

Fragrance — An Important Adjunct to Marketing

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The real test of marketing any personal and household care product is not only to sell once, but also ensure that the consumer will buy the product again. It is no doubt simple to sell almost anything the first time, but the ability to sell the product repeatedly to the same consumer will largely depend on its intrinsic value. When products and marketing concepts are discussed the problem that confronts the product manager are almost always, pricing policy, target group positioning (whether high premium, popular or mass market), distribution channel, advertising and promotion strategy, product quality and product configuration like design, shape, packaging, colour and fragrance. The decision to choose the best fragrance profile is only one of the many selection criteria a product manager has to make.

In developing a new product line, an established organisation having a competent technical set-up does not require a great deal of imagination. Putting together a product in a right packaging, investing in promotion and advertising would generally get a decent reception from distributors and retailers. However to be successful the initial customer should come back for more. Nobody purchases a product just because it is manufactured by a well-known company and it is displayed in a visible location in an upmarket departmental store. A customer will repurchase only if the product is in a position to fulfil the functional and emotional needs of the consumer. Today, fragrances are present throughout all levels of product — right from an expensive one to the cheapest — playing an invaluable role. The fragrance used in a product may range from 0.5-2.0%, but its performance and signal attributes claim a high percentage of almost 70-80%. As Prophet Mohamed once remarked, “*Perfume is the nourishment that stimulates my thinking.*” Fragrance in functional products takes care of this emotional need, stimulating as well as calming or relaxing the user. Consumer care products have two basic requirements to fulfil:

- **Functional requirement** which is directly related to the primary product performance. For example: soap for cleaning; shampoo for cleaning and condi-

tioning hair; deodorant to keep one free from bad odour; skin cream say for moisturising, skin lightening; hair oils to make hair manageable, etc.

- **Emotional requirement** to give feeling of satisfaction that the product is of high quality. Fragrances are used to necessarily provide that emotional feeling of satisfaction and social expression to a purely functional product.

Odour stimulates the brain determining moods and influencing spending habits. The odour of a product as perceived along with visual sense and colour is linked to moods and expectation and ultimately decides ones real interest in any product. The product formula should take care of the functional requirement and an excellent fragrance is necessary to satisfy the emotional needs of the consumer. Consumer first smells the product to get convinced that the product is right. During usage, it should support the in-use claims and so the product effectiveness. No doubt following initial product attraction, price is always a factor to choose between similar products.

It is difficult to imagine product success without a consumer likeable fragrance. A successful product with a poor fragrance is difficult to believe. There may be exceptions, largely due to sharp positioning at the right time that fulfils the immediate requirement and captures the consumers interest and imagination. However astute the positioning, one should also be willing to make major investments in backing it up with dramatic promotions. Nevertheless, exceptions cannot be a rule. However, we have to accept that product success or failure does depend on the excellence of the fragrance, in addition to the functionality of the product.

It is sometimes believed that fragrance as a marketing tool does not always enjoy a predominant position in all functional products, as it does with toilet waters and fine fragrances. Deodorants, for instance, have a strong functional requirement to mask unpleasant body odour. An anti-perspirant has to reduce under-arm per-

spiration. Toilet soap has to clean and shampoo effective in washing hair. Functional requirements like deodorancy, cleansing, conditioning, etc., in products are taken for granted. Fragrances for long were accorded a low priority in personal care products; it is no longer so. Now-a-days consumers are looking for something more than just a straight functional product. Fragrance in a consumer product has graduated into an essential factor occupying a predominant position for attaining general recognition. For example, the highlighting of freshness in advertising is nothing but a special emphasis on the fragrance. In this case, this advertising statement should be fully supported by a fresh fragrance. It is noteworthy that stress is now being laid on stronger fragrance requirements and that dosage levels are on the rise.

The more the functional use of the product is taken for granted by the consumers, the stronger will be the compulsion to offer products that have a stronger likeable fragrance. Functional products today largely are identical to one another. The differences in functions are so slight that only a superior fragrance can provide

the necessary edge and a real momentum for rapid brand growth. Are we not aware of products where fragrance was largely responsible for the super success of the brand?

In the case of laundry products, notably detergent bars and powders, cost considerations forces a fragrance to play a subordinate role. However, it is not long when these products will also become fragrance oriented. People now-a-days are well aware of the air of glamour and magic a fragrance creates to give a consumer product a distinct character and identity. In fact, this distinct fragrance identity is sufficient to ensure the acceptance of the product to make the consumer loyal to it or reject it outright. This aspect is something no sane person can ignore and product manufacturers have to attune themselves to a level that can fulfil consumer requirements.

To sum it up, we can affirm that in today's times a superior fragrance is a key marketing tool and, in some cases, a principal one if one has to achieve unprecedented success.