

The Sweet Smell of Success

... or Not!

Isn't it time we came to our senses... or are we all so involved with the practice that we're missing what our basic senses are telling us?

When taking a look around the practice and reflecting on what works and doesn't we often miss the obvious.

As we all become technologically more competent, and life gets more complex, we tend to neglect those instincts, which tell us whether events, things and people are good, bad or dangerous – instinctive responses which override the thought processes which may follow. Practices are continually striving to educate owners that their pets are animals and as such, may bite and scratch; that dogs and cats will sometimes behave like wolves and wildcats on an instinctive basis. It's worth reminding ourselves that we are not so very different.

Taking a closer look at our sense of smell, the diagram below is a hypothesis resulting from research into the relative strengths of different species senses.

The hypothetical 'Odour wheel'

This diagram represents and compares the odour worlds of mouse and human. (see figure 1) The inner part represents the different categories of odours experienced by the mouse. The relative importance of each category for the mouse smell-independent behaviour is indicated by the area of each wedge.

The outer part represents the same categories for the human; the importance of each category for human smell - independent behaviour compared with the mouse is indicated by the area of each wedge. Note the greater importance of food odours for the human. Note also the retention of some sensitivity to social and other odours prominent in rodents, though in many cases to still undermined degrees.

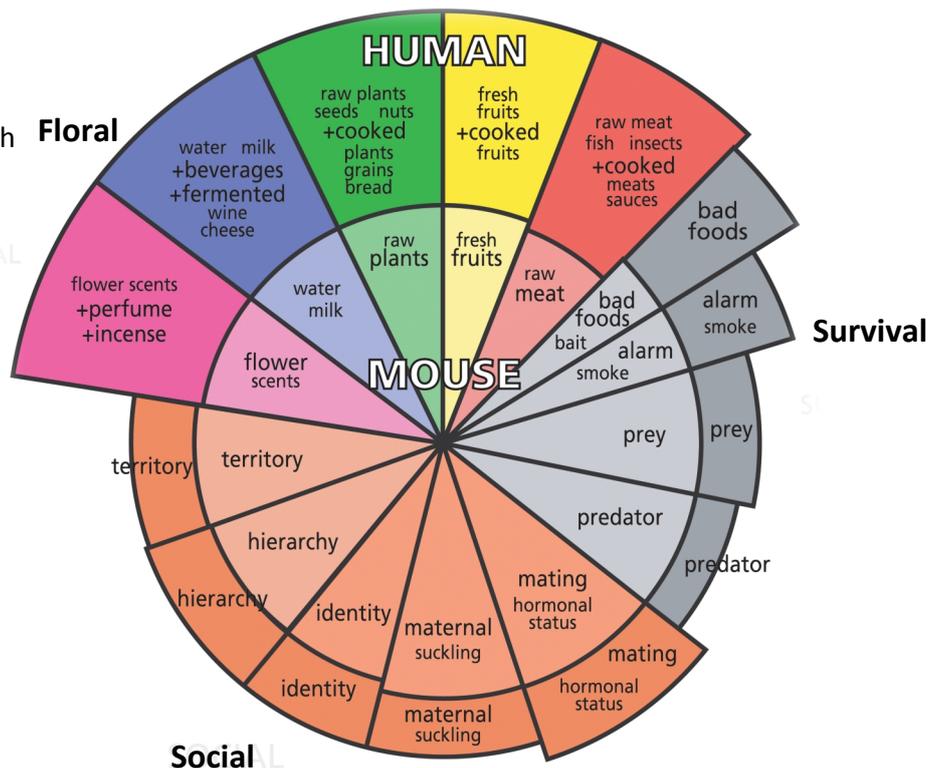
What is my point?

It is this: give your practice the senses test, see what's going on, touch the surfaces, make a conscious note of the smell in different areas and hear the general practice malaise.

The resultant changes could elicit the sweet smell of success!

Ideally get someone who's not involved with the practice to do this. An experienced customer service professional can help you. You will be amazed at what is reported back.

Relative Odour worlds of mouse and human foods



Consider the following scenario 1.

I park the car in the car park; I **notice** that the fence needs repairing; I **look** for a sign that tells me where I'm supposed to go. I open the door, the door handle **feels** cold and is stiff to open - are they shut? I **look** around and see other people inside and so assume not and give the door a shove. It **makes me** nervous just in case they have locked the door for a reason and I'm about to wreck the door or end up with handle in my hand whilst at reception! I enter and shut it behind me and I notice a **smell** when I enter - now what is it? Mmm, something like wet smelly dog with a dash of ... not sure but something unpleasant, maybe it's the mat. I've just **walked** across it did **feel a slight stickiness** underfoot now I **think** about it. I register at reception and am acknowledged, between mouthfuls, whilst the receptionist drinks her coffee, which does **smell** nice after the initial wet dog waft on entry! I **think** what a good idea - I could just do with a coffee now. I can almost **taste** the coffee, it **smells** so good. But no chance of getting one until I'm back at home.

I take a seat, I **look** to choose the one with the least pet hair on but it still sets my mind wondering what was wrong with the pet that came in previously. Lice, mites, fleas? Something that could be transferred to my pooch here or at home? My mind becomes distracted as I **hear** a conversation between the receptionist and one of the nurses. These two are revealing the inadequacies of another member of staff in a disparaging way. My **thoughts** then turn to who this person might be and the hope that they

won't be seeing me or dealing with any aspect of my pet's health.

I **notice** an information board, which carries a display on fireworks and safety tips for November the 5th

It's now April.

This is an accumulation of experiences but I have come across all of them recently.



Most of these problems are relatively easy and inexpensive to fix. Doing so would make the experience of your clients so much better and would put them more at ease.

- Fix the fence. You could probably do it yourself - it was only a loose board.
- Ease the door opening – perhaps get a carpenter in for the morning.
- Wash the mat at least once a week. Dependant on footfall and incidents.
- Ensure that your Receptionist only has coffee when morning appointments are over or when she's away from the desk.
- Have seats that aren't covered in cloth and so are easy to clean – after all you are in a potentially messy business.
- Encourage staff to come straight to an appropriate partner or practice manager with a grumble. They wouldn't like their

shortcomings to be discussed in public would they?

Don't expect clients to enter the practice with a "hear no evil, see no evil, speak no evil and for pity's sake don't touch anything attitude"; they're too caught up with anxiety about their best pal.



Their instincts however will give them an emotional impression of their visit that will leave them with a sense of whether or not the practice is a good one.

Take note of the following extract and think of the last time you went somewhere and didn't go in because it just didn't feel right!

Emotion

The perception of smell consists not only of the sensation of the odours themselves but of the experiences and emotions associated with these sensations. Smells can evoke strong emotional reactions. Surveys on reactions to odours show that many of our olfactory likes and dislikes are based purely on emotional associations.* Ref : Social Issues Research Centre- Smell report

Our sense of touch is our way of feeling the world around us, whether it's a handshake or petting man's best friends. It's our first form of communication: studies have shown that an embryo has acquired a sense of touch by the eighth week of its development.

How would your practice score?



See page 3 for scoring for scenario

Veterinary practice is an emotion experience business. Sometimes it's the little things that give us the good feelings about a place.

Think of some of our common sayings: to smell a rat, the sweet smell of success, gut feeling, wake up - smell the coffee, to lose one's touch, unable to hear oneself think. All these are directly related to our senses and to the importance of taking action.

The things that go unnoticed because you see them every day could be the reasons for a client choosing another practice. The shabby look of the paintwork outside, hairs on the seats (a professional hazard, I hear you cry) but not noticed in all practices because they have seating that doesn't hold hair. Sitting on hairy seats will be a turn off for some of your clients and not for others.

Think about Mrs Jones a poodle breeder: it would be an issue for her because she prides herself with being as immaculately turned out as her dogs. John the Bricky probably wouldn't notice when he comes in with his Staffy, Helga. When Helga had puppies she chose to do it in the cab of John's truck. He wasn't bothered and she was happy. But put it right and none of your clients will complain. *

The table below shows how the scenario would rate (1 being bad, 2 poor, 3 average, 4 good, 5 very good)

I leave you with the thought that it's the little things in life that can sometimes make all the difference. Realise what your instincts are telling you and take action.

Activity	Hear	See	Touch	Smell	Comments
Parking the car		2		3	Broken fence
Outside the practice	2	3		3	Mostly OK, but had to look for reception sign, which was not obvious. Building work next-door, noise irritating, scared my dog. Paintwork a bit shabby on door.
Entry	3	4	2	2	Registration desk obvious, door handle stiff, felt awkward, smell of wet dog, yuk.
Reception	3	2	3	4	No undue noise, receptionist drinking coffee, reception desk clean, nothing nasty to touch, coffee smell good but left me feeling of regret at not being able to have one.
Seating	3	2	2	3	No undue noise, hairs on the seats, hairs on hands after sitting on the seat, smell of wet dog and coffee not the best of smells
Waiting	1	2	2	3	Disparaging conversation between staff, wonder what they say about their clients? Display out of date, nothing new to help my pet, still feeling uncomfortable.

**Note: Any people and pets named in this article are fictitious and used to demonstrate attitudes and customer behaviour.*

Nicki is known in the Veterinary pharmaceutical arena for introducing practice development programmes, and launching a licensed product via a consumer TV campaign (Both firsts in this Industry at the time). She negotiated co-promotions with leading names such as Sony, and developed other innovative award winning ideas, gaining market shares, profitable sales, and elevating corporate visibility.

Since launching NGM, she has worked with new businesses as well as large multi national companies throughout a diverse range of sectors from Veterinary Pharmaceuticals, IT, Furniture manufacturing and retail to Dating agencies, giving her an increased breadth of business acumen used to assess the market needs of a myriad of areas.

Her creative ability, imaginative thinking and customer focus has successfully marketed products and services in global and local markets to businesses and consumers.

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