

MARTIN LINDSTROM

New York Times and *Wall Street Journal*

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Brand Sense

SENSORY SECRETS BEHIND
THE STUFF WE BUY

"One of
the five best
marketing books
ever published."
— *The Wall
Street Journal*

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FOREWORD BY PHILIP KOTLER





Brand Sense

Sensory Secrets Behind the Stuff We Buy

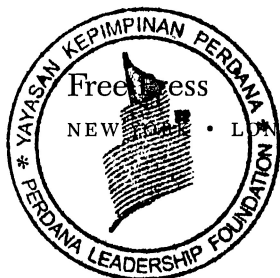
Martin Lindstrom

Foreword by Philip Kotler

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*For Dorit, Tore, Vibeke, and Allan
You are the words in my life*



*Tell me and I'll forget,
Show me and I might remember,
Involve me and I'll understand.*

—BENJAMIN FRANKLIN

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Foreword

Philip Kotler

MARKETING ISN'T WORKING TODAY. New products are failing at a disastrous rate. Most advertising campaigns do not register anything distinctive in the customer's mind. Most products come across as interchangeable commodities rather than powerful brands.

Yes, there are still powerful brands—Coca Cola, Harley-Davidson, Apple Computer, Singapore Airlines, BMW. They have learned how to make their brand live in the customers' minds. The brand, of course, must at least deliver a distinctive benefit. No amount of dressing up will make up for this lack. All of the aforementioned brands deliver a distinctive benefit.

But distinctive brands require something more. They have to be powered up to deliver a full sensory and emotional experience. It is not enough to present a product or service visually in an ad. It pays to attach a sound, such as music or powerful words and symbols. The combination of visual and audio stimuli delivers a $2 + 2 = 5$ impact. It further pays to trigger other sensory channels—taste, touch, smell—to enhance the total impact. This is Martin Lindstrom's basic



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message, and he illustrates it beautifully through numerous cases with compelling arguments.

Most companies take the easy way out to market their brands. They buy a lot of expensive advertising and make clichéd claims. The companies in Martin's book are much more creative. One of the main reasons to read this book is that it contains a treasury of ideas for bringing new life to brands.

CHAPTER 1

Start Making Sense

IN THE WEEKS AND MONTHS FOLLOWING publication of *Buyology: Truth and Lies About Why We Buy*, I was invited to appear frequently on America's most popular morning program, the *Today* show. The topics we covered were various—shopping addictions, whether sex in advertising sells, subliminal advertising, and so on. During a recent appearance, I carried out a focus group with a selection of tweens, ages eight through twelve. My goal? To measure the degree to which sensory branding—that is to say, the use of fragrances, sounds, and even textures to enhance the appeal of products—affected these kids. It was like emceeding a strange new game show called “Name That Sense.”

First I played a handful of well-known songs associated with various well-known companies and TV shows. Most of the children were able to name them immediately, among them Disney, Apple Computer, and the signature theme music from *Spongebob Squarepants* and NBC. Now it was time for the smell test. The first fragrance that floated out was (and will always be) one of the most evocative aromas in the world.

“Oh, I know that smell,” one said.

“Every kid knows that smell,” another broke in.

“Okay,” I said. “On the count of three, you’re going to tell me what the brand is. Ready? One . . . two . . . three—”

They all got it: Play-Doh! The next two fragrances? Crayola crayons and Johnson’s Baby Powder. The children identified those, too. Next, we graduated to a brand “collage board,” where only parts or fragments of companies’ logos or symbols were visible. Still, the kids were able to identify most if not all of the brands, from Kellogg’s to Pepsi-Cola to MTV to Nike. Some, to my surprise, were even able to recognize the logos of Gucci and Tiffany’s.

After scanning a handful of logos, I brought out a bunch of products from high-end designers, popular department stores, and even some generic clothing I’d picked up from street vendors.

Now, blue jeans are a not uncomplicated item for most fashion- and brand-obsessed middle-schoolers. One of the girls—Olivia—cradled a pair of jeans in her lap.

“These are from Abercrombie!” she announced happily.

As offhandedly as I could, I asked, “So how do you know those jeans are *really* from that store, and not fake?”

“Because of their *smell*,” Olivia replied. She then proceeded to inhale the sweet (some might say sickly sweet) fragrance of the Abercrombie & Fitch jeans she was holding.

What Olivia was holding looked like any other pair of blue jeans. They could have come from Target. They could have come from Macy’s. They could have come from a factory outlet anywhere in America. But this middle-school student had identified those jeans without blinking for one reason only: their unmistakable aroma.

As strange and intriguing as Olivia’s brand preference might sound, my appearance on the *Today* show couldn’t help but remind me of the first worldwide sensory branding research project I ever carried out, which concluded in 2005. It was a five-year mission involving hundreds of researchers and thousands of consumers across four continents. Our goal was to understand the rationale behind behavior like Olivia’s—and provide a road map for consumers to understand why they were drawn to a product, whether it was an iPod, a jar of Nescafé coffee, or even a simple breakfast cereal.

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Olivia, after all, was a living, breathing example of what marketers aspire to when they create a brand. I've long wondered: What is it that makes a child (or for that matter, an adult) fall head over heels for a brand like Apple or Kellogg's? What components of the brand form such a magical, magnetic, long-lasting connection? Does an obsessive belief in a brand ever wilt into disappointment or even boredom?

That is why in 2005's Project Brand Sense, my team and I went out and asked all kinds of questions of people who have strong affinities for various brands—in some cases, you might even call them love affairs. They willingly, and generously, shared their passions and insights—invaluable information that led me to conclude that if products and advertising want to survive another century, they'll need to change direction entirely. Yet another ad plastered on a billboard in Times Square simply won't do the trick. An entirely new—and sensory—vision, one that appeals to our emotions, is what's required.

I realized then, as I do now, that a brand *has* to transform itself into a sensory experience that goes far beyond what we see. I also realized that more than anyone on the planet, children seem to bond most profoundly with brands that are truly sensory—that involve sound, touch, smell, and feel. This may not come as a shock when you consider that a typical child's senses are approximately 200 percent more potent than an adult's. In fact, when a new mother first cradles an infant, she probably has no idea that a newborn's sense of smell is more than 300 percent greater than her own. Call it nature's ingenious way of securing a permanent bond between mother and child.

Let me give you another amazing example of the power of sensory branding. Royal Mail is the national postal service of the United Kingdom. As many people know, postal administrations all over the world are suffering massive declines in revenue. Very few people are sending mail nowadays—packages, sure, but not those white things known as envelopes with something called a stamp placed on its upper right-hand corner. When you think about it, when was the last time you received a handwritten letter in your mailbox? The world far prefers the convenience of email, Facebook, and Twitter.

Brand Sense

In order to breathe new life into its declining direct mail figures, Royal Mail launched a campaign known as “Touching Bands.” Its aim was twofold: to reconnect with consumers who’d drifted away from what was now termed somewhat dismissively “snail mail,” and to demonstrate direct mail’s pivotal role in the digital age as a natural partner to new media. The UK-based Brand Sense Agency was tapped to help them explore how we can use our five senses to enhance our affinity to a brand—in this case Royal Mail. The experiment was dubbed “Sensational Mail.” The results were, well, sensational.

The first piece of “Sensational” Royal Mail sent out was a personalized letter inscribed on a slab of chocolate—you read that right. Who can resist chocolate—the smooth touch, the smell that makes us salivate, the cracking sound as you break the bar in two, and last but not least, the taste?

Praised as being innovative and eye-catching, the overall response to our Royal Mail chocolate mailing defied all expectations. Three quarters of all its recipients felt it demonstrated how direct mail could engage all five senses, but they also took some action as a result of our mailing experiment, action, I should emphasize, that went over and beyond eating the chocolate letter. Quite simply, they started sending out letters again!

But we wanted to confirm our findings scientifically as well for media planners and advertisers. Using neuroscience and the most advanced brain-scanning technique available today—the fMRI—global research institute Millward Brown studied the brains of twenty men and women in the UK to find out whether the “Royal Mail experiment” had created true emotional engagement, that is to say, a potent emotional response, in consumers. They wanted to see if volunteers’ brains responded at all differently to material via direct mail than they did to comparable information shown them on a computer screen. For any brand, ad, or entreaty to work (and remain memorable), it has to make its way somehow into the overstuffed workspace that is the human brain. As you might imagine, our brains are adept at filtering out irrelevant information. Emotion gets our attention through our senses—which then influence our decision-making processes. Brands that create an emotional connection to

Start Making Sense

consumers are much stronger than those that don't—it's as simple (and complicated) as that.

Millward Brown's scientific research study confirmed that direct mail—namely, those chocolate-laden entreaties—was far more “real” to the brain, and had a definite “place” in consumers' perceptions. Moreover, direct mail was easier for the volunteers' brains to process, more likely than not to generate emotion, and also able to promote more fluent decision making. In short, the Royal Mail experiment proved conclusively that direct mail was able to penetrate the overcrowded closet that is our mental workspace—a spectacular feat, considering that the majority of us live in an increasingly digital environment.

Another aspect of the new branding I gleaned from my experiences with Olivia and Royal Mail is that a brand should attempt to create a following akin to the obsessive adoration a sports fan feels or even, in some respects, the faith of a religious congregation.

Without taking comparisons to religion too far, we can see the relevance of spirituality for certain aspects of sensory branding. The most memorable, savored brands of the future will be those that not only anchor themselves in tradition, but also adopt religious characteristics as they simultaneously make full, integrated use of sensory branding—period. Each fully integrated brand will boast its own identity, one that's expressed in its every message, shape, symbol, ritual, and tradition—just as sports teams and religion do.

Evoking something resembling religious zeal, however, is only one objective of the next generation of products and advertising. In order to survive, brands will have to incorporate a brand “platform” (meaning a set of associations a consumer makes with a product, or company) that fully unites the five senses. Witness Abercrombie! We live in a landscape where consumers desperately need something to believe in. Ironic though it may sound, as religions struggle to find new constituents, consumers in contrast are desperately seeking something else. Sadly (some might say), more than ever that “something else” is, well, brands—a phenomenon you would appreciate even more if you visited China, where the power of “brand religion” often seems even stronger than its thousand-year-old faith-based counterparts.

The foundation of this book is a direct result of an extensive research project that sought to investigate the role each of our five senses plays in creating a passionate love affair between a consumer and a brand. Our study also sought to determine to what extent a religious factor—faith, belief, belonging, and community—might serve to guide the future of branding. At first glance, religion and brands might seem almost insultingly far apart. But are they really? Visit any church and even before you enter the building, the first thing you'll notice is a full-frontal sensory assault, whether it's the noontime bells pealing across Zurich, Switzerland, or the sounds of prayer overwhelming Istanbul. Inside a church, your senses will continue to be stirred and awakened, whether it's from the unmistakable fragrance of incense in the air, or the musty odor of the pews. No matter where you live, or what faith you practice, religion sends a series of clear, unmistakable signals via your senses—even if you never glimpse a cross, an altar, a stained glass window, or a yarmulke. Our oldest religions have been around for roughly 3,500 years. Our oldest brands? One hundred and fifty years. That is why I believe that it may be time for brands to borrow respectfully from religion—and learn a few crucial lessons about belief and loyalty.

Moreover, we decided that our Brand Sense study would have relevance only if conducted globally. Our multicultural research team involved people drawn from twenty-four countries, and speaking eighteen languages. Additionally, our global research study had another objective. We wanted to identify growing trends, and explore the evolution of local brands to help us create a solid foundation for the implementation of our fully integrated brand theory, in order for it to adapt to any market regardless of cultural differences and preferences.

I decided to team up with Millward Brown, whose extensive brand knowledge made them an obvious partner for a project of this caliber. The idea—which we dubbed “Brand Sense”—took seed in 1999 and eventually developed into a brand research project that involved some six hundred researchers across the globe.

Start Making Sense

Let me be frank—no one had ever carried out research on sensory perception and religious comparisons to branding before, and we tried our best to remain sensitive to their differences in character, profundity, and ultimate truth. My publisher was seriously concerned, and not unreasonably, either, as I began this book. I went so far as to conduct a series of sessions across the United States to test out my theories in front of live audiences. In particular, I recall one speaking engagement in Washington, D.C., where I showed a photograph of the pope on one side of the screen, and Ronald McDonald on the other. Being a native of Denmark, where traditional faith barely exists, I learned quickly (extremely quickly) that many people elsewhere are highly sensitive about the topic of religion. A classic live-and-learn experience.

Project Brand Sense is therefore (dare I say it?) a pioneering study. We conducted focus groups in thirteen countries, selecting each country on the basis of its market size, brand representation, general product innovations, religious representation, state of brand maturity, not to mention the country's sensory history. We swiftly learned that even though a brand is supposedly global, the way local cultures perceive it can be extremely varied.

The Brand Sense study therefore is a composite of distinct and different markets. For instance, we selected Japan, India, and Thailand because all three countries have a long-standing history of integrating five senses within their culture and traditions. Some of Japan's most innovative brands often make use of the five senses. Now, if you're ever in a hurry, don't expect a grab-and-go experience if you're visiting a Japanese retail store. But there's a fantastic upside. Your transaction may not be speedy, but you'll get to witness a truly astonishing, sometimes half-hour-long, wrapping ritual, and your purchase will typically end up resembling an exquisitely beribboned work of art. Japan, after all, is the nation where brands like Marlboro found out that placing a little dotted line in the plastic foil enveloping its iconic cigarette packs transformed sales from sluggish to impressive. Why, you might ask? Because the Japanese hate the sensation of unwrapping a box of cigarettes where the foil tears up or shreds all over the box. By installing a minuscule touch such as a simple dotted



“Martin Lindstrom, one of branding’s most original thinkers, reveals how to break out of the two-dimensional rut of sight and sound, and connect emotionally with all five senses. His book provides data and insights that will surprise even the most savvy brand watcher.”

—ROBERT A. ECKERT, CHAIRMAN & CEO, MATTEL, INC.

Did you know that the gratifying smell that accompanies the purchase of a new automobile actually comes from a factory-installed aerosol can containing “new car” aroma? Or that Kellogg’s trademarked “crunch” is generated in sound laboratories? Or that the distinctive *click* of a just-opened jar of Nescafé freeze-dried coffee, as well as the aroma of the crystals, has been developed in factories over the past decades? Or that many adolescents recognize a pair of Abercrombie & Fitch jeans not by their look or cut but by their fragrance?

In perhaps the most creative and authoritative book on how our senses affect our everyday purchasing decisions, global branding guru Martin Lindstrom reveals how the world’s most successful companies and products integrate touch, taste, smell, sight, and sound with startling and sometimes even shocking results. In conjunction with renowned research institution Millward Brown, Lindstrom’s innovative worldwide study unveils how all of us are slaves to our senses—and how, after reading this book, we’ll never be able to see, hear, or touch anything from our running shoes to our own car doors the same way again.

An expert on consumer shopping behavior, Lindstrom has helped transform the face of global marketing with more than twenty years of hands-on experience. Firmly grounded in science, and disclosing the secrets of all our favorite brands, *Brand Sense* shows how we consumers are unwittingly seduced by touch, smell, sound, and more.



MARTIN LINDSTROM was recognized by *Time* magazine as one of “The World’s 100 Most Influential People” of 2009. His latest book, *Buyology: Truth and Lies About Why We Buy*, appeared on both the *New York Times* and the *Wall Street Journal* bestseller lists. A frequent advisor to numerous Fortune 100 companies, Lindstrom has also authored five bestsellers that have been translated into more than thirty languages. For more information, visit his websites: MartinLindstrom.com and BrandSenseAgency.com.

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