

Experiencing the Games

How Coca-Cola and other brands are making the most of experiential marketing

Coca-Cola is one brand that took advantage of every aspect of the Olympic Games in Rio—the athletes, the sports, the venues, even staging mini events at dozens of small villages all across Brazil before the Games even began.

The campaign was built on a basic insight: The outcome of any experience is about the memory you are left with after the experience is over. And more often than not, that memory is captured through videos, photos and tweets—by both the brand and consumers—and posted on social media to share with followers and fans.

Experiential marketing plays a growing role for marketers looking to directly engage with consumers and encourage them to participate in the brand. In fact, more than half of marketers (51%) plan to invest more in experiential content this year. This makes sense, considering that 98% of consumers capture content at live events and 100% share that content across their social media networks, according to the Event Marketing Institute and Mosaic's EventTrack study.

Coca-Cola's Olympic #That'sGold campaign is grounded in capturing "gold moments" through the marketing experiences it staged around the Games.

"Each element and experience around the cam-

paign ties to, and supports the next experience," says James Williams, Olympic marketing and assets director at The Coca-Cola Co.

Coca-Cola, as do many of the athletes participating in the Games, set its sites on celebrating gold—but not just the gold medals found on top of the world's most elite podium. Now in its 88th year as an Olympic partner, the brand rolled out the #That'sGold integrated experiential campaign around the

world in July. The goal was to celebrate with fans across the world the gold feeling that comes from accomplishing something great, however simple, in an everyday moment.

When Coca-Cola began planning its Summer Olympics' push, it started by creating an idea that would work in multiple

channels through a number of key experiential elements, Williams says.

The torch relay, an iconic event in the Olympics, was the kickoff to the #That'sGold campaign. Coca-Cola, a presenting partner of the Olympic flame on its 95-day journey through Brazil, stopped at 84 small villages where it set up mini-stages each evening as the torch arrived to bring people together in the spirit of the Games through music and dance offs.

"It's experiential centric and builds excitement for



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A view of Parada Coca-Cola, a hangout for teens, located outside the Olympic Park.

the Games all over the country,” Williams says. “It’s our biggest sampling and experiential activation, sampling 1.3 million Coke and Coke Zero mini cans in remote regions of Brazil.”

Then, when the torch arrived in Rio signaling the start of the 2016 Olympic Games, Coca-Cola was ready with multiple experiences.

For example, Parada Coca-Cola (The Coca-Cola Olympic Station), a first in the brand’s Olympic history, is billed as the official ‘must-see’ hangout for teens in Rio where they can experience and engage with the Games on their terms. It opened Aug. 6 and is located in the new heart of the city and Official Rio Live Site, Praca Maua. The hang out gives teens the chance to experience #ThatsGold in a number of ways, from innovative tech activities to headline events. The space mixes athletes, musical artists and influencers and links activities to Olympic events taking place that day. Olympic medals are on view. There were dance offs and plenty of photo opps allowing teenagers to create and share their “gold moments” across their social networks.

“To make it a must-go-to destination, we needed to understand from the teenagers themselves how they would find it exciting,” Williams says. “Previously, what we did was very linear: go here, then there. This year, we created something with a number of different experiences so teenagers could experience it when they wanted to. We are colliding their world with the Olympic world and pop culture.”

Within the Olympic Park itself, The Coca-Cola experience is a visually stunning activation. There, visitors can enjoy an ice-cold Coca-Cola in a commemorative gold aluminum bottle, celebrate the Olympic torch relay (including a photo with the torch), view highlights of the long-standing partnership between Coca-Cola and the Olympic Games or attend a pin trading and retail experience.

To spread #ThatsGold across the world, Coca-Cola enlisted a selection of global influencers, including: Australian superstars Cody and Alli Simpson, Canadian actress and fashion blogger Allie Evans, and British YouTuber Jake Boys. The influencers created a series of content defining what #ThatsGold means to them and encouraged their social media followers to celebrate their own gold moments.

“At the very beginning we put these all on the table to make sure the campaign can live and breathe in these separate experiences,” Williams says. “But then they all came together to engage people in so many different ways. It was imbedded from the beginning. It’s about creating that live moment that people can share with their friends.”

“FOR THIS CAMPAIGN, WE WANTED TO BRING IT TO LIFE—LIVE TO PEOPLE—TO REALLY ENGAGE THEM AND GIVE THEM SOMETHING TO TALK ABOUT AND TO SHARE.”

— JAMES WILLIAMS, OLYMPIC MARKETING AND ASSETS DIRECTOR, COCA-COLA

The Rio 2016 Olympic Games will also see the Coletivo Coca-Cola project extend further through Coletivo Events, a training program for young people from Rio de Janeiro’s favelas that aims to empower people from these communities through work. During the Games, Coca-Cola employed young people from the initiative and trained them to work within hospitality, venue operations and experiential roles, giving them valuable work experience and a once-in-a-lifetime chance to be part of the Rio 2016 Olympic Games in their home city.

Coca-Cola has a number of different ways that it measures experiential marketing. It records the number of people it touches. It works with IMI to conduct detailed interviews before, during and after the experiences. For example, it conducted surveys during the first week of the torch relay as it came to Brazil and made adjustments based on the responses. It surveyed people again four weeks later to understand sentiment and engagement. It tracks the number of photos taken, how many shares, the use of the hashtag #ThatsGold and buzz around the experiences. Press coverage and both paid and earned media is also monitored.

“For this campaign, we wanted to bring it to life—live to people—to really engage them and give them something to talk about and to share,” Williams says. ■

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MESSAGE MEETS EXPERIENCE

HOW MARTECH INNOVATIONS ARE CHANGING EXPERIENTIAL MARKETING

Joe Mastrocovi, a 30-year veteran of the experiential and event marketing industry and CEO at experiential marketing agency Moderne Communications, offers insights into why experiential is evolving, how the lightening-fast pace of marketing tech fits in and the key benefits and challenges of experiential marketing, among other topics.

CHIEF MARKETER: WHAT IS YOUR DEFINITION OF EXPERIENTIAL MARKETING?

MASTROCOVI: At its core, it's still about connecting a key message with your target audience in a meaningful, engaging way. With experiential, we have the power to be even more transformative and engaging in that connection. We can truly physically touch someone, or create a physical and emotional connection that transcends simple media and creates a lasting touchpoint.

CM: HOW HAS EXPERIENTIAL EVOLVED OVER THE LAST FEW YEARS?

MASTROCOVI: Technology has far and away changed how experiential is executed and how the brand experience is received and shared. Now we can count on consumers to help us spread the brand message within seconds of the execution going live.

CM: HOW DO YOU DO THAT?

MASTROCOVI: We rely on a robust digital media network including 3D projections, mobile projections and other tech, as well as engaging technology platforms like PaveGen tiles, instant branded photo and video capture technology and others to enhance our experiential activations. These technology upgrades have made our activations grow in size and scope over the past 10 years, and we're confident that tech innovations will lead the way in enhancing our experiential marketing efforts for the next decade.

CM: HOW ARE ALL THE INNOVATIONS IN MARTECH CHANGING EXPERIENTIAL?

MASTROCOVI: Marketing technology is the baseline element of every experiential marketing campaign that we propose and execute. Because marketing technologies are so pervasive—and effective at helping us spread the key messages of the campaign—we truly feel that our campaigns can't be authentic and fully engaging without leveraging marketing technologies. I'm a 30-year veteran of this industry,

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EXPERIENTIAL MARKETING: THE NEW CONTENT FACTORY

Experiential marketing has emerged as an incredibly effective platform for creating and distributing content between brands and consumers, according to the fifth annual Event-Track study from The Event Marketing Institute and experiential agency Mosaic. Here are the highlights:

- More than half of marketers (51%) plan to invest more in experiential content this year.
- 98% of consumers capture content at live events, and 100% of those who capture content share it across their social media networks.
- Marketers are putting more emphasis on cultivating consumer-created content than their own brand-created content. And almost a third (32%) use content from live events as content for their traditional above-the-line media campaigns.
- More than three-quarters (77%) of brands use content from live events and experiences across their social networks. And 83% of consumers share content from events up to 15 times—some 47% of them would prefer to share content they capture versus content fed to them by a brand.

“Using live experiences to create content for the rest of the marketing mix is one of the fastest-growing trends in the world,” says Mosaic President Jeff Stelmach. “Experiential marketing has become the modern CMO’s content factory. And consumers themselves are, more and more, creating, capturing, distributing content across their own social networks.”

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Joe Mastrocovi,
CEO,
Moderne
Communications.



yet sometimes the best marketing tools are those that were created six weeks ago in Silicon Valley.

CM: WHY DOES EXPERIENTIAL MARKETING CONTINUE TO GROW?

MASTROCOVI: Experiential is all about the confluence of brand message and experience, so it's only natural that—especially as other, less effective media and marketing forms struggle to gain attention—brands turn to experiential to create the impact they want. For us, experiential is the natural evolution of media and marketing—it allows for deeper, more authentic touchpoints than simple outdoor media or digital media, and it invites the consumer in to help share the brand message on their own terms. You don't get that from traditional media or old-school marketing efforts, so, I think we'll continue to see more brands jumping aboard the experiential train in the coming years.

CM: WHAT WOULD YOU SAY ARE THE TOP THREE BENEFITS OF EXPERIENTIAL MARKETING?

MASTROCOVI: The first is experience and asking consumers to share their experience with the world. It's a way to exponentially increase the impact of that marketing campaign. The second benefit is increased engagement. Traditional outdoor billboards or TV buys can give you scale, but they can't let the consumer feel, touch or emote with the brand. Experiential can and does. The third is increased brand value. When consumers can touch and feel a brand, that brand grows in those consumers' hearts and minds. We've been able to increase market share and grow profits through effective experiential campaigns.

CM: WHAT ARE THE TOP THREE CHALLENGES?

MASTROCOVI: Experiential can be hard to pull off. Not every campaign is experiential-ready and not every brand is ready to expose themselves to the rigors of the road or to being so close to their target audiences. For the brands that do pull it off—who make the requisite investments in time and resources—experiential pays off, but requires a commitment.

CM: WHAT DOES THAT COMMITMENT REQUIRE?

MASTROCOVI: Some brands aren't ready to make that commitment to testing, learning, optimizing and improving their campaigns. If a brand doesn't see immediate results—sometimes you don't with experiential—they pull the plug. This is a big challenge for brands, but the most successful brands stick through it and optimize experiential just like any other media or marketing campaign.

CM: HOW DO YOU SCALE THESE CAMPAIGNS?

MASTROCOVI: Really good experiential campaigns can be hard to scale to millions. Though your mobile tour may be able to reach hundreds of thousands, or your sampling tour reaches a few million people, it is hard to reach everyone in your target list via experiential. That's where digital extensions really help power the offline-online connection that can set experiential apart from other media—successful brands use experiential to drive the one-time experience while leveraging digital media to spread the brand message far and wide beyond the physical footprint. Using live experiences to create content for the rest of the marketing mix is a fast growing trend.

CM: WHAT TYPES OF CONTENT ARE AGENCIES/ BRANDS CREATING?

MASTROCOVI: Successful brands are able to suggest—and control—the narrative coming out of consumer experiences well before the experiential campaign launches. Start in the campaign-planning phase to create digital video content and sizzle reels for the pre- during- and post-experiential phases of a campaign. Empower consumers to share brand assets across all social networks. Seed viral content-to-content aggregators like BuzzFeed, Mashable and others and create newsworthy experiences that local and national press outlets will cover.

CM: WHAT METHODS ARE AGENCIES/ BRANDS USING TO CAPTURE THE CONTENT AND HOW IS IT BEING DISTRIBUTED?

MASTROCOVI: We use a multi-step process to ensure that content is being generated, captured and distributed effectively. On the internal side, we use videographers and photographers to positively portray

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the brand experience then repurpose that content into sizzle reels, post-event recaps and future brand assets. On the consumer side, we encourage consumers to capture and share everything they see and experience using controlling language like hashtags or suggested brand elements. We employ digital media immersion by offering consumers screens to create and send their own branded media. We also deploy brand ambassadors and advocates to create and capture content for the brand via consumers.

CM: HOW DO YOU DETERMINE IF THE CONSUMER-GENERATED CONTENT IS BEING USED AS PLANNED?

MASTROCOVI: We use social listening tools to understand trends and to triage problems on the spot, ensuring that the brand's desired message is spread effectively.

CM: WHAT ARE THE MOST EFFECTIVE METHODS FOR MEASURING EXPERIENCES AND EVENTS?

MASTROCOVI: Measurement starts in planning. By understanding our brands' goals and objectives, we're able to bake the most effective measurement elements into each aspect of the experiential campaign. We measure physical engagements—how many consumers engaged with the experience elements, for how long, etc. We track digital engagements—how much media was created by us and by consumers on site. We also look at conversation elements, trends, social metrics and consumer engagements, as well as what the consumer sentiment was during campaign.

CM: WHERE DO YOU SEE EXPERIENTIAL MARKETING IN THE NEXT TWO-TO FIVE-YEARS?

MASTROCOVI: I see an increase in adoption of engaging brand experiences being added to marketing plans. More technological advances plus more brands being more "in the know" about experiential means that the experiential budgets and risks brands are willing to take should grow handsomely.



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