



EXPERIENTIAL MARKETING AND **YOUR EVENT**

Stop me if you've heard this one before... *"Millennials are an important segment for marketers to reach. They are the key to our long-term sustainability and existence."*

Hopefully this is doesn't come as a surprise to you – but we've heard this all before with the dawning of the Baby Boomers several decades ago. For over half a century, we've been hearing about the "Boomers" and now as they age into their golden years, a ripe, new, even larger generation stands ready to pick up the mantle and move forward.

While the cultural explosion of the Boomer generation was tied with the invention of the television, the Millennials will forever bridge the divide between digital natives and immigrants and the advent of the internet.

After attending a recent youth marketing conference to understand where the next generation will take us, it is easily understood that while the technology may change, the roots of consumerism from packaged goods to events remains the same, yet there's still something missing between all of the bite, bytes and selfies.

This most critical link is the personal connection between individuals and the products or services of marketers in your community and around the world.

What we offer in the event, festival and arts space is the generation of the social capital necessary to build brands and engage communities. Social capital is the glue that holds us all together and in these days of increasing communication via social media, we rarely are in the same place at the same time with our neighbors, friends, peers or colleagues.

The connections and the sense of belonging felt by being together in person enjoying a concert or engaging in a work of art or participating in a community event is precisely the type of experience that all of the Instagram posts in the world can not provide.

The magic happens when you combine a fabulous in-person experience with individuals who want to communicate and share that in-person experience. These influencers work on their own to build the desire to attend or participate amongst their friends and peers. Those types of remarkable events are what many of us offer, yet few of us leverage to its fullest extent.

A current article published by Digiday "Why the New York Times and other publishers are adding experiential marketing services" says that experiential marketing is just at the beginning of a trend that will only grow over the coming years.

Gone are the days of digital web banners on media sites. Replacing them are experiential opportunities that pair the media and the experience to drive awareness and build business for their clients. We as event promoters are first in line to be able to provide those unique opportunities to brands, but also to the media who are looking to revamp their models to make them more relevant.

Brand marketing agency Freeman, quoted in the Digiday article reported that experiential marketing will soak up at least one-fifth of marketing budgets in three to five years. Experiential being defined as "events, trade shows, sponsorships, exhibits, permanent installations, virtual or augmented reality experiences and/or pop-ups."

According to another survey by the Event Marketing Institute, 90% of Chief Marketing Officers would increase the amount of money allocated to events and experiences in the coming year, rising by 11% from 2016 to 2017.

When you personally think of experiential marketing, what comes to mind? Perhaps augmented or virtual reality displays are the first examples you can think of when experiential is in the activation plan. However, these integrated technologies come at a hefty price along with set-up and a touring team to help manage and troubleshoot.

For sophisticated marketers, these displays are part of a traveling road show that may be booked months in advance. But clearly from the demand for these activations, they are popular and successful platforms for you not only to provide a high profile opportunity for your partner, but also assists to build your own brand to have people buzzing about your event.

Creativity is the name of the game when packaging experiential opportunities for your partners. Sometimes those ideas are tied in very closely with the product or service of your partner. Other times it is more about building the brand and there isn't a direct business case for the onsite experience.

Either way, it takes time to roll up your sleeves and find out the outcomes your partner needs to see to justify the return on investment. It is always best to head into these planning meetings with a blank sheet of paper and an open mind to investigate what all of the possibilities can be.

Sure, sometimes you can be challenged by budget and at other times it is logistics, but either way showing your partner you are open to new solutions for marketing and branding challenges will go a long way in building your relationship.

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As pressure continues to grow to maximize every dollar in the marketing budget, it is encouraging that experiential activation, even with some of its “squishy” characteristics such as quality of life and community engagement are finally being held up against the antiseptic, bland “data-driven” world which now envelops us.

The definition of success is not only the experiential engagements that provide a remarkable story to share, but also activations that have measurable outcomes that define the resulting impact for our partners. It may be the elusive, Holy Grail for marketers and event promoters alike, but finding the right balance of data outcomes and experiential satisfaction is a goal worth for us all to pursue.

Be creative. Be remarkable. Be effective. If you're able to achieve all three of these goals, your partners will not only look to invest in your event, they will be looking for new ways to expand and further develop the relationship for years to come.

In closing, I'm always the eternal optimist. Despite the current discourse to the contrary, I am bullish that there is a great deal of opportunity for all of us in the events and arts space to leverage our unique assets to help build genuine, authentic experiences for Millennials, families, retirees, teens, Boomers... our neighbors. After all, we have to remember the oldest Millennials are now parents and the cycle will start once again.

Sean King is a Principle at Aspire Consulting Group in Allentown, PA and has been consulting with small businesses and non-profit organizations for over 20 years. He also blogs regularly at www.artsmarketingblog.org. You can follow Sean on Twitter @skingaspire or contact him at: sking.aspire@gmail.com.