

HOW FRAGRANCE INFLUENCE OUR WORLD

By Johan le Roux

What function does an air freshener system fulfil in a washroom, hospital, office, restaurant or leisure facility? This question was addressed to some leading manufacturers regarding the value that fragrance systems can add to specific environments.

Most people would agree, the main role of an air freshener system is to mask bad smells. And for obvious reasons, they are mostly used in the washroom. However, fragrance systems are increasingly being used in other environments as well, such as leisure centres, hotels, gyms, offices, shops and spas. Rather than simply being a means of covering up unpleasant aromas, they are being deployed to add an ambience and promote a sense of wellbeing among customers, guests and employees.

But how far does this picture alter from facility to facility? And how important are air freshener systems in each environment?

The fragrance of a hotel, restaurant, café or spa is key in creating an atmosphere for customers. Smell is often the first thing we experience when entering a premise, even before we notice the décor. It stimulates the memory and reminds us of pleasant moments.

Marketing specialists understand this and focus heavily on olfactory marketing as a result. However, in some environments, the number one objective is to hide bad smells. This may be the case in hospitals, retirement homes, washrooms and changing rooms, for example.

In retirement homes it may be necessary to destroy bad odours and create a pleasant olfactive atmosphere to prevent the facility from smelling like a hospital. So, the choice of perfumes here is extremely important.

According to some manufacturers, the scope of fragrances is limitless, some are designed to encourage relaxation while others evoke an efficient working atmosphere. There are even amusement parks that use different fragrances to reflect the 'universes' through which the visitor passes. And brochures and magazines are now sometimes scented to influence our buying decisions.

Olfactory marketing can have a major impact on consumer behaviour. The smell of warm bread or pizza might make our mouths water, but those fragrances that the customer doesn't actually notice can have an even more powerful impact. More and more retailers want manufacturers to create personalised fragrances such as the scent of clean laundry, leather, cut grass or the smell of coffee.

According to one of the manufacturers, the presence of a fragrance creates the impression of cleanliness. Most cleaning companies use effective products, but the smell of these will only linger for a few minutes after application and therefore the use of automatic fragrance delivery systems will create a scent that remains in place throughout the day, maintaining the smell of cleanliness.

It is widely accepted that fragrances can have a major impact on customer behaviour. Multiple sensory marketing studies have shown how businesses can create a particular atmosphere by means of music or a pleasant perfume.

In a washroom scenario, air freshening should be the final step in any cleaning routine. Even though the premises may have been thoroughly cleaned, there could be some residual bad smell, as often happens in ablutions and then the cleanliness of the washroom will be questioned, resulting in complaints.

Eliminate, don't mask

A bad odour creates a negative first impression of any facility. Fresh, clean air reaffirms the fact the premises are clean and safe, whereas a bad smell will leave visitors with a poor perception of the cleanliness of the environment. If a customer walks into a hotel, office or leisure facility and is met with an unpleasant smell, they may not return again.

It is therefore vital that the root cause of the odour is eliminated rather than mask it with a fragranced spray. Many air fresheners may hide bad smells, but if the source isn't fully removed, those smells may return at any point. The only way to prevent that from occurring is to kill the bacteria that has caused the odour in the first place. Purifiers can deliver real health benefits by removing harmful bacteria and viruses from the air, reducing the risk of picking up an infection.

Healthcare settings present a greater challenge. Creating a friendly and welcoming atmosphere is particularly difficult in hospitals and care homes because these environments evoke a sensation of discomfort and even anxiety for many people. Eliminating that distinctive hospital or care home smell will definitely help to improve the customers' sense of wellbeing.

Fragrances form an important part of the marketing strategy for many businesses. This is particularly the case in retail centres, restaurants and coffee houses where fragrances are used to create positive memories or favourable impressions. If a scent can be found to match the product on sale it can have a positive influence on the purchasing behaviour of the customer.

During one study in a Las Vegas casino, it emerged that a pleasant scent could be linked to a 45 percent rise in slot machine revenue compared with an equivalent non-scented area. Another study in a shoe shop revealed that 84 percent of people were more likely to buy shoes when trying them on in a scented room. However, a fine balance needs to be struck when creating a fragrance, as a too powerful scent could turn customers away, while a scent that is too weak would not be memorable.