

9 Experiential strategy

Strategy is important to any plan. It is the core of achieving your objectives. This is the part of the plan where you outline your Experiential strategy, the campaign's main concept. It is the answer to the questions 'How will we achieve our objectives, and what is the big idea?' This book recommends that the big idea for the experiential marketing campaign is based on a two-way interaction between the consumer and the brand, in real time; in other words, a live brand experience.

Almost all experiential marketing campaigns include two or more of the 10 experiential elements. These elements can be mixed in any combination to create the experiential strategy. At this point in the planning process, you will at least have a rough idea of the kind of thing you want to do in your experiential marketing campaign, because you will have already brainstormed using BETTER, and presented ideas using the IDEA format. In SET MESSAGE you have already covered the Situation and background, the Experiential objectives, the Target audience, and the Message – key communication stages. In the process, you will have planned your aims, decided on the components of your message that you will integrate into the live brand experience, and carefully analysed your Target audience's lifestyle and aspirations.

STRATEGIES

STRATEGIES is an acronym that allows you to pick your experiential elements and combine them to formulate your Experiential strategy:

Service
Theatre
Research
Adverts
Televised or broadcast
Entertainment
Game (or competition)
Interactive technology
Education
Set

S is for service

Service is something that you can provide as an added-value element for the Target audience. Service can mean many things: a laundry service, car washing, transport, delivery, pampering or a makeover. In this context, anything that human beings (or in some cases, technologies) do as a process that adds value can count as a service. By using the Service element in your strategy, you can bring to life the Brand personality and benefit consumers. Service can facilitate a two-way interaction.

T is for theatre

This is clearly an important element, and there have been many debates about whether experiential marketing is in fact simply 'brand theatre'. It is actually not as simple as a branded performance, but Theatre is a key element of many Experiential strategies, and can be integrated with other elements to create an exciting strategy. This element can be especially successful when integrated with the Adverts element, which we will discuss below.

R is for research

Experiential marketing lends itself perfectly to providing both qualitative and quantitative research as part of the campaign. Research strategies can be integrated easily into the interaction in a way that is unobtrusive to consumers, yet still manages to uncover significantly valuable information. In fact, the Research element is very popular because it is often a shame not to make the most of an interaction with the Target audience. Brands and marketing agencies alike are finding that the experiential marketing campaigns that they run give them

insights into the thoughts, feelings, lifestyles and purchasing behaviour of their consumers. It is simple to gather valuable data in the form of consumer conversation and surveys because there is always direct contact with consumers, and many live brand experiences involve face-to-face interaction.

A is for adverts

In this context, the Adverts element is representative of one of several elements that combine to form the Experiential strategy. Just as an advert can amplify a live brand experience, a live brand experience can bring to life an advertising campaign. First, the live brand experience can reinforce advertising that the Target audience may have already been exposed to, and secondly it gives consumers the feeling that they are closer to the brand, and that the brand is a real part of their everyday lives.

Live brand experiences can be used to communicate the content of an advert in situations where it is unlikely that the Target audience will otherwise see the adverts. For example, if there are no billboard sites in a target area or event, then a live brand experience, which reflects the theme and content of the ad, is the perfect alternative. If a sporting event is held and sponsorship is out of budget, sometimes it is more cost-effective (and more interesting) to bring to life the advertising campaign with an experiential element. Also, using an Experiential strategy to convey your advertising message can be a good way to make the campaign more memorable and allow the consumer to interact with the brand, resulting in a deeper relationship that stimulates word-of-mouth.

T is for televised or broadcast

Imagine how much you can expand the reach of your live brand experience by forming a media partnership, and broadcasting it on television, radio, or online channels. A media partnership that informs consumers about a live brand experience prior to it happening and then broadcasts the experience, can be very successful in positioning the brand as one that cares about its consumers. This perception can be achieved with those who do not participate in the live brand experience as well as those who do.

E is for entertainment

This entertainment element is not relevant for all brands, but when it is in line with the Brand personality, then this element of your Experiential strategy can be valuable in terms of adding value, gathering large numbers of people to a live brand experience, and positioning the brand in a certain way. In fact, many companies use brand-relevant music festivals or fairs as core elements in their experiential strategies. Some famous examples of live brand experiences that include the entertainment element are the Ben & Jerry's Sundae Festival and Innocent Smoothies' village fête and Fruitstock. In this context, the entertainment element can represent music, fashion or culture-based activities. It can be a good alternative or partner to sponsorship. Entertainment can provide a fabulous source of word-of-mouth stimulation while building relationships between brands and their Target audiences.

G is for game (or competition)

Games and competitions are great ways to create brand-relevant two-way interactions between consumers and brands. Obviously, if your product is a game, then creating an experience that features a game is a pretty straightforward option. But that doesn't mean that this element should be used for gaming brands alone. In fact, when an experiential marketing agency organized 'business picnics' for a mobile phone brand that was targeting business users, it integrated intelligent games such as chess and Jenga to bring the intelligent brand personality to life.

If you would like to use games as an element in your Experiential strategy, look to existing games for inspiration and make sure that you select and adapt them to be brand-relevant and engaging for your Target audience. Consider researching TV game shows, quiz games, board games, playground games you used to play in school, sports team matches and competitive games. Also consider arcade games, and games that you come across in an amusement park or fairground. Even simple games, or the type you would play using paper, like crosswords, Sudoku and rock-paper-scissors, can be inspirational when relevant.

The great thing about games within the experiential marketing context is that you can personalize them to the brand and the objectives, making them larger than life. Even when a Game element is not wholly relevant or appropriate in the traditional sense, you can build in a competition mechanism where the prize is a means of bringing your brand personality to life. By integrating a simple but effective game

into your Experiential strategy, you can create a memorable and fun experience for the participants.

I is for interactive technology

By studying the BETTER model you already understand the importance of two-way interaction in experiential marketing, and the value that can be generated from two-way participation in brand-relevant activity with a Target audience. We live in the age of technology; each day it becomes more and more cost-effective to customize technology to better serve our needs and desires. Think of the interactive technology you can find on a TV set; when a button is pressed a signal is sent, and then the channel or settings are changed in the desired way. Also, think of visiting a museum and participating in an interactive display, lifting flaps, pressing buttons, pulling levers and enjoying the discovery process, presented in a creative way.

The technology can facilitate an amazing range of both face-to-face and remote two-way interactions. When integrated into your Experiential strategy, technology can be a very good way to interact with your Target audiences, whether it is used to gather data, educate, demonstrate, or provoke reaction. Even when your product is in a non-technology based sector, the Interactive technology element can be formulated in an innovative way that is fun and conveys complex brand messages.

E is for education

Experiential marketing is a fabulous way to educate consumers about your product or service. The Education element can be integrated to communicate your product's heritage, its features and benefits, or subjects that reflect its Brand personality and show relevance to your Target audience's aspirational lifestyle. Education-based experiential marketing strategies have been historically popular with government bodies, wishing to educate stakeholders on issues such as voting, health and crime. But likewise, if your campaign is for a car brand that is superior to other cars in its class, one of your main objectives might be to educate your consumers about its technology, in which case Education is likely to be a key element of your Experiential strategy. This element can be especially beneficial when conveying rational messages, and can be an integral part of your strategy, regardless of sector.

S is for set

The Set element of the Experiential strategy represents the purpose-built/designed environment of the live brand experience, and this applies for both face-to-face and virtual settings. The set can form part or all of a retail environment. It could be a converted double-decker bus, or a purpose-built garden in the middle of a shopping centre. The set is any environment that becomes the location for the live brand experience. It should be designed with all the elements of your Message and key communication in mind, and should reflect the visual identity of your brand as well as its personality.

The sets of most live brand experiences attract a lot of interest because they are enticing to the Target audience. A good set, designed as an immersive sensory environment, might be remembered by the participants for years to come. Some experiential marketing agencies outsource the production of sets that are used for face-to-face live brand experiences to companies that traditionally make props and stages for television, film and theatre, or exhibition stands. Similarly, some experiential marketing agencies outsource the production of sets that are used for remote/virtual live brand experiences to digital agencies, web programmers and TV production companies. Meanwhile, some of those digital providers are beginning to offer remote or virtual live brand experiences. This is another reason why, when appointing an experiential marketing agency, it is good to research their company history and understand how they began and evolved, because this will give you an idea of which areas within experiential marketing are their forte.

It is advisable to integrate the Interactive technology element with the Set element into your Experiential strategy, because the more innovative and interactive your set design is, the more engaging your live brand experience will be.

Integrating the selected elements to form the Experiential strategy

It is important to remember that your selected elements need to be integrated to form your Experiential strategy, which will be a combination of two or more of these elements. The Experiential strategy provides a structure for your idea, as well as a clear direction for your plan. When you pick your elements to create the Experiential strategy, keep in mind your original idea and the steps that you have taken thus far to come

up with and refine it. The original concept was formulated using the BETTER model; the Brand personality (three brand values that sum up the brand's human-like characteristics), the Emotional connection (multi-sensory and/or authentic, positively connected and personally meaningful) the Target audience (their daily lifestyle and aspirations), the Two-way interaction (the live brand experience), the Exponential element (the word-of-mouth stimulant), and the Reach (the two-way interaction reach, word-of-mouth reach, and amplification channels reach). Since you began mapping out the plan in SET MESSAGE format, you have refined the idea further, carefully considering the Situation and background, Experiential objectives, Target audience and Message – key communication.

As well as ensuring that the Experiential strategy elements you select encompass your idea, it is also very important to remain open to new approaches regardless of any preconceptions that may exist concerning your sector or Target audience. Whether your consumers are affluent executives, or over 50s, or your product is an FMCG (such as a chocolate bar), or a high-involvement luxury purchase (such as a Rolls Royce), Experiential strategy elements can be combined successfully, as long as they are relevant to BETTER. By selecting elements that stay true to your Brand personality, creating an Emotional connection with the participants, and always keeping your consumer front of mind, you can develop an Experiential strategy that creates the right experience for the right people.

You should pick two or more of the most appropriate elements from the STRATEGIES acronym, then integrate them to form your Experiential strategy. Below are sample combinations that mix three or four elements, illustrating how you could go about mixing the selected elements to formulate an Experiential strategy.

Scenarios

Educational + service + research + set

When Sophie, the marketing director of a popular brand of margarine, wanted to show the brand's Target audience how the margarine could be used to lower cholesterol, as well as bring the active, healthy Brand personality to life, she designed an Experiential strategy involving a cholesterol-testing experience in a 40-foot branded trailer. First, doctors and leading experts educated participants about the negative effects and risks of high cholesterol, and secondly they provided guests with

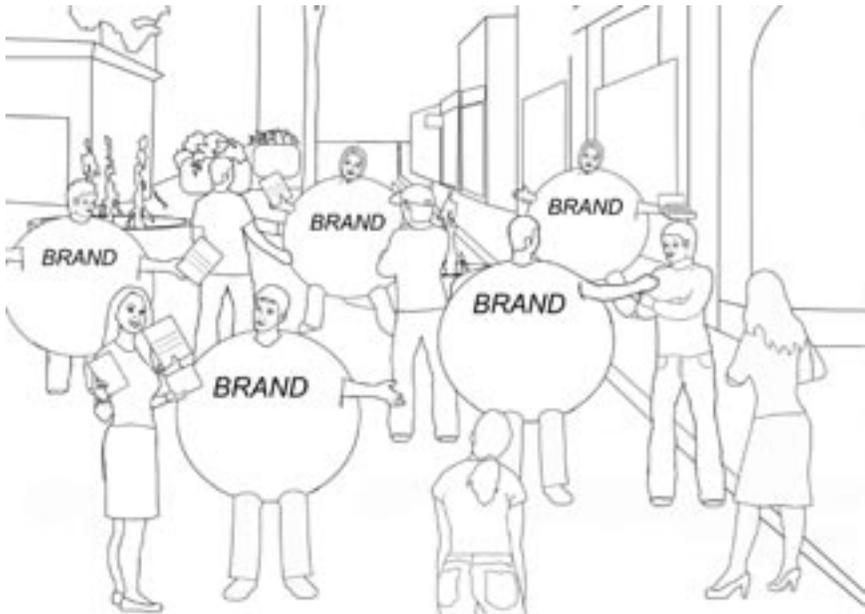
free cholesterol and heart-rate tests. Sophie received a contribution from the market research budget towards this campaign and wanted to gather data from the participants (to facilitate tailoring of marketing and distribution to customer needs). She wanted to know which supermarkets the Target audience members shopped in most regularly, how frequently they purchased butter or margarine, and which brands they preferred, and why. The Brand ambassadors, who were assisting the consumers through the cholesterol and heart-rate testing, asked consumers a few quick questions prior to their test. In return for answering the questions, the consumers were given a free heart-rate monitoring wrist strap. The campaign successfully achieved Sophie's objectives: it gathered insightful research, and brought to life the healthy Brand personality. The selected Experiential strategy elements educated consumers about the product's benefits, differentiating it from its competitors, and provided a free relevant service (in order to add value) to its participants in a memorable way.



Theatre + advert + game

Mark, the creative director at a leading advertising agency, was informed that a brand of small pocket mints wanted to bring to life its advertising

campaign with a live brand experience. The unique selling point of the product (and a key focus in the communication message) was that the mints had a special cooling effect. The live brand experience channel was intended to reinforce the creative from the adverts that Mark's team had designed. Mark wanted to bring the mint's Brand personality to life so he carefully analysed the creative, looking for inspiration on how to do so. The TV advert featured hundreds of life-size mints that visually symbolized 'cooling agents', so he decided that these would be the inspiration for the experience. The strategy incorporated acting, a Game, and the Advert. Professional actors dressed up as the cooling agents in costumes that were identical to the ones worn in the TV advert. The actors, reincarnated as mints, gave out samples of the cooling mints and engaged participants in a game, asking them to guess from three multiple-choice answers what the exact temperature was. Those who answered correctly were entered into a prize draw to win a skiing holiday, which reinforced the cooling USP. The Experiential strategy neatly and relevantly integrated elements of the Advert, Theatre and a Game, which in combination succeeded in bringing to life the advertising campaign.



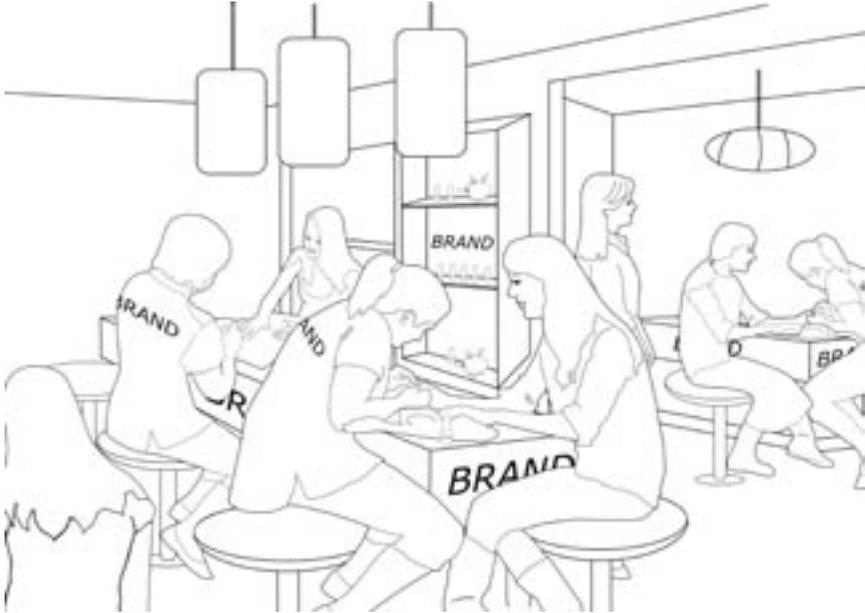
Service + set

Jaleel, the marketing manager for a brand of paints for the home, ran live brand experiences to position the brand as a colour-matching expert with the Target audience of affluent women aged 25+. His Experiential strategy was designed to convey the colour-matching expertise of the brand, and promote its three main product ranges, Pure, Cirque and Revolution. The first was a range of neutral paints, the second a range of bold paints and the third a range of metallic paints. He combined the most appropriate elements to formulate the Experiential strategy: Service (to benefit and relate to his Target audience's lives), and Set (to demonstrate the appearance of the paint ranges on real walls).

He had already come up with a concept and completed the first four stages of SET MESSAGE during which he carefully researched his Target audience. He discovered that the demographic aspired to having beautiful homes with professional interior design. The women also spent a lot of time discussing their personal appearances and aspiring to look fashionable and stylish. These insights inspired Jaleel's Experiential strategy.

He created a live brand experience involving a set that toured the central atriums of major shopping centres. The set represented three adjoining rooms of a beautiful home, and each room was decorated to reflect one of the brand's paint ranges: Pure, Cirque and Revolution. The rooms featured complementary colours from their respective paint ranges, demonstrating the brand's expertise in colour-matching.

The mini houses had beautician Brand ambassadors positioned in each of the rooms, fully trained on the three paint ranges and on the brand's colour-matching techniques. The Brand ambassadors, who were seated at a branded counter, invited consumers to have their nails painted in shades that matched their outfits. The women were assigned one of three different themes to reflect the neutral, bold, and metallic ranges offered by the brand. Then the consumers were handed a 'Colour-match wheel' and shown how to select the nail polish colour that corresponded best with their outfit. This process closely replicated the process that the brand's website and store advisers used to intelligently match paint ranges and individual colour choices with consumers' style and home furnishings. This Experiential strategy successfully combined two elements: Service (colour matching and painting nails) and Set (a beautiful home environment) to achieve Jaleel's objectives.



Research + entertainment + advert + game (competition)

James, a brand manager at a well-known bank, was tasked with generating leads for a new unsecured loan product that targeted lower-income families. The brand's advertising agency created a TV advert that showed staff from the bank's branches dancing and singing (in the style of a Broadway musical) about an unsecured loan product that the bank had launched. James decided to reinforce the TV campaign with experiential marketing. He hired an experiential marketing agency to produce a series of live brand experiences that would replicate the advert as a live performance, thus bringing to life the advert's creative.

During the Target audience stage of SET MESSAGE James referred to data that indicated that the demographic were most susceptible to applying for loans during school holidays, because these periods were most popular for expensive holidays abroad. Taking this insight into consideration, he decided that the performance should be presented as a 5-minute live advert, shown during the commercials at cinemas during school holidays. A host manned the microphone and introduced the musical performance. Before the performance began, he encouraged the families to complete a quick 'Dream holiday survey', handed out

by Brand ambassadors, which asked them about their ideal holiday destinations and activities. In return for completing the survey, the kids received free popcorn (in a branded container), and the families were entered into a competition to win their dream holiday.

This successful and simple live brand experience was performed many times a day during the winter and summer holidays at over 20 cinemas, entertaining families that might not have been able to afford to go away on holiday. The Experiential strategy combined Advert, Entertainment, Game (competition) and Research elements to achieve the brand's experiential objective of lead generation whilst also reinforcing the impact of the advertising campaign through a memorable experience.



Game + televised/broadcast

Andrew is the sales and marketing director at a drinks company. He was planning the launch of a new brand of Caribbean rum. The brand had a pirate-themed brand personality, and Andrew was keen to launch it with an integrated experiential marketing campaign. The objectives were to bring to life the Caribbean and pirate themed Brand personality, drive product trial and generate word-of-mouth. After carefully analysing the concept to determine which strategy elements it combined, he decided

on the Televised/broadcast and Game elements for his Experiential strategy.

Following a BETTER brainstorm session with his creative team, he selected a pirate-themed one-hour ‘Treasure hunt challenge’ with prizes of cases of rum and Caribbean cruises. The campaign ran six ‘Treasure Hunt Challenges’ simultaneously, one in each of the six main regions in England. Each city had its own branded treasure hunt map, with key points identified as locations to pick up clues. Andrew’s PR agency secured local press coverage in advance, ensuring a high level of participation in the live brand experience. The articles instructed readers to form teams of five with their friends before meeting at the start points in each city. Advertising was also used as an amplification channel, with print and billboard ads promoting the ‘Treasure hunt challenge’ during the week prior to it happening.

On arrival at the meeting points, participants were greeted by Brand ambassadors (wearing pirate hats, fake parrots and eye patches) who registered them for the game and gave them their kits containing treasure maps, rum samples, and branded T-shirts. Off they went racing round the cities to hunt for clues, in the hope of finding the treasure chests that contained prize tickets, within the allotted hour. Andrew secured a media partnership and the nationwide ‘Treasure hunt challenge’ was broadcast live on television in a one-hour slot, showing the teams running around each town hunting for clues and treasure chests. A 30-minute special the following week showed the winners enjoying their rum cases and Caribbean cruises. In addition to the 10,000 registered consumers that participated in the actual Challenge, another 3 million people tuned in and watched the live brand experience on TV, and almost 1 million watched the special the following week.

The Game element enabled a high level of two-way interaction between the brand and participants, while the Televised/broadcast element enabled the live brand experience to have a massive reach. The experiential marketing campaign brought to life the rum’s Caribbean and pirate-themed Brand personality, drove product trial and generated massive word-of-mouth at the same time.

Educational + interactive technology + set

Adriana was responsible for launching an innovative mobile phone that had a built-in, high-quality video camera. It also had a revolutionary function that allowed consumers to edit their videos on their mobile phones using the built-in editing software and effects suite. The product was the first of its kind, and Adriana wanted to create an experiential

marketing campaign that would educate consumers on its special features.

Her Target audience, fun loving Generation Y-ers (18–25), inspired Adriana to hire an experiential agency and create an innovative live brand experience on US beaches. They created a giant set, a ‘Mobile-video-phone zone’ shaped like the mobile video phone itself, and positioned it on beaches that attracted the young, fun demographic. Brand ambassadors were trained and armed with the mobile video phones. They approached groups of friends who were sunbathing on the beach or playing sport such as volleyball, and invited them to be filmed by the Brand ambassador holding the videophone. The groups of friends were excited at the thought of making their own mini beach-movie, and were keen to oblige and participate. Beachgoers were then encouraged to enter the ‘Mobile-video-phone zone’ to watch a demonstration and tutorial that educated them about the video-editing features of the phone. Brand ambassadors encouraged them to participate in editing the movie clips in which they starred, using life-sized buttons on the sets walls that visually replicated the buttons and features on the device itself. Thousands of excited consumers from beaches around the United States edited their movie clips, which they received on the spot on a branded DVD. The participants had the opportunity to give their contact info and receive the clips by e-mail for use on YouTube or Facebook. As well as being given the DVDs, consumers received branded beach balls and fake tattoos, which raised brand awareness to other beachgoers.

Adriana’s Experiential strategy was Educational, and used Interactive technology built into a brand-relevant Set. The live brand experience was also amplified with digital ads, showing some of the live brand experience highlights and social network groups. The experiential marketing campaign achieved its objective of educating consumers about the phone’s video-editing features. The memorable and fun two-way interaction also succeeded in generating brand advocacy and driving word-of-mouth amongst the young, fun, Target audience.

Make the experience memorable and ongoing

Keep in mind that even without any additional actions or triggers, a live brand experience is by its nature more memorable than any other form of marketing, and the live brand experience should be at the core of the experiential marketing campaign. Memories themselves do not merely exist across time, linking the past, present and future, nor are

they only live within the individual's consciousness. Memories exist at the very heart of 'lived experience', whether collective or individual.¹ To ensure that the experiential marketing campaign is remembered for the maximum possible length of time, you can create external aids that reinforce the memories of the people that it reached.

A great option when the live brand experience is executed face to face is to provide participants with visual evidence such as photos or videos of their experience. For example, you can take the consumers' photos while they are in or on the set and then let them download their photos online, give them printouts in branded frames or even print their photos onto mugs/magnets/stickers, etc. Visual evidence is a great way of triggering positive emotions in the memories of the participants by reminding them of how much they enjoyed the experience (the souvenir may also become sentimental and lead them to romanticize their experience). When provided in a digital format, the visual evidence can incorporate an Exponential element such as a 'forward to a friend' feature.

Relevant branded gifts are another great way of triggering memories. The gift then acts as an external aid, and an 'important reason for why external aids facilitate memory is that the physical presence of an object usually stimulates memory more than imagining or thinking'.² They can either be given in person (when the live brand experience is face to face) or by inviting consumers to order their free gift themselves by text or web form (when the live brand experience is remote). By providing the participants with a call to action prior to receiving their gift, therefore making it necessary that they actively request the gift, you stimulate their intention to remember the experience.

It is recommended that you provide participants of the live brand experience with a trigger mechanism that makes it easy for them to pass on their experience, and then support that system with an incentive for doing so; this forms the Exponential element for the campaign. When the incentive is a gift, the recipients of the participant's message should also have the opportunity to receive a gift, as should those who heard about the live brand experience from an amplification channel. Even though the individuals in these groups did not all participate in the experience themselves, they have the opportunity to receive something tangible, symbolizing the experience that they heard about from a peer or amplification channel. In this way the external aid does not only serve as a tangible reinforcement of the participant's memory, it also provides the recipient of the message with the opportunity to engage further with the brand and form their own personal connection with it.

By creating a further interaction between the brand and both the participants and the recipients, the relationship continues beyond the

initial campaign. Ongoing positive interaction is key to establishing long-term customer loyalty, this being the ultimate aim of experiential marketing. By collecting the contact data of the participants of your experience and the recipients of the experience message, and then contacting them with invitations to future experiences (perhaps invitation only), you can convert recipients of a second-hand message about a live brand experience into participants of a live brand experience. By continuing the ongoing experiential marketing communication with a live brand experience at its core, you can build golden bonds with your Target audience and strengthen the feeling that you want to add value to their lives. As a result, the consumers will remember that the relationship that they have with you are long-term and two-way, and that it does not end when the first experience or purchase does. The other phenomenon that can occur as a result of inviting consumers (participants and recipients) to future live brand experiences, is that bonds will form between the individuals in the groups of those invited, and the memory of the group realizes itself in individual memories.³ This long-term view should be considered when formulating your long-term Experiential strategy, which when coupled with a customer-experience orientation within your organization will build the foundations for brand advocacy and long-standing customer relationships.

Summary

In summary, there are 10 basic elements in the STRATEGIES acronym: Service, Theatre, Research, Adverts, Televised or broadcast, Entertainment, Game (or competition), Interactive technologies, Education, and Set. You should take your existing experiential concept and check which elements from the STRATEGIES acronym best define it, then develop it further by combining two or more of those strategy elements. All Experiential strategies should bring the Brand personality to life, create an Emotional connection with participants, and be relevant to the Target audience's lifestyle and aspirations. You should always have an Exponential element or a talking point that inspires word-of-mouth, and strive to attain maximum Reach (combining the initial reach of the live brand experience, the word-of-mouth reach and the reach of amplification channels) whilst maintaining quality engagement. The Experiential strategy should be fitting to the Experiential objectives, and should integrate the brand's Message – key communication. Use the BETTER model as your checklist to ensure your Experiential strategy is as effective as possible.

Notes

1. Middleton, D and Brown, SD (2005) *The Social Psychology of Experience: Studies in remembering and forgetting*, Sage, London
2. Gruneberg, M and Morris, P (1992) *Aspects of Memory: The practical aspects*, Vol 1, p 154, Routledge, London
3. Halbwachs, M and Coser, LA (1992) *On Collective Memory*, p 40, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, IL