

What's the Big Idea?

Few marketers are eager to place blame on the agencies themselves. Rather, most say the onus is on the client to focus its partners on a single big idea — regardless of its source — and set clear objectives for the campaign. “Agencies can’t solve the

problem; they can only do what clients ask them to do,” says Lisa Cochrane, vice president of integrated marketing communications at Northbrook, Ill.-based Allstate Insurance Co.

Her simple formula for ensuring integration and cooperation among agencies begins with breaking down walls by rallying people

PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE

THE EFFECT OF EXPERIENCE MARKETING BY DAVID M. RICH

FOR COMPANIES INTERESTED in moving past price wars with competitors, a strong brand is the deciding factor in whether they win or lose. In turn, marketers increasingly acknowledge that effective brands are best achieved through integrated, multidimensional touch points with the brand promise ultimately realized through experiential activity.

Taking an integrated marketing communications approach to brand engagement is, like many best practices, easier said than done. The transition to an integrated marketing model presents considerable challenges not always rooted in marketing issues. Veterans of integration programs acknowledge that it is a people challenge as much as a marketing challenge.

Interestingly, experience marketing (a new form of the older specialty of event marketing) is increasingly being utilized to drive integrated programs with effective results. The planning and activation of experiential campaigns inherently draws on multiple marketing disciplines. As a result, experience marketing is suddenly facilitating cross-discipline collaboration — not long ago an unrealized dream.

As experience marketing moves closer to the center of campaign planning, it is empowering marketing leadership to view every audience touch point in terms of engagement. Will it provide a foundation for engagement? Will it activate engagement? Will it extend engagement? Experiential marketing changes the integration conversation: it's not about a top-down marketing mix model; it's about bottom-up campaign planning focused on engaging target audiences.

Key Concepts at Work

In the past decade, three factors have come together to refocus the spotlight on the role of experience marketing in driving integrated marketing programs:

1 Effective engagement. No longer does it suggest mere sampling or interrupting you on a trade show floor. Properly messaged,

created, and targeted, the live experience is a dialogue — on the street, at a sales conference, or at the mall, for example — that has the potential to enhance our lives and reinforce the brand perception established through other media. It creates a situation in which the individual (or target community) is confronted with making a decision: Do I trust this brand enough to do business with them? Successful face-to-face brand experiences are interactions that bring to life the promise and identity of the brand in ways that are indelible, personal, and deeply meaningful.

2 Talent. The past 10 years have seen the homogeneity of the marketing industry break up with the emergence of a cadre of professionals who understand how to strategically plan, create, and manage in the new specialties of interactive and experience marketing. As products of the most multifarious advertising culture in history, they are attuned to an integrated approach.

3 An inherent dependency on other marketing disciplines. Experience marketing translates the brand promise into a dialogue and physical interaction, taking advantage of and timed to all the awareness and consideration being created through other forms of marketing. Often, pre- and post-event touch points have to be incorporated into a campaign for experience marketing to be successful.

Integration in Action

Considering these macro-level shifts, there is no better time to fully leverage experience marketing to drive integrated programs than right now. With that in mind, two key concepts you will have to plan for are (1) the highly choreographed ways you will manage internal/external teams and (2) the way you utilize senior leadership to enable and fuel the integration effort.

A new era in team management. Acting on this theory requires that every agency partner and everyone on the internal brand marketing

teams meet early and regularly throughout a campaign. That includes the experiential partner, who brings a unique perspective and is often the strongest advocate for integration.

In optimized experience marketing, the central idea becomes the platform for the campaign. Then it can be enabled by all of the appropriate disciplines, with each playing the required roles to deliver on the purpose. At all times, it's important to make this process as objective-driven and data-founded as possible, to eliminate the emotions that frequently derail integration efforts.

This measurement approach can be supported through another dimension: measuring the successful integration of internal staff and agencies. We wouldn't be the first to say, “Inspect what you expect.” Establishing incentives based on quantified performance in this dimension will lead to more of the right behavior. This is made easier when agency-of-record relationships are in place — agencies are more likely to hold a long-term view rather than work with an eye on short-term gain.

Leadership buy-in. Great agencies do their best work in collaboration with great clients. Here being great includes the brand-side marketer's role at the leadership level in facilitating collaboration across marketing disciplines. That has to be driven by the senior-most executives in the marketing organization, and they need to regularly communicate results so that their priority becomes visible.

Without that level of understanding and commitment — and sustained, programmatic dedication to integration — the program will fail more often than not. Look at every area of specialization within the marketing function, including experiential, and develop a game plan for how these teams will collaborate.

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