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PROMOTIONS & EVENTS, LLC

WHY DO EVENTS (rather than just spending the money on more advertising)?

By John Roush, President, Geronimo Promotions & Events LLC

After any discussion about an event marketing campaign or experiential marketing tour, almost inevitably the first question I get asked by anyone who is advertising-centric is: why should we do an event that reaches tens of thousands of people, when I can do an ad for the same amount of money that reaches millions? It is a fair, if predictable, question.

First of all, in this world of social media and viral surprises, it is no longer a foregone conclusion that an event, stunt or live marketing program will not achieve an equal or greater reach for the dollars spent. Facebook is filled with posts of flash mobs or creative stunts doubling as press and publicity events. Some are quite elaborate, such as the “Push the Button to Add Drama” event that TNT fielded to promote their new channel in Belgium. With nearly 10 million views in the first 48 hours, TNT’s 90-second video of the event may have been more popular than any show on the network. Some events are quite simple, like Jean-Claude Van Damme’s epic split between two Volvo trucks, and some are just brief surprises turned into real advertising spots. Nothing quite beats the look of a real consumer when something completely unexpected happens. The point is: the nature of event marketing and promotions of this type effectively lend themselves to viral activities and can promote huge word of mouth support for the brand.

However, for the moment, let us leave these hit or miss events behind and focus on the heart of event marketing. Before we go too far, let us first define event marketing. According to the Business Dictionary, it is the “activity of designing or developing a themed activity, occasion, display, or exhibit (such as a sporting event, music festival, fair, or concert) to promote a product, cause, or organization.” Or as Wictionary puts it: “The marketing discipline focused on face to face interaction via live events, trade shows and corporate meetings among other event types.” The important thing here is the concept of live, face-to-face interaction, or one-to-one interaction, as in the interactions via social media. This is the element that lends this particular kind of marketing its great strength.

Event marketing is often called “high touch” marketing, because this kind of marketing goes beyond short term effects to touch the consumer in a unique way and generate a longer term brand value. A brand experience of this nature will often create an emotional connection that translates to a likelihood to recommend, and the most important recommendation you can get is from another person. No other marketing tool gives you this one-to-one, face-to-face opportunity. So, event engagement has a proven power to create memorable and lasting consumer connections. Done right, it lets one engage and “experience” the brand in a meaningful and relevant way, rather than just listening to a one-way communication like an advertisement.

Here are some statistics from a study done by PROMO Magazine:

- According to research, a positive, active engagement will provide a lift of 25% to 34% in purchase intent, emotional connection, consideration to use, and brand familiarity.
- 93% of marketers who use this tactic said the promotions generate advocacy and word-of-mouth recommendations
- 77% of marketers who use this tactic said it generate sales.
- The fact that 75% of marketers around the world will increase spending in this area indicates that it is a successful tactic and gaining in importance in the marketing mix.
- This program creates content that can be used virally, on-line, and in a variety of ways that effectively extend the program into the consumers household and keep the brand front of mind for months after the initial contact.

As you can see, event marketing is an important and growing part of the marketing mix for several very good reasons. The next question should be: how?

“Long term experiential marketing tours are really expensive!” is the most common comment I get. And yes, they can be. However, they don’t have to be. More importantly, done well, the resulting publicity and increased sales can make the event a smart investment.

There are some really simple things that a brand can do that will help engage consumers. Activities like blogging, posting on social media pages, webcasts and the like are all easy ways to engage consumers. Sampling programs have long been a staple of promotional marketing, and represent an opportunity for engagement beyond just handing consumers a bit of food. For example, we actually paired magicians with samplers for a brand to make sure the experience was memorable. If you are going to do a promotion or ad campaign built around an entertainment or sports property, create content from that property so you can post new videos for consumer comment every few days. For example, as a part of a tie-in we did with So You Think You Can Dance, we got six former stars of the show to create fourteen unique dances and filmed them so that we could post a new one each week during the promotion that also featured a contest and sweepstakes. If you do have a team traveling around the country engaging consumers, make sure you use them to create new content for your Facebook page and website. Consumers like to watch themselves, so we will frequently find reasons to film consumers answering relevant questions and post the best on the client’s web site. We even used a tour as a primary method for finding models for the annual catalogue of a well-known vehicle manufacturer.

Perhaps the most interesting tour we ever fielded used green screen technology to allow people in bars to participate in a “screen test” for a beer brand. They watched a commercial, then did two “takes” of the commercial and walked away with a copy of their few minutes of fame. For almost three years, the team traveled from bar to bar: two

gigs per night, five nights per week. The bar got to keep the master reel of their patrons engaging in the promotion, the consumer got to take home a copy of their video and show it to their friends and the best takes were posted on the client's promotional web site. The promotion was incredibly popular because it engaged all levels of consumers: those that wanted to participate, those who wanted to cheer on their friends, and those who just wanted to watch from a bar stool. It "owned" any venue in which it appeared, including the Super Bowl Experience, and by the end of any evening, every person in the venue could recite the brand nugget from memory.

This is exactly what you want in an event:

- something that engages your target consumers in a relevant and memorable way
- something that works at both the live venue level (immediate engagement)
- while simultaneously creating content for later interaction (continuing engagement), and
- that directly support the brand imagery and message.

The point is, be creative and use any opportunity you can find to actually touch the consumer and give them a reason to care.