the power of brand experience in the exhibitions industry

Leveraging the Medium to Emotively Connect with Audiences
At Freeman, we believe meaningful experiences have the power to evolve brands.

They help build relationships, inspire action, and create bold new economic opportunities for businesses, communities, and individuals.

Brand experience connects people, organisations, and cultures in ways that create positive change on a global and local scale. The medium also teaches us what our audiences value, and increasingly, it’s experiences over possessions.

This is why brand experience is now an important part of the marketing mix — more and more corporate marketers and associations are investing their resources into live events, in order to cut through the clutter of modern life and emotively connect with their audiences.

But don’t take our word for it. To better understand the power of brand experience, we commissioned SSI to conduct an independent study of a range of B-to-B and B-to-C marketers in a variety of roles across Western Europe, North America and Asia, to uncover how they perceive brand experience, and it’s clear that the outlook for our industry is positive.

To celebrate Global Exhibitions Day 2017 and the power of brand experience as a marketing medium, the following insights paper delves into four key themes we’ve identified from this research, backed up by statistics and commentary from industry experts.

63% of respondents rate brand experience as effective at marketing product(s).

The percentage of marketers assigning between 21% and 50% of their budget to brand experience is expected to rise by 72% over the next 3 to 5 years.

44% of those we surveyed measure the success of a brand experience every time.

93% of marketers agree that the ability to personalise brand experience helps create a stronger connection to the brand.*

* 2017 Freeman Global Brand Experience Study
Tom Hall  
Editor  
Exhibition World  

Tom is Editor of Mash Media’s Exhibition World and a contributor to Conference and Meetings World magazines. He has been responsible for two complete magazine redesigns – reinvigorating both Access All Areas and Exhibition World – and has travelled to more than 30 countries researching content. He was the recipient of CWT’s Business Travel Journalist of the Year in 2012 and has written for titles including City AM.

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Jackie Brown  
Director of Client Solutions  
Freeman EMEA  

Jackie is Director of Client Solutions and has overall responsibility for account management, event planning and delivery within the EMEA region. An experienced commercial professional, Jackie has more than a decade of event sales and marketing experience, working both in the hotels and head offices of major hotel groups, including Hilton UK & Ireland, Ramada Jarvis and GLH (Guoman & Thistle Hotels). Jackie joined the business from The Hotel Partnership, where she held the role of Commercial Director.

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Jeremy Rees  
Executive Director  
ExCeL London  

Jeremy has worked in the events industry for over 20 years, with experience in venue operations, event organising and as a technology supplier to the sector.

In addition to his role as Executive Director at Excel London, Jeremy is currently Chairman of The Event Industry Alliance and the Association of Event Venues.

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Kai Hattendorf  
Managing Director  
UFI
Kai became the Managing Director of UFI, the Global Association of the Exhibition Industry, in October 2015. As such, he is responsible for all UFI activities and events, as well as the operation of its three offices in Paris, Hong Kong and Sharjah. Prior to his current role, Kai worked in the exhibition industry for a number of years in senior management positions at Messe Frankfurt's global headquarters, focusing on transformational issues ranging from digitisation to marketing and communications.

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Rob Sherwood  
Managing Director  
Forest Exhibitions Ltd.
Rob has worked in the exhibition industry for 18 years, in a career encompassing Blenheim Exhibitions, Advanstar, Expomedia, and for the last 10 years, working as partner to Messe Frankfurt Exhibition GmbH. Sherwood Event Services represents the Messe Frankfurt exhibition portfolio to UK and Irish markets. Forest Exhibitions organises the award-winning Automechanika Birmingham exhibition, which is run under license from Messe Frankfurt Exhibition.

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Chris Skeith  
Chief Executive Officer  
AEO
Chris has worked in the events industry for more than 20 years and has been CEO of the Association of Event Organisers Ltd (AEO) since 2014. In 2006 Chris moved to the Events Industry Alliance (EIA) as Project Director. Two years later he became Director of ESSA, overseeing the merger of AEC and BECA (to form the association for suppliers to the events sector). In 2010 Chris also became Director of ESSA's sister association, the AEV. Chris holds a seat on the UK government's Events Industry Board and is Vice Chair and Treasurer of the BVEP.

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Andrew Harrison  
Director  
ESSA
Andrew is the Director of the Event Supplier and Services Association (ESSA), a trade body representing the very best suppliers of goods and services to the events industry.
He joined the association in 2011 as accounts and communications manager before becoming deputy director and then director in 2014. Andrew also worked for the Association of Event Venues (AEV) until stepping up to his current position in 2014.

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Trend 1: Marketers find brand experience effective

The study found that 63 per cent of respondents rate brand experience as effective at marketing product(s), engaging their target audiences, building brand strength and accomplishing overall marketing goals.
“While it’s common to see speculation on how brand experience is achieved — using quirky technology and interaction techniques, for example — there’s also interesting research coming out looking at why brands need to work on improving their brand experiences.”

Tom Hall, Exhibition World
Brand experience is indeed vital, and ways of conveying a brand are becoming increasingly sophisticated. While it’s common to see speculation on how brand experience is achieved — using quirky technology and interaction techniques, for example — there’s also interesting research coming out looking at why brands need to work on improving their brand experiences. GRS Research and Strategy’s recent neuromarketing project wired up event visitors with sophisticated stimuli-measuring equipment to gauge how changes to an exhibition booth can improve their experiences. The results showed that dramatic increases in skin-arousal levels can be achieved by getting the brand environment right.

63% rate brand experience as effective at accomplishing overall marketing goals.*

* 2017 Freeman Global Brand Experience Study
Jackie Brown, Freeman
Today, we often spend more time interacting via email, phone and platforms such as WebEx, which means face-to-face communication is valued more highly than ever. Exhibitions are an incredibly powerful way for companies to connect with their target audiences, as they have the ability to engage attendees and immerse them in their brand worlds in a way that other mediums cannot. Visitors can learn about an exhibitor’s offering by experiencing its product and service offering first-hand, and these live interactions allow a brand representative to understand an individual’s requirements so that they can provide a tailored solution that serves the individual’s needs accordingly.

Jeremy Rees, ExCeL London
Exhibitions are an integral part of the experience economy, providing a platform in which brands can come to life and engage and connect with customers. The undeniable power of brand experience is driving the number of brand extensions that are being hosted at ExCeL with leaders in their fields, including Adobe, Sage, SalesForce, SAP and Google, utilising the power of face-to-face to create memorable, immersive brand experiences.
Trend 2: Personalisation is key but under utilised

Our research uncovered that 93 per cent of marketers agree that the ability to personalise brand experience helps create a stronger connection to the brand; meanwhile, 91 per cent agree the approach can drive increased sales.
“Personalisation is one of the industry’s oldest value propositions — the bringing of buyers and sellers together under the one roof is central to the exhibition business model.”

Kai Hattendorf, UFI

Personalisation is one of the industry’s oldest value propositions — the bringing of buyers and sellers together under the one roof is central to the exhibition business model. I believe the biggest potential for the future of personalisation lies in the 362 days of the year between trade shows.

There is huge value in marketing a show or service to an audience year-round, and there are now so many digital tools available to us that facilitate this engagement. When the event does take place, personalisation on the show floor can be further enhanced, through initiatives such as curated attendee programmes and matchmaking.

93% of marketers agree a personalised brand experience can create stronger connections.*

91% agree the approach can drive increased sales.*

* 2017 Freeman Global Brand Experience Study
**Rob Sherwood, Forest Exhibitions**

Improving the personalisation and categorisation of our marketing is a huge imperative for Forest Exhibitions. In the automotive industry, a garage owner’s motivation for visiting Automechanika Birmingham is very different to that of a buyer from a motor factory or a supply chain manager who works for a vehicle manufacturer. We’ve subsequently looked to segment our marketing language and messaging to these different groups by researching their motivations to visit, looking at the reasons different groups chose not to visit the inaugural show, and tailoring our messaging accordingly. To effectively personalise your marketing, you have to be confident in the data, and we’ve spent a huge amount of time and effort going through it manually to try and ensure we categorise our audience groups correctly.

**Chris Skeith, AEO**

With careful planning, exhibitors can completely personalise their approaches with highly targeted pre-event direct mail or email communications and, during the event, with personalised giveaways and well-briefed staff. Events also provide a fantastic opportunity for capturing personal preferences for developing tailored sales follow-ups. Surprising your audience with a well-thought-out, personalised campaign can create a more memorable brand experience, leading to deeper engagement from the outset.
Trend 3: Budget allocation for brand experience is increasing

56 per cent of marketers state that they dedicate up to 20 per cent of their overall marketing budget to brand experience. The percentage of marketers assigning between 21 per cent and 50 per cent of their budget to the medium is expected to rise by 72 per cent over the next three to five years.
“There is no doubt that brand experience is on the rise. It’s more challenging than ever to attract — and importantly, retain — the attention of the modern consumer, which means brands are looking for new, creative ways to connect with their target audiences.”

Jackie Brown, Freeman

There is no doubt that brand experience is on the rise. It’s more challenging than ever to attract — and importantly, retain — the attention of the modern consumer, which means brands are looking for new, creative ways to connect with their target audiences. This is particularly evident when you look at the various companies that have opted to launch live versions of their successful media brands, such as the newly launched This Morning Live and Who Do You Think You Are? Live — they want to provide their audiences with a new way to experience the features they already know and love yet in a whole new, interactive environment. In line with this research, I confidently believe that investment in brand experience will continue long into the future.

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Tom Hall, Exhibition World
This was an interesting finding, pointing the way towards more engaging, targeted event environments of the future. The event market lags behind sectors like retail when it comes to curating meaningful brand experiences, but when the industry gets it right, the results and the rewards are obvious. In certain event markets, festivals for example, it’s been interesting to witness a drop in consumer suspicion when it comes to brand experiences. While there was a fear that events could be watered down or cheapened by having heavy brand involvement, it seems that both consumers and businesses have matured in their approaches to events to create some mutually rewarding experiences. The investment can certainly be worth it, but big budgets aren’t always better.

Andrew Harrison, ESSA
It is heartening to see the evidence within this research bearing out what we all believed to be true: that marketers recognise the value of face-to-face marketing. The predicted growth of 72 per cent will provide reassurance to many companies working in the industry as well as the proportion of marketing spend allocated to face-to-face marketing.
Trend 4: Measurement is important, but marketers struggle to effectively measure

Only 44 per cent of those we surveyed measure the success of a brand experience every time, and those that do measure focus on methods such as purchase intent (30 per cent) and lead generation (30 per cent). Thirty-nine per cent of the interviewees feel that the most important way to measure the success of a brand experience should be through post-event sales.
“To get a true indication of success, it’s critically important to set out well-defined objectives, create an experience to deliver against them and include a range of measurement options.”

Chris Skeith, AEO

Clearly sales are important, but events can deliver so much more than purely a sales transaction. Our FaceTime research* shows that having a great brand experience creates a heightened impression of a brand’s quality and value, and attendees will recommend it after the event. To get a true indication of success, it's critically important to set out well-defined objectives, create an experience to deliver against them and include a range of measurement options. Outlining desired outcomes in the first place is where you must start.

* Credit Source: The Power of Live Events
  Research conducted by Cog Research on behalf of FaceTime

* 2017 Freeman Global Brand Experience Study
Kai Hattendorf, UFI
There is an increased focus on measurement in the marketing world, and new currencies are evolving in the exhibitions industry. Traditionally, success would be measured by looking at the number of attendees that walked through the door, whereas, in part, thanks to the rise of technologies such as heat maps, lead tracking tools, and beacons, it’s now more about the quality of connections generated and the flow of attendees through a space. And while it can be difficult to measure the effectiveness of a handshake or a casual conversation at a stand, when it comes to generating leads or securing sales, these face-to-face interactions cannot be underestimated.

Andrew Harrison, ESSA
The measurement of specific outcomes of any tactical activity will vary between the campaign, the organisation and the type of activity being undertaken, so it would be very interesting to see a more holistic view across the entire range of marketing activity and how that delivers against the critical success factors for the organisation. However, this piece of research reinforces many others preceding it, and it is another indicator that face-to-face delivers the results that marketers are seeking when looking to have demonstrable ROI for tactical activity.
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— JACKIE BROWN
About Freeman
Freeman is the world’s leading brand experience company. We help our clients design, plan, and deliver immersive experiences for their most important audiences. Through comprehensive solutions including strategy, creative, production and operations, and digital and event technology, Freeman helps increase engagement and drive business results. For more information visit: www.freeman.com