

In the Mood

Making the atmosphere in your booth a sensory experience

by Bruce Baker

When it comes to merchandising, an artist needs to take the entire sensory experience of their customer into account. The mood your booth projects is a culmination of many things, including sight, smell, sound and your personal aura.

As base as it might sound, your booth is like a trap to catch a potential customer to "take the bait and reel them in." You have actually captured them when you sell them something! So, just like any good hunter, you need to do what it takes to create an environment that will generate successful sales.

The visual sense is one most people use to get the result that they want, but to be the best hunter, you will need to use more than just sight. The senses are your allies when it comes to drawing people into your space and actually converting them from lookers to buyers.

At first sight

The "visual" is the first thing customers will notice. No doubt your visual merchandising must match your product line, and the mood it creates must be exciting to draw customers in. You have three to five seconds to capture the attention—and eye—of buyers, or they will walk past. How do you display your art and how well does your display and merchandising relate to the objects in your booth?

Into the light

Another factor that influences mood is light. If a customer cannot see it, they will not buy it. Light is the key (especially with older customers) and is a necessary ingredient in a successful booth. Just as important is the size of fonts you use in signage and promotional materials. If typeface is not large enough, they will not be able to read it and gather your story—a story which entices them to buy.

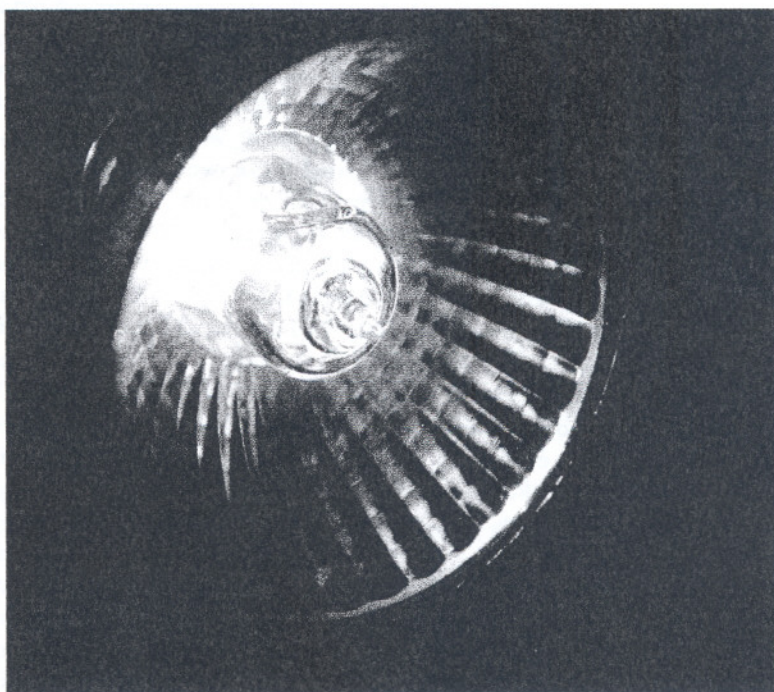
Touch

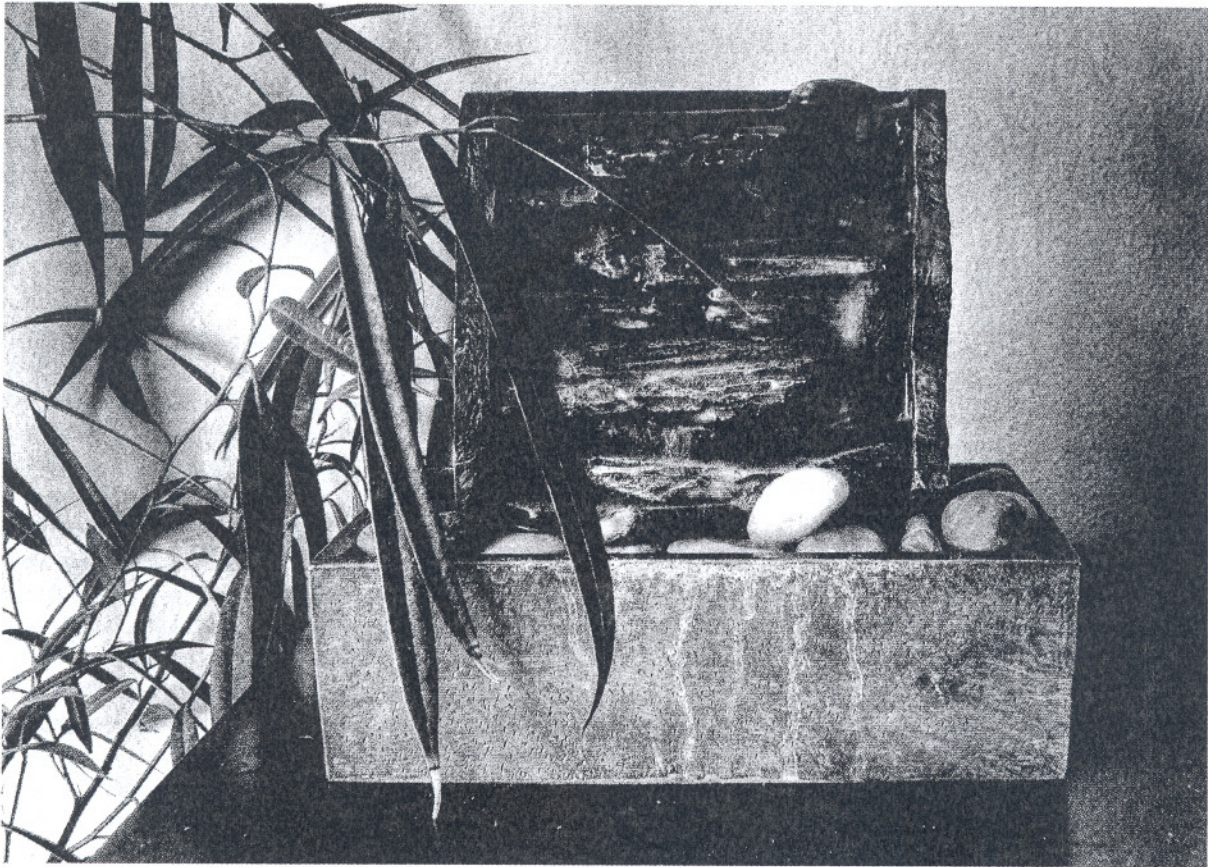
The sense of touch is another important sense to put to work. Encourage your customers to touch your work. Be sure to display your work so it is easy and inviting to touch. No display technique works better than to hang it. When you hang your work (if that is an appropriate method for your product line), you will find the touch response is almost irresistible. Be sure not to overcrowd your booth; this discourages the touch response because buyers will worry that things may start tumbling. Don't put merchandise on the floor that acts as a barricade to work displayed above it. Make sure every display is in easy arms' reach to make it comfortable and secure for customers to touch.

If it is work that cannot be touched, you have to get them to touch it in their mind, like the dialogue in a mail-order catalogue, or have a sample or fragment they can touch. Statistically you are four times more likely to sell a customer something they have touched.

Sound

There are several ways to create the right mood in your booth using the sense of sound. One of the most impor-





tant aspects of the sense of sound is your own voice. Are you projecting energy and enthusiasm with your voice when you address your customers? Energy is an amazing attribute to a sale and when you have it, other people around your booth generally pick it up—the result is a contagious reaction from your customers. Make sure you are projecting energy and enthusiasm with appropriate dialogue as you talk about your work; it will go a long way to demonstrate your pride and this in turn will make people want to share it with others. When they look at the art they will see you and what you brought to the piece.

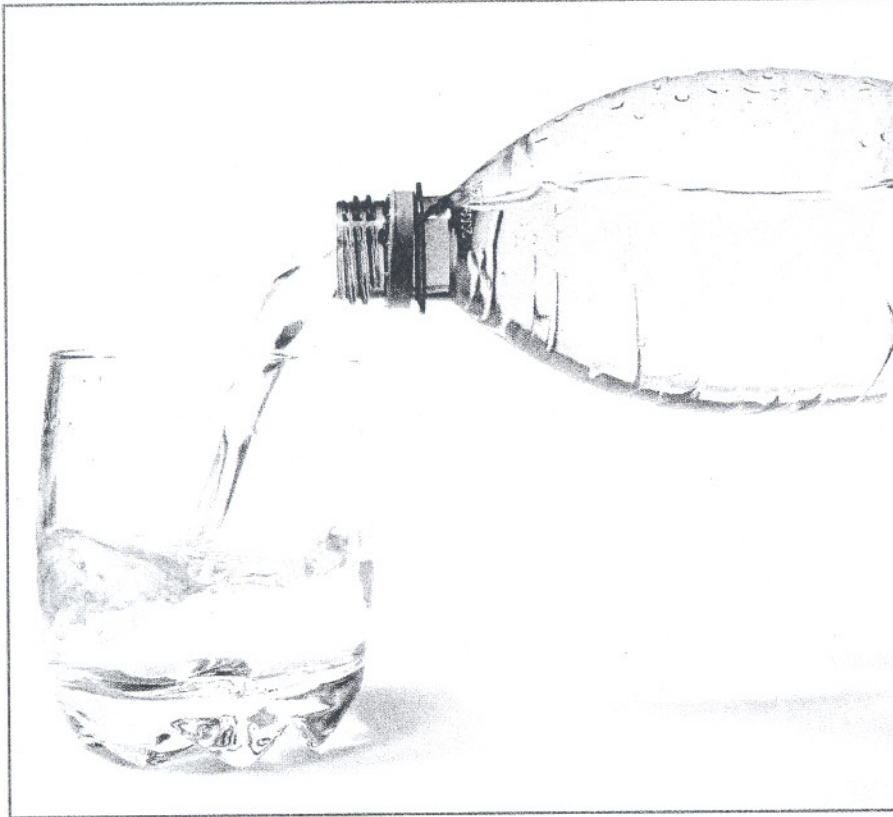
Consider environmental noises, like wind chimes, fountains or any other appropriate sounds to make your booth stand out. The sound generated must be appropriate to your product line and when it is a fit, magic happens.

I remember seeing a booth that displayed ceramic birdhouses. They were displayed on natural, lush green grass (sod) used as a table covering for risers and pedestals. The sound emanating from the booth was continuous bird songs turned down low, so it didn't leak much beyond the booth. It was so magical when you walked in. The natural grass and the sound made you look at the birdhouses more closely and enjoy the mood that was set; it was a breath of fresh air! I have one of these birdhouses in my home and every time I look at it I remember that booth.

Taste

Taste is another sense that has an amazing effect on your customers. Giving your customers a tasty treat when appropriate plants a seed that will pay off generously. The treat doesn't need to be fancy or expensive, just appropriate for the venue. Chocolate is rarely a bad choice. My wife uses Hershey's Kisses in her store to obtain customer e-mail addresses. She has a sign out with a small dish of kisses. The sign reads "a kiss for your e-mail." The kisses disappear and e-mail addresses appear on the sheet.

If you ask a customer for their e-mail they will most likely turn you down. Using "kisses" you can get this valuable information at very low cost. Many times you will be at a seasonal show and the tiny offering can be appropriate to the holiday, like candy corn (autumn), peppermints (winter holidays), or cinnamon hearts (Valentine's day). I was once converted from a looker to a buyer at a show with a glass of water. As I walked by a booth an exhibitor asked me "Would you like a glass of Vermont Spring Water?" It sounded good to me, so I said yes. As I took the water, I thought to myself, I can't leave now, that would be rude. So, as I drank the water I started looking closely at his line and found it interesting and a good value, and before I knew it I was writing an order. He had converted me with a glass of water! Use the lure of food or drinks to get your customers to engage.



Smell

The sense of smell is another great mood enhancer. Our culture does not give much credit to smell, but it has great power over customers. We associate smells with events and emotions from the past. Sometimes these associations are subconscious, but you will find if you use an appropriate scent for your art, it will have a positive effect on your sales. Light, delicate and natural smells are the key. If you overdo the sense of smell (both in the booth and on yourself), customers will not stop, no matter how great they find your work. But delicate fragrances like vanilla, cinnamon or lavender can create an amazing ambiance in your booth. The seasons can also play into this sense. A bit of balsam at a holiday show can be wonderful, evoking that holiday spirit within.

Do keep in mind that smell, as in all the senses, has a positive and a negative side. If carpet or booth materials smell stale or musty from being stored in a damp place, it will have a negative effect on the mood your booth creates.

Your aura

The final sense is the aura of your business. This is the sense that is the hardest to detect or describe. The aura mostly comes from you. Make sure the image you are projecting is one that is positive and upbeat. If you are not satisfied with the show and how it is going, this often leads to bad vibes which customers pick up on. Declare your booth

is a "happy space" and do whatever it takes to project positive and upbeat energy.

Your aura will affect how the customer feels about you. Unless a customer likes you and feels like he or she can identify with you, they will not buy your art. That's one of the reasons people go to art shows—they actually get to meet the artists face to face! If they think you are arrogant, judgmental or desperate, they will not buy your art. It is very important we project the kind of person we are through verbal and body language. If you are too pushy you will turn them off and they will walk. If you are too laid-back (which I often find comes from a core of shyness) you won't seem to have the "it" factor and they will walk on until they

find someone who does. Try to maintain a balance of these factors: friendly, informative, confident, and available.

An exhibitor projecting a bad mood or frustration about unmet expectations is the kiss of death; expectations really are one of the keys to our attitude. Once you start to fret about not making the sales you hoped for, or start thinking about anything negative, for that matter, you cut yourself off from the positive mood that is the key to your success. Negativity and worry can permeate a space of 1,000 square feet or more! Most art or craft show booths are 100 square feet, so the bad vibes are cranked up tenfold. Make sure you have the self-discipline to transcend the negative vibes you are capable of projecting.

The whole picture

The senses used in your booth are similar to when you go to someone's home for dinner, and you enter to the wonderful smell of food being cooked, candles on the table, great music playing, and people excited to see you. Your visual merchandising, your sales presentation and projecting a positive sensory experience will attract more customers to your space and the sales will follow as a result of the mood you have created. **TCR**

Bruce Baker is a jeweler, gallery owner and nationally recognized expert in booth design. Visit his website at www.bbakerinc.com.