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BrandAnimation: Are You Experiential?

By Erik Hauser



Welcome to the first of a monthly series by Erik Hauser, creative director/founder of San Francisco-based marketing firm *Swivel Media* and founder of *IXMA*, the International Experiential Marketing Association.

Once upon a time, back when I was starting my company, my business partner and I used to spend countless hours after work discussing terminology. According to the yoga studio owner next door — who complained only once that we were scaring her students — it was more like childish ranting and screaming than coherent discussion.

Alas, we are both passionate about marketing and enjoyed yelling at the top of our lungs in the middle of some poor soul's downward dog. We knew we had stumbled upon some big ideas but couldn't agree on how they should be positioned.

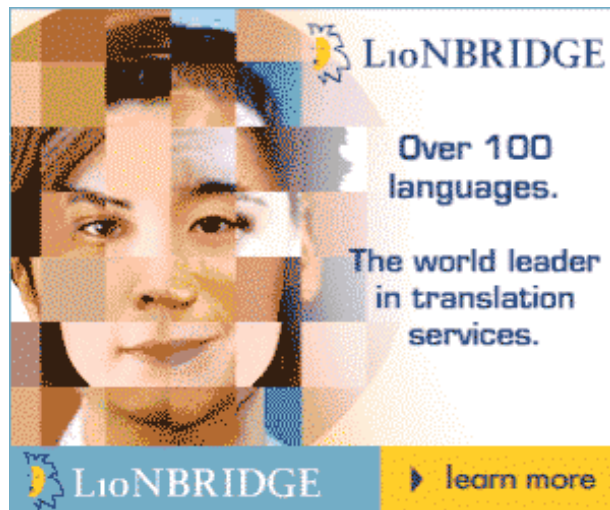
At the time, we were trying to define what was often called nontraditional marketing: marketing typically focused on direct means of communication using less conventional methods. Only we didn't see anything nontraditional or unconventional about what we were doing. We were creating relevant and meaningful brand experiences.

Classic branding, plain and simple, right? Sort of, but it was and is so much more.

While our philosophical differences would be argued only by two people who, years ago, had a Cadbury Creme Egg eating contest in 11th-grade science class, my partner and I always agreed that experiential marketing was the term that best fit our evolving business.

Fast-forward several years, and the marketing paradigm is quickly shifting to the experience model. Leading brands have begun to not only grasp this shift but also to assign executives to answer it.

For example, one of our clients, Wells Fargo, recently transformed its Integrated Brand Implementation unit into the Experiential Marketing department. A bold move for a financial services company, but surely an indicator for the future. In today's hyperfragmented marketplace, brand experience is the ultimate differentiator.

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Time will surely be the measuring tape. I firmly believe that more industries will soon find themselves weighing an experience-marketing-based model concentrating on experiential marketing methodology.

Why? It works, and the companies that provide the great experiences will certainly be the companies that capture market share. The key is to win the hearts and minds of your customers, and they will ultimately reward you with their business. The deeper and more well rounded experiences companies can provide, the more relevant connections they will forge with their customers. Great brand experiences satisfy the consumer's senses, allowing them to connect and engage their intended audience. As we say at Swivel, "Deliver the right message to the right audience via the right medium at the right time."

As this is my first column for CHIEF MARKETER, I'd like to take this opportunity to say how excited I am to have this platform to reach new people to spread the word about experiential marketing. Over the coming months, I will tackle a variety of experience-related marketing topics. Some will be from own personal experiences, others from the industry in general and finally some will be from you, the reader. So please send e-mails so that I don't have to turn my columns into a series of David Letterman top-10 lists.

By the way, when I was coming up with the title of the column, my partner and I locked ourselves in the office war room (think padded walls and ceilings), and before we could even get our gloves laced, we both uttered "BrandAnimation." And what does it mean? Well, I've got an entire column just waiting to be written.

You can reach Erik Hauser at erik@swivelmedia.com.

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