EXPERIENTIAL MARKETING'S EFFECT ON BRAND AWARENESS

By

HANNAH RACHEL KITKOWSKI

A Thesis Submitted to The Honors College
In Partial Fulfillment of the Bachelors degree
With Honors in
Marketing
THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA
M A Y  2 0 2 0

Approved by:

_____________________________________
Dr. Nooshin Warren
Department of Marketing
Table of Contents

I. Abstract .................................................................................................................. 3

II. The History of Experiential Marketing ............................................................... 4

III. What is Experiential Marketing? ........................................................................ 7

IV. Types of Activations .......................................................................................... 10

V. Social Media’s Impact ......................................................................................... 12

VI. What is a “Good Event”? .................................................................................. 15

VII. The Challenges .................................................................................................. 19

VIII. Conclusion: The Future of Experiential Marketing ........................................ 21

IX. Index ..................................................................................................................... 24

X. References ............................................................................................................ 28
Experiential Marketing’s Effect on Brand Awareness

Abstract

In today’s technology driven world, where consumers are easily distracted, businesses are constantly trying to maintain consumer interest and competing to become the “next big thing.” In turn, the marketing landscape is evolving to meet the needs of companies trying to stand out in this challenging environment. The rise of social media and online sharing has created new obstacles. Now businesses must continually engage with their current and future customers through interactions on Twitter, encouraging them to take pictures to post on Instagram, creating contests to partake in on Facebook, and more. Although social media and the internet has changed the way consumers interact with businesses, one thing that the internet is missing is the opportunity for customers to physically interact with a product. So, how do businesses market online but also give customers physical contact with their products? This is where experiential marketing comes in to play (Alan & Kabadayi, 2014). To get a personal look into the experiential marketing industry, I had the opportunity to sit down with NVE Experience Agency CEO and Founder, Brett Hyman, who I will be referring to throughout the text (Figure 1).
The History of Experiential Marketing

Before the 18th century, companies and manufacturers would put in little effort to get consumers to buy their products or services; they simply would proclaim the existence of their product. But, in the 18th century, companies started utilizing images and words to tell a story that they hoped would entice customers and persuade them to buy their product. This is when marketing started to gain popularity in the business world. Fast-forward to the 1920s: Print, by then, was already widespread and the radio, able to reach even wider masses, had recently been invented. It was around this same time that advertising agencies began to pop up everywhere in order to help brands best market their products. The next big milestone in the marketing world was the creation of the television. There was no “marketing challenge that couldn’t be solved with a 30-second TV spot” (Smith & Hanover, 2016). As the years went on, the marketing mix continued to grow.

Initially, all these marketing efforts had the same idea: that “the loudest voice garnered the biggest market share” (Smith & Hanover, 2016). Two ideas about marketing predominated: One was that if people were aware of your product, they would purchase it. The other, that the company that reached the most people would be the most successful. Both turned out to be false. In turn, the promotion age of marketing was born. Brands started becoming more aware that “advertising could change people’s minds, but promotion could change their behavior” (Smith & Hanover, 2016).

One big instigator in the formation of promotional marketing was Barq’s, a beverage company, that did a “Soviet Union Going Out of Business Sale” (Smith & Hanover, 2016). Marketers of the brand traveled to Russia, bought various Soviet goods, and gave them to consumers if they could prove they had purchased a 12-pack of Barq’s Root Beer. With this and
other studies, marketers found that combining a compelling story with incentives to purchase was more effective than the traditional marketing techniques they had been relying on for years. This marked the first step in the movement towards experiential marketing (Smith & Hanover, 2016).

One of the biggest growths in marketing came with the creation of the internet and the World Wide Web. The internet allows businesses to reach more consumers than ever before. Furthermore, as the capabilities of the internet increased, so did digital and email marketing capabilities. Then, around the early 2000s, social media and social networking became popular. Websites like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram started dominating the world and are a major aspect of marketing today. Marketers can now track people’s behavior and past-purchases and tailor advertisements to each individual customer (Terrell, 2019). Also, throughout all these changes, marketers were “dabbling” in what they then called “branded events” or what we now call “experiential marketing” (Smith & Hanover, 2016)

One of the first records of experiential marketing was in 1979 when Gary M. Reynolds formed the Miller Band Network. However, the concept of experiential marketing officially entered the marketing field around 1982 (Marketing Gnome, 2014). In the 1990s, brands were starting to utilize events to market their products, but these were considered “advertising spinoffs;” an after-thought or add-on if the budget allowed (Roxas-Murray, 2015). Some marketers, despite the lack of funding, continued to experiment with branded events in order to
Experiential Marketing’s Effect on Brand Awareness

reach increasingly difficult consumers. An example is The Pepsi Challenge, in which people were given blind sips of different colas and “essentially turned millions of consumers into an army of branded spokespeople.” Another example is when toy company Saban transformed thirty-one Walmarts across the nation into a festival for kids. Over 4,000 fans attended the event and the company’s sales increased by 400% as a result (Smith & Hanover, 2016). However, despite the growing successes companies were having with these events, there was still a lack of internal company support. Additionally, it was difficult to gather credible and tangible information, which added to managers animosity towards investing towards larger-scale experiential marketing events. But many marketers believed in the strategy and continued to experiment with branded events (Smith & Hanover, 2016).

It wasn’t until the late 90’s that companies started to realize that their fallback marketing techniques started “showing their age” (Smith & Hanover, 2016). Consequently, the number of marketers trying their hands at branded events started to grow. For example: when Bell Atlantic rebranded into Verizon, they installed temporary luge tracks at a few ski resorts for skiers to enjoy and use to engage in friendly competition. Simultaneously, there were Verizon spokespeople on hand to answer questions and distribute information about the brand. Soon after, more and more companies followed suit. Fast forward to 2003 at an industry conference, where Coca-Cola CEO Steve Heyer greatly accelerated the popularity of experiential marketing and customer focused marketing by stating:

“We’re thinking about marketing in a radically different way…

Corporate marketers will reflexively turn to TC advertising when
Experiential Marketing’s Effect on Brand Awareness

what we want is powerful communications and consumer connections… Experienced based, access-driven marketing is our next frontier” (Smith & Hanover, 2016).

In March 2006, the Advertising Research Foundation officially defined experiential marketing as “Turning on a prospect to a brand idea enhanced by the surrounding context” (Marketing Genome, 2014).

**What is Experiential Marketing?**

Although it has been many years since experiential marketing entered the marketing field, it was not until we entered what is known as the “Age of the Customer” that this advertising trend really began to pick up speed (Bodine & Dorsey, n.d.). Despite its newfound popularity—and the fact that it has integrated itself into marketing, advertising, and branding—a definition for experiential marketing has not been universally accepted. Some say that it is basically guerilla marketing with a “shiny new name” (“3 Excellent…”, 2019). Brett Hyman, CEO and founder of Experiential Marketing Agency, NVE Experience Agency, defines it as:

> “an opportunity for a brand to have a two-way interaction with the consumer…. Experiential [Marketing] is an immersive, engaging personification in the tangible real world of brands values and narratives…. and it’s an opportunity for the brand to come to life, surround you, engage the senses and actually respond to you in real time.”

Not only is experiential marketing hard to define, it is also elusive when it comes to what industry it competes in. Some see it as marketing & advertising while others categorize it as event services. Since there does not seem to be a singular industry attached to it, this makes
measuring competition somewhat difficult. However, there are some separate agencies devoted to experiential marketing including NVE, MKG, BeCore, The Taylor Group, AgenC, and many more, emerging into the marketing world.

To really understand what experiential marketing is, it is helpful to be aware of the differences between it and traditional marketing. Traditional marketing, also commonly called outbound marketing, is the type of advertisement that most often comes to consumers’ minds. These ads can appear on TV, online, in magazines, on billboards, in emails, through direct mail, on the radio, in the newspaper, or on social media (“Why Traditional…”, 2019). With traditional marketing, the simplified end goal for a company is to get the consumers attention and have them take a desired action.

While there are still some benefits to the traditional way, increasingly “consumers are tired of feeling like they exist merely to make money for companies” (“Why Traditional…, 2019). As said by Hyman, “Most marketing is one way: ‘watch my advertising.’ They don’t hear you. They don’t know what you’re saying.” In contrast, Experiential Marketing provides a different way to engage and get feedback from customers. Specifically, the differences between these two techniques is the way information flows, the influence it has on purchasing decisions, the memories associated, and the value created (Johnson, 2017).

It is also important to note the difference in experiential marketing and event marketing. While both do fall under the same overall marketing agenda and are relatively similar, there are some key differences;¹ The main difference being the level of engagement. In event marketing, the main channel of communication is one way. Consider a career or club fair in which attendees are being handed pamphlets. Although it is an event, the brands are typically promoting

¹ Note that many of these differences also apply to the differences between traditional marketing and experiential marketing.
Experiential Marketing’s Effect on Brand Awareness

themselves to consumers, but consumers are not giving any of their own input. On the other hand, experiential marketing facilitates two-way communication in which the consumers can engage with the brand or product, and then are encouraged to respond (“Experiential Marketing vs.…”, 2017).

Another difference between the two marketing techniques is the overall experience. While all concerts are not created equal, the overall experience of the crowd is generally standard in an event like this. You buy a ticket to listen to the same music as everyone else simultaneously and leave with a small souvenir. Everyone has left the show having experienced the same thing. On the other hand, with experiential marketing, brands want people to walk away with their own unique experience and memories (“Experiential Marketing vs….”, 2017). For Hyman, this individualism is inspiration for his company’s slogan: “The Right Moment Will Transform Someone Forever.” As said by Hyman:

“For me, we have the phrase because it’s so meaningful for me when someone says, ‘I’ll never forget this.’ And we’ve done a few things, I know it’s a bold statement, but we’ve done a few things that I know a lot of people will not forget. They will not forget those things.”

Lastly, another major difference is the goals of the two marketing strategies. In event marketing, the main goal is to generate buzz and promote, sell, and get media coverage with a new product. An example of this would be the Apple product launches, which display the products and its features and do successfully generate a high amount of attention. However, as

“The why was everything… Not enough people ask why and asking ‘why’ is really important and valuable”

- Brett Hyman
Hyman puts it, rather than focusing on the ‘what,’ experiential marketing should focus on the ‘why’. Because, although experiential marketing is still about promoting a new product or brand, this is not the ultimate goal. The goal is to connect with customers, grow and create relationships, and produce positive associations with the product and brand. This customer-centric, ‘why’ principal is the foundation for planning the activation. So, although selling and gaining awareness of a product is an added benefit, “An experiential activation will help your brain associate the brand with something deeper and more personal and more meaningful to you”.

**Types of Activations**

Within experiential marketing, there are many different types of events which are commonly referred to as “activations.” As an intern at NVE in their production department, I learned much about how these activations differ. The main things that differ between each activation are involvement, scale, time, and type. For involvement, some companies take the planning in their hands completely. Some hire an outside agency, like NVE, but still are highly involved in the creative process. Others let the outsourced agency take the majority of or full creative control. The scale of the event has to do with the budget allocated by the company to the activation. Some events cost is in the thousands, while others can range in the millions. Timing can differ per event, which can also be determined by budget. For example, an activation done by NVE for Milk Makeup was for only one night in a small venue. On the other hand, another activation done by NVE with Disney lasted months at their Downtown Disneyland theme park.

The major difference has to do with the type of activation. Let’s start with one of the smallest: photo experiences. As we will get into later, social media and photo sharing is one of the biggest goals of experiential activations. Therefore, getting people to take photos is crucial.
Experiential Marketing’s Effect on Brand Awareness

One example of a photo activation is when the Reef Agency installed a giant mistletoe for Reyka Vodka at the Toronto Christmas Market, which they called the Reyka Vodka “Kisstletoe” (Reef Agency, 2019). This can be an easy way for brands to do an activation that reaches thousands of people, while being more small scale. As said by Reef Agency, “Friends, couples, and families stopped to grab an awesome holiday-themed photo and as a result, connected with our brand activation” (Reef Agency, 2019).

Another type of marketing activation is guerilla marketing activations. Although guerilla marketing is usually just seen as experiential marketing, it is important to point out what makes it distinctively a guerilla activation (“O.B.I.C”, 2019). The biggest goal of these activations is to become record breaking or viral. While this goal can often be difficult to meet, if a brand still wants to do a guerilla activation, it needs to fall under “over-the-top” or “one-of-a-kind” creations (“O.B.I.C”, 2019). An example of a successful guerilla experiential activation was Taco Bell’s Airbnb “SteakCation.” With this event, Taco Bell partnered with Airbnb and turned their busiest location in Canada into an Airbnb. The activation went viral across news outlets and social media accounts across the country. (Reef Agency, 2019).

Another popular type of experiential marketing activation are pop-ups. Pop-ups are usually temporary branded experiences built in a retail space or within a larger event. These are a very popular type of activation because they still provide brands a great way to connect with their customers without committing to a full store or large event (“Why Pop-Ups Are…”, n.d.). A very popular pop-up, which started in 2015, is Refinery29’s “29Rooms.” This pop-up was created in a space in New York city during Fashion Week to celebrate
Experiential Marketing’s Effect on Brand Awareness

Refinery29’s 10-year anniversary. Refinery29 used the opportunity and “collaborated with visionaries and brands in the fields of art, activism, style, and technology to bring you 29 experiences under one roof” (About 29Rooms, n.d.). Every year they have the pop-up in multiple locations around the country with thousands of people traveling to see and share their experience (Buxton, 2017). Pop-up activations are a very popular form of experiential marketing, with many brands using them during popular events such as Comic-Con and Coachella Music Festival. Doing a pop-up within an already existing event gives brands an opportunity to use the big crowd to their advantage and create brand awareness (“Why Pop-Ups Are…”, n.d.).

The last type of activation is a full-on branded event. These events are often very large scale, can last for multiple days, and are more exclusive. For example, NVE did a Halloween event with the makeup brand Anastasia Beverly Hills. While this activation only lasted a night, this event was only available to “elite guests” and the press to attend (“NVE Anastasia Beverly…”, 2018). The Halloween bash, as described by NVE, was

“a fantasy play-land complete with immaculate floral detailing and an imaginative forest to match the Anastasia Beverly Hills notorious reputation of glamour, creativity, and sophistication, delivering dozens of photo-worthy moments for the bloggers and influencers to share.” (“NVE Anastasia Beverly…”, 2018).

Ultimately, if a brand is looking to start introducing experiential marketing into their initiatives there are many different types, both big and small, for them to choose from.

Social Media’s Impact

One important aspect of experiential marketing that sets it apart from other types of marketing is the use of social media. Twelve years ago, marketing via social media was not as
common a practice as it is today. Many of the beloved social media websites such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter were either not created yet or not as popular as they are today. Therefore, many brands did not invest as much into marketing efforts online. In fact, only about $1.6 billion was spent on advertising in 2008. While this is a significant sum, it does not compare to the $6 billion spent on online and social media advertising today (Chris, 2017). In the present-day US, social media is the most widely utilized channel of advertising used by brands with around half of social media users exposed to the advertisements. In fact, based on a survey done in 2019, there are many benefits brands have experienced from using social media to advertise and post including increased traffic, exposure, and lead generation (Clement, 2019).

Social media has also been a big driver in the growth of experiential marketing. In earlier days, many firms did not invest as much in experiential marketing because it was too expensive (Smith & Hanover, 2016). Another problem, as mentioned by Hyman during my interview, was the lack of scalability. But, with the rise of social media users, all of that changed. Before, brands “only had 500 or 1000 or 2000 people see it. It just wasn’t scalable. They needed television, they needed digital formats because that was the only way. That all changed with social media. Because now, an experience might only have 500 people, but 500,000 people can see it” (Hyman, 2019).

While social media has increased brand popularity and awareness, with about 3.5 billion users as of 2019, there is still a challenge faced by consumers. This comes in the form of consumer annoyance towards online advertising and a desire for a real connection. As mentioned by Hyman, there are many tools available to consumers to block out advertising such as adblockers and DVR. In fact, an estimated $7+ billion spent on digital advertising has been wasted with close to 90% of people feeling that digital advertising is intrusive. This exhaustion
Experiential Marketing’s Effect on Brand Awareness

over online advertisements adds to the “heated conversation regarding ad fraud, fake news, and poorly targeted ads, and there’s little wonder why consumers increasing tune out brand talk” (Stein, 2017).

Another thing that many consumers value is a relationship with the brands they love and associate with. Digital media is often more of a one-way communication. People are not always able to make a true and “meaningful connection with the brands they support” (Smith, 2014). Brands have become more aware of the need to gain trust with consumers, a trust which can often be tainted by irritation with marketing channels such as email. Nowadays, people are “engaging with companies in more dynamic ways than ever before, creating a sense of mutual trust in the brand and consumer that has never fully been there in the past” (Smith, 2014).

Experiential marketing therefore is a powerful marketing tool because it is not often seen as an advertisement and people grow more meaningful connections through these two-way interactions. Experiential marketing is a way for people to be advertised to through word-of-mouth. Word-of-mouth, especially via social media, is a powerful way to build brand awareness, loyalty, and trust because it isn’t necessarily seen as an advertisement (Whitler, 2014). Hyman puts this perfectly by explaining:

“That amplification, albeit digital, is less tuned out than an advertisement that is clearly a paid to play. If your friend posts: ‘I had the best time at the Spotify party,’ you don’t look at that as an advertisement, even though it is. It’s authentic. It’s the same thing as Yelp. Why do people go on Yelp? Because they kind of trust regular people more than they trust paid placement of things.”
Experiential Marketing’s Effect on Brand Awareness

In fact, according to a study done by Neilson Ratings, around 92% of consumers are more likely to trust and believe recommendations coming from family or friends compared to all other forms of advertising (Whitler, 2014). Furthermore, a study done by Mintel also found that most younger generations learn about live events, such as concerts, on social media mostly through friends and family or from artists themselves.

Experiential marketing is also an opportunity for brands to have that face-to-face communication with their consumers. Although people are online more than ever, there is still a strong desire for a physical connection and offline engagement. Experiential is a way to capitalize on people’s desire to post online while also providing a human connection to a brand that other forms of marketing don’t utilize. Experiential makes consumers feel like they are more than just another faceless number (Stackpoole, 2016).

What is a “Good Event?”

A brand looking to try their hand in experiential marketing might be asking themselves: What qualifies as a “good event?” Based on my research, there are many ways a company may
Experiential Marketing’s Effect on Brand Awareness

qualify an event as “good.” Event manager Christina Green has a basic guide for putting on an experiential marketing event. Whether this is done in-house or through an experiential marketing firm it’s important to first figure out the budget and the goal for the event. Do you want to increase sales, educate people on your product, start a conversation, or get celebrities to try your brand? This base goal is essential to have in order to build your whole strategy (Green, 2019).

Next, it is important to figure out the mood-board and what the brand envisions the physical event to be like. Some key elements that the event should have, according to Green, are a highly trafficked area (if this is not a private event), an interactive component, branding, the ability to be shared and captured on mobile devices, and capturing everything on the brands platforms so others can share it as well. It is also important to figure out the type of event (Pop-up, multi-day, etc.). One of the last things, aside from putting on the actual event, is logistics. Logistics include fabrication needs, selecting vendors, the social media plan, staffing, etc. (Green, 2019).

Another view of what it takes to put on a good experiential activation comes from a study of more than 10,000 experiential campaigns. This study found that the best strategies over the last decade “are grounded in Five Core Experience Platforms” aka the Big C’s: connection, control, content, currency, and conversion (Smith & Hanover, 2016). Each experiential marketing event should create a “connection” with their audience. These connections can vary between information-driven or emotion-driven connections and is important for the brand to determine. The brand should also establish the amount of control they wish to have. Brands must choose if they want low control and have their audience decide how they experience the event, or

---

2 This is a simplified version of the process and not necessarily the exact order. Experiential marketing event planning is a very long and involved process and this is just a simplification.
if they want high control in which they dictate every moment of the experience (Smith & Hanover, 2016). Brands also want to make sure that the content they are displaying is consistent with their entire marketing mix. This is not only so the content they choose does not stray too far from people’s current associations with the brand (e.g. Marlboro and cowboys) but also because this activation could create content for the rest of the marketing mix. Currency refers to “when a target audience willingly provides something to or engages in an interaction with a company in exchange for an experience” (Smith & Hanover, 2016). This “currency” does not have to be a money exchange but could be in another form, such as sharing on Instagram, and is important to determine when strategizing. Similarly, conversion is the goal of the experience and could be in the form of sales, lead-generation, social engagement, retention, and awareness (Smith & Hanover, 2016).

While there are many guidelines and businesses that have dedicated themselves to creating continuously successful experiential activations, they have one thing in common: the importance of people. People, which includes both those inside and outside the organization, are important for putting on a great activation. When asked what he thinks it would take to put on a good event, Hyman stated “Well, I would say the number one thing is good people. Sometimes everyone is like ‘oh what piece of production can you put in there?’” and I’m like “how about good people? How many times have you been to an event where the people were like, scaring you and you’re like ‘I got to get out of here.’” Furthermore, the customer should be the focus. Customer-centricity has been commonplace in marketing throughout the recent years and experiential is no exception (Palmatier & Sridhar, 2017). In today’s tech driven world, people are isolated more than ever and community is being desired by people more than ever. Thus, the goal of any experiential activation boils down to the consumer, so designing the event with the
consumer’s desires in mind can provide the community people so desperately seek and be a
tremendous success for the brand (Hyman, 2019).

As mentioned above, the right steps or rules to follow is relatively dependent on the
brand or experiential firm. So here are some customer focused things Hyman mentioned he likes
to try and include in NVE events.

**Sight Lines**

“I think that there needs to be sight lines. I really believe that obstruction of your vision,
you know like big poles in the middle of a tent; big like columns and things, help lower the
energy in the room and make people less interested in exploring and walking to new areas. They
don’t like to go where they can’t see.”

**Amber Light**

“I’m also a big fan of amber lighting, especially near bathrooms. This is because amber
lighting can clear up your complexion and a lot of the times you’ll stay longer at the event if you
look cool or pretty. So, I use as much as I can like when people look in a mirror.”

Ultimately, the way in which an experiential marketing campaign is deemed significant
varies. However, if a company is trying to figure out which method to use, the “11 Experiential
Pillars” that is based on an analysis of over 1,000 winners of the global Ex Award, can be a good
foundation for all companies. The 11 pillars state that an activation should be: 1) remarkable, 2)
shareable, 3) memorable, 4) measurable, 5) relatable, 6) personal, 7) targetable, 8) connectable,
9) flexible, 10) engageable, and 11) believable.
Experiential Marketing’s Effect on Brand Awareness

The Challenges

Experiential marketers face many challenges, both major and minor, when designing and putting on an event. These activations can be a long and laborious process for event producers and there are numerous challenges faced by all of them. In Hyman’s experience some of these include:

*Timing*

One challenge marketers face is having enough time to produce the desired event. If an event is being planned for the next week or month, it may be too last minute and not reach its full potential (Hyman, 2019). For example, when interning at NVE, finding vendors and contacting them was one of my main duties. Many of these vendors were either booked or needed time to prepare everything. Also, if there was any custom fabrication, that can take weeks to months to develop depending on its size and intricacy.

*Creativity*

Another challenge is being unique and creative with each event. It’s important to brainstorm different ideas and see which one better matches the brand’s goals with its desired target market. Also, with the increase in different experiential marketing events and agencies, it
is important to make sure the brand is not simply reiterating activations done by others (Hyman, 2019).

**Logistics**

Another challenge is making sure the ideas are plausible. It’s important to be creative and imaginative, but also align with the logistic possibilities (Hyman, 2019). Fabrication studios can do a lot if given enough budget but, as said by Hyman, “It’s fine to talk about hosting a party on the moon as long as you’re not wasting valuable resources trying to make it happen.”

**Uncertainty**

One specific challenge faced by agencies, pointed out by Hyman in my interview, has to do with the uncertainty surrounding the event industry. Hyman stated, “There’s no guarantee that they are going to have an event next week, next month, next year. That’s probably the biggest thing in running this business.” This uncertainty can bring up more challenges to consider such as hiring and long-term stability of the firm (Hyman, 2019).

**Measuring**

The biggest challenge faced by experiential markets and of marketing in general is measuring the impact in financial terms. When investing in marketing, companies want to be able to measure their ROI in order to rationalize the high marketing expense (Smith & Hanover, 2016). However, like most marketing, the direct impact on sales can be quite challenging to quantify. Furthermore, with experiential marketing “Impression metrics and social shares can’t tell you how deeply your experience impacted your audience” (Hyman, 2019). Fortunately, as the business of experiences has grown so has the ability for brands to measure impact.

First, implementing physical staff at the event so they can talk to consumers is always helpful and can provide great information on how consumers feel about the activation or brand in
general. Second, technology advances have provided more ability to track how well an event went and has improved the ability to get attendee data. One way events can do this is through an RFID element that provides information on the consumers and the ability to access more data from social accounts (Hyman, 2019). For example, when NVE put on two Amazon Prime activations at San Diego Comic Con in 2017, they use RFID wrist bands that showed how many people attended the activation.

Press, social media buzz, and sharing are often the main goals of these events and are good ways to track the impact of these events. The use of online metrics and impression tracking, aka social listening, can provide a plethora of information (Hyman, 2019) (Smith & Hanover, 2016). For example, NVE found that their Amazon Prime activations generated 77.6 million impression and was reported on by more than 30 media sites. Brands can also help with the estimation of social reach and shares by including photo booths that track how many people took photos and shared them (“Experiential Marketing – Amazon Prime Video”, 2018).

Conclusion: The Future of Experiential Marketing

Like with all marketing, inevitable changes will shift the way brands advertise. The same goes with experiential marketing. While experiential marketing is exponentially growing in recent years, with 93% of consumers saying they are more influenced by brand activations rather than TV ads, new trends will increase the battle for consumers ever-diminishing attention. One
change is that experiential will become a central part of marketing rather than just an add-on (“What’s The Future…”, 2020).

Regarding physical events, there are predictions that brands will focus on creating more immersive and personal experiences (Kellner, 2020). Currently, social media is a big part of experiential marketing, but as time passes, events created only to be ‘instagrammable’ will not be enough. Instead, firms will want to engage all five senses because “an event that pulls people out from behind their screen is going to be more memorable” (“What’s The Future…”, 2020). Furthermore, there will be a deeper focus on the individual. Right now, for many firms, the goal is to engage as many people as possible. However, there are reasons to believe these experiences will start to become more personal and allow them to create their own story (Kellner, 2020)

While there is reason to believe experiential activations will be more personal, there is also an increased interest in technological capabilities. When asked, Hyman believes that experiential marketing will become more digital friendly. He believes

> “that the word ‘experience’ is going to take on a new definition because, who said all experience has to be in the physical world?.... I mean, I still think that people would physically still love to hug [laugh] but I also think that you will see a blending, a blurring of the line between real and digital.”

Brands today have already started creating experiences that incorporate virtual and/or augmented reality (“What’s The Future…”, 2020). Hyman even gave the recent example of the video game Fortnite putting on a Marshmello concert that gamers all over the world could attend. Also, considering the recent events of the global coronavirus pandemic, there is an increased
interest in trying to reimagine experiential marketing in a virtual, zero-contact landscape (‘Experiential marketing in the time of…’, 2020).³

There are many trends that are unforeseen that change experiential marketing and many that are more predictable. It is becoming more immersive, personal, and technology friendly. There are also some trends from the past few year that may have a large influence. Some of these will be a focus on more sustainable and environmentally conscious, corporate social responsibility, and increased brand collaborations. While no one knows exactly what the future of experiential marketing holds, it will be an engaging experience to witness it.

³ For more information on how Brett Hyman/NVE is dealing with the Coronavirus pandemic, watch his interview with Fortune Magazine here: https://fortune.com/videos/watch/3f18bddd2-5d0e-4aa2-92f7-c59d843734d4
Interview with Brett Hyman – NVE President, CEO, and Founder

Me: “How did you get where you are today? What was your journey?”

Brett: “My journey was kind of a winding path. I went to undergraduate business school at Tulane University in New Orleans. I’m from LA, born and raised, but went to Tulane as an undergraduate business major and thought I was going to go to law school and be a lawyer because that’s what my Jewish mother told me to do. Then in my senior year, Hurricane Katrina happened. I went back to LA and I went to USC for a semester, the first semester of my senior year. I was just taking this entrepreneurship class and they asked me to find an interesting industry and write this paper about it. And I found LA’s night club business and I was like ‘these people are crazy’. And they were. It was like the wild west. There was no structure but there was a lot of money. So, I wrote a lot of interesting ideas for them and they basically came back to me and said, this guy said, ‘why don’t you come work for me this summer’. Summer turned into a year and very quickly, I realized that I could have my own little company being a club promoter. Basically, a club promoter consultant for different clubs. That put me on the path of just kind of evolving from club promoter, to event producer, to now experiential marketing. You know the path was me being very entrepreneurial that I was networking and trying to scale and grow and just asking what’s next throughout every step. First starting with being a club promoter, I was like the nerdy guy who did not belong in the clubs, but I made them all money so they all liked me. And then people started staying, “hey could you do this party? Do it at my house or NOT in a club”. That made me realize that I needed to learn what were the technical elements. The lighting, sound, stage, décor, operations, staffing, catering, logistics and that’s involved in event production. You know, you know it now too [laughs]. So, I evolved from club promoting to event production. For a few years, like 3 or 4 years, that is what I thought was the end goal. “Oh, I’m going to do all these private events”. Once in a while, they were for companies and celebrities like red carpet, maybe a premier. Then that part of the business grew to a point that I could get out of clubs, which was really great and a very exciting time.

We then went from that level to – I started to wonder – so I did that for a long time, and I feel like it was around 2013 where I started to go ‘why are we doing this?”. And the why was everything. And that’s a really important element of maybe you should write about. Not enough people ask why and asking why is really really important and valuable. I started asking clients first thing “why do you want to do this premier? Why are you doing this video game launch?”: They first would say my boss just told me to, and then they would eventually say “well I need social media” or then they would say “I need PR”. And I said well maybe if your goal is this marketing objective, maybe I should have some marketing people on my team to make sure that the event I’m building is not just about the what, like about the stage, but it’s about the why, getting you to PR. And maybe the stage or some elements of the event production would be influenced by marketing. And that’s when we began to layer on top of our event business the...
Experiential marketing that’s our business. Now it’s kind of two different worlds that operate in tandem, but they are two different disciplines and crafts. Did that make sense? [laughter]"

Me: “Yeah, that’s great!... Okay, based on the research I have done on experiential marketing, I found that there is so many different definitions people have. So, I was wondering, how would you define it?”

Brett: “I would define experiential marketing as an opportunity for a brand to have a two-way interaction with the consumer. Most marketing is one way: “watch my advertising”. They don’t hear you. They don’t know what you’re saying. But, experiential is an immersive, engaging personification in the tangible real world of brands values and narratives. And, it’s an opportunity for the brand to come to life, surround you, engage the senses and actually respond to you in real time. And, create a memory that accesses a different part of your brain than the part that wants to buy the product. Right, if you’re a mom going out and buying detergent for your kids, the only part of your brain you need to use is “what is going to be the best”. But, say if one of your detergent values is about being healthy and being happy, say as a mom, having healthy children, you create an experience that’s just all about how can the world have healthier children? An experiential activation will help your brain associate the brand with something deeper and more personal and more meaningful to you.”

Me: I’m a marketing major –”

Brett: “I wish I was [Laughs]”

Me: “[Laughs]. I was just wondering what’s your opinion on – well I guess you already kind of answered this – your opinion on experiential marketing versus traditional marketing techniques. Is it that two-way communication you mentioned?”

Brett: “Yeah I feel that all marketing is quite different, but consumers are handed the tools to tune out most marketing. Pop-up blockers, DVR, and stuff like that. So, I just think the other marketing methods are very one-way, one-dimensional, and that experiential is an opportunity to have a two-way communication experience. Now, that was a problem for a long time because brands thought it was way too expensive to do this experiential activation. They only had 500 or 1000 or 2000 people see it. It just wasn’t scalable. They needed television, they needed digital formats because that was the only way. That all changed with social media. Because now, an experience might only have 500 people, but 500,000 people can see it. And that amplification, albeit digital, is less tuned out than an advertisement that is clearly a paid to play. If your friend posts: “I had the best time at the Spotify party”, you don’t look at that as an advertisement, even though it is. It’s authentic. It’s the same thing as Yelp. Why do people go on Yelp? Because they kind of trust regular people more than they trust paid placement of things. So, to me, all events are massive Yelps. Opportunities to amplify a brands narrative, story, value system, and everything in-between.”

Me: “Over the past few years, how would you say experiential marketing has grown and do you foresee it to keep growing? I’ve seen that there’s more agencies popping up.”
Experiential Marketing’s Effect on Brand Awareness

Brett: “[Laughs] Yeah there is. So, as I kind of eluded to, social [media] has really transformed experiential, that’s for sure. In a big way, social [media] has really given us a significant transformation. I believe that the word ‘experience’ is going to take on a new definition because, who said all experience has to be in the physical world? Can we create interactive digital experiences but still feel and have the same effects as a physical real experience? Taking place virtually and what benefits? Like could I have a concert that people still attend but don’t physically go to LA. Fortnight did that – did you see that? – they put Marshmellow in the game and people were able to go into a Marshmellow concert wherever they were in the world. So yeah, it’s going to happen, and experiential is going to be more than just physically events. I mean, I still think that people would physically still love to hug [laugh] but I also think that you will see a blending, a blurring of the line between real and digital. Which is definitely something you can talk about.”

Me: “Yeah for sure. Especially with the ever-changing technology today”

Brett: “I mean, we are experimenting – to know more about what NVE vision is – we’re building an interactive department here right now. And it’s happening. It’s a real slow process and it’s going to take time, but I think we’re going to have a little badass interactive thing sometime soon”

Me: “What would you say it takes to put on a really good event, in your eyes?”

Brett: “Well, I would say the number one thing is good people. Everyone thinks it’s like – sometimes everyone is like ‘oh what piece of production can you put in there?’ and I’m like “how about good people?” How many times have you been to an event where the people were like, scaring you and you’re like ‘I got to get out of here.’ And I think that experiential agencies a lot of the time forget that or don’t even know where to start. They’re all executional, they’re all the ‘what’. I believe that NVE is the what, the why, the who and that being part of a good activation can help represent that. So, I think really good people. I also think that – have all these secret crazy principles that I think I developed from being in clubs. For example, I think that there needs to be sight lines. I really believe that that obstruction of your vision, you know like big poles in the middle of a tent; big like columns and things, help lower the energy in the room and make people less interested in exploring and walking to new areas. They don’t like to go where they can’t see. So, I’m always a big fan of open sight lines and I’m also a big fan of amber lighting, especially near bathrooms. This is because amber lighting can clear up your complexion and a lot of the times you’ll stay longer at the event if you look cool or pretty. So, I use as much as I can like when people look in a mirror they like – it was the face filter, way before face filter happened! [Laughter]. So, those elements are probably my favorite.”

Me: “What would you say is the most challenge aspect of being in this business?”

Brett: “The most challenging aspect is that the nature of events is very short term and it’s hard because when you are hiring people [clients] for a job, you are not hiring them for an event but for years hopefully. And there are many clients that don’t plan enough in advance and you just don’t know. I don’t know how many events we are going to have next month, or next year. So, it’s hard to have a business that has stability if your clients are going to be inconsistent with how
often they hire you. There’s no guarantee that they are going to have an event next week, next month, next year. That’s probably the biggest thing in running this business.”

Me: “That’s all I have right now that I can think of, but do you have any additional information that you think would be valuable to know?”

This is where we got a little more conversational and so I pulled the important bits.

~He asked a little about me and my passions ~

Brett: For me, we have the phrase “The Right Moment will transform someone forever” because it’s so meaningful for me when someone says, ‘I’ll never forget this.’ And we’ve done a few things, I know it’s a bold statement, but we’ve done a few things that I know a lot of people will not forget. They will not forget those things. Some of them met significant others at those events, they’re like ‘I can’t forget it because I literally met my wife there’ and I’m like ‘Thanks Bro’ [Laughter]. And sometimes it’s like, they saw Eminem and Drake in a room with 10 people and they were like ‘that would never happen. So, yeah, the iconic-ness of being able to do entertainment, that’s what makes LA a little magical, so I like that.”

He started talking about how he loves that the interns, like me, have come to talk to him.

“It’s been enlightening for me. It has because I want to know what makes people tick and I want to know what people are interested in and also like what brings you here, and what brings you into this industry and other industries. We need to constantly have new fresh perspective come in here. It’s valuable to have you.”

Talking about how schools don’t teach this type of marketing and that there’s a lot to learn from it.

“I also think marketing is about having empathy and culture and understanding of all the intersections of everything. For us, I think relevance, keeping up with everything is so critical and there are so many agencies that have been doing the same thing forever and I’m like “what?” Even a lot of our competitors! The reason we’ve risen up into that scene and kind of gotten really good is because we’re no better at production than any other company. Companies have been producing events for like 50 years. There’s no way to beat that. But, there is a way to be different and there is a way to say that there is a new generation of people that you have to understand in order to produce events for them. So, it doesn’t matter how many years you have been producing, doesn’t matter how many huge events you’ve done, because we are never going to win that battle. It’s about understanding the context of everything and NVE is built to understand that context. Culturally, analytically, and everything in between. So that’s working, at least for now. So, a big part of my day is not about building the actual events but about building this agency.”
Experiential Marketing’s Effect on Brand Awareness

References

About 29Rooms. (n.d.). Retrieved from https://www.29rooms.com/about


“Experiential Marketing – Amazon Prime Video – Comic Con 2017” (2018, August 13)  
*YouTube Video.* Posted by “NVE Experience Agency”  
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K6dYzfR8RCs&t=5s


Hyman, B. (2019, April 9). Why Community is the Cornerstone of Experiential Marketing.  


Experiential Marketing’s Effect on Brand Awareness


Palmatier, R. & Sridhar, S. (2017). Marketing Strategy: Based on First Principles and Data Analysis. Published by PALGRAVE.


