

NAD Smells Problems in Scented Oil Tests

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This week, NAD issued a decision in a case involving a commercial for Air Wick Scented Oil that includes some valuable lessons about claim substantiation.

One version of the commercial starts with a family of four engaged in various activities while crowded into a small corner of an otherwise empty living room. A voiceover states: “You don’t live in one corner. Fragrance shouldn’t either. Air Wick’s new technology releases fragrance upwards and outwards. So now, you can fill every corner with fragrance.” Animated arrows and flowers flow from the top of the Air Wick product and reach into every corner of the room.



NAD determined that the commercial conveyed two key claims: (1) that the product enables fragrance to fill the four corners of a room; and (2) that the product does this better than others on the market. Although the advertiser presented a Computational Fluid Dynamics analysis with visual simulations of what the fragrance plumes emitted by the device should look like under certain pre-specified conditions, NAD found that that the substantiation wasn’t sufficient to support the claims.

There are a few points in the decision that are worth highlighting because they tend to come up frequently.

- The tests were conducted in a “steady state” that did not take into consideration variables, such as air flow throughout a room. Although NAD acknowledged that tests don’t need to account for every possible variable, “there is reasonable middle ground between a room awchirl with moving air and the steady state that the advertiser’s simulations were based upon.”
- The analysis of the fragrance uniformity in the tests was conducted at 25 cm and 50 cm above

the device. This did not fit well with the broader message about how consumers “don’t live in a corner” and the product can “fill every corner [of the room] with fragrance.”

- Although the testing instruments showed a 25% improvement in fragrance distribution over the previous model, there was nothing in the report to indicate whether that difference would be perceptible to consumers.

Test protocols and results are often debated before the NAD. When designing your protocol, it’s important to try to mirror actual use conditions as closely as possible. Make sure your claims are tailored to the test results. And keep in mind that although higher test scores are a necessary prerequisite to any superiority claim, they may not be enough – consumers must also be able to perceive the differences themselves.