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Does Scent Enhance Consumer Product Memories?

It may seem odd to add scent to products like sewing thread, automobile tires, and tennis balls, as some companies have done. But a new study in the [*Journal of Consumer Research*](#) says scent helps consumers remember product information.

“Product scent may be particularly effective at enhancing memory for product information as a function of its ability to enhance a product’s distinctiveness within its surrounding context,” write authors Aradhna Krishna (University of Michigan), May Lwin (Nanyang Technological University, Singapore), and Maureen Morrin (Rutgers University).

Scent enhances a product’s distinctiveness, which helps consumers remember it down the line, the authors found. And while ambient (atmospheric) scents seem to boost memory for all the objects encountered in the scented environment (product, signs, lighting, salespeople), it doesn’t much help people remember particular products.

In one study, the authors had 151 participants evaluate pencils that were unscented, scented with pine scent (common), or scented with tea tree scent (uncommon). “We found that the memory for the scented pencils was much greater than memory for the unscented pencils, and that this effect was especially pronounced after a time delay,” the authors write. They also found that participants’ memory of the uncommonly (tea tree) scented pencils was more resistant to decay.

In a second study, the authors compared the effectiveness of product scent to ambient scent. The researchers manipulated whether or not the target product (facial tissues) was scented and whether or not the room was scented. “We find again that when a product is scented, long-term memory for that product’s attributes increases, and further, that product scent is more effective than ambient scent at enhancing memory for product-related information,” the authors write.

“Our studies show that product scent significantly enhances recall of product information, and that this enhanced memory for product information persists over time—for at least two weeks after the time of exposure,” the authors write.

Aradhna Krishna, May Lwin, and Maureen Morrin. “Product Scent and Memory.” *Journal of Consumer Research*: June 2010 (published online December 4, 2009).

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