

Fragrance Oil Evaluations

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In response to a fragrance brief, fragrance houses submit a number of fragrance oils all vying for selection and use in the end-product. In this paper we discuss the main criteria on which fragrance selection is made and orders placed with the fragrance house for large scale fragrance manufacture.

Aesthetic appeal

When a fragrance is submitted by a fragrance house, the first impression we draw is generally a decisive one. A positive or negative reaction on the fragrance odour profile that an evaluator has decides the fate – its acceptance or rejection. We know that eventually only a single fragrance oil can be selected, out of the many available for use and without doubt only after it is tested in the final product and accepted by consumer tests. The fragrance selected should also be suitable for the product aesthetics, type, category, colour and its suitability for marketing and publicity. Practically, it is these subjective criteria that are important; these are selections not based on any objective standards – chance plays a very prominent role in fragrance selection. Many a times these subjective impressions are influenced by views of our colleagues and associates. This can be avoided if we have a systematic method of fragrance selection. A systematic selection is possible only if we have developed an above average sensibility to smell and have a good knowledge of odour profiles and fragrances. In any case, initial fragrance selection criteria are carried out in a manner where evaluation is predominantly subjective in nature. One major advantage of a subjective selection is that we can take a very quick decision. However, unusual 'out of the box' fragrance creations that could

have become trendsetters, can be at a disadvantage and get unfairly eliminated.

Technical requirements

Once preliminary selection is made, the fragrance selected should be subjected to technical tests. These tests are very important to determine the suitability of the fragrance with regard to the product base. The stability of the fragrance in the base determines whether the fragrance is in harmony or not with the product during the life time. Although fragrances submitted by fragrance houses are stability tested in a standard base, one should never take these tests as sacrosanct. Most bases differ substantially amongst one another. Tests carried out in one base can be quite irrelevant in another. Moreover the stability protocols, packaging used or manufacturing process differ substantially. It is advisable to carry out a separate stability test every time, using the actual manufacturing process and packaging the product in a way it is to be marketed under real market conditions of temperature and humidity.

Consumer tests

Consumer tests are necessary to gauge consumer acceptance of the product earmarked for launch. Fragrance is an important parameter in the marketing mix as it can even assume the role of giving the product its character and make it distinct from other products in its category. Socio-demographic groups, based on psychological consumer needs of users of the products, are selected and tests conducted to confirm final selection. No tests done should disregard even the smallest consumer, as their viewpoint can reveal any lacunae unnoticed during internal assessment. Monadic or paired comparison difference objective evaluation based on classical parametric statis-

tical methods or non-parametric statistical methods, as required, are used to draw conclusions and take decisions.

Sales & marketing acceptance

Generally, in a consumer test only one fragrance emerges as a winner. However, sometimes when two or three fragrances get equal acceptance, it becomes difficult to choose the best among them. The only option left is to repeat the tests all over again or select one of the fragrances based on parameters not necessarily based on the quality of the fragrance submitted, but on some others. These parameters could be:

- ♦ Price
- ♦ Relationship with the fragrance house supplying the fragrances (based on past experience of supplies to any other market brand variant, or currently marketed successful brands).
- ♦ Whether the fragrance is for a new product type or category, or for a successfully marketed product and the risks involved envisaged by the product management team.

Only when all the above barricades are cleared by the selected fragrance, one should place an order.

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