique experience

When it comes to getting shoppers to visit a brick-and-mortar retailer, the experience is key. For some stores, this means curating items in a way that feels unique.

Stores like the clothing retailer Anthropologie, which is decorated like a boutique, are particular about the placement of merchandise. Items must be arranged so they don't feel out of place.

"As stores get bigger and bigger, the chance of getting overwhelmed gets bigger and bigger," MacInnis said. Anthropologie gives shoppers "a smaller chunk of information to process."

Curation also extends to the styling. In stores like West Elm, shoppers might notice that furnishings aren't just stacked up with tags on them. Their products are arranged like you would find them in your home. A living room features a couch, coffee table and a rug, for example.

MacInnis calls this tactic creating "moments."

"It's not being in a store. It's having a shopping experience," she said, noting that it gives shoppers a different experience in the store compared to one online.

It's also about making the store a destination.

"Kids cannot walk by the Disney Store without wanting to go in," MacInnis said. "It just has that gravitational pull."

The store exudes the Disney brand and the fun feeling of its theme parks.

Said MacInnis: "You're entering a different world, almost."

Provided by University of Southern California

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