

# THE FIVE SENSES OF ENGAGEMENT

Influencing behaviours and creating suggestions at both the conscious and unconscious levels can be the right stimulus for Consumer Arousal.

By Gopal Nair

**SIMON A. Faure-Field**, CEO of Equal Strategy has been at the forefront of driving and building demand for sensory branding techniques in the retail industry for the past several years. His company, which is the only one of its kind in Asia to effectively integrate the different sensory elements, is used by Mercedes-Benz, Courts, OCBC Bank, DBS Bank, and a multitude of hotel chains across Asia. Marketing Magazine sat down with him at Starbucks and listened to the British sensory branding guru on how he how to “scientifically” introduce touch points such as music, fragrance and ambient lighting into retail environments.

**Can you tell us a little bit more about yourself and your establishment...**

I'm 38 years of age and run a dynamic and exciting sensory branding business, the only one in Asia that specialises in

the integrated use of music and fragrance to create unique signature customer experiences which reinforce the brand propositions of our clients. I founded Equal Strategy in KL during the Asian economic crisis of 1998.

**Can you elaborate on what is it that the world's most successful branding companies do differently in terms of touch, taste, smell, sight, and sound? Can you give some examples?**

They recognised the integral importance of the customer experience to their brands. Research found that peoples' opinions of brands are formed and reinforced in the minds of customers during their actual experiences buying and using a product or service, and not by the advert that got them to the store initially.

Brands such as Starbucks built a successful global business through the



Simon A. Faure-Field, CEO of Equal Strategy

idea of blue printing and standardising all the aspects of service delivery throughout outlets on a global scale. Four years ago Westin Hotels and Resorts rolled out “globally” a consistent music and scent experience in all its hotel lobbies, followed one year later by its sister brand Sheraton, and the following year by Le Meridien. Two years ago, we were involved with Shangri la Hotels and Resorts to develop a signature scent, designed to smell ‘expensive’, and diffused through the air conditioning system of their Asian business hotel lobbies.

**Can you tell us the response that you have garnered from the Malaysian market? Is the Malaysian market receptive to the concept of sensory branding or are Malaysian companies adopting a wait-and-see-attitude?**

It's new, so awareness of the techniques and how they are applied to differentiate businesses is partly an educational row. Colleges and Universities are still teaching the methodologies of 40 years ago. Marketers still think if its not TV, radio or print it's not the marketing departments' responsibility.

The reality is, if it touches people internally or externally, it is a marketing issue.

Mind you, we've had positive interest but find the market still heavily obsessed with short-term tactical ROI as opposed to long-term strategic ROI. Businesses

need to realise that branding is a long-term strategy that still delivers the figures in the end. But patience and backing from the CEO is critical to make it a success. Look at the fortune 500 companies which have paid close attention to this down through the years – Microsoft, Dell, Fedex, Coca Cola, Walt Disney and Boeing. They all mean something to us. I rest my case.

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**How do you brand or market this service/product that you are so passionate about? Can you elaborate on your marketing strategies?**

We decided upon a strategy to work with well established

and respected Malaysian brands, and lead by example. This would enable the market to experience our services on a personal level and realise it makes sense.

**How do you help companies develop sensory plans? What can they expect when it comes to investing in such plans?**

We recognise all clients and their brands are unique. Through our collaborative methodology we take the time to understand each client: who they are, where are they now, what are they trying to achieve, explore concepts and ideas, define how we are going to get there. Once we agree on the plan, we take ownership of the project, let the client sit back, and we make it happen.

**What do you personally consider as the most interesting and surprising fact that you've heard from marketing researches regarding sensory branding?**

That people fall deeply in love with your brand!

**Can you name a few clients that you have worked with in Malaysia and what was their perception of the concept of designing a brand experience for their customer?**

Equal Strategy has been working with OCBC for ten years, and for the past three years Equal Strategy has been an integral part of OCBC's branch transformation team. They realised market

segmentation isn't just about data on paper, but that the experience should fit the segment. This too should be experienced not just by adverts in print, but when they visit the branch. We rolled out our music solution across branches, using background music profiled (in terms of tone, feel, texture & genre) to differentiate consumer banking and premier banking. Each profile was standardised across each segment. OCBC were open minded and valued the experience and knowledge we could bring to the table, and adopting our technology, were enabled to change and update music content in individual or nationwide branches overnight, in both East and West Malaysia.

Pacific Regency Kuala Lumpur has been a fun client to work with. Besides its' roof top chillout bar “Luna”, which has been being recognised as the best Malaysian night spot for several years. The GM recognised the need for their service to start at the guests first touch – when using the phone. The ability to replace “Kenny G” often found on hold, with appropriate music to reflect its brand positioning, and interlaced messages spoke by internationally recognised professional Malaysian talent, immediately differentiated the experience to others. The music concept was later extended to public areas of the hotel to reflect the different moods of the day, and days of week.

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