

THE UNBOXING PHENOMENON IS BOOMING —BUT WILL IT STICK?

ELABORATE MAILED KITS ARE MAKING CONNECTIONS AND BRINGING BRANDS TO LIFE

Premiums and promotional items can be anything from an afterthought to a highly coveted item that anchors conversations at a launch, conference or trade show. But this year, as live events pivoted to in-home experiences, they've become just about the only touchpoints for marketers looking to strengthen connections.

Outfitted with everything from custom merchandise to digitally enhanced happy hour packs, these elaborately produced kits are meant to surprise recipients, engage their senses and lead them through a memorable brand experience.

But are these unboxing kits just a stop-gap solution, or are they destined for a more permanent spot in the marketing toolkit? Let's take a look.

UNBOXING: TEMPORARY TREND OR HERE TO STAY?

The unboxing phenomenon actually has its roots in the tech world. Back in the mid-2000s, technophiles would take to YouTube and document the experience of unwrapping their purchases in a ritualistic fashion. Interest in those unboxing videos exploded and soon spread to other categories like toys, beauty and fashion.

Today, unboxing has become one of the biggest genres on YouTube with videos racking up billions of monthly views and serving as cash cows for their creators (the top-paid YouTuber is, in fact, a nine-year-old who earned \$29 million this past year for toy unboxings).

Savvy marketers are now getting in on the action and developing elaborate mailers to more closely link up with these creators.

Take Rimmel London. To promote its Lasting Matte product line, the beauty brand developed an influencer kit where the package itself created the reveal. Opening like a set of swinging gates, the box slowly exposes three trays at staggered heights that, when fully extended, artfully display the products inside.

That element of theater is just one reason why unboxing engagements work. The ritual of opening these kits makes the occasion and the product feel special and creates that coveted "surprise and delight" response that helps cement brand loyalty.

It's no wonder that interest in such engagements spiked this past year as brands worked to stay connected with remote workers and former live audiences.

Kara McCaffrey, Director of the Experiential Division at *hmt* Associates, a brand-engagement agency, says clients who shifted dollars that were normally reserved for events have been pleased to see how unboxing can map back to marketing goals.

"Each unboxing experience gives brands the opportunity to elevate conversations, engage audiences and create tangible meaningful connections," she says. "We've seen it explode as a way to bridge the gap with the physically distant world and keep connections from a business standpoint. It really brings brands to life."

CO-PRODUCED BY



WHAT'S INSIDE

- Four engaging unboxing programs...p.2
- How to unbox like a seasoned pro...p.3
- The future of elaborate mailed kits...p.4
- Four tips for creating an Instaworthy program...p.4

INSIDE FOUR UNBOXING PROGRAMS

Unboxing engagements aren't just for YouTube creators. They're primed for engagement with all types of audiences, from employees and sales prospects to influencers and consumers. Here's a look at a few standout programs.

'PERRY MASON' UNDER COVER: To build awareness for its "Perry Mason" series, set in Prohibition-era L.A., HBO developed a themed "watch kit" for superfans and influencers. The studio partnered with an iconic L.A. restaurant to deliver a four-course dinner accompanied by a "Prohibition Kit" staged to look like a dairy-farm delivery in a custom wooden crate. Inside, milk bottles contained "illicit" liquor and craft syrup.



The kit also included a decanter, bar tools, fruit garnishes and a 30s-style newspaper with cocktail recipes. HBO worked with a popular YouTube mixologist to develop tutorials shared weekly on its Instagram and

YouTube channels, linking the physical and digital and expanding the engagement to those who didn't receive the original kit. (Agency: RQ Media Group)

B&G FOODS' MULTIDAY MOMENTS: When B&G Foods' multiday national sales meeting went virtual, the company wanted to keep engagement high and maintain experiences that typically would emanate from its brands at the physical event. The solution was an unboxing program with various layers of reveals that ensured a steady stream of experiences throughout the proceedings. Recipients received one large box with 28 components—including several smaller boxes and other elements—that progressively mapped to presentations, innovation announcements and other special moments taking place on screen. One box, dubbed "Fuel," contained conference snacks culled from the company's family of food brands. Another was designed to prompt a creative cooking session with a QR code that launched a video of a company chef. Each moment combined to tell a cohesive story that reinforced company culture and revved up the team for the year to come. (Agency: hmt Associates)



MICHAEL KORS' SEXY PR KIT: Michael Kors took a layered approach in the media kit it fashioned for the limited release of its Sexy Ruby perfume. Opening the octagonal jewelry-box-like pack, recipients discovered a lidded compartment that's printed with a shimmering lenticular image. Lifting the lid reveals a full-size glass bottle in a molded case that's also printed for effect—this time, with a glittering mound of red rubies. The next layer is a pull-out compartment that holds a kaleidoscope, a smaller product sample and a hidden battery pack. When you flip the switch, an LED lights up the interior and illuminates the lenticular and ruby images in a final, dazzling effect. (Agency: GPA Luxury UK)



CHAMPIONING SALES CHAMPIONS: Mondelēz International had its annual sales award trip planned and ready to execute but made a six-week pivot to a virtual in-home experience once COVID hit. The "Circle of Champions" unboxing engagement was tasked with not only recognizing top sales performers but also with keeping connections high between recipients and senior leaders, and with finding ways to maintain all the moments people had come to anticipate at the live event. The resulting program was staged as a series of five deliveries to complement the virtual components. It started with a welcome kit to kick off the virtual event and was followed by a wave of drops: a welcome gift bag themed to the original event location; a boxed champagne kit with branded flutes, a split of champagne and a "dinner on us" gift card; a beautifully packaged cocktail kit that invited recipients to a virtual networking session with a professional mixologist; and a personalized award and gift personalized for each recipient, which kicked off the official virtual recognition ceremony where each recipient celebrated with their family and senior leaders. The staggered deliveries created opportunities for connectivity and interactivity and injected company culture into the proceedings in ways that tied the experience together. (Agency: hmt Associates)



HOW TO UNBOX LIKE A PRO

It's a great time to experiment with unboxing engagements (the buzz is too hard to ignore), but you need to be thoughtful to make the most of your efforts.

The most important factor is making sure all your planning tracks to strategy, says *hmt*'s McCaffrey.

"We always start by understanding the program goals, target audiences and how we'll be defining success," she says. "You're not just kitting here. The best engagements are strategic and customized."

The good news is that you don't need massive spend to take part. There can be a relatively low cost and barrier to entry.

"It can be as simple as a designed and curated folder with a small premium or built up to an elaborate fully branded program with AR components and a series of delivery drops," McCaffrey says. "There's real scalability."

However, timeline constraints can impact the level of engagement. While small programs can turn around quickly, a fully branded kit for a bigger launch may require anywhere from six to eight months to plan and execute. Your timing will depend on the intricacies of the experience design. There are always ways to expedite. The key is to understand what date you want the experiences to be in the hands of your audience prior to launch or sell-in, and then work back.

That might include a few rounds of high-level sketches to get alignment and then digital renderings, any technology integration, development of prototypes and final creative development and fulfillment of the kits.

McCaffrey says *hmt* is able to streamline what can be a complicated multi-vendor process because it does everything—all the design, procurement and even fulfillment of each kit—in-house.

Here are a few additional measures McCaffrey suggests for activating an unboxing program that brings success to your brand:



1. TELL A STORY. Know what your narrative is going to be and build strong connections between each element in your kit. Every piece should ladder up to the next, McCaffrey says. "Use structure and content and integrate technology to tell your story in a great way."

2. CREATE AN EXPERIENCE. Know what you want the recipient to see, feel or do by adding in tactile and auditory elements. Or transcend the physical altogether with the addition of VR or AR elements. That emotional sensorial aspect is as much a part of the effort as the product or service you're trying to sell.

3. PACKAGE RIGHT. Get the visuals right from the get-go. Think about materials, the way components open and close and how various layers can create a reveal as they're removed. Tip: More weight and bigger sizes add to your budget.

4. DESIGN IN FLEXIBILITY. Build in flexibility to be able to offer tiers of engagement and reach more people with a tighter budget. So while recipients may all attend the same virtual experience, some groups may receive more elaborate kits based on their superfan status, their tenure or some other important factor.

5. GO NEXT-LEVEL WITH INFLUENCERS. Rather than just tap an influencer for a one-off project, consider a long-term partnership where you co-create engagements. In-house influencers (employees with their own brand channels) are also good prospects.



NEXT-GEN UNBOXING: WHAT THE FUTURE WILL LOOK LIKE

We may never return to the pre-pandemic ways we engaged in business. So what role will unboxing engagements have in this new world of work?

A BRIDGE AND BEYOND. As communities slowly open up, many marketers still favor a hybrid approach to events with unboxing engagements continuing to provide that much-needed bridge between the physical and virtual.

"We'll still need to consider the comfort levels of consumers because, for many, it will take some time to fully go back," says Lindsay Krumheuer, Sr. Account Executive, Experiential Division at *hmt* Associates.

Marketers will need to fully integrate attendees into the experiences and conversations so that they still feel connected in a meaningful way. In fact, it's likely that event marketers will permanently allocate dollars to reaching those who don't or can't travel, Krumheuer says.

"We've seen that it can be done in an impactful way," she says. "We'll likely never go all-in just for in-person anymore, which means we'll continue to see rising demand for unboxing engagements as that important link between digital and live events."

Unboxing will also be used in new ways. Rather than just focusing on a one-day event or a time-sensitive window of opportunity, it's likely that unboxing will be used more broadly to maintain connections with audiences and build business with ongoing regular touches throughout the year.

NEW TECHNOLOGIES. Technologies like augmented reality and virtual reality will be tapped more readily for elaborate product demos to instantly cue up a Spotify playlist and set the mood. Cutting-edge technologies will also be leveraged to immerse recipients in the brand experience.

SUSTAINABILITY CONCERNS. There is much optimism when it comes to unboxing. But there is one slight word of caution. As the rise of unboxing tracks with that of e-commerce, consumers may start to feel the pain of all the excess packaging that ends up in their homes and the environmental cost of so many deliveries. And your unboxing engagements could begin to face some scrutiny as a result. You can work to get ahead of such sentiments by considering more recyclable elements in your kits, sourcing sustainable contents and using no more material than necessary.

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.

IS IT INSTAWORTHY?

If social sharing is a part of your unboxing strategy, you want to create a box worth sharing. Here are some tips to help you inspire recipients to spread the word about the experience in a meaningful way:

1. PICK THE RIGHT INFLUENCER. Don't just view an influencer by the size of their audience; look for one that shares your values or already expresses a love for your brand. If they're genuinely excited, they're more likely to share.

2. WOW THEM WITH PACKAGING. First impressions count. Don't simply stash stuff in an ordinary box—go for custom if budget allows. Then, add in playful surprises or unexpected details that make people talk.

3. MAKE IT CAMERA-READY. Is the unboxing intuitive, or is the recipient digging for each item? How are the contents displayed? Are they ready to pick up for the camera?

4. PLAN FOR THE SENSES. What do you want the recipient to see, feel or touch? And how will they share that experience? Plan for viewers to see the gooiiness of a product or hear the swish of your fabric—you don't want to be limited to a one-dimensional experience.



ABOUT



hmt delivers fully integrated brand-engagement solutions that connect consumers hands, hearts and minds to your brands. Rooted in insight-driven strategy and fused with real-world experience, we create culturally relevant actionable ideas to grow your brand. From insight to activation, our team thinks boldly, pivots quickly and activates flawlessly to deliver results.