

Experiential Marketing : A Conceptual Framework For Connecting With The Customers

*“Nothing ever becomes real until it is experienced.” -- John Keats
“I hear and I forget. I see and I remember. I do and I understand”--Confucius*

** Lakshmi Nair*

INTRODUCTION

It takes a marketer to recognize the blessing and the curse that lies behind the saying: 'May you live in interesting times.' Today's interesting times are marked by dramatic societal changes, and the breathtaking technological breakthroughs that are instrumental in pushing them, and have opened a vast spectrum of opportunities, challenges and demands for the marketing profession. In this rapidly evolving environment, the number of levers that must be pulled to reach the customer are growing rapidly. Technology has not only helped to fuel this expansion, but has opened up the vistas in expanding marketing's ability to tap into the possibilities more creatively and effectively than ever before. It enables a richer understanding of customers' expectations of, and interactions with a brand, giving the business deeper insights into ways to better harness the relationship to create business growth. It creates the means for more personalized, one-on-one interactions and experiences with the brand. But the pressure is also on marketing to think more strategically in light of all these changes: about how to marry the 'art and science' that come with the job more effectively; about ways to demonstrate its relevance and expand its role outside its traditional sphere of influence; about how marketing can quantifiably contribute to the business's long-term success.

More and more businesses- large and small understand the new media landscape and are finding ways to connect through the creation of brand experiences. Smart brands are turning to the acquisition model -through-experience model. Experiential methodology is driving strategies and tactics for brands in an increasingly hyper-saturated and hyper-fragmented marketplace.

Some marketers believe that experiential marketing efforts are simply tactical in nature, and they are increasingly being integrated into the overall marketing mix. To others, the consumer experience is the centerpiece of an overall brand strategy, where all aspects of the experience are managed, and experiential marketing is more of an overarching strategy throughout all campaigns and communication. The business successes achieved by focusing on experience are exactly why experiential marketing is becoming increasingly important to any company's marketing mix. It may be a modest percentage now, but it will inexorably grow. Companies will soon be forced to adopt experiential marketing strategies in order to connect to people. Instead of relying solely on advertising, brands will seek out events where their customers and potential customers can physically interact with them.

Marketing campaigns will need to deliver clear benefits to people, allowing causal marketing to take a more prominent role in a company's marketing plans. Individual engagement and empowerment has become instrumental in driving sales. The Internet is already making this a reality. For instance, 80% of Hyundai customers currently go to the automaker's Website to choose their vehicle, even before they visit the showroom. Whatever the methodology, it's increasingly clear that customers desperately want goods and services, communications and marketing campaigns that dazzle their senses, touch their hearts, and stimulate their minds-delivering a positive experience that they will remember. So, it becomes essential to explore the virtues of Experiential Marketing in depth to get a conceptual and practical idea about it.

WHAT EXPERIENTIAL MARKETING MEANS?

Experiential Marketing is everywhere --- from consumer packaged goods to industrial products to services. Experiential marketing is the art of creating an experience, where the result is an emotional connection to a person, brand, product or idea. The name experiential marketing is relatively new. However, the fundamental concepts behind it are not. For decades, activities such as field marketing, customer service, special events, product promotions, PR

**Lecturer (Marketing), Indira School of Business Studies, Pune, Maharashtra. E-mail : nairlakshmi011@gmail.com*

stunts have engaged consumers and the public emotionally.

However, what has happened recently is the specialization of taking the fundamental concept of creating connection through a designed emotive experience. More and more marketers are realizing the need to move away from the 'feature and benefits' marketing to experiential marketing. A wide variety of perspectives on what experiential marketing is and what it can accomplish exist. The experiential marketing label is catchy, and it's no wonder that many companies are confused about what they will get from it. The term itself has been used by some companies to simply add a new dressing to the same salad of products and services they've offered for many years.

Overall, experiential marketing represents the opportunity to address and in some cases, reconnect with customers and potential customers in relevant and meaningful ways. Equally important, in a time of consumer-generated media and skepticism concerning conventional media, the experiential approach is treasured.

Experiential marketing is the kind of marketing that connects with the consumer on multiple levels - it appeals not only to their emotions, but to their logic and senses.

To put it simply, experiential marketing focuses on the entire customer "experience" and what the consumer's response is, rather than a certain individual marketing piece. Some famous definitions related to Experiential Marketing are given below.

DEFINITION OF EXPERIENTIAL MARKETING

✕ Experiential marketing can be defined as 'a live interaction between a brand and a consumer that is sensitive to the brand's values, impactful, memorable and capable of generating lasting positive relationship. Experiential marketing is essentially concerned with the six senses: smell, vision, taste, hearing, touch and balance (Schmitt, 1999).

✕ Experiential marketing is the art of creating an experience where the result is an emotional connection to a person, brand, product or idea (Wikipedia).

✕ Experiential Marketing connects audiences with the authentic nature of a brand through participation in personally relevant, credible and memorable encounters. Whereas traditional marketing has focused on mass communication using rational, left-brain directed persuasion, experiential marketing focuses on making a personalized connection using emotional, right-brain directed involvement (Todd Austin).

Experiential Marketing is a directed, engaging, creative interaction between a product or service and consumer. With the purpose of enhancing, driving or directing the perception of the product or service and the objective of increasing sales or adding perceptible value to the product or service (Craig Wilde).

DIFFERENCES IN TRADITIONAL AND EXPERIENTIAL MARKETING

"**Experiential marketing**" is the antonym of "**product centric marketing**," which makes "**customer centric marketing**" somewhat synonymous with "experiential marketing." Importantly, the idea of experiential marketing reflects a right brain bias because it is about fulfilling consumers' aspirations to experience certain feelings - comfort and pleasure on one hand, and avoidance of discomfort and displeasure on the other. In contrast, traditional product centric marketing reflects a left brain bias because it generally seeks to persuade consumers by invoking rational factors that position the advertised brand as better than competing brands. Product centric marketing presumes a degree of rationality in consumers' decision-making that contemporary brain science refutes. Consumers' decisions are much more influenced by emotionally generated feelings than by their rationally derived thoughts.

Consider the huge difference between traditional marketing and experiential marketing. Traditional marketing is going to try to "sell" the consumer of the features and benefits of something, while experiential marketing is going to allow the consumer to experience and test it for themselves. When applied correctly, experiential marketing is also the breadwinner when it comes to building brand loyalty and following.

Experiential marketing has grown in importance because traditional marketing has largely ignored the notion of act experiences. Thus, if we return to the traditional marketing concept; we see that only customer satisfaction is important, whereas in the experiential paradigm, emotional attachment is the key. Thus, marketers are faced with the challenge of finding ways by which this can be accomplished. An ongoing emotional attachment between a brand and consumer is the ultimate aim of experiential marketing. The delivery is through a unique experience, which can only be created by the brand, giving owners a higher degree of control. Companies that engage in experiential marketing take a brand essence and bring it to life in the form of an event, experience, or interaction. The company must be active rather

than passive in relation to the brand.

Experiential marketing represents a fundamental shift from the traditional marketing concept with regards to segmentation. NZ Marketing Magazine (2003) reported that “traditional marketing is no longer as effective as it once was ... in this new world, experiential marketing creates relationships”. If a company uses traditional segmentation approaches, it is difficult for a company to communicate with both 25 year olds and 65 year olds or even a broader range of demographics or profiles. Experiential marketing makes this process easier by grouping people according to their values, their enjoyment, personality type and social group in the loose sense. Thus, the understanding follows.

TRADITIONAL MARKETING	EXPERIENTIAL MARKETING
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✘ The focus is on being more efficient and effective than competitors. ✘ Features and benefits are more relevant for the industrial age. ✘ The marketing research function is mostly analytical and quantitative. ✘ Products are equivalent in terms of quality; they have parity in terms of functional features and benefits. ✘ Consumer decisions are influenced more by rationally derived thoughts. ✘ The communication function relies on mass media, advertising, sales promotion, trade shows, public relations, personal selling, events and sponsorships. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✘ The focus is on creating and modifying the environments in which customers interact. ✘ Creating experience providers through sensory, affective and creative associations is the new mantra for the information age. ✘ There is more room for qualitative assessment of customers. ✘ The experience cannot be the same as emotional touch points are different. ✘ Consumer decisions are much more influenced by emotionally generated feelings. ✘ The main challenge is to integrate employees, customer, corporate learning, corporate culture and database.

THREE MAIN DRIVERS OF EXPERIENTIAL MARKETING

As marketers, its always important to put themselves in the customers shoes. When they're viewing marketing pieces, what kind of thoughts are going through the consumers' minds? What is their feeling? Experiential marketing is going to help on many levels by creating a full customer experience by engaging the consumer in many kinds of media platforms: visual ads, print ads, audio, and others to gauge the overall response of the entire brand and marketing campaign as a whole.

The fact of the matter is, people today are super busy. Everyone wakes up out of bed and has a vast to-do list: a soccer mom has to take the kids to school, the working professional is busy from 9-5 - thereafter, he just doesn't want to be bothered, etc... And marketers just aren't helping by trying to push the same tired old messages.

Experiential marketing is the greatest solution to reach these people. What's needed (and what very few marketers are doing) is a way to win over these consumers emotionally, personally and literally connect them to the brand forever.

The rise of experiential marketing can be attributed to 3 main drivers:

1. Perception: Experiential marketing is seen as the 'new thing', the smart new way to connect with customers. Agencies need to be seen being able to deliver what the client or market demands.
2. Standard media is losing its traditional ability to connect with the public. Companies need new ways to connect with their target market.
3. Creating emotional connection through an experience works.

Experiential marketing is not a fad. It is being implemented in practice, yet is not accounted for in the various philosophies (concepts) of marketing. According to US and European marketing experts, experiential marketing is set to turn most of traditional marketing on its head. A study conducted by Marketing Week (as cited in NZ Marketing Magazine, 2003) forwarded that 71 per cent of the senior executives in the US and UK agreed that the customer experience is the next big battleground. Experiential marketing will rise in importance (especially for marketers of intangible products) because marketing in the twenty-first century is more challenging than ever due to fragmented media, clever and articulated consumers, and the rise of the “free-thinking” consumer. Experiential marketing is about more than a one-off experience. It's a totally new way of thinking about marketing. The crux of experiential marketing is that a marketer should not only be concerned with customer satisfaction. He or she should be (more) concerned with making the consumer emotionally attached to the product/service.

Today, the customer needs to be involved with the marketing of the company, they don't want to be fed a monologue

message, and they want to engage in dialogue with the company. In essence, then, experiential marketing is not an innovative creation of marketers as much as a response to the more mature “mind of the market” that exists today.

EX•PER•I•EN•TIAL MAR•KET•ING thus is :

1. To add an experiential layer to marketing programs, inserting a brand into a target's life where they can touch it, feel it, taste it, play it, hear it, use it.
2. (noun) A marketing program that bridges a “boardroom” message with the real world and/or allows consumers to experience a brand in a “real life” way and ultimately understand the brand's place in their lives.
3. (Adjective) Pertaining to a marketing processs, in which, a target connects with a brand and adds it to a list of brands they use and talk about.

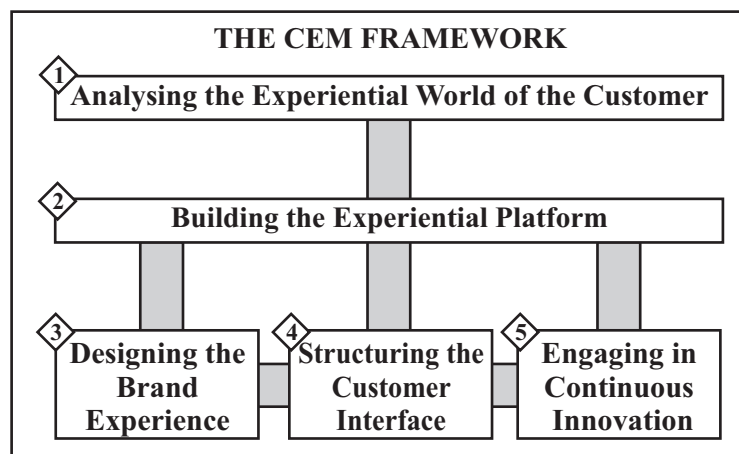
TOOLS AND TECHNIQUES OF EXPERIENTIAL MARKETING

But despite huge growth in this sector, now worth approximately £250m per year, there is still little or no knowledge of what consumers really think about experiential marketing.

What the companies and their management need are management tools that truly focus on the customer experience at every touch point. Customer Experience Management is that approach (The EX Group, LLC 2003,). To put it simply, Customer Experience Management, or CEM, is the process of strategically managing a customer's entire experience with a product or a company. The CEM framework is a unique marketing and management approach that allows companies to conceive, manage, and integrate an extraordinary customer experience. Its methodologies address core marketing issues such as branding, segmentation, positioning, and service. Its five-step framework provides an understanding of the customer's own context, needs, lifestyle and desires, and delivers a relevant, valuable, and consistent experience at every touch point. The result is a customer experience that can be the key to competitive advantage and growth for any company.

THE CEM FRAMEWORK IS MADE UP OF FIVE BASIC STEPS

1. Analyzing the experiential world of the customer.
2. Building the experiential platform.
3. Designing the brand experience.
4. Structuring the customer interface.
5. Engaging in continuous innovation.



✳ **STEP 1:** The first step of the CEM framework, “Analyzing the Experiential World of the Customer,” provides original insight into the customer's world. For consumer markets, this comes from analyzing the socio-cultural context in which consumers operate: their experiential needs, wants, lifestyles and desires. The purpose of this exercise is to identify the touch-points and the trigger points in the customers' minds that ignite the consumer desire. Experiences can trigger different emotions; hence, the company's aim should be to understand the entire world of customers. The starting point is 'emotion' and not 'reason'. While they are inextricably linked, emotion underpins reason. Rational

constructs are only a means to express deeper understanding emotions.

The quest, therefore, is to associate the company/product/brand with emotions; in other words, to develop a Somatic Marker in the consumer's mind. Somatic markers are a special set of feelings that have been connected by learning. Somatic markers are the repertory of emotional learning that we have inherited or acquired, according to Damson. The main function of the brain is to monitor, integrate and regulate the other entire organs in the body, linking the body changes with the emotions that accompany it. And this association is stored in a nerve cell. This association is called as 'somatic markers' and is capable of directing the human mind. To illustrate, when someone makes you angry, your face flushes, your heart pounds and the stomach muscles tighten.

These markers, more often than not, operate in the subconscious and unconscious mind. Hence, establishing a linkage between benefits and signals is necessary for a company to occupy the consumer's mind space.

✱ **STEP 2: “Building the Experiential Platform,”** is the key connection point between strategy and implementation. This is not a cut-and-dried positioning statement or a two-dimensional perceptual map. Instead, the experiential platform includes a dynamic, multi-sensory, multi-dimensional depiction of the desired experience (referred to as the “experiential positioning”) and a specification of the experiential value (“the experiential value promise”) that the customer can expect from the product or service. For example, Consider Puma, the German athletic shoe maker that had delivered amazing financial results in 2002. Puma declares that it wants to be a “brand that mixes the influences of sports, lifestyle and fashion.” Puma “makes products designed to... evoke the most passionate responses.” Note how Puma's positioning is quite different from those of Nike (“Performance”) and other competitors. To deliver on this experiential platform, Puma has collaborated with Xuly Bet, AEROSPACE, German fashion designer Jil Sander and, recently, Japanese designer Yasuhiro Mihara. The shoes, which are available at high-end boutiques and department stores are low-profile, fitness-inspired shoes in several colors: “gray/camel,” “wine/purple,” “yellow/apricot,” “violet/tan,” for example. Thus, it is established that the image is a function of the consumer's mind. The image or impression is created as a result of information received from various sources viz advertising, packaging, and experience. Therefore, the products are gateways to experience. The starting point is the customer focus. The customer task must be easy to perform with your product than without it. The business aim should be to develop a sense of loyalty with the customers (including internal customers). The aim of the research must always be to map the customer's experience by internalizing the following processes:

- ✱ List the aspirations that connect fundamentally to your product.
- ✱ List the emotional responses (touch, taste, sights and sounds) that you wish to elicit.
- ✱ List the aspects of the existing experience.
- ✱ Audit and modify the elements of your design.

In other words, the main emphasis is on selling knowledge and not features. The success depends on customers' experiencing positive emotions. Some common customer experience objectives are Trust, Confidence, Comfort and Fun.

To exemplify, we can consider trends in retail store design- shopping is a relaxing past time for many, fun for some and necessity for others. But either way, it is an integral part of our daily lives. Store design- use of light, sound, mall, colour schemes is all about mapping the experience. Another case in point is the advertisement of Naukri.com, where it has been shown that a lot of people leave their jobs because of bad bosses.

It is significant to mention that experiential marketing is an important component of Customer Experience Management, which is more comprehensive in scope. CEM seeks to help companies understand the entire world of customers and how to better interact with the customers across environments to develop lasting relationships.

After the management has built the experiential platform, the platform must be implemented in three more steps.

✱ **STEP 3: “Designing the Brand Experience,”** includes the quality and design of a product that delivers the experiential (Puma's shoe designs and colors). The brand experience also includes the “look and feel” of packaging and retail spaces, and the experience of advertising and communications.

✱ **STEP 4: “Structuring The Customer Interface,”** includes all sorts of dynamic exchanges and contact points with the customer, whether they happen face-to-face in a store, during a sales visit in a client's office, at an automatic

teller machine at a bank, at the check-in counter of a hotel, or as part of ecommerce on the internet.

❖ **STEP 5:** Finally, in step 5, the experiential platform must be reflected in a company's innovations- a process that the author calls **"Engaging in Continuous Innovation."** A great example of an attractive brand experience, customer interface and ongoing innovation is Pret A Manger, the UK-based sandwich company. The company was founded by Julian Metcalfe and Sinclair Beecham, two London City workers who were dismayed by the lack of fresh lunch fare available in their area. Today, there are more than a hundred stores in the UK, several in Hong Kong, a dozen in New York and plans are underway to expand globally. McDonald's recently acquired a 33% share of the company, with a promise not to interfere in what makes the company unique. The Pret A Manger brand is about great-tasting, handmade, natural products served by amazing people who are passionate about their work. The sandwiches and the stores look appealing and attractive. The company hires only 5% of those who apply and only after they have worked for a day in a shop. This process ensures good fit and good teamwork. An array of employee benefits including incentive rewards, pay raises, company parties, and others-helps ensure the loyalty and happiness of the staff.

The CEM framework can be used to address a variety of core marketing issues. For instance, many companies view segmentation from the perspective of the company and its products (segmenting by features, price, or distribution channel, for example). The CEM framework approaches segmentation and targeting very differently, by starting with research tools that reveal meaningful data from the customer's perspective, and using these to develop a customer-focused segmentation scheme.

Another key issue for companies is how to position the corporation, its brands, and its products. For that purpose, many companies commission perceptual maps--usually based solely on verbal input and unrepresentative of customers' real experiences. Just ask yourself how much insight and guidance for implementation you can derive from the typical two- or three-dimensional perceptual maps with the dimensions labeled "high price - low price," or "high quality - low quality," or "strong image - weak image". As we have seen in the case of Puma, an experiential positioning is richer and more imagery- and sensory driven and thus can be easily used to guide implementations in packaging, advertising, the customer interface and innovations.

Moreover, many branding issues are not a problem of the logo or the advertising. Most branding issues are brand experience issues. To address these issues effectively requires more than policing of corporate identity standards or soul-searching about the company's values and the meaning of its brands. What is needed is, first, an original understanding of the customer's experiential world and, second, the creation of a differentiated strategy platform that can be implemented in an innovative fashion. Great brands are the result of great, and consistent customer experiences. In sum, what attracts customers to any company and sustains their loyalty to its products, services, and brands, is the customer experience. That experience encompasses products, services, communications, and every interaction the customer has with the company.

EXPERIENTIAL MARKETING IN ACTION

CASE IN POINT -DISNEY: AN EXPERIENCE MARKETING EXAMPLE

Disney Land is one of the ultimate testaments to the concept of Experience Marketing.

Walt Disney was first recognized (after several failed business attempts) as an innovator in the world of animation and movies. They truly revolutionized the industry through innovations and drive. But, the bottom line was that - they were a film production company. However, Disney's vision did not end there. He wanted to allow people to experience all the magic of their films in a world outside the movie theater. This is what truly brought and continues to bring the Disney brand to life. People are able to experience the brand of Disney in so many different ways. There are films, TV shows, theme parks and a cruise line. There is also special vocabulary, tons of memorabilia and an overall brand experience of bringing magic into people's life that makes the brand very tangible and understandable for everyone around the world.

❖ Clearly determine the brand experience - Is it bringing magic into people's lives? or something else? It must have emotion and feeling!

❖ Clearly define key target audiences and learn about them and their lives.

❖ Create unique experiences, somewhat based on products and services, that let people experience your brand as often as possible, throughout their lives. These experiences should be also be accompanied with branded visuals, descriptive

vocabulary and cool memorabilia.

That's it!! That is truly all it takes to bring a brand to life. Disney was not always who they are today. At one point in time, they were simply an innovative struggling film animation company. Through passion, vision, imagination and determination, they have become a global icon as the world's largest media and entertainment conglomerate.

CASE IN POINT: THE APPLE STORE

✧ The **Apple Store** is a chain of retail stores owned and operated by Apple Inc., dealing in computers and consumer electronics. As of December 2009, Apple had opened 294 stores across the world. The stores sell Apple Macintosh personal computers and software, iPods, iPhones, third-party accessories, and other consumer electronics such as the Apple TV. Many stores feature a theatre for presentations and workshops, the Studio for training with Apple products, and all stores offer a Genius Bar for technical support and repairs, as well as free workshops available to the public. The new store design replaced the dedicated point of sale station with the handheld Easy Pay system. In order to effectively assist customer's needs, every Apple Store has a variety of staff trained for specific tasks like:

✧ **Concierge** : Performs assorted customer service tasks such as: hosting the entrance to the store, greeting customers, maintaining and running the Genius and iPod Bar and answering the store's phones. A concierge is recognizable by his orange shirt.

✧ **Specialist** : Answers questions about Apple products and third party accessories. Specialists conduct product sales as well as explain the store's promotions and services, such as AppleCare, MobileMe and One to One. Specialists carry a hand-held checkout device called an EasyPay, which is used to process customer payments.

✧ **Genius** : Diagnoses issues with Apple products, as well as performing repairs or providing replacement services. Customers make an appointment to see a Genius at the Genius Bar if they're having problems with a Mac, iPod, iPhone or Apple accessory.

✧ **Creative** : Provides training sessions on a variety of topics for One to One customers. Creatives teach customers about their Mac as well as various Apple software, such as iLife and iWork. Many Creatives are also certified to teach about Apple's pro applications, such as Aperture and Final Cut Express.

✧ **Theatre Presenters** : This role is only seen in larger stores such as the SoHo store in New York City or the Regent Street store in London. Theatre presenters carry out workshops and demonstrations about Apple hardware and software, either to large or small groups of people.

This is an excellent way of creating the right experience for the Apple customers.

CASE IN POINT: DOVE SOAPS

The Dove soap - which was just a bar of soap - but is not anymore. There has been a fabulous advertising campaign recently for real beauty. In this advertising campaign, you could see 'real' women who were not supermodels - and this is an attractive experience for lots of women- who don't want to be someone else, they just want to be themselves. They depict real women using and commenting for the product in a real experience.

CASE IN POINT: IKEA HOTELS

Given the commoditized status and lack of differentiation of many hotel chains like Hampton Inn, Fairfield Inn, Red Roof Inn, etc., imagine if a particular chain partnered with IKEA to decorate their rooms with simple, clean and comfortable bedroom furniture. This fact alone would give that hotel chain a significant point of differentiation. The hotel chain also gets the economic benefit of furniture at prices that are even better than wholesale prices on generic furniture.

IKEA gets significant "consumption-experience level" exposure to target customers at a fraction of the expense of TV ads. Consumers get to experience IKEA furniture "in action" which undoubtedly would give them enough first-hand experience information to make future purchase decisions. Finally, some creative "consumer insights research" opportunities can even be built in, such as allowing visitors to select from among differently decorated IKEA hotel rooms and tracking such decisions to gather which items are most popular or even how to make IKEA's in-store bedroom sets more appealing. In summary, both the hotel and IKEA achieve "experiential marketing" which drives greater marketing effectiveness (i.e. hotel chain differentiates themselves from others; IKEA lets customers actually

experience their products prior to going to a store), delivers a more impactful experience to customers, and even reduces costs for both parties.

CASE IN POINT : TOYOTA'S SCION “BEHIND THE WHEEL” TOUR

Toyota stayed low and under the radar with a youth-targeted retail program for its Scion automobile. Eschewing traditional marketing for personal one-to-one connections, Toyota launched Behind the Wheel to foster a conversation with Gen Y consumers that was real but not rushed, welcomed but not forced, and a catalyst for ongoing communications. The campaign toured 21 markets with test-drive events set up outside hip, trendy retail stores in each city. Pre-production teams were advanced to each city to locate and partner up with three leading retailers in each market. The effort brought six vehicles to each event - four that consumers could test-drive, and two just for show. The ethnically-diverse, pierced, tattooed, and dreadlocked twenty something field crew played the part well as they invited consumers to take a test drive in exchange for \$15 gift certificates from their local retail partners. While many drive programs transport test vehicles between cities on enclosed semis or specialty haulers, these vehicles were driven from city to city, becoming moving billboards through small towns across the U.S. Toyota's goal of generating 1,300 Gen Y test-drives was surpassed by the 13th market, and 27 percent of the respondents asked to be contacted by a dealer.

CASE IN POINT AT PEPSI & JELLY BELLY CANDY: PRODUCT SAMPLING - A GREAT MARKETING TOOL FOR FOOD AND BEVERAGE MANUFACTURERS

✳️The only problem is that once the sample is gone, there is nothing left to show for it. When the **Jelly Belly Candy Company launched a national road tour**, the company not only wanted to provide consumers with an opportunity to sample its newest product flavors, it also wanted to offer them a small, memorable Jelly Belly souvenir to take home. "It's important to let our customers try samples, but once they've eaten the jelly beans, there isn't anything left to remember us by," said Herman Rowland, chairman of Jelly Belly Candy Company. "We wanted to incorporate something into our promotional campaign that would attract people to our display to sample our true-to-life-tasting Jelly Belly flavors, that also would serve as a unique, take-home gift to help keep Jelly Belly in top-of-mind with our customers - without costing us a fortune."

✳️ THE PEPSI TASTE TEST

The idea that such a large company wanted to hear the opinion on something as large as whether they were better than Coke or not - plus having the guts to take the chance on people saying they disliked it. It worked for so many reasons - it was portable - all they needed was a guy in uniform and a stand - they went everywhere- so, saw many people. It was original - not just a meet and greet. It integrated with a larger overall campaign. It got user feedback on a huge scale. It got the customers involved. And made the customers trust the brand.

CASE IN POINT -COMPANIES LIKE SINGAPORE AIRLINES, STARBUCKS & AMAZON.COM -WHO HAD REVAMPED THE CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE IN THEIR INDUSTRY

Singapore Airlines focuses on delivering an extraordinary experience“a great way to fly”through outstanding service. The company has thought through every step of the customer experience, even in economy class. When customers make their reservations, they are met by a friendly and competent reservation agent. The check-in procedure is fast and efficient. Entering the plane, each passenger is greeted with a warm and natural smile; one of the flight attendants walks the passenger to the seat; at the seat, there is an amenities box; during the flight, the attendants are attentive; and so on and on.

For a great “fast food” experience, go to **Starbucks**. Of course, it's not called “fast food.” In fact, the service may even be a little slow. That's all part of the experience. This “Third Space” between home and office provides an outstanding customer experience through its comfortable and well-designed stores and its innovative product line.

How about on-line ordering? **Amazon.com** provides a marvelous online shopping experience. The site has the right look and feel, as well as an amazing interface. What's more, Amazon.com is continuously improving on the experience it provides.

MOST SIGNIFICANT RESULTS EXPERIENTIAL MARKETING CAN DELIVER

Customers are every company's most valuable asset. Now more than ever, companies need to retain existing customers and attract new ones in order to survive and grow. In today's hyper competitive scenario, more than three quarters of the money and time spent by companies go towards acquiring and retaining customers. Customer-centricity is the buzzword. Positioning companies, services or products is a technique which helps in easy brand recall due to its approach of occupying separate place in the customer's mind.

Experiential marketing helps the customer in retaining and recalling the service or product offered by companies. In other words, "Experiential marketing helps brand marketers gain valuable insight by interacting directly with consumers outside the mass-media landscape".

Experiential marketing is the next marketing methodology that can bridge the disconnect between customers' increasing demand to engage marketers and brands on their own terms and the slow-footed reluctance of traditional marketers to move away from mass-media marketing.

Today, traditional marketers continue to contend that mass media is still relevant to the customer, especially while launching a new brand. However, they need to understand that there is an increasing demand for out-of-box ideas and experiences that the mass media may or may not be able to offer. An experiential approach to launch a brand may be more effective and relevant than anything that television/print advertisements will offer. For example, Mahindra Tractors wanted to launch their HyTec brand which was a strong hydraulic tractor aiming to help farmers sow the field. To show this technology to the farmers, they engaged them through a technique in which sensors were fixed to the hydraulic and a large LCD monitor was placed for the farmers, which captured the movement of the cultivator on an ECG graph. This activity was easily understood and remembered by the farmers and the sales graph was tremendously increased.

Experiential marketing provides experience of the brand and not just the product. The innovations, designs and concepts cut through the clutter of thousands of impressions that people are bombarded with each day. The innovative and multi-dimensional experiences create emotional resonance; strengthen the bond between Brand Identity and Brand Loyalty.

An experiential approach to launch a brand may be more effective and relevant than anything that television advertisements can offer. One of the best examples is Absolut vodka. In Australia, Absolut Vodka launched a brand called "Cut", through a strictly experiential marketing point of view. Using public relations, point-of-sale, online and event marketing, Absolut was able to eschew traditional advertising altogether, something unheard of when launching a spirits brand. In a rather astounding bow to experiential marketing over mass marketing, Absolut leased two bars in Sydney and Melbourne, put on DJ sets, band concerts and photo exhibitions in these spaces. Visitors to the Absolut Cut bars got a free bottle of Cut, and consumers were given a chance to contribute their photos to the exhibits, generating what Absolut hoped would be a viral element to the campaign. The campaign flew in the face of traditional ways to launch a brand. Instead of using mass marketing to blanket the millions in order to reach the few, Absolut chose to target the few to eventually reach the masses.

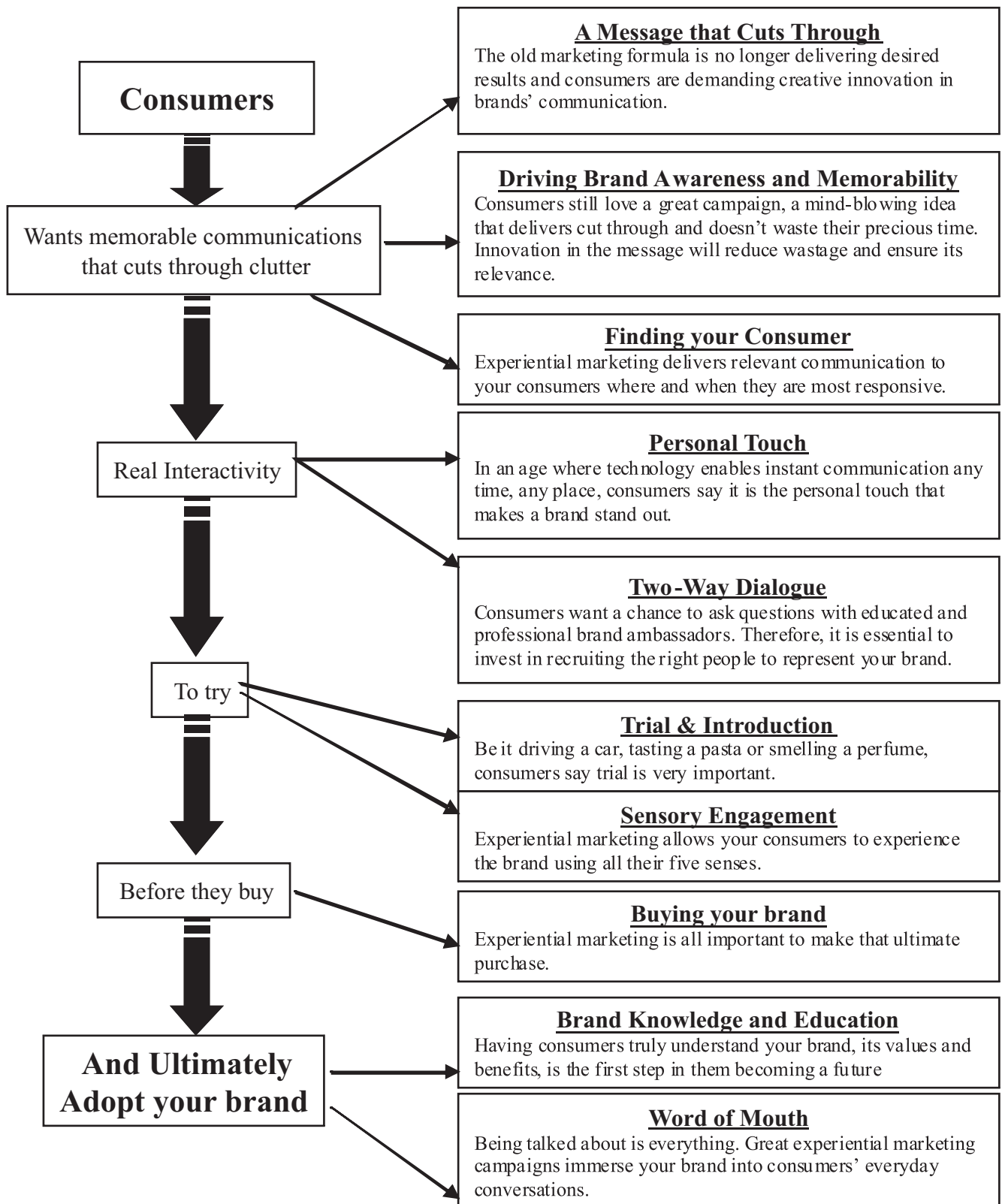
A strong brand can no longer shield a company from competition, nor can it ensure that customers stay loyal to it. Products are also becoming congested with too many features, making it difficult for the customer to distinguish one product from another. This environment forces brand managers to find new ways to create and maintain a relationship between their product or service and the customer in a way that makes their brand more than just a fancy nameplate in front of a product.

Perhaps this is why some leading companies are choosing to forgo brand extensions for something more experiential. As empowered customers are increasingly demanding better products and services, and thereby disproving the notion of brand loyalty, brands are beginning to team up with each other to offer customers a new type of brand that answers this demand.

It is now no longer surprising to see two, three, or four separate brands combine their core competencies to launch a so-called "branded brand." Like Rin and Surf Excel, the leading clothes washing bar, coming together with the dual branded bar.

Customers are more skeptical than before about marketing and advertising, and often tune out marketing messages completely. This only becomes imperative for brand managers to find out and appreciate how their brand is understood by the customer and how they are interacting with them differently than before. By engaging in experiential marketing

CONNECTING YOUR BRAND AND CONSUMERS



campaigns, brand marketers are able to gain valuable insights into this realm by interacting directly with consumers outside of the mass-media landscape. With Indian markets getting more complex and demanding, mass media is working less and less. Today, the best marketers have a skew that is 55:45 mass media to experiential marketing. According to a study done by HPI Research Group, 68 per cent of surveyed marketing executives spent more on experiential marketing in 2006 than in 2005 and half of those executives expect to increase spending in 2007. Currently, BTL holds 15 per cent of the total advertising expenditure, which is expected to grow by another 10 per cent in the coming years.

Brands are now also being driven by the customer themselves, through experiential elements like Converse's co-creation marketing or Nike's iD system, design your own shoes. Nike came up with an innovative idea to gauge customers by giving them an experience of being themselves. Customers can design their shoes according to their likes and dislikes, material, colour, shape etc... which was definitely creating an identity for themselves. So, a model can be developed based on the realizations of the customer.

The discussion can be rightly summarized by again highlighting some of the most significant results or benefits of experiential marketing;

- ✕ Greater and deeper impact on the prospective customer and helps retaining them.

- ✕ Increased effectiveness of advertising and other marketing mix.

- ✕ Cost saving relative to traditional advertising and marketing techniques.

Thus, it can be said that, more far reaching is what experiential marketing holds for the future of our everyday experiences with brands and services. Experiential marketing can make brands important again. Instead of marketers spending their time on new products, line extensions, or new-and-improved packaging, they should concentrate on their existing marketing strategies to see how they are engaging, benefitting and empowering their customers.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- 1.Andrews J Craig, Durvasula Srinivas and Lysonski Steven (1991), "Understanding Cross-Cultural Student Perceptions of Advertising in General: Implications for Advertising Educators and Practitioners", *Journal of Advertising*, Vol. 20, No. 2, pp. 15-28.
- 2.Bernd Schmitt, CEO (2000)The Ex group customer experience consultants Competitive Advantage Through The Customer Experience.
- 3.Brand Ties: Connecting with Customers through Experiential Marketing- www.polaroid.com
- 4.-By Schmitt, B. (1999). Experiential Marketing, *Journal of Marketing Management*, Vol. 15, No. 1-3, pp. 53-67.
- 5.Clinton David Lanier, 'Experiential Marketing: Exploring the Dimensions, Characteristics, and Logic of Firm-Driven Experiences', University of Nebraska at Lincoln2.
- 6.Erik Hauser and Max Lenderman (2007), 'Companies that can deliver such experiences when and where', *Experiential Marketing Forum*.
- 7.Erik Hauser, July(2007), *Brandweek: Experiential Marketing*.
- 8.Experiential Marketing Changing the way you relate to brands International Experiential Marketing association, www.idinfo.com
- 9.Experiential marketing what consumers really think- www.idinfo.com
- 10.James H. Gilmore And B. Joseph Pine,(2009)' II Wanted Chief experience officers', *The Experience economy* .
- 11.Latest Survey of Marketers Reveals Plans for Increased Spend on Experiential Marketing for 2009 BOSTON, June 23 /PRNewswire/ -- Jack Morton www.jackmorton.com.
- 12.Lender man, Max Experience the Message: How Experiential Marketing Is Changing the Brand World - By .
- 13.Liz Bigham, WHITE PAPER No.12 It's about (quality) time :Experiential marketing ROI www.jackmorton.com
14. Lon Zimmerman (2004), American Marketing Association- St. Louis Chapter White Paper#4 Zimmerman Marketing Research.
- 15.Luis Montero, WHITE PAPER No.13 Hispanics and Experiential Marketing: Research and Best Practices.
- 16.Patrick McCole,(2004), Refocusing marketing to reflect practice, The changing role of marketing for business, *University of Otago*, Dunedin, New Zealand *Journal: Marketing Intelligence & Planning* Volume: 22 Number: 5.
- 17.Pradeep Narasimha, April (2009), Brand Experience Vs Customer Retention .
- 18.Ryan S. Elder and Aradhna Krishna. February 2009 "The Effects of Advertising Copy on Sensory Thoughts and Perceived Taste." *Journal of Consumer Research*: (published online June 25, 2009).
- 19.Schmitt, Bernd H (1999), *Experiential Marketing: How to Get Customers to Sense, Feel, Think, Act, Relate*.
- 20.Shaz Smilansky(2009), *Experiential Marketing - A Practical Guide to Interactive Brand Experiences*.
- 21.Timira Shukla , April 2007,Experiential Marketing: The New Paradigm- *Indian Journal of Marketing*.
- 22.www.experientialforum.com
- 23.www.experientialforum.com
- 24.www.ft.com
- 25.www.luminous-asia.com
- 26.www.wikipedia.com
- 27.'What Consumers Really Think',(2004) white paper, www.idinfo.com