

QUICK HITS

Sharing Industry Knowledge and Connections

[IDEAS 2 GO]

It Makes Scents

Olfactory marketing brings pleasant aromas to customers pumping fuel. **BY PAT PAPE**

It's surprising that someone hasn't thought of this before: a machine that acts as a "scent cannon," shooting blasts of a fresh coffee fragrance into the forecourt while customers fill their tanks. Not only does the scent improve the ambiance of the gas pump area, but it lures customers into the store to purchase a cup of aromatic java.

"When you're standing at the gas pumps and smell fresh coffee, you can't resist buying a cup," said Carmine Santandrea, CEO of ScentAndrea, the Santa Barbara, California, company that has developed this new marketing tool.

After extensive consumer testing, ScentAndrea plans to roll out the company's first scent machines for convenience store forecourts this year. According to Santandrea, the scent-squirting cannon resides in the same type of container used for security cameras and adheres to a

pole near the pumps. A sensor notifies the cannon when a driver pulls up and only then does a blast of fragrance release. A fan inside the housing — either electric or battery-operated — pushes the fragrance toward the customer.

"The electricity is well out of the fume range," Santandrea said. "We are legal and safe, and you won't blow up a gas station with my machines."

POINT-OF-SMELL

To make the marketing even more effective, ScentAndrea has partnered with Gas Pump Media, a Ventura, California-based company that provides digital advertising screens for product promotion.

During six months of tests at stations in Nevada, Ohio, California and Florida, the scent machine released coffee aromas at the same time the



DID YOU KNOW?

The scent of talcum powder will make people feel safe, while peppermint and citrus will make people feel more alert. Barbecue smoke makes a room seem smaller and cucumber makes it seem larger. Also, customers will browse longer or buy more when they smell floral/citrus scents.

(Source: Scent Marketing Institute)

digital screen was running a 15-second ad for fresh coffee. "Sales of in-store coffee jumped 300 percent [during the test]," said Allen Fleisher, managing partner of Gas Pump Media. When the scent machine was removed from the area, and the digital screen was used alone to promote fresh coffee, sales were up only 75 to 80 percent above average.

Of course, the rich aroma of coffee in the forecourt is worthless if the store's coffee offering is below par. "The coffee (inside) must be hot and fresh," Santandrea said.

Getting into the forecourt scent-and-advertising business will cost you. Depending on the number of pumps outfitted, purchasing both digital screens and scent machines can run around \$60,000, while leasing can reach



ScentAndrea's scent-squirting cannons can eject scents like vanilla, cut grass and even garlic butter.

TOP

5

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\$1,800 a month, Fleisher said. In spite of the cost, however, over the next three years, the company expects to install the system at 7,500 stations nationwide.

For locations that can't afford both pieces of equipment, "the scent cannon [alone] is inexpensive," Santandrea said. "A system for a gas station can cost as little as \$400 and can earn that cost back in coffee sales in one week."

THE NOSE KNOWS

ScentAndrea machines and other scent products also have a place inside the store. Frank Wallace, marketing instructor at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette, has tested ScentAndrea technology with a various products at a local grocery store (part of a well-known national chain). The tests allowed him to observe consumer response to various scents, while simultaneously teaching students about retail marketing.

One of the most productive tests involved broadcasting the smell of cinnamon buns from the grocery's bakery counter. One Sunday morning, the fragrance helped generate such a demand for cinnamon buns that bakery employees found themselves three hours behind in their work! "We stopped the test," Wallace said.

Another winning experiment involved a rose scent in the floral department two weeks after Valentine's Day. As the scent cannon would release the smell of fresh-cut roses, customers often left their place in the checkout line to go pick up a bouquet of flowers. During the test, "that store sold more roses than any other store in the chain," Wallace said.

Not every scent test has been a rousing success. Wallace once took a clear strip of plastic, embedded with the

ONE SUNDAY MORNING, THE SMELL OF CINNAMON BUNS GENERATED SUCH DEMAND THAT BAKERY EMPLOYEES FELL BEHIND IN THEIR WORK BY THREE HOURS!

scent of chocolate, and hid it in a large display of packaged candy. This inspired chocolate-loving children to demand the candy, resulting in arguments with parents who preferred not to make the purchase.

GOOD SCENTS MAKE GOOD SENSE

In the retail environment, pleasant ambient scents, such as lavender, can influence shoppers by creating a positive mood, reducing perceived wait times and helping to build brand recall.

ScentAndrea believes that scent-enhanced retail environments will take marketing to a new level, and other scent marketing companies, such as Air Aroma, DMX, Prolitec and ScentAir, agree. All are developing and promoting marketing tools aimed at influencing consumers through their sense of smell, the one human sense that cannot be "switched off."

"Smell is the most emotional sense we have," said Santandrea. "And this is the fastest growing category in advertising." **NACS**

Pat Pape worked in the convenience store industry for more than 20 years before becoming a full-time writer.