



## CREATING A 'WHOLE' STORE EXPERIENCE

**Date:** 9/12/2005; **Publication:** Supermarket News; **Author:** AnnaMaria M. Turano

WALK INTO A WHOLE FOODS STORE and experience a treat for the senses.

As the world's leading natural and organic food supermarket, Whole Foods Market's success is in part the result of what we call "natural marketing" -- marketing that creates an organic connection with consumers. What's that mean? By "organic," I mean the earthy, tangible sensations that focus on consumers' senses using products, merchandising and services that are naturally inviting to consumers.

Mainstream retailers can adopt several aspects of this strategy to their own benefit. In some instances, they may already be doing so to promote other categories. However, the health and wellness area might require certain additional steps to attract consumer attention:

**Looks:** Emphasize your "wow" factor.

Retailers should leverage their expertise by showcasing their "wow" product categories and educating consumers with tips and tricks of using these products. This education helps the consumer better understand and appreciate the product.

**Smells/Tastes:** Encourage consumers to interact with your brand.

With well-versed demonstrators, Whole Foods goes beyond merely providing a small bite of a product with its formal and informal sampling programs. Retailers should look at every available opportunity to formally and informally sample their offerings, allowing consumers more opportunities to interact with a brand before purchase.

**Sounds/Touch:** Provide a soothing shopping experience.

Whole Foods emphasizes a soothing shopping experience, from the gentle rainforest-like drizzling of the produce displays at the store entrances to the back/shoulder massages offered in the health and beauty care section. Retailers should strive to provide a relaxing shopping experience. Relaxed consumers will stay in stores longer and recall a pleasant shopping experience (from sampling to purchase decision, checkout and actual product use) and will likely return as a repeat customer.

Whole Foods has successfully created an organic connection with its consumers, focusing on ways to tantalize consumers' senses via products, merchandising and services that naturally look, sound, smell, taste and feel inviting. If they are not already doing so, retailers should be employing these principles of "natural marketing" to improve the way they connect to consumers.

AnnaMaria M. Turano is a founder and an executive director of Marketing Consulting Associates, Westport, Conn., a strategic management consulting firm dedicated to helping its clients achieve business growth objectives.