

EXPERIENTIAL & BEYOND

WHY BRAND EXPERIENCE SHOULD BE AT THE CENTER OF YOUR MARKETING STRATEGY

RISE OF THE BRAND EXPERIENCE

What's Driving the Evolution of the Brand Experience—and Why Does it Matter?

We live in a rapidly changing world, one driven by advances in technology, design and social expectations. As a result, marketing campaigns must stay ahead of the curve to remain relevant and meet consumers' demands for transparency and authenticity from the brands they support. Today's consumers value experiences more than material goods and expect those experiences to speak to them on a personal level, and to respond their needs for information, community and fun. Brand experiences that satisfy these needs, that are meaningful and engaging, lead to consumer loyalty and brand advocates. As a result, brand experiences should be at the center of any well-conceived marketing strategy.

Brand experience today involves much more than building a trade show booth or planning a conference and hoping people will attend. The most effective brand experiences have at their center a live event—an exhibit, sponsorship activation, virtual or hybrid event, a virtual or augmented reality engagement, or pop-up—then surround that event with integrated communications, social media and marketing campaigns. These brand experiences are highly personalized and highly specific, delivering highly customizable experiences online and offline.

The result is an unforgettable, multidisciplinary, multisensory brand experience that touches every point in a customer journey.

Take the launch of Warner Bros.' "Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them" in Beijing, China, for example. The goal was to capitalize on China's huge Harry Potter fan base to drive ticket sales and build excitement for the new franchise. Besides an exhibition space at a popular mall and two red carpet events, a digital platform promoted social media sharing. In addition, an HTML 5 scavenger hunt hosted on WeChat encouraged visitors to scan QR codes at each location to collect digital badges and unlock rewards.

"When they are well-crafted, brand experiences inspire new thinking, connect people in meaningful ways, move audiences to take action like no other medium and, as a result, they deliver results. At the end of the day, the measure of any medium is its ability to move your audience farther and faster, and brand experiences do that in a really compelling way," says Chris Cavanaugh, CMO at Freeman.

New data from the [2017 Freeman Global Brand Experience Study](#) confirms the value of brand experience as a way to generate high customer engagement and interest, to bring people into a community

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and to connect them with each other. Across the board, more than two-thirds of the surveyed marketers agreed that brand experience is an effective way to achieve their organizations' goals. Besides creating loyalty and advocacy, brand experience can help marketers generate valuable sales leads, foster customer appreciation and lead to increased sales.

The evidence confirms that today's customers and consumers are more responsive to brand experiences than ever before. These experiences put attendees at the center. They present a platform for attendees to tell their stories and share them on social media. They



are an opportunity to align attendees' own personal brand with those they care about. Brand experiences also offer attendees the chance to discover first-hand a company's core values and to interact with its employees and representatives.

"If you're not evolving with your audience, if you're not continuing to delight and attract people into the tent, if you're not growing, you're declining," Cavanaugh says. "There is a huge opportunity where audiences are willing to be part of an experience and continue that relationship after the program. The audience is now in charge. If we can keep pace and anticipate what they need, we'll stay relevant."

LIVE EXPERIENCES

The Ultimate Branding Tool



Marketing is about engagement, and nothing is more engaging than the live event at the center of a brand experience. What makes live events particularly impactful and effective? Let us count the ways:

THEY ARE MULTI-SENSORY. Live experiences involve all the senses as attendees interact with others, absorb content and visually take in the scene. As a result, live experiences are the most immersive form of brand engagement.

THEY ARE 360-DEGREE. Live experiences are as close as brands can come to a total customer experience, forging a physical and emotional connection with attendees as they communicate their message.

THEY ARE SOCIAL. Live experiences satisfy the need for social connectivity. "Nothing is more powerful than building a tribe, and that is what happens at a live event," says Andy Cunningham, Freeman Design Council Member.

THEY ARE "STICKY." The best live experiences are engaging and shareable with the capacity to reach so many more people and amplify brand reach.

DESIGN THINKING

How to Design Experiences for Today's Changing Audience

As audience behaviors and expectations evolve, they create new opportunities for brands to design experiences that will attract a new generation of attendees and keep the old ones coming back. No other media can compare to brand experiences when it comes to the ability—and bandwidth—to inspire, educate and connect with a live audience. But brand experiences don't happen by themselves. Bruce Mau, Designer, Author and Chief Design Officer at Freeman, has optimized a method called Design Thinking that enables marketers to move the needle in achieving these outcomes.

Design Thinking immerses the audience inside a brand experience, one that goes beyond the visual to involve all five senses, combining them in new ways to deepen audience engagement. This type of design keeps its focus on the individual and delivers an experience that is fresh, new and relevant. Experiences based on Design Thinking create a consumer mindset that results in brand loyalty and brand advocates, and in the case of Apple, a veritable cult. And what marketer wouldn't want that?

Design Thinking begins by asking marketers to take a step back, formulate their goals, identify what they are going to solve, then solve it. It's a method that asks, Why do you need that? Why do you need to do it in that way? It pushes marketers to evolve along with their audiences and to question the status quo. "It's not about what the brand wants or the CMO wants, but to really understand why the CMO wants that, so that we can produce and align everything to create the impact that the CMO is really asking for, then define it in terms of the customer experience," says Mau.



Leading-edge brands like Apple, Nike, Samsung and Adidas have set the standard for today's design culture. As a result, consumers expect experiences that are fresh and surprising and that connect with their way of life, ones that adapt as rapidly as their world is changing. Take the International Home + Housewares Show, an event platform that has taken place in Chicago for the past 40 years. "We want to design the platform at the highest level, and then keep redesigning so it remains fresh and relevant because the needs of our customers are constantly changing," Mau says. "We just can't get it right and then stop, because right this year is going to be wrong next year."

Among the 24 principles of Design Thinking, one of the most effective is "break through the noise," which Mau describes as a way to align resources around ideas that will make a difference. That method involves editing an experience to eliminate anything that isn't relevant—that may be a static display that people walk by without noticing or the inexpensive items that fill a swag bag and get tossed away. Doing so can save millions of dollars that can be invested more wisely to create impact.

In sum, the most important design principles for creating a brand experience come down to this: Make it memorable, make it relevant, make it personal and make it for the senses.



UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL

Five Ways to Personalize the Customer Journey

Personalization is a major trend driving consumer preference and behavior today. Consumers are in the driver's seat, choosing which brands they will purchase and which experiences they will attend. Brands that win their time, attention—and dollars—know their customers and their expectations and deliver on them in personalized, customizable experiences that don't disappoint. After all, people these days are busier than ever. They are overloaded with marketing messages and information. Designing a brand experience that is personalized, one that meets their needs, is more imperative than ever before.

Personalized experiences are grounded in human-centered design. These experiences enable attendees to forgo their daily challenges and immerse themselves in an event for a period of time. They get people to look up from their devices and participate in the experience surrounding them. These experiences are relevant and mesmerizing and enable the attendee to make it their own.

Brand marketers can crack the personalization code through communications that are customized to each attendee's customer journey, then leverage data collection to encourage them further along in a way that feels organic rather than a straight line from point A to point B. Anne Houghton, VP-Creative, North America at Freeman, outlines the following five steps to achieve that result.

STEP 1: KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE

It may seem obvious, but personalization begins with knowing your audience—their needs and preferences. Why are they coming to your event? For large, diverse groups of attendees, it helps to categorize them into personas. Are they young professionals or seasoned vets? Has their attendance gone up or down? What are their pain points? What do they care about?

STEP 2: DESIGN A HUMAN-CENTERED EXPERIENCE

Once you know your attendees, put yourself in their shoes in order to design an experience that meets their needs and expectations. Visualize their journey and how you can make it more meaningful and



relevant. That may mean offering messaging in various languages, way-finding signage that facilitates their progress through the brand experience journey, or providing downloadable customizable content rather than reams of paper handouts.

After all, as the poet Maya Angelou once said, "At the end of the day, people won't remember what you said or did, they will remember how you made them feel." Creating those "right-through-the-heart" types of feelings or, "Wow, I didn't know that!" moments through human-centered design will resonate with the audience and lead to lasting, favorable brand impressions.

STEP 3: DEPLOY THE DIGITAL

Layering a digital communication plan that begins prior and continues during and after the experience is another way to ramp up the personalization factor. Before the event, consider the registration process. How can you make that experience feel easy? Ask for attendees' engagement preferences. Do they prefer text messages or email interactions? Using an event app or printed pieces? Make onsite registration as painless as possible. And stay in touch post-event.

STEP 4: DRIVE FORWARD WITH DATA

The data that results from personalizing an experience is invaluable when it comes to driving the experience forward and moving attendees to the next point on their journey. The more information you can obtain, the more effective you will be when it comes to knowing what an individual wants to do and how to get him or her there in a way that feels comfortable. Point attendees to brand interactions that would be most meaningful to them or connect them with a community of like-minded individuals. If attendees feel like you listened to them and answered their needs, they will become loyal customers who will come back for more.

STEP 5: ADD THE FACE-TO-FACE

Despite advances in technology, people are still human. They relish face-to-face interactions where personalization is at its height. It is in these one-on-one meetings or networking events where they can find an expert who can answer their questions and solve their unique challenges. Human interactions are a marketer's dream when it comes to projecting their brand in a most impactful way.



CONNECTING THE DOTS

Using Data to Design Better Experiences for your Audience



Knowing your customers, what they want and how they behave is a critical component of any business and the core focus of marketing. Marketers today have a wealth of information at their fingertips. The challenge, however, is how to connect the dots in order to better understand their customers' wants and needs and how to respond to them.

Live experiences are highly sensorial environments with loads of data inputs. Picture the many attendees milling around a plethora of sounds, visual cues, interactions, objects and media that take place during this type of engagement. The data collected at these events has tremendous value when it comes to understanding how these live experiences impact attendee behavior on down the road. That data also helps marketers better design those experiences so they are better orchestrated to deliver the desired response.

"Data therefore becomes an integral part of the design of the experience in terms of what you are trying to achieve and what signals you are collecting that can help you better design and nudge people into getting a better result once it's been produced," says Haluk Kulin, SVP-Strategy and Data at Freeman.

With those goals in mind, following are five ways Kulin suggests that marketers use data to design smarter experiences.

1. IT'S NOT A DATA PROBLEM, IT'S A DESIGN PROBLEM. Marketers need to know the end point they are trying to achieve, then determine

what systems they have to support that end point and what data they can collect so they can iterate quickly toward that goal.

2. IT'S ABOUT DECISION-DRIVING, NOT INSIGHTS. "A lot of people ask for insights, but the question should be, what decisions are we trying to make and how can we make better ones?" Kulin says. "You really want to discover information so you can make a decision that will have a positive impact immediately, that you can measure, that you can see, and then you can refine your decision."

3. IT'S ABOUT ORCHESTRATION. This entails getting all the silos—from marketing to event management, to content creators, networking, sponsorship and more—to speak to each other and understand how the decision of each impacts the other, and how they need to inform each other.

4. IT'S ABOUT BREAKING ROI INTO SMALLER COMPONENTS. Instead of focusing on that big, fat ball of wax called ROI, break it down to understand the impact of each of those silos. Knowing the impact of networking versus content and the other components can help amplify the impact of each and lead to increased ROI for the entire experience.

5. IT'S A CULTURE ISSUE. Even the most sophisticated marketers may miss the boat by designing their experiences for reporting in numbers rather than designing for enabling a culture of better decision-making. As Kulin says, "Unless they're super athletes, humans don't like data much, and measurement can feel confining rather than enabling."

Since your audience most likely doesn't feel the love when it comes to data and measurement, how do you get them to dish up everything from their name and age, to their address, income and produce preferences? Especially in an environment where everyone is concerned about security and data breaches.

"It's critical for companies to remember that data is not an asset, it's a trust they have with their customers," Kulin says. To that end, transparency, permission and clarity on what is being measured and how it is being acted upon are increasingly important. After all, the ability to have your audience go through a live experience and the opportunity to help them understand what you are trying to achieve—then have them participate with you in that solution—is a marketer's dream. Use the data you collect wisely.

THE FREEMAN LEARNING CYCLE DESIGN METHOD

How to ensure that brand experiences keep pace with the changing needs and expectations of their customers

1. OPPORTUNITY: Understand your goals and challenges and what you hope to accomplish through the brand experience. Are you introducing a new product, a new technology, or a new idea?

2. FORMULATE: Use the objectives you identified in the Opportunity Phase to develop your ideas.

3. BUILD: You've done your research and understand your goals. Now go for it!

4. DEBRIEF: Learn from what you are doing. This is your chance to make things better for next time.

TECHNOLOGY FOR THE WIN

Top Tech Trends that Drive Engagement

Just as technology has woven its way into everyday life, with our smart phones, smart TVs, smart cars, even smart refrigerators, technology has become integral to the live brand experience. The web, mobile apps, digital ticketing, social sharing platforms, Augmented Reality, Virtual Reality and other technologies add value and impact to these consumer connections. Technology attracts millennials and brings young people together in an event. It can help make an experience more personalized, educate consumers about a product or service and amplify brand reach on social media platforms. Technology can encourage audience collaboration and rev up competition among attendees. In short, technology equals scale.

Technology is a powerful tool, especially when it comes to telling a brand story. "When it comes down to it, **technology is a storytelling medium**, and when you tell a story, hopefully you know your audience so you can craft that story in such a way to make it more personal and more meaningful to them as individuals," says Michael Schaiman, SVP-Digital Experience at Helios Interactive, a Freeman company.

Telling that story begins with knowing your audience and personalizing the message to them. Just **which technology to deploy depends on that story and the target audience**. Are you trying to reach a small VIP audience? Is this a massive group of 100,000 people at a festival? Soccer moms? Millennials, for example, have different expectations than other audiences and are seeking experiences that speak to their wants and needs.

Music festivals typically leverage high-visibility technologies such as **large digital screens**, or **mobile phone interactions** to communicate with attendees. For smaller audiences **interactive touch displays** or **VR** can deliver a deeper and more impactful experience. Other options include having people log into a website, send a text or use a mobile app to participate in an experience.

Geolocation technology is a way to become a part of consumers' rituals. A coffee brand targeting commuters on their daily train ride



into the city used geolocation tools to set up an activation within their path. The key is to be organic and not interrupt the person's routine.

Brands can borrow from **gamification** to ramp up the engagement factor at a live experience. A VR cycling activation for Lexus at the Amgen Tour of California had people put on VR headsets, hop on bicycles and experience various environments. The engagement mapped their performance to a Lexus model and got people comparing results: "I was an L400." "I got the GS 300."

VR is a valuable educational and storytelling tool. Visa University, an internal learning program for the bank card, recently deployed a multiplayer VR technology in which 10 employees engaged together using their mobile devices while a "captain" wearing a headset answered their questions and led them through a series of exercises as they learned about the company's products and services. The experience fired on all fronts—storytelling, personalization, gamification, engagement, education, collaboration, competitiveness and fun. And that's what it's all about.

CONTRIBUTORS

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ABOUT

CHIEF/ MARKETER

Chief Marketer, an Access Intelligence brand, provides marketers and aspiring CMOs with content, ideas, recognition and events that help them make smarter decisions with their marketing budgets. It offers data-driven industry intelligence, actionable insights, inspiring case studies and the latest technology trends so marketers can improve their campaigns and increase ROI.

ABOUT

F R E E M A N

Freeman is the world's leading brand experience company. We help our clients design, plan, and deliver immersive experiences for their most important audiences. Through comprehensive solutions including strategy, creative, logistics, digital solutions, and event technology, Freeman helps increase engagement and drive business results. What makes us different is our collaborative culture, intuitive knowledge, global perspective, and personalized approach, gained from our 90 years as an industry leader. Freeman is a family-owned company with 90+ locations worldwide and over 4,500 employees, 500 of whom are located outside the U.S. For more information, visit <https://www.freeman.com>.