

## **Joint promotion adds stickers to sweet smell of marketing**

*Stuart Elliott*

A promotion scheduled to begin Monday may prompt hotel guests to exclaim, with apologies to "Apocalypse Now," that they love the smell of advertising in the morning.

Guests at Omni luxury hotels will find small scented stickers on the front pages of their free copies of USA Today. A blackberry aroma will suggest that the guests start the day at their hotels with a cup of Starbucks coffee "paired with a fresh muffin." The promotion, to be tested for at least six months, is being sponsored by Omni Hotels and Starbucks Coffee.

It is one of two ideas being explored by the Gannett Company, the parent of USA Today, in the increasingly popular realm of scented advertising. The other concept Gannett is testing is to let marketers add scents to the ads they run in the pages of USA Today. Another national newspaper, The Wall Street Journal, owned by Dow Jones & Company, is also looking into scenting its ad pages.

Scented selling, part of a trend known as sensory marketing, is gaining favor because it helps brands stand out in crowded, competitive categories.

For example, visitors to the lobbies of Omni hotels can smell blends of lemongrass and green tea, which since late 2005 has been the official scent of the lodging chain.

"We're looking for a way to carry the scents, the whole sensory experience, further," said Caryn Kboudi, vice president for corporate communications at Omni Hotels in Irving, Texas.

Other sensory-marketing tactics at the 38 Omni hotels, which are intended to help "create a more memorable stay," Kboudi said, include Sensation Bars, redesigned room minibars stocked with items like mojito-flavored jelly beans and miniature Zen gardens; elaborate floral displays in public spaces; and "Sensational Wednesdays," offering gifts for guests like eucalyptus bath salts. There are even chimes that play softly when computer users visit the corporate Web site ([www.omnihotels.com](http://www.omnihotels.com)). "Omni is one of the brands getting aggressive about sensory marketing," said Michael Davidson, vice president for national circulation sales at USA Today in McLean, Virginia, which made Omni executives "excited to try this."

USA Today and Omni worked together about six months to try various types of stickers, Davidson said, making their way through the estimated 160 scents available from the sticker maker, the WS Packaging Group in Algoma, Wisconsin

Kboudi recalled evaluating "at least 50" aromas, she said, "sniffing a lot of little Baggies with scent stickers inside."

After executives at Starbucks were invited to weigh in, the verdict was that "we all gravitated to the berry scent," she added, because it "made you go 'yum yum' and had a very fresh scent." (The smell of Starbucks coffee was deemed too difficult to duplicate.)

The stickers are composed of two layers and measure 2 inches long by 1 inch wide. They replace the single-ply stickers affixed to the front pages of USA Today, informing the guests the newspapers are courtesy of Omni Hotels. The chain distributes 10,000 to 13,000 copies a day of USA Today, Davidson estimated.

The stickers are of the "peel and sniff" variety in that the berry scents are not supposed to be released until the top layers are lifted. That is intended to minimize complaints from allergic — or berry-allergic — hotel guests.

Scented ads, like any sensory experience, have generated their share of protests. Ads in magazines featuring scent strips, for products like fragrances, draw the ire of readers who believe the smells are unpleasant or too powerful.

As a result, publishers like the Time Inc. unit of Time Warner, which owns magazines like InStyle, People and Real Simple, adopted a policy by which readers can request scent-free issues from customer service representatives.

And in December, the California Milk Processor Board ran afoul of scent-sensitive commuters when it asked that adhesive strips smelling like chocolate chip cookies be affixed to five bus shelters in San Francisco.

Gripes about the aroma from the ads, part of the "Got milk?" campaign, led the local Municipal Transportation Authority to order CBS Outdoor, which maintains the bus shelters, to remove the scent strips.

Such troubles may lead some consumers to conclude that ads in general are good only for wrapping fish. For them, help has arrived.

To promote the series "Deadliest Catch," which will begin its third season Tuesday night, the Discovery Channel cable network is providing branded wrappers to 12 fish markets in Boston, San Francisco and Seattle.

The estimated 185,000 feet of wrapping paper, enough for more than 100,000 seafood orders, tells shoppers they can now watch "fresh episodes" of the series, which follows crab fisherman in the Bering Sea.

The promotion, which began last week, is to continue through April "or until we run out of paper," said Julie Gordon Willis, senior vice president for marketing at Discovery Channel in Silver Spring, Maryland, part of Discovery Communications.

The promotion was developed by PHD, a media agency owned by the Omnicom Group, and produced by Metropolis Media, part of Ubiquitous Media in New York.

Hmm. Perhaps the two promotions can be paired, encouraging those who read newspapers online to buy the printed versions because fish cannot be wrapped in computers.

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