One of our 10 Trends for 2013 is Sensory Explosion, the idea that with more of life virtual and online, we’ll place a premium on sensory stimulation, and in turn marketers will look for more ways to engage the senses. While researching this trend, we reached out to Aradhna Krishna, one of the leading academics in the field of sensory marketing. Krishna held the first academic conference on sensory marketing, in 2008, and runs a sensory marketing research lab at the University of Michigan’s Stephen M. Ross School of Business. Her new book, Customer Sense: How the 5 Senses Influence Buying Behavior, argues that companies can greatly enhance the appeal of products by making small changes that trigger subconscious responses. She explains here how sensory marketing has evolved in recent years and how marketers can cut through advertising clutter with some carefully formulated sensory cues.

How do you define sensory marketing?

In my book, I have defined sensory marketing as subconscious triggers that affect how people make purchase and consumption decisions. With advertising, the marketer is claiming that their brand is good or that their potato chips are crisp or that their cologne smells very masculine. The consumer may then feel that the marketer is deliberately trying to influence them; they may react by saying, “Well, sure, they just want to sell the product, so they’re trying to say their product behaves in a certain way. How do I really know?” Whereas if the product itself is giving that message through sensory means, it’s a much more persuasive message. It is a more subconscious message.
Q&A with Aradhna Krishna, professor and sensory marketing expert | JWT Intelligence

What’s the best way to approach sensory marketing?

It has to be done in a very systematic way. When I do my consultancy work, I focus on identifying the sense or senses and the sensory message that would work for a brand. You don’t want to just hype up every sense, which is unfortunately what many sensory marketing consultants are advocating these days. You need to understand what would really work for this product.

What some people are doing instead is saying, “Let’s make this product smell better, and let’s make it feel better, let’s make it look better … let’s just try and make it as ‘multi-sensory’ as possible.” But what one needs to figure out is what sensory elements are really consistent with this product? Let’s say you wanted to make a potato chip appear very fresh and crisp. Not only would the chip have to make a loud sound when it was bitten, but the packet too would need to make a loud pop when it was opened. The potato chip may not actually be that fresh, but when the bag makes that pop sound, one associates that with freshness.

Firms have been practicing sensory marketing for a long time in the same way as firms have been doing advertising forever. But the question is, have people been thinking about it in systematic ways? There are very few examples from the past where people were indeed thinking about sensory aspects of their product. Singapore Airlines is an exception, where very early on they created a signature smell. This smell is still used by them and is identifiable in the plane and in their lounges. While it is not strong in concentration, one can smell it sort of subliminally, and it seems to connote luxury and comfort.

But it’s only recently, in the last two or three years, that people have been focusing more explicitly on sensory marking. They realize now that that’s the way of the future to make the product more appealing.

What are some of the drivers behind this renewed interest in sensory marketing?

People are realizing there’s a lot of clutter in the marketplace in terms of deliberate advertising. And so they are saying, “How do I cut through this clutter to make my product intrinsically appealing?” In my book, I have hundreds of examples of how companies have used creative ways to engage the customer. There’s the example of the potato chip: Why is the potato chip made bigger than the mouth? Why do you have to bite it to make it fit in the mouth? One reason is that when you bite it, you hear the sound and you think it is extremely crisp. The other thing is that when you’re biting it, other people around you hear it and they get more excited to also eat that potato chip.

There is lots of research which connects the sound of the potato chip to the freshness—there are beautiful experiments where people were put into little booths with headphones and they had to eat these potato chips, and for some people, the sound of the potato chip being eaten was magnified. For the people for whom the sound was magnified, they felt the taste of the potato chip was much more crisp and fresh. It’s directly linking the sound with freshness.

What’s a more recent example of smart sensory marketing?

Let’s talk about the iPod Touch. Just the fact that they called it the “Touch” made the consumer much more involved with the product. If they had called it some alphanumeric name—let’s say, RXD2—they would not have had the same sort of success. Just calling it the Touch really made people much more engaged with the product—they wanted to touch it, to interact with it, and felt closer to it. Their advertising too was a play on Touch and emphasized it. So it was very beautifully done to engage the consumer.
Are you seeing a growing interest from marketers in sensory marketing?

I organized the first sensory marketing conference in 2008, where I brought together academics and industry people. Research was being done in scattered ways on all the senses, so that some people were working on smell and others on touch, but they were not conversing with each other. People hadn’t got together and said, “Look, there is this whole thing of sensory marketing, which is extremely important to marketers.”

Once I had the conference, I got a tremendous number of calls from consultants who wanted to enter the area of sensory marketing. Even now I get a lot of calls from consultancy firms that have taken on assignments but are finding it a little difficult to approach them. While people are excited about the area, they don’t have too much expertise. As firms get in-housing training, the expertise will build up and you will see more and more ability to engage consumers through sensory aspects of products.

Do you have examples of new sensory experiences that have successfully captured the interest of consumers?

Are you familiar with Dippin’ Dots? Dippin’ Dots is a completely new sensation. They are these little pellets of ice cream that melt in your mouth. The ice cream company can charge much more per ounce compared to other ice creams.

You can also reformulate a product to make it sensorially more appealing. An example from my book is Hershey’s milk chocolate. You can have it as a flat slab. Or, as they decided to do, you can make this same product sensorially more appealing by transforming it into the Hershey’s Kiss. The Hershey’s Kiss is extremely sensorially appealing in many ways. It feels very good in the mouth. The shape looks very good. When you are unpackaging it, you’re unfolding the flag. It’s also like unwrapping a present. It’s very creative.
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- Talk of Peer Power and FOMO at LA Tourism Forum

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Favorites
As we note in our recent report “Retail Rebooted,” speedier delivery is coming to online ordering, and the pressure is on to deliver goods within hours. This means a new demand for couriers, some of whom will do both the shopping and the delivering. “Valets” for eBay Now track down and drop off items in the markets where the service is available; *Fast Company* recently tagged along with a Manhattan deliveryman. And last year a *TechCrunch* writer spent a few hours as a courier for *Postmates*, which delivers lunch, groceries or office supplies. PocketShop is a similar, London-based startup focused on groceries; its *Pocket Shoppers* “go through rigorous tests to discover who knows their Galas from their Golden Delicious, their Minstrels from Maltesers.” And in Chicago, the startup *WeDeliver* trains “delivery specialists” to work with local merchants. —Marian Berelowitz

*Image credit: Postmates*

- **NFC-enabled tables**
  
  August 20, 2013 | 1:15 pm
Our 100 Things to Watch in 2013 included NFC tags—tags that users can program to initiate an array of functions on mobile devices—and noted that they have interesting potential for brands, which can use them to simplify processes like downloading information. Now McDonald’s Singapore is using NFC tags for something a little more playful: Placed under tables, the tags turn dining surfaces into interactive McDonaldland racetracks and Android phones into “cars.” Diners download the McParty Run app, then simply hold their phone over the “Happy Table” to play, collecting virtual burgers and apple pies while helping Ronald McDonald organize a party. New games, including Battleship, are on the way. —Geri Kan

- **Intelligent rings**
  August 12, 2013 | 4:15 pm

Are rings the next wave in wearable devices? A highly successful Kickstarter campaign out of the U.K. proposes a steel or titanium ring equipped with near field communication technology that enables wearers to unlock a smartphone or door, and share public information like a Twitter handle. The ring is designed to balance data protection and sharing, as a video explains. (But as the ring pairs with the user’s mobile device, iOS users are excluded, since Apple has yet to integrate NFC.)

Wearable technology, as we’ve noted, has spurred the creation of items that help people go Private in Public using tech-infused Intelligent Objects—two trends featured in our 10 Trends for 2013. The ring promises an innovative convergence of these themes, offering a potential alternative for those who fear biometric authentication (one of our 100 Things to Watch in 2013). —Bobby Esnard

- **Catalogs 2.0**
  August 6, 2013 | 9:45 am

Place IKEA furniture in your h...

Print catalogs are still alive and well, proving to be an enduring way of connecting with consumers, as we...
note in our recent report on “The Future of Correspondence.” But increasingly catalogs will also bridge the physical/digital divide, thanks to augmented reality. Last year Ikea added an “X-Ray” feature to its catalog—one of the most widely distributed texts in the world—that allows readers to peer inside products and see, for instance, what a cabinet interior looks like. For the 2014 catalog, customers can place virtual furniture pieces into real-life rooms simply by scanning products with a smartphone or tablet and laying the catalog on the relevant spot on the floor. It’s an ingenious way to add functionality to analog media. —Bobby Esnard

- **Lorde**
  July 30, 2013 | 3:15 pm

At the ripe old age of 16, Lorde (Ella Yelich-O’Conner) has several hit songs in her native New Zealand, a single (“Royals”) that’s getting global exposure and an upbeat profile in *The Wall Street Journal*. What sets this young talent apart from the typical pop starlet is her “elusive approach to publicity,” as the *Journal* put it, and her edge, reminiscent of the grungy, rebellious ’90s.

“Royals,” which reached 100,000 hits on *YouTube* within 24 hours, comes across as a counter to poppy perfection, eschewing typical aspirational and glamour themes for a more authentic depiction of teen life. “I thought it was time someone in popular music was saying what everyone my age was thinking: we don’t even have licenses, let alone Maybachs,” she told *Bullett*. Lorde’s debut album is set for release Sept. 30.

—Maxine Gurevich

*Image credit: Lorde*
The rise of tracking technology and Intelligent Objects is helping pet owners better understand their animals. Whistle is an on-collar device that monitors activity and health, relaying data to owners via a Wi-Fi or Bluetooth connection. Whistle takes details such as breed, age and size into account to provide feedback on everything from activity level and quality of sleep to sociability and play time. It can also identify unusual behaviors, potentially enabling early detection of illness. Owners can track the data over time, establish goals for their pets, and easily share the data.

There’s also Tagg, a GPS tracking system that lets pet owners track location and activity, and Wandant, a dog pedometer available in Japan that also monitors health. Meanwhile, Project FIDO out of the Georgia Institute of Technology proposes a wearable computer that would enable assistance dogs to send messages to handlers. —Alexandra Stieber

- Brands Reengineering Randomness
  July 18, 2013 | 5:45 pm

As we outlined in one of our trends for 2012, Reengineering Randomness, greater emphasis is being placed on randomness and discovery as an antidote to our worlds becoming more personalized and niche. Two brands recently tapped into this by offering serendipitous travel experiences to people willing to embrace risk. Heineken’s “Departure Roulette” invited travelers at New York’s JFK airport to abandon their itinerary and take a free trip to a mystery destination instead; this video shows the results.

As part of its “Travel Is Calling You” campaign for the HHonors loyalty program, Hilton placed a large gold rotary phone in a pedestrian plaza in Chicago. Some who picked up when the phone rang were offered a weekend trip to Miami, provided they could find a travel companion and leave the next day. The four winners were greeted with salsa dancers and a pedicab that took them to an AT&T store, where they received an iPad Mini and other gifts. Find some older travel-related examples here. —Will Palley
Move over wine, coffee and beer. A new libation is gaining popularity, fed in part by the growth in gluten-free diets and craft-beer drinkers looking for something new. Sales of cider (the alcoholic kind) tripled in the U.S. between 2007 and 2012, according to IBISWorld (though the $600 million in revenues is a tiny percentage of overall spending in the alcoholic beverage category), and interest in the U.K. has also grown over the past few years.

Big companies such as MillerCoors (which has the Crispin brand) and Anheuser-Busch InBev (whose Stella Artois brand recently introduced Cidre in the U.S.) are putting their distribution and marketing muscle behind the product. They’re not the only ones turning apples into booze. As with the craft beer craze, small entrepreneurs from Chicago to Seattle are seeking a piece of this pie. — Aaron Baar

Image credit: Stella Artois

As literary movements go, “chick lit” proved fairly durable, spawning countless novels since its late-’90s heyday, most featuring young heroines braving the wilds of city life in search of careers and mates. Now a
A new crop of heroines are kicking off their Manolos and trading martinis for manure, spawning “farm lit,” as The Atlantic reports. Novels such as Georgia’s Kitchen by Jenny Nelson and nonfiction accounts like Rurally Screwed: My Life Off the Grid With the Cowboy I Love by Jessie Knadler all feature ambitious young women fleeing the fast track for “simpler, more authentic lives”—perhaps a response to the recession or to what we’ve termed The Super Stress Era. In Australia, where the genre is known as “chook lit,” the fantasy often extends to herding sheep.

Despite the down-home themes, some marketers are selling a chic version of the lifestyle: Williams-Sonoma now offers high-end chicken coops, and Urban Outfitters’ upscale Terrain garden stores stock $68 garden hoses. —Alec Foege

Image credits: Simon & Schuster; Penguin Group

• Cruising Asia
June 24, 2013 | 5:15 pm

With Asia leading the global tourism market, the stage is set for rapid expansion of the region’s cruise market. Royal Caribbean’s Mariner of the Seas recently became the first ship into Hong Kong’s new Kai Tak Cruise Terminal. In May, Carnival Corp. opened a regional office in Singapore as headquarters for its new Carnival Asia unit, which will oversee expanded offerings from the Costa and Princess Cruises brands. And new ports in Singapore, Shanghai and Tianjin in northern China have lured some companies away from once-popular European and Australian destinations. As Asia-Pacific itineraries expand, 2014 promises to be a big year for Asian cruisers. —Bobby Esnard

Image credit: Princess Cruises

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