



EXPERIENCE EQUALS EMOTION

*With an emphasis
on creating an
emotional connection,
experiential marketing
takes engagement
marketing to the
next level.*

By JOYCE KAUF

ENGAGING WITH CUSTOMERS is a time-tested tenet of retailing 101. But ecommerce has upended brick-and-mortar across the consumer landscape. “For the jewelry industry, the challenge for a retailer is how to take the elements that customers really like about shopping on Blue Nile and bring them into the ‘real world’ where they can hold the product, touch it and feel it,” explains David Title, creative director of Bravo Media, an experiential marketing company based in New York City. For retailers seeking to attract and retain customers, experiential marketing — combining engagement and emotion — may be the path to success.

“Experiential marketing is a strategy that involves engaging customers interactively — on a number of sensory levels — with critical brand elements,” says Kate Peterson, president, Performance Concepts, Inc., a retail consultancy specializing in the luxury goods sector. “The goal,” she continues, “is to form a memorable and emotional connection between the consumer and the brand in the hope of generating loyalty and influencing purchasing decisions.” Furthermore, Peterson emphasizes, “The message needs to be about what the brand or product does

for the consumer — not about what it is.”

In contrast to traditional marketing, which Peterson defines as “essentially passive,” experiential marketing seeks to “create value in the eyes of the target consumer on her terms.” Ish Benhalim, senior director of content in the New York City office of George P. Johnson Experience Marketing, elaborates on that distinction. “Historically, whether on television or in print, we basically dictated the message we wanted customers to see. With experiential marketing, we want to foster a relationship and dialogue and immerse consumers in an experience that they can associate with the brand.”

Share, Share, Share

“An easily sharable consumer experience is essential to any experiential campaign,” says Peterson. Highlighting its benefits, Title points out, “People who create and share something through their social media channels give any brand/retailer an exponentially larger reach than its own social media channels can provide. Generally speaking, the focus is around how the brand/retailer can tap into those influencing circles of its demographic.” As an example, Title cites

EXPERIENTIAL MARKETING CHECKLIST

the app that Bravo Media created for Leo Schachter, in which a customer can try on a ring virtually, scale it to fit, take a picture of it on her hand and send it to fiancé, friends and family.

Peterson notes that current trends include the use of live streaming and blending the physical and the virtual, as in a smartphone app that leads customers on a bridal scavenger hunt. Both incorporate technology, which is another important element in the experiential equation. But “not one size fits all,” cautions Benhalim. The key, she points out, is determining the appropriate technology that best facilitates a “two-way engagement” with customers. Depending on the target demographic, the customer's comfort level with technology should be taken into account; anything that appears too complicated will dissuade a customer from even participating. “Sometimes all that is needed is the power of the big red button,” says Title, noting that often something as simple as a touchscreen with a “press it” call-to-action is effective.

In addition to the technology being a good fit for the demographic, it is essential that the application work correctly. It must be tested to ensure that it can handle the volume of customers. The skill set of the staff responsible for executing the strategy also has to be evaluated. Having to train staff adds to the time and money involved, another key factor, especially for smaller, independent stores.

Corporate Campaign

Experiential marketing campaigns are not limited to retailers. Corporate entities have embraced experiential

“As in any marketing decision, the first step in creating an experiential marketing campaign is to define the outcome that you want to achieve,” advises David Title, creative director, Bravo Media. His checklist for retailers includes:

- ◆ **Consider what demographics** you are trying to reach.
- ◆ **Evaluate your resources** and limitations — creative, budget and staff.
- ◆ **Identify the technology** needed. Is it basic or advanced? Will your staff require additional training?
- ◆ **Check whether you have** to alter the physical space. How much of the selling space will it entail?
- ◆ **Size up your physical space.** Are you in a mall? A flagship store? Do you have to roll out the campaign to 500 doors? If so, how will you ensure a consistent experience?
- ◆ **Determine what you hope** to achieve that could not be realized in a traditional campaign. Increase sales? Gain confidence around the buying decision? Build brand awareness? Create excitement over a new product launch?
- ◆ **Know your market.**

marketing to drive their business-to-business sales. Given their larger budgets, the wow factor may come into play on a grander scale. Title helped launch two successive virtual reality (VR) campaigns for Rio Tinto at JCK Las Vegas in 2014 and 2015. The first presented a diamond mine and the second, more technically advanced, enabled people to experience the process of mining at the Diavik mine in Canada. “From a PR perspective, the campaign differentiated Rio Tinto from its competitors, but more importantly, it took people to a place that was unexpected. It offered transparency and authenticity, which is especially important in today’s environment to attract Millennials and those coming up behind them.”

Measuring ROI

Metrics need to be established for measuring the return on investment (ROI). But, again, many factors come into play in determining benchmarks. Benhalim notes, “I no longer accept that ROI is simply a measurement based on investment and return on sales. Is it to make an investment

that hits social sentiment ROI or awareness ROI that actually translates into sales? Are they talking about the product while they’re in the store and then afterwards? It all revolves around what your goal is.”

“Experiential marketing moves retail from traditional advertising to an event that has some kind of real moment-to-moment value. Even one simple act of interaction increases the engagement exponentially,” says Title. “The content has to be compelling to engage with customers and create that emotional connection. You have to win over hearts before dollars,” concludes Benhalim. ◆