

Newspapers Make Sense

Print has been referred to as a passive, one-dimensional medium. But the power of print to be a highly-engaging, multi-faceted advertising vehicle can be evidenced in its ability to tap into the five human senses.

Sight, sound, taste, touch and smell. These five senses allow us to perceive and interpret the world around us and act accordingly. So how can newspaper advertising facilitate the five senses? Understandably sight and touch fit with newspaper, but what about smell, taste and sound?

Essential in fiction writing is the description of what everything feels like from sensual pleasure to pain and torture.

“. . .the success of your story or novel will depend on many things, but the most crucial is your ability to bring your reader into it. So your job is to either make them recall exactly what it feels like when something occurs in your story or, if they haven't experienced it, what it would feel like if they did.”
Ron Rozelle, American author.

The printed word strikes into the hearts of readers by allowing them to imagine a world the way they want it to be. This creates a far deeper experience than television or film, for example, which imposes a visual on the viewer.

As Hugh Mackay (Australian social researcher) in Cutting Edge Advertising says, “the words are asking me to make up the pictures, so they're my pictures. There's a creative act within the reader. On television the work's all done. I only receive; I don't construct and create the way I do with print”.

Just like fiction, successful print advertising connects with the reader's senses. Based on experience, these senses heighten perception or awareness of the product.


Sight or vision is the ability of the brain and eye to interpret an image. Everything is as it seems...or is it? In this award winning ad by Toyota, the eye plays tricks on the brain. The illusion of black dots is used to illustrate the dangers of “black spots” during the notorious Easter weekend. And in the Dulux ad, colour swatches prompt the brain to visualise the result.

Touch refers to the sense of pressure, generally on the skin. Being the largest sensory organ in the body, the skin is sensitive to many different types of “stimuli”. For example a wallet stuffed full of cash as demonstrated by Lotterywest. And how about a soft, fluffy bunny? Add some prickly spikes and you now understand, thanks to Sorbent, “Nothing else feels soft anymore”. Can almost feel the conflicting sensations on your fingers and nose?

Hearing is the sense of audio perception. How can you print sound? Check out Bose's award winning ad for their Noise Cancelling Earphones - you could definitely hear the shrill sound of the baby's cry if you were to remove the headphones. Equally the print ad for Nova radio station uses incompatible sight and sound sensory to engage the reader in “sounds different”. Or the hilarious Virgin Atlantic ads for their inflight entertainment brought to you by the elderly lady in seat 4c – you've heard the stories before...you can feel the torture starting.

Taste is one of the two main “chemical” senses (other being smell). There are four well-known types of tastes that buds (receptors) on the tongue detect: sweet, salt, sour, and bitter. As portrayed in this firey sauce ad – hot hot hot!

Smell is the fifth sense. We can recognize a wide variety of smells, with some stirring up memories eg freshly cut grass reminds us of summertime and coffee reminds us of morning. This coffee smell was used recently in an ad for Air New Zealand's new Koru Hour, with a “rub 'n' smell” ad-hesive posted to the front of the New Zealand Herald. The Otago Daily Times invoked a feeling of “fun and family times” when they made their paper smell like chocolate for a Cadbury anniversary. Further afield, a scratch and sniff ad smelling of frosted cake appeared in The Los Angeles Times at end of



last year for the new movie “Mr. Magorium’s Wonder Emporium”. This novelty scented ad increased the time people spent with the ad and it’s pass-around factor.

Our senses are critical in gathering information about the world around us and we interact with it through our actions. Use newspaper advertising to tap into your customer’s senses – sight, touch, smell, hearing or taste - heighten their perception of your product and drive them into action. Now that makes sense.

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