

EXPERIENTIAL & BEYOND

WHY TODAY'S TOP BRANDS ARE USING LIVE EVENTS TO BOOST ENGAGEMENT—AND THE BOTTOM LINE

WHY EVERYONE IS GOING 'LIVE'

Inside the evolution of experiential marketing, and why it's poised to anchor the marketing mix

For many years, events were merely "special." A fun party as an add-on to the marketing mix, but not necessarily strategic. But as marketers began to understand the importance of relationships with audiences as a key component of the purchase cycle, they began to recognize event experiences as drivers of strategic business value. From high profile, consumer-centric events like the SXSW festivals in Austin, to mega events like Salesforce's Dreamforce, today's top brand marketers are putting experiential front and center in the minds of marketers and neighboring disciplines alike.

"Experiential has matured in the sense that marketing executives are starting to better understand and see many examples in the world proving the power of experiences," says Chris Meyer, CEO at George P. Johnson. "Experiential has finally moved to the adult's table along with advertising, PR and digital."

What's driving the sea change? Consider experiential's rise in parallel to behavioral trends influencing how today's savvy consumers interact with and respond to brands—blocking them out altogether with ad blockers and DVRs and tuning out the irrelevant "wide net" that advertisers cast. Then, consider the cultural trends driving audiences'

desires for shared experiences with peers and colleagues. And finally, with the rise of smart devices and the second-screen, consider the fact that distracted audiences need to feel something in order to be engaged. Face-to-face event experiences connect all the dots.

In this "content is king" age, events are providing a natural platform for brands to generate meaningful content for social media and digital channels, setting the stage for engagement year-round and extending the experience beyond the event footprint. They also inspire and generate content that consumers and business audiences need to fuel their own personal brands online. Their posts about your brand are influential.

In addition to cultural trends and content that are supporting the rise of experiential, today's consumer and business audiences crave hyper-personalization, something traditional channels struggle to deliver. It's yet another area where experiential succeeds. The data that marketers collect on event attendees—what they interacted with, what sessions they attended, the products they demoed, the information they requested afterwards—can influence how brands speak to and market to audiences year-round, all based on that live experience.

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From this perspective, experiential is poised to be a driver of the marketing mix. Where the traditional purchase funnel required five different marketing budgets to move a customer from “unaware” of a product to a “buyer” of it, experiential creates a single-channel marketing discipline based on engagement, impact and conversion on the spot. Evidence of this shift is seen in marketing budgets that are directing more spending toward events and experiential.

In a survey of more than 200 brands, Event Marketer’s “Experiential Intelligence Report: 2018 Experiential Marketing Spending Forecast” found that marketers will spend 20.7 percent of their overall marketing budgets on event and experiential in 2018, which is up from 18.7

percent in 2017. Fifty-two percent of brands indicated in the survey that their event and experiential budgets increased in 2017, up from 39 percent in 2016.

“A higher percentage of the pie is going toward experiential as the other marketing tactics aren’t delivering the results brands want, and aren’t personal enough,” Meyer says. “It’s also interesting to see from our perspective the number of prospective employees that want to join our company from traditional and digital agencies and PR, which tells me that those other tactics are seeing the evolution and the momentum and overall power of experiential, and how events are now positioned as driving brand impact.”

THE 10 HABITS OF HIGHLY SUCCESSFUL CONSUMER EVENTS

Smart strategies consumer marketers are leveraging to connect with target audiences

HABIT 1: DO GOOD.

Despite popular belief, millennials are frugal and invest only in things they believe in—like social causes. In experiential, causes are a natural vehicle for meaningful engagement with millennials. State Farm’s “Here to Help” lounge at music festivals offered “micro-volunteer” activities for consumers, like making “Welcome Home” banners for returning military personnel, assembling school kits and creating chew toys for a local animal shelter. The insight: data indicated consumers want to make a difference in their communities, but only one in four ever follow through. State Farm closed that “intention gap” and gave consumers reason to stay, hang out and feel good about themselves—all thanks to the insurance brand.

HABIT 2: MAKE IT PERSONAL.

In the algorithm and curation age, consumers lack patience for irrelevance. A personalized experience can mean the difference between a demo or a test drive, and a sale. Take Lancôme, which live-wired a mirror with augmented reality technology (an overlay of computer-generated images) that captured consumers’ preferences and delivered a virtual try-on along with product recommendations. Or Acura, which transformed a run-of-the-mill driving simulator with “Mood Roads,” an experience at the Sundance Film Festival that put consumers behind the wheel of an Acura, driving a virtual roadway custom created before their eyes based on brainwaves collected from the gear on their head. No two journeys were alike.

HABIT 3: LEVERAGE INFLUENCE.

Celebrity endorsements have their place, but with their status and millions of fans, they can feel a little out of reach for consumers. Enter: social media influencers, users that have established credibility around certain subject matter, and that consumers can converse with directly on the platform—thereby forming a direct and more personal link to a brand. They run the gamut from fitness to fashion to family, and can help amplify an event to a target audience and deliver content along the way. Scott 1000 bath tissue targeted household decision makers by enlisting YouTube families with large followings to take a cross-country road trip, creating content and documenting their adventures along the way—all on a... wait for it... single roll of toilet paper.



HABIT 4: ENGAGE THE SENSES.

Consumers love their technologies and digital lives, but they still crave a tangible experience in order for something to feel “real.” Experiences that engage the senses are pulling consumers out from behind their second screens, and tasting, smelling or feeling something on behalf of a brand. Stella Artois engaged taste makers and brought to life the nuances of its “big brand” beer and new cider line with a multisensory dinner experience that had attendees foraging for their salads, gazing up at projected constellations and smelling the aroma of morning dew. Memorable? Yes. Highly Instagram-worthy, too.

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HABIT 5: BE FRICTIONLESS.

Data collection is an exercise in give and take with today's consumers. Smart marketers make it as seamless as possible. Creative marketers gamify it. Using RFID-enabled wristbands, which house chips carrying personal information that consumers register with, can give marketers key insights on what consumers interacted with and for how long—just by tapping. At San Diego Comic-Con, Amazon promoted the reboot of "The Tick" on Prime by creating a "scavenger hunt" for consumers through replica sets from the series, with RFID "tap" stations supporting every component. Consumers swiped their wristbands to unlock "clues" hidden throughout four rooms—in the final room, they redeemed their clues for swag after completing a survey.

HABIT 6: ALIGN WITH PASSION POINTS.

Make emotional connections with consumers over the things they're passionate about, whether it's food, music or sports. Subaru's WinterFest program tours mountain resorts throughout ski and snowboard season with warming lounges and partner activations. Celebrity Cruises leverages dining events to transform the way consumers feel (and read about) food onboard a ship. And Citi's entertainment portfolio allows it to engage cardmembers in exclusive music experiences, like album releases and backstage lounges.



HABIT 7: RELIEVE PAIN POINTS.

Brand experiences aren't just about entertainment. They're about helping consumers, too. It can be as simple as creating a hydration station and cooling lounge for music festivalgoers. Or, it can be as creative as activating a mobile charging rescue operation—as mobile battery maker Mophie did, lending a helping hand to SXSW attendees by sending adoptable dogs from the National St. Bernard Foundation in motorcycle sidecars with mobile charging stations to attendees who requested help. And don't forget about queue lines: LG brand ambassadors engaged consumers waiting to get into its Cinema House experience to view its new razor-thin TV with a "face swap" app engagement they could share on social.

HABIT 8: BUILD IN PLAYTIME.

Playtime is as important for adults as it is for children, lowering stress levels and increasing creativity. The best event engagements strike a balance between business and play—often, it's a mixture of both. Rather than rely on a "step-and-repeat" for photo ops, create a bubble pit for consumers to leap into. Rather than rely on a digital engagement, set up lawn games and coloring stations. And, rather than offer the standard demo, transform a ride-and-drive with an obstacle course as Jeep and George P. Johnson do at the auto shows, where the Camp Jeep program installation transforms "test drives" of the latest line of vehicles into a ride of performance, while delivering pertinent product information.

HABIT 9: CAPTURE CONTENT.

Event engagement doesn't end on-site within the footprint. Content, captured by the brand or consumers, allows an experience to continue on social media, engaging audiences beyond those physically at the event. Taste of Home recently used Facebook Live at its Kids in the Kitchen activation at Kids Fest in New York City to capture sponsor Galbani's different demos. JetBlue created an event "on a plane" that had passengers en route from Boston to Phoenix "Reach Across the Aisle" during the election season, literally, to agree on one domestic or international destination they would earn free tickets to. Captured on YouTube, the in-flight program received more than 1.1 million views.

HABIT 10: GO BIG.

No really, big. By banking on the boldest ideas, a marketer can sear its brand into the minds of consumers for years to come. Maybe it's a stunt, like HBO's "Game of Thrones" experience in the U.K. that resulted in a dragon skull the size of a bus "washing up" on a public beach in Dorset. Maybe it's The North Face Korea challenging consumers to rock climb for a free coat—and then removing the floor from under them. Or maybe, you take over an entire town as Bud Light did with Whatever, USA—the finale of an advertising and event campaign brought to life with 1,000 consumers of all backgrounds (bankers, artists, engineers, you name it) in a completely transformed Crested Butte, CO.

ENGAGING ON A BUDGET

Six ways to save on face-to-face experiences in B2C & B2B events

From smart partnerships to creative ways to be at a trade show, here are a set of ideas to incorporate into event budgets that keep engagement high while benefitting the bottom line.

1. THINK OUTSIDE THE BOX.

Don't be boxed in by convention centers and conventional experiences. Sometimes, it's worth setting up shop outside an event rather than inside, as game publisher Devolver has done during the annual video game conference E3 in L.A. The brand nixes big-budget footprints inside the show for a parking lot across from the Los Angeles Convention Center, and it even hosts its own satirical press conference, which has earned viral returns.

2. PLAN FOR DOWN THE LINE.

Executives are on-site at a show. Attendees are active and engaged. Recording equipment, lighting and other production tools—all there. On top of capturing content from the day's event, consider building a program ahead of time that addresses future needs and takes advantage of the personalities at your disposal. "Think about what's coming further down the line, whether it's a product launch or educational session or announcement or meeting," says Tara Higgins, EVP of Operations at George P. Johnson. "Identify those things and then record and capture on-site to put in the can. You're saving all of those production costs without having to rent equipment again.

3. DESIGN REUSABLE BUILDS.

Avoid an event program that requires building an experience from scratch every single time. Consider modular kits that can be modified and incorporated into different events and footprints throughout the year. Not only will you save money on design and materials, but you'll have a design framework that leads to a consistent brand message across events. Your attendees will easily recognize your "event branding" and will follow the brand storyline better.

4. LEVERAGE SCALE.

Scaling an event is a ticket to higher engagement. Take the case of Netflix and its reboot of "Gilmore Girls" which leveraged more than 200 local coffee shops across the country (paying homage to a key setting of the series) for a one-day "Gilmore Girls"-themed takeover that sent fans into a tizzy. Or, consider a live stream program. At the New York International Auto Show, Dodge and George P. Johnson unveiled the new Challenger Demon vehicle to 500 members of the press at an on-site event, as well as many more via a live stream in Times Square and on a microsite—capturing 55,000 live views and 600,000 views within 12 hours of the event.

5. ENLIST YOUR PEOPLE.

Sometimes the most effective brand ambassadors are your people. Cisco for its annual Cisco Live conference leverages its own social media team for the show in a social media command center that serves as a real-time content generator and help desk. For its activations at esports events, Xfinity enlists employees who are gamers to interact with fans. "A lot of these employees are very technical, they're engineers, they know our products and understand how to use our products for gaming purposes, so they can really talk to the fans, and also converse about the actual competition or conference, so it's just that much more authentic," Matt Lederer, SVP-Marketing Communications and Strategy at Comcast, told Event Marketer.

6. BOOK UNCONVENTIONAL VENUES.

Ballrooms and convention centers have their place—and they're typically your most expensive venue option. To shake things up, consider an unconventional venue that will not only give your event a new flavor, but make it more millennial-friendly, too. Tourism conference Camp 9600 literally takes advantage of the outdoors in Breckenridge, CO, with sessions that take place on fly-fishing excursions and on bikes riding along local trails. Warehouses that offer an industrial-cool feel with an open concept airport hangers are fair game, too, which Tinder leveraged for an influencer event introducing its new "global" matchmaking app feature.



FORWARD THINKING

Five trends to bet on for building the experiences of the future

From the cultural influences of up-and-coming generations to technological advances driven by artificial intelligence, live experiences and the marketing strategies behind them are evolving at lightning speed. What will attendees crave in the years ahead? Experts suggest emotional intelligence will play an increasingly important role.

“For marketers, it is a question of how are you closing the attendee’s knowledge gap, comparing what they entered the event with versus what they came out with. Are you pulling their emotional trigger and encouraging them to join that health regimen or buy that product or engage their workforce in that complex solution?” says Kurt Miller, SVP-Strategy and Planning at George P. Johnson. “The event strategy of the future considers context, relevance and empathy, and not just bells and whistles.”

A look at what else is coming down the pike.

PREDICTION #1: ONE SIZE WON’T FIT ALL. Marketers will think beyond “targets” when building an experience and consider emerging and “halo” audiences.

“We’re trained to think about aligning event experiences to millennial traits, and even Gen Z,” Miller says. “When creating event experiences in the future, we’ll think about the demographic and psychographic makeup of the intended audience, but then also not leaving out the peripheral audiences that you may not be primarily designing an experience for but are absolutely there—like employees and future employees, citizens of the general public, school children—and thinking about using those secondary audiences as tests for human relevance.”

In other words, “Create something as if your grandmother or a child would understand it,” Miller adds. “Take the jargon out, take the proprietary knowledge out. And try to realize that whatever you’re doing and whatever technology you use, you have to create a universal storyline.”

PREDICTION #2: METRICS WILL BECOME SMARTER, AND MORE FEELINGS-BASED. At events, marketers have plenty of information at their disposal on what attendees interacted with—what they demoed, what information they requested. But what they haven’t been able to

collect is how attendees truly felt about a product, solution or brand. In the future, biometrics will be generally applied to event experiences. The result: Unbiased reporting, real-time analytics and psychological profiles that will help brands better engage their audiences in the future.

PREDICTION #3: WORK-LIFE BALANCE WITHIN COMPANIES WILL TRANSLATE OVERTO EVENTS. According to Pew Research Center data, half of two-parent households in the U.S. are dual-income, which means work-life balance is becoming an increasingly important factor for employees and for event attendees. To grow the attendee base, marketers will begin to adopt family-friendly solutions and agendas that will make the decision to travel easier. Think: pet hotels, more mother’s lounges and nursing breaks, and family-friendly after-hours events.

PREDICTION #4: VIRTUAL OVERLAYS WILL TRANSFORM THE BOTTOM LINE. While virtual events have never been able to beat physical, face-to-face interactions, digital overlays made possible by solutions like Magic Leap and HoloLens will transform the attendee and sponsor environment. No need for stale PowerPoints and rows of seating—demos become live-wired by real-time content overlays, presentations are fluid and dynamic. And in event design, the confines of sponsor-able spaces, like signage and booths, suddenly become irrelevant.

PREDICTION #5: ATTENDEES WILL EVOLVE FROM “AUDIENCE” TO “FAN BASE.” B2B marketers will take cues from popular culture and foster event fan bases with year-round content, from shows to podcasts, that offer deep dives into topics surrounding the event program. This will include the Easter egg phenomenon, made popular by cult-fan bases of programs like “Doctor Who,” that reward fans with hidden clues and inside jokes at events. “It’s about providing rewards for hyper engagement, it’s developing advocates through storytelling, and leveraging high-tech tools to take that storytelling to the next level,” Miller says. And developing your own generation of event Whovians.

ABOUT

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ABOUT



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