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[THE FIELD TESTER](#)[BUSINESS](#)[COMMUNITY
TECHNOLOGY](#)[EVENTS](#)[MARKETING](#)[PRODUCT TRENDS](#)

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Sensory Deprivation: A Case Study

It's often said that promotional products are the only advertising medium that appeals to all five senses. In this blog, we explore what that really means and why it's so important.



In the promo industry, we often discuss how promotional products are the only advertising medium that appeals to all five senses. It is a badge of honor and is commonly associated with high-quality promotional products.

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with the standard elevator pitch about the industry. But what does it mean to appeal to all the senses and just how important is it? Sometimes to understand why something is valuable to us, especially when it is commonplace, it must be removed from our routine; in other words, we must be deprived of it.

A Sensory Experience

One of my favorite places to work outside of the office or the home is at a local coffee shop. I have found myself seeking out locally owned, small, craft coffee establishments throughout my travel. But like many things in our regular lives, I took these opportunities for granted prior to the onset of the pandemic. This week, for the first time since the start of the pandemic, I returned to my favorite local coffee establishment. Mask-donned, sanitizer in tow, I was ready to sit and work in an environment other than my makeshift home-office.

It was not until I ordered, sat down at a freshly sanitized table, and began to work that it hit me. I was experiencing a sense of elation and joy that I hadn't experienced in some time. But why? Why in such a common setting was this happening? Then I realized, I was experiencing a multi-sensory situation that only deprivation could have made so visceral.



Touch

There is an indescribable joy of holding a coffee cup, a real coffee cup – not one made of paper but of ceramic. The weight, the feel, the variety of its design, and even its color all creates an appeal and a sensory experience.

Smell

Even those that do not like coffee I suspect can appreciate the smell of a coffee house. The mix of roasted beans and sugary pastries is unforgettable and yet, I had forgotten.

Taste

Needless to say, if you like coffee, you will get this one. If you don't like coffee, are you okay? Should we talk?

Sight

I am continually amazed that coffee shops, which all provide a very similar product, can be so unique. Some are bright and energetic; some are tranquil and serene. We have become all too aware that our favorite locations look different these days, if we can enter them at all. I was happy that the coffee shop still looked like the coffee shop.

Sound

Stay with me on this one, but I find something indescribable about the melodic tones of bad coffee house music, the hiss of the espresso machines, and the clink of the cup against the saucer. The sound, good or bad, is part of the experience. It rounds out the multi-sensory impact.

Sensory Experience in the Promo Industry

So, why is this so important for our industry and at this point in history? Like you, most people are deprived of certain sensory experiences in their lives because of the global situation we find ourselves in. The unfortunate truth is that most of us don't realize that we are being deprived because our new routines have become so usual.



The promo industry, and those who advocate for it, have the power to provide marketing in a multi-sensory way. In our now increasingly digital world, branding by sight and sound continues to expand while other senses suffer. But we can work to change this. For example, print media including magazines, books, and newspapers, is making a huge comeback. Why? People crave that which they do not have, and in the modern era we lack many of the sensory experiences that have been replaced by the digital. This is an indication that we all can apply moving forward – and a sign of the transformative power of sensory experience.

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