

Why Experiential Marketing is needed now more than ever

As the coronavirus pandemic rages on, it brings an unprecedented set of challenges to business owners. The question of how should marketers respond is a tricky one. Frances Spencer-Barton, co-founder of LOOKLOOK, innovators in photo experiences explores why experiential marketing is needed now more than ever and shares tips on creating brand experiences adapted to COVID.

For businesses that have included experiential marketing as part of their plans, this too needs to be evaluated. Many opportunities for experiential activations such as commuting, festivals, sporting events are now on hiatus. So how can businesses still engage with this medium?

Here we take a look at why experiential marketing is needed now more than ever and how to create brand experiences in a COVID-compliant manner.

What is Experiential Marketing?

Experiential Marketing is a technique that creates experiences between brands and consumers. Experiential campaigns use an activation such as product sampling, immersive experiences, stunts, and events to bring brands to life so that consumers can engage with them.

It is about making a transactional interaction an emotional one. When was the last time you got really excited about buying a jumper? Would you tell all your friends about it? Possibly not. But if that brand were activating at a festival and you got access to an exclusive set from a band you loved, treated to the VIP area and a grammable photo experience to make your friends swoon, then you've got to think that's a pretty good deal.

Consumer Behaviour is key

We all know what it feels like to be advertised to, and it's not fun. Experiential Marketing and Brand events are win-win. It's fun for the customer to participate in ie. they get to feel special. And the brand receives some love in return – in the form of a brand advocate.

Studies have shown millennials prefer experiences over things. They don't want to acquire things like the generation before, steady job, car, house, etc. This is the generation who prizes working from anywhere and taking a month-long work/surf trip to Bali.

And it's not just fluffy marketing stuff, the results speak for themselves. 98% of consumers are more likely to purchase a product after attending an activation.

Why is experiential marketing needed now?

The current situation does mean the landscape has changed. But as history has shown, companies that stay steady in a crisis reap the rewards. Looking at research from Millward Brown and others shows that brands that maintain marketing spend during a crisis increase sales and market share. Moreover, the decision has a lasting impact for several years after the crisis period.

For example, in the recession of the 1990s, McDonald's decided to cut their advertising spend while Pizza Hut and Taco Bell didn't. The former saw sales decline 28% while the latter two saw an increase in sales by 61% and 40%

respectively.

Therefore, a brand that is willing to still give back their devoted fans, in times of a crisis, can reap the rewards. If brand experiences are essentially about showing your customers some brand love, then putting on COVID-compliant events, at a time when there aren't many experiences on offer, is a strong act of commitment.

The situation is different now but people's core needs still drive them. With lockdown lasting a number of months, people have been deprived of live events, but the need for connection is still there.

"I personally feel I am waiting for one brand to break from the crowd and really embrace this situation and utilise Experiential Marketing. Experience marketers should take advantage of all the technologies at their disposal and create an experience that delivers on their consumers thirst for experience and brand knowledge." – Kenny Hyslop, former Head of Experiential Marketing at Pernod-Ricard and Founder of Zipstons

How can brand events be COVID-secure?

There are a number of technological innovations and considerations that can make brand activations COVID-secure.

COVID-secure brand activations suggestions:

1. Stagger ticket times. Invites should be for a set time to stagger guests' arrival times
2. One-way systems around the activation to reduce proximity between guests
3. Avoid gift bags and physical giveaways to reduce touchpoints

4. Set-up segregated areas for smaller groups to gather such as pods for dining events, individual platforms for festivals or even car-parking spaces for outdoor gigs
5. Include touch-free technology such as a [touch-less photo booth from LOOKLOOK](#) for increased engagement and ROI
6. QR codes are seeing a huge revival at the moment. Utilising this method allows low-touch interactions
7. Finally, be authentic. Ensure messaging is sympathetic and relevant, aim for genuine connection rather than a monologue.

Times have changed, but our emotional needs have not. Brands that can still provide their customers with opportunities to connect and express themselves at this current time will reap the benefits for years to come.

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