

10 Selected locations and Brand ambassadors

You've probably heard the popular sayings 'Location, location, location!' and 'People buy people!' many times. These two statements may be most frequently used in retail, property and sales environments, but they apply to every touch point that a consumer has with an organization or brand during his or her journey with it. This journey includes the marketing communication that the individuals participate in. As previously explained, it is suggested the big idea in your experiential marketing campaign is based on a two-way interaction, in real time. This live brand experience needs to be positively managed by people, and whether they are your employees or part-time representatives, they should be Brand ambassadors. The synergy between participants, locations and Brand ambassadors is very important. Therefore, to be successful in experiential marketing you must strive to create the right experiences for the right people, and those experiences need to happen at the right place, at the right time.

When you completed the Target audience part of the SET MESSAGE plan, you completed the day-in-the-life analysis, also looking at the aspirational lifestyle of your Target audiences, taking time out to truly consider where to find them and how best to appeal to their desires. Therefore, finding the ideal locations (whether face to face or remote) for the experience and setting it up effectively is key. There are many

factors to be taken into consideration when selecting locations for live brand experiences. This chapter will give you an in-depth understanding of what needs to be considered at this stage in your experiential plan, and how the choice of locations can make or break an experience.

The Brand ambassadors, also of ultimate importance, are the second facet of this chapter. During the live brand experience they become the identity of the brand, because they are the only human interface between the Brand personality and the consumer. They are the people who have the potential to appeal to the desires of the participants and strengthen their relationship with the brand. You can spend all the time in the world planning your live brand experience and ensuring that everything is logistically perfect, but if a Brand ambassador is not carefully trained or not properly matched to the brand and the Target audience, then the live brand experience will not be a success.

To help you to avoid wasted efforts, this chapter looks at how to plan and carefully select the right locations (whether face to face or remote) for live brand experiences, how to choose the right Brand ambassadors, and how to train them and ensure flawless problem-free delivery.

Choosing locations

There are five factors to consider when evaluating possible locations for your live brand experience:

1. Demographic (of the location's visitors).
2. The state of mind (of the location's visitors)
 - are they seeking to purchase/socialize/be entertained/learn?
 - how much dwell time do they have available; are they in a rush or in leisure mode?
 - and if they are with others, who are they with?
3. Footfall (number of visitors).
4. Practical and logistical considerations.
5. Cost (which should be related to the spaces, footfall, ambience, attributes and positioning).

Since different locations have different demographics, it can be difficult to know exactly where to place your live brand experience. Some places, such as business districts, have an affluent population. This could suit a live brand experience for a credit card, if it wished to reach an affluent Target audience. Areas with large universities will have a strong student demographic, and could therefore be ideal for a brand that wanted to

create brand experiences for students or the young, hip and trendy. Likewise, some areas are very 'middle England/middle United States' and could be ideal for targeting the middle-class family demographic, yummy mummies or housewives (and househusbands). No matter who your Target audience are, there are locations (whether face to face or remote) such as venues, events, or institutions that are perfect for reaching them in their natural environment. This applies to every population, no matter how niche or mainstream they are.

When scouting for Selected locations for your live brand experience, it is of vital importance to ensure that the location's visitor demographics match your Target audience's demographics. At this stage in the plan you have already covered analysing or conducting market research into the Target audience's lives, and you should now be referring to those key insights and findings to extrapolate the perfect settings for your live brand experience. The day-in-the-life analysis should be referred to at this stage. If you are working with an agency, this could be its role, but you as the client should still be checking that it has selected the right locations for the interaction.

The second factor to be considered when selecting your live brand experience's locations is the state of mind that the Target audience is in while they are visiting. In this instance, the state of mind refers to what they are seeking (to purchase, socialize, be entertained or learn), the dwell time that they have available (whether they are in a rush or in leisure mode) and whether they are alone or, if not, who they are with.

If it takes five minutes to engage with the experiential interaction, then it is important the participants have five minutes to spare in the selected locations. For example, people at airports have lots of time available. They are often bored and it is most likely that they would welcome an interactive added-value experience with open arms. On the other hand, commuter points, rail stations and transport hubs are high-footfall locations where a live brand experience will not always succeed in capturing a consumer's attention. Twenty seconds' interest may be the maximum here, and it is important not to be a nuisance to participants by attempting to keep their attention for longer than they desire. Trendy music-lovers at an outdoor music festival are likely to have lots of time available and to be open to interactive experiences, especially ones that relate to their state of mind. Imagine you have been camping at a festival for three days with no laundry or cleaning facilities, and a Brand ambassador representing a denim brand approaches you, offering to wash and return your jeans to your tent. This is an added-value experience that relates to the state of mind of the festival-going Target audience, there and then. It is easy to imagine this person putting on the crisp, freshly-washed jeans and telling all his or her peers about

the excellent experience he or she just had with the denim brand. This word-of-mouth marketing dynamic would not have been created if the experience had been positioned in the wrong locations. The research that you analysed earlier, in the Target audience part of the planning stage, will be crucial now. By understanding the state of mind of your Target audience while they are in their natural locations (the ones you noted while doing the day-in-the-life analysis), you will be able to ensure that your live brand experiences are relevant, appropriate and welcomed.

The third factor to take into consideration is vital: footfall. The reach of your live brand experience will largely depend on the number of people that visit the locations. Busier locations tend to be better for live brand experiences as they allow a larger number of interactions, and therefore both the initial and the word-of-mouth reaches will be higher. Some live brand experiences that target niche audiences might have to compromise and use locations with a high concentration of the target demographic, but which sacrifice high footfall. Either way, footfall should be taken into consideration, as it ultimately affects the return on investment (ROI) and long-term return on investment (LROI) of the live brand experience.

The fourth important consideration when selecting locations is the logistical or practical factors. There are legal implications when setting up an experience, and depending on who owns the space, permission will need to be granted, hire fees may need to be paid, insurance may need to be in place and all health and safety and risk assessment paperwork (when the experience is face to face) will need to be complete. When the experience is delivered face to face, weather is also a serious consideration, especially when deciding whether to position the live brand experience internally or externally. Sometimes the space may not be practical for the set that you have in mind. If you planned to have a luxury experience located in a park, for example, then under-planning for rain and mud could potentially ruin everything. If you are thinking of hiring space in a shopping centre, that ideal spot located just outside the store in question, which would show your product in its best light, may already be contracted to someone else. If you want your live brand experience to be held on your brand's website homepage but the set is a flash game or gallery zone that takes up more space than is available, then a micro-site may be better. If you want to set up your live brand experiences within a short timescale but you want the experience to be positioned at airports, then it may need to be re-thought because in airports you will face weeks of applications and bureaucracy, not to mention countless security checks prior to and during the live brand experience. If you want to target young children face to face, then the

locations must always be safe and appropriate, with a set made of soft, non-harmful materials, without intrusive or flammable surfaces, and the Brand ambassadors will need to be police-checked and experienced in working with children. Keep in mind that the set (its size, look and purpose), whether it is a physical or virtual set, must be appropriate and natural for the Selected locations and their surrounding environments, whether face to face or remote.

Aside from the many practical and logistical factors to be taken into consideration when choosing locations for a live brand experience, there is the pressing fifth factor: cost. Space hire can vary from free to extremely expensive, and can be the make-or-break factor when it comes to the ROI and LROI from a live brand experience. The cost should be directly in line with the location's footfall (or visitor traffic), ambience, physical space and positioning.

For example, a high-footfall location might cost more to hire than a low-footfall location, but if you compare the cost per thousand people visiting both locations, then you may find that the space with the lower price is far more expensive when it is related back to the volume of interaction opportunities that it provides. In this respect, looking at the cost of hiring live brand experience space is similar to looking at the cost of hiring media space. Placing an experience in the right physical or virtual space is similar to scheduling an advert in the right media space. Some owners are aware that their space is very valuable from an ambience or positioning (how it is perceived by its visitors) perspective and take advantage of this by charging high rates to those who wish to hire space. Other space owners (from event promoters to property tycoons, and website entrepreneurs) haven't taken the financial opportunity of hiring space for live brand experiences into consideration; when this is the case, they will usually be willing to provide good rates or contra deals, so sometimes it is good to be creative and think 'out of the box' when scouting or on reconnaissance. Think of places that other brands may not have used for this purpose in the past, in order to maximize the value of the space you can get in return for your investment.

Every element that has been covered thus far in the SET MESSAGE planning system will come into play when selecting the right locations for the brand experience. Therefore, you should keep in mind the Situation and background, the Experiential objectives, the Target audience, the Message – key communication, and the Experiential strategy when considering the space hire options that you have available.

Bear in mind that any location with people in (or on) it could be a potential locations for live brand experiences, from cinemas, to television channels, to gyms, to Second Life, to libraries and many,

many more. Below are some examples of locations that have been used for live brand experiences.

Examples of live brand experience locations

An in-store live brand experience

Harry is a marketing manager for a market-leading brand of PCs and printers. When his experiential marketing agency was tasked with the brief of increasing sales and bringing to life the stylish Brand personality of an expensive new printer it was launching, the agency decided that the right locations would be in-store. The printer, which has a premium price and targets affluent dads, required an experience that both added value to the participant and drove sales. The experiential marketing agency designed an experience held in the stores where the printers were sold. The experience invited participants (dads with their kids) to have their photos taken in front of a branded backdrop. Their photos were printed out on the spot and given to the participants. Those who chose to buy the printer also received a high-quality, sterling silver frame for their photo.

Live brand experiences at events

Events-based experiences can be wholly or partly organized by brands, and provide the opportunity to create a large-scale environment with plenty of chances to add value and bring the Brand personality to life. In Britain, Ben & Jerry's organizes an annual music festival 'Ice Cream Sundae', while Innocent Smoothies organizes an annual organic-themed festival 'Village Fete'. Both of these attract thousands of avid participants, who interact with these brands while they makeover large parks in the summer.

Even though it can be successful to organize a large-scale event, existing events can also be fantastic settings for live brand experiences. They are especially effective for achieving objectives such as 'position the brand as x' or 'gain credibility with y'. By positioning a live brand experience at an existing event, you affiliate with the event's values and the aspirational lifestyle it represents for its guests, in much the same way as sponsoring such an event. The visitors' perceptions of the event instantly 'rub off' onto their perceptions of the brand, and vice

versa. Though live brand experiences enable deep and relevant two-way interactions that sponsorship can't achieve alone, the branding opportunities that sponsorship deals provide can be complementary to the live brand experience, reinforcing awareness and strengthening the impact of the live brand experience channel. Sometimes, good package deals that include both live brand experience space and sponsorship branding can be negotiated at events.

A live brand experience at a sports match/game

The founder of a poker website wanted to bring to life the brand's 'Living the dream' message while driving membership sign-ups. The experience he designed with his experiential marketing agency involved a branded stretch Hummer limo with external plasma screens. The Hummer parked outside sporting events and a team of Las Vegas-style female Brand ambassadors, the 'Living the dream girls' exited the Hummer, which had a casino-themed interior, and they invited the male sports fans to have their photos taken with them. The sports fans sat in the Hummer and felt like they were 'living the dream'. The team of glamorous Brand ambassadors also distributed scratch-cards to passers-by, encouraging them to scratch off the printed poker card design and win 'free money' (online gambling credit). The sports fans who had their photos taken with the girls were invited to log on to a micro-site and download their photos, whilst being entered into a competition to win prizes such as trips to Las Vegas, and a VIP night out with the 'Living the dream girls'.

A live brand experience at an exhibition

A brand of premium gin that targets fashionable females aged 18–30, wanted to create a live brand experience that brought its Eskimo-themed Brand personality to life, drove product trial and captured participant data. The data would enable continued communication with the participants, allowing the brand to invite them to exclusive gin events that they planned to organize in the future. Sandy, the marketing director for the brand, hired an experiential marketing agency to deliver the live brand experience on a trial basis, prior to shifting more resources and investing in the ongoing live brand experience programme. For the trial, the agency hired space at a fashion exhibition, knowing that the Target audience was the primary demographic of the exhibition's guests. It would be the only gin brand to exhibit at this show, which would be saturated by clothing and cosmetics brands.

The set was a super-cold igloo-style stand, which was very realistic and even featured real ice and real-looking snow. The participants were invited to put on branded Eskimo coats and go into the two-degree igloo, enter a competition to win a fashion-filled party holiday to Iceland and receive a shot of gin. The Brand ambassadors were fashion models dressed as Eskimos who engaged the participants and appealed to their aspirational lifestyle. By positioning the brand experience at a fashion exhibition, the brand gained credibility with a hard-to-impress audience, and the experience was ‘the talk of the show’. By capturing data through the competition entries, the brand succeeded in building a database of participants who would soon become brand evangelists and spread word-of-mouth – especially after being invited to exclusive invite-only fashion events.



An online live brand experience

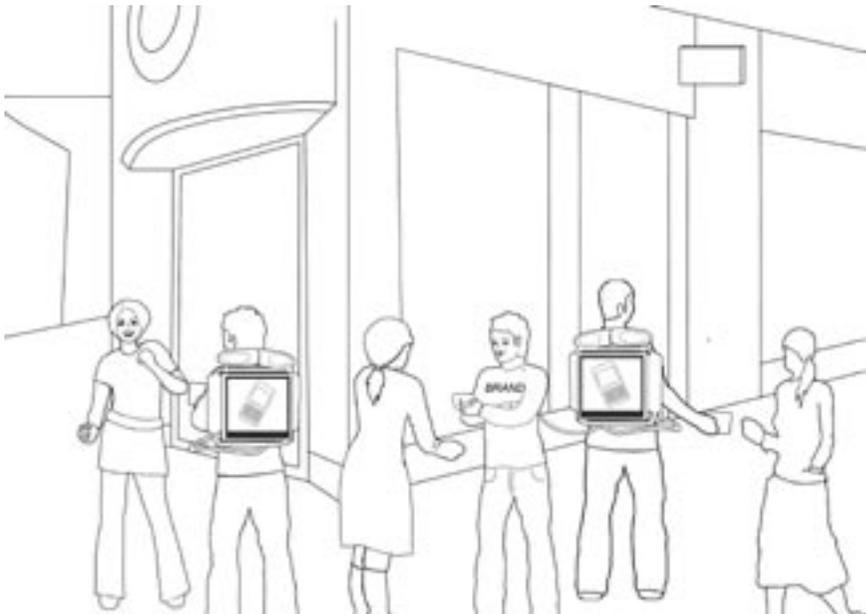
Live brand experiences are not only suitable for face-to-face locations; you can deliver a great live brand experience online or in any remote environment that facilitates two-way interactions in real time. In recent years, a well-known brand of iced tea wanted to reach large numbers with a limited budget. It decided to save money on logistics and space hire by holding its live brand experiences on the internet. The iced tea

brand had a sexy and refreshing Brand personality, and the objective of the live brand experience was to drive word-of-web.

The brand worked with a digital agency to develop a micro-site featuring a flash game. The game featured a beach setting and showed lots of animated 3D sexy people sunbathing, surfing, walking around and playing volleyball. The game challenged participants to refresh the beachgoers before they became dehydrated and dropped to the floor. To rehydrate the beachgoers, participants had to drag-and-drop cans of iced tea from a branded cooler, quickly enough to fill up the 'refresh-o-meter' on the side of the screen. The fun and addictive game had the exponential element of a score board with the option to send a 'challenge invite' to a friend, and as a result its hits grew exponentially. High scorers on the game received a month's supply of the iced tea and all participants had the opportunity to order a free branded T-shirt, thus becoming walking adverts for the brand.

A live brand experience outside stores

A marketing manager at a mobile phone manufacturer wanted to drive footfall into the stores that were selling an innovative new phone. She designed a simple live brand experience held on the street outside the



stores. The experience involved a team of Brand ambassadors wearing Adscreens on their backs. The Adscreens were connected to the phones, and the Brand ambassadors demonstrated the unique features of the phone to passers-by. During this time they were able to communicate key messages and ask participants about how they organize their social life, demonstrating how the phone's features could facilitate socializing. This interactive demo brought to life the phone's Brand personality, which focused on the 'business of socializing', whilst driving footfall into the stores and thereby increasing sales.

A live brand experience in shopping malls

A clothing catalogue that targets busy women aged 25–50 has a fashionable and relaxing Brand personality. The Message – key communication was that with the catalogue, busy women can shop easily and conveniently from home without the stress of shopping malls. Grace, its brand manager, wanted to encourage consumers who were in shopping malls to relax and shop from home using the catalogue. Her objectives were to promote the catalogue's new cosmetics offering and sign people up for catalogue subscription.

She worked with an experiential marketing agency and created a live brand experience that toured 12 shopping malls (with a high percentage of the target demographic) with a weekend at each. The experience invited visitors to be pampered in a branded relaxation set. The participants received a relaxing pedicure and foot massage, relieving their tired 'shopping feet'. While they were enjoying this treat, they were given copies of the catalogue by the Brand ambassadors, who encouraged them to browse through the cosmetics and fashion items on offer. Grace succeeded in driving catalogue subscriptions by making subscription a prerequisite for participating in the live brand experience. After being pampered, participants were given goody bags by the Brand ambassadors that included a copy of the catalogue, make-up samples from the catalogue's cosmetics range, and a discount voucher for their first/next purchase.

A live brand experience in offices

An upmarket credit card brand that targets affluent professionals wanted to communicate its Message – key communication, that it goes 'the extra mile' for consumers and has a helpful, concierge-style Brand personality. The credit card brand gained permission for its Brand

ambassadors (who were dressed as concierges) to enter the office blocks of large, successful organizations and offer executives the chance to have their suit jackets dry-cleaned and returned by the end of the day. The Brand ambassadors returned the pristinely dry-cleaned blazers in a protective branded wrap. Then, they communicated the message: when the professionals signed up with the card, they could call and ask for advice on anything, from dry cleaning services and hard-to-find sports tickets, to restaurant reservations and movies. This office-based live brand experience succeeded in engaging the right demographic while communicating the brand's message and bringing to life the credit card's concierge-style Brand personality.



A live brand experience at skiing /snowboarding slopes

Marko, a brand manager for a manufacturer of gadgets and MP3 players, wanted to bring to life the funky, trendy Brand personality of its latest MP3 player and recorder. Marko secured a partnership with a funky skiwear shop for the live brand experience. He organized skiwear fashion shows with popular DJs and stylish light displays at snowboarding and skiing competitions. Brand ambassadors invited participants to

watch the skiwear fashion show, gave out PDAs that were pre-loaded with multiple-choice questions and encouraged participants to identify which brands of clothing each model was wearing. The models on the catwalk had numbers on their backs, and participants logged their guesses (along with providing their contact data). The top 10 scorers won MP3 players, whilst all participants received earmuffs featuring the logo of the player.

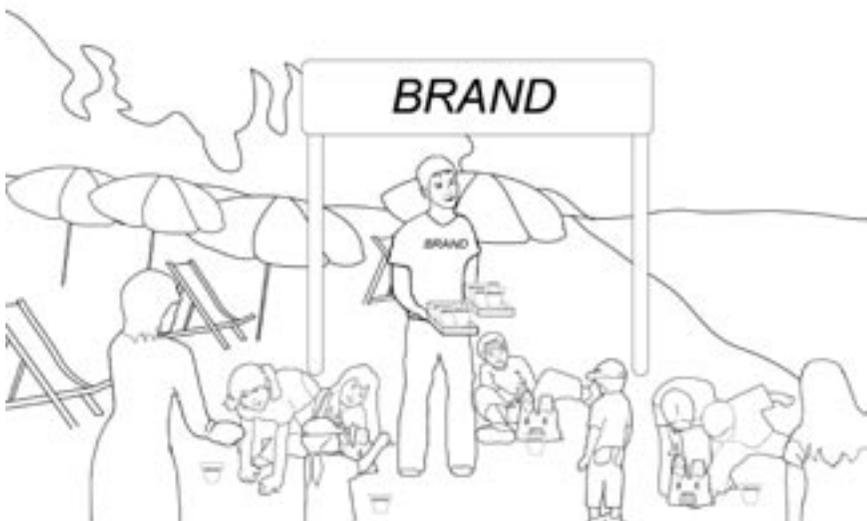


A live brand experience on the beach

Greg, the owner of a restaurant chain located in tourist resorts, targets families on holiday. The restaurant chain's Brand personality was 'fun' and 'kid friendly'. Greg had not seen a good return on investment from his previous marketing and advertising campaigns and wanted to try an experiential marketing approach with live brand experience at its core. He hired an experiential marketing manager to organize an interactive live brand experience targeting families at the beaches near his restaurants. Jackie, his new employee, carefully followed the SET MESSAGE system and designed a live brand experience that invited beach-going kids to enter the 'Sandcastle Challenge', a sandcastle-making competition. She asked kids from families who already ate

at the restaurants to use the crayons provided and draw pictures of themselves on the beach making sandcastles. The best drawings were adapted to form adverts promoting the ‘Sandcastle challenge’. The ads that served as an amplification channel were printed in tourist guides, shown as banner ads on resort websites, and even used to make flyers that were displayed in branded dispensers at reception desks in local hotels. She hired and trained bubbly children’s entertainers, forming teams of Brand ambassadors. The teams were deployed at beaches and gave out sandcastle-making kits that featured the restaurant chain’s branding. The Brand ambassadors encouraged kids to participate and make impressive sandcastles in the hope of winning a free meal for their whole family. All participating children received branded caps to wear when making their sandcastles, while the mums and dads received flyers featuring the restaurant’s menu and a buy-one-get-one-free offer.

On the selected beaches, the ‘Sandcastle Challenge’ (and therefore the chain of restaurants) became the main topic of conversation for every family with kids. Jackie also used PR as an amplification channel by giving local newspaper editors free dining passes in return for them featuring photos of the competition winners on the front pages of their publications. Photos of the kids making the sandcastles were even featured on a hall-of-fame board inside the restaurants, further enforcing the restaurant’s fun and kid friendly brand personality.



Live brand experiences are like theatre productions

A live brand experience is like a theatre production, where the Brand ambassadors can need as much training and rehearsal as actors on a stage. The cast, the lighting, the rigging and the audience are all key factors in the smooth delivery of a successful performance. This is not to say that the Brand ambassadors should not believe what they are saying; that would be far from ideal. In fact, a vital factor in the success of a live brand experience is that the Brand ambassadors have an opportunity to experience the product themselves, like becoming method actors who truly feel that they are the character they are playing.

If the Brand ambassadors are given the opportunity to trial the product or service prior to the live brand experience going ‘live’, they will always be able to speak from the position of a genuine personal recommendation when communicating with participants. The personal recommendation and word-of-mouth, as previously discussed, are the ultimate marketing tools that create the golden bonds between consumers and brands.

The reason it is important to draw a parallel between actors and Brand ambassadors is that they need to be carefully trained on the brand, product and Experiential objectives, but most important, truly believe in the brand, similar to the way in which actors must get into their role, fully rehearse their lines and movements, and truly believe that they are the character. The Brand ambassadors should be as rehearsed and genuine as actors, and the behind-the-scenes cast of a live brand experience need to work together as a team, just like the behind-the-scenes cast of a theatre production. There must be a strict schedule, highly organized production managers and contingencies in place across every element of both types of production because, as with theatre, live brand experiences are executed in real time. There is no time to edit later or cut out the bad bits.

Brand ambassador selection

Proper selection of Brand ambassadors is of ultimate importance to the success of live brand experiences. When your agency is selecting Brand ambassadors, there are three key factors to be taken into consideration:

1. Matching the Brand ambassadors to the Target audience and/or their aspirational lifestyle.
2. Selecting Brand ambassadors who are suited to the brand and the Experiential objectives.
3. Contingencies need to be put in place when hiring Brand ambassadors.

1. Matching the Brand ambassadors to the Target audience and/or their aspirational lifestyle

The first key factor is deciding when it is appropriate to match the Brand ambassadors with the Target audience themselves (so that participants can relate to the Brand ambassadors), and when it is preferential to match the Brand ambassadors to individuals that reflect the Target audience's aspirational lifestyle (so that the participants look up to the Brand ambassadors).

A nappy brand

For example, a popular brand of nappies uses an integrated experiential marketing strategy and places live brand experiences at the core of its campaigns. If it hired glamorous young models to become its Brand ambassadors while promoting its brand of nappies to mothers at supermarkets, it is unlikely that the mothers would have been able to relate to the Brand ambassadors, or that a genuine relationship between the two groups would have formed. Young Brand ambassadors of this type are unlikely to be running a family of their own, and therefore would not have been able to relate to the concerns and considerations that the mothers have when they are purchasing nappies.

The nappy brand knows that it is best to match the Brand ambassadors to the Target audience, which is why when briefing its staffing agency, it clearly specifies that its highest priority in Brand ambassador selection is that the Brand ambassadors are mothers with young children themselves, and it is compulsory that they receive nappies to trial before they are able to work on the live brand experience.

A tanning product

In contrast, a brand of tanning products targets women who aspire to be glamorous and sun-kissed, and it is correct in encouraging its agency to select the aforementioned variety of model-like Brand ambassadors. The brand knows that its customers purchase tanning products because using them makes them feel closer to achieving their aspirational lifestyle.

During its last campaign, tanned and beautiful Brand ambassadors engaged women and encouraged them to participate in the tanning product's live brand experience. As a result, the participants made the connection between the beautiful Brand ambassadors and the tanning product, which led them to associate the outcome of using the product with their desired physical appearance. Therefore in this brand's live brand experience programme it was more appropriate that the Brand ambassadors matched the aspirational lifestyle of the Target audience, rather than if they had been selected to match the Target audience themselves.

A nicotine patch

When a brand of patches that help people quit smoking designed a live brand experience to promote the patch, it ensured that the Brand ambassadors were non-smokers who at some point in their lives had smoked but succeeded in quitting. The reason for this choice was that during the Target audience part of SET MESSAGE, Tom, the patch's brand manager, had identified a key insight while he studied the Target audience's aspirational lifestyle (smokers who want to quit). He found that the Target audience aspired to be like people they knew who had previously smoked and succeeded in quitting. The Brand ambassadors were able to encourage many of the live brand experience's participants to try the patch because they had inspired them with their stories of having previously achieved quitting smoking themselves.

Just imagine the consequences if the brand hadn't taken any precautions, and Brand ambassadors wearing anti smoking T-shirts were seen smoking cigarettes on their lunch breaks!

Life insurance

Recently, a financial services company launched a live brand experience that targeted one of its life insurance products at men and women aged 55 to 70. The Selected locations were bingo halls and golf clubs frequented by the Target audience. The day-in-the-life analysis and aspirational lifestyle research conducted by the company's experiential marketing agency showed that the 55–70-year olds considered their 40s to have been the time of their lives that were most enjoyable, and they often aspired to recapture the way they looked and felt during that time. Some additional supporting research also provided an important insight: the Target audience didn't consider young people to be credible sources for information on important financial matters such as life insurance.

The agency had an in-house staffing division and strategically selected Brand ambassadors who were mainly in their 40s because they

were old enough for the Target audience to relate to while still young enough to represent the Target audience's aspirational lifestyle. As a result, the Brand ambassadors were able to successfully connect with the participants, strengthening the relationship between the brand and its Target audience whilst selling the life insurance product to a record percentage of participants.

2. Selecting Brand ambassadors who are suited to the brand and the Experiential objectives

It is important that the Brand ambassadors are reflective of the brand personality and are suited to the campaign's Experiential objectives. Some Brand ambassadors are good at driving sales; they have the qualities required, including persistence, charm and stamina.

Brand ambassadors need to be carefully selected to reflect the brand personality and bring it to life. If a brand is sophisticated, its Brand ambassadors must be the epitome of sophistication. On the other hand, if a brand personality is fun and comical, so must be the Brand ambassadors.

A brand of streetwear

A brand of hooded sweatshirts, hats and jackets had the Experiential objective of positioning itself as a preferred choice of funky streetwear, and gaining credibility with a funky youth audience. The brand manager, Laura, hired a promotional staffing agency to provide Brand ambassadors who were skateboarders and graffiti artists with progressive looks such as funky hairstyles, tattoos and piercings. The skateboarders and graffiti artists who were selected locally were well-known on the streets in their areas, and once they interacted with the Target audience through a street art competition, the results were exceptional.

The experience invited the Target audience to participate in spray-painting the purpose-built walls surrounding the stores, as well as the skateboarding ramp inside the store, giving them a chance to win concert tickets and other youth-oriented prizes. The brand gained the same respect and credibility that the skateboarders and graffiti artists had to begin with.



3. Contingencies need to be put in place when hiring Brand ambassadors

The third and most important factor to remember when you or your agency are selecting part-time Brand ambassadors is that many of them have other commitments that they may see as a higher priority than being a Brand ambassador.

Many Brand ambassadors are out-of-work actors, models, singers or dancers who are well suited to live brand experiences because of their bubbly, performance-oriented nature. Though these types of people can be very good choices on many occasions, and the work suits them because they need to maintain flexible employment to enable them to go to castings, auditions and performances when necessary, they may be liable to cancel at the last-minute due to 'call-backs', or bookings for their 'real careers'.

Some Brand ambassadors are housewives, or students who again have other commitments such as children or degrees, which they are likely to see as higher priorities than your campaign, and if they need to attend to their existing commitments due to an unexpected occurrence, they are liable to let you down. Additionally, there are also many genuine reasons why Brand ambassadors might let down their agencies and their agencies' clients. They might pull out at the last minute due to sickness,

car breakdowns, deaths of relatives, along with a multitude of other unpredictable emergencies.

These apparently devastating and unavoidable occurrences need not jeopardize the success of the live brand experience. If Brand ambassador contingencies are adequately planned and prepared, and a 'problem solving in advance' approach is employed, then these types of cancellations will not cause major problems.

No matter how friendly, well-meaning or committed your Brand ambassadors are, difficult things will happen and in a live marketing environment, there needs to be a Plan B for every scenario. By having additional Brand ambassadors trained and on standby, or present during the live brand experience as 'reserves', a full team headcount can usually be achieved.

Reserve Brand ambassadors are crucial to the success of the live brand experience. Most good experiential marketing agencies have an in-house staffing division, because the agency will know the importance of the Brand ambassadors to the success of the live brand experience (especially when it is executed face to face).

It can be highly detrimental to attempt to book, train and manage Brand ambassadors yourself if you don't have the proper resources to do so. This is a full-time activity and requires a lot of patience, skill and experience. Therefore, it is best for clients not to attempt to manage Brand ambassadors and leave this task to a specialist agency (or an agency that will effectively outsource to one).

The extensive experience that is required for this type of problem solving and trouble shooting strengthens the argument for not attempting to bring staffing in-house. It must also be remembered that experiential marketing agencies or staffing agencies provide their Brand ambassadors with regular work, and they maintain a certain level of loyalty as a result. The relationship between an agency and its Brand ambassadors (and event managers) is extremely valuable, and its importance should not be underestimated.

Recruiting Brand ambassadors

It is good to try and gain an understanding of your experiential marketing agency's recruitment strategies and policies, because its approach to recruitment can make a difference to the performance and success of the Brand ambassadors in your live brand experience.

There are two different approaches to recruiting Brand ambassadors: either they are recruited specifically for a one-off live brand experience,

or they are recruited to join a general database where they can be booked for lots of jobs, and then selected from that database for specific live brand experiences. Brand ambassador recruitment ads can be placed online on relevant websites and forums or offline, for example posters in independent shops or face to face at events.

Word-of-mouth is also a common recruitment driver. Once an agency gives lots of fun work to its Brand ambassadors, they often tell their friends and colleagues about that agency and many Brand ambassadors start applying to join their books. Word-of-mouth recruitment can be encouraged by the use of 'Refer a friend' schemes, where Brand ambassadors are incentivized to recommend others to join the agency's books. There can be downsides to such schemes. For example, if a team of friends are booked to work together as Brand ambassadors, and one cancels, the others are more likely to cancel too. A social attitude to work can develop that is unprofessional; it can create a situation where Brand ambassadors spend too much time chatting and not enough time engaging with participants.

With that said, there are some advantages. Small or remote geographic areas can be hard to recruit in, and in these cases 'Refer a friend' schemes can be successful as long as relevant precautions are taken, such as not booking friends to work together and ensuring that only experienced Brand ambassadors are able to work. In addition, good Brand ambassadors who have worked in live brand experiences for years, tend to know other good Brand ambassadors from past live brand experiences. This is a definite advantage and can mean that when Brand ambassadors try and join an agency's books, another member of staff can vouch for them. The Brand ambassador who vouches for them is unlikely to put his or her own reputation on the line to get work for a friend, so this can usually be trusted.

Important points that an experiential marketing agency's staffing division should review when selecting and recruiting Brand ambassadors are as follows.

Selecting Brand ambassadors

- The Target audience and their aspirational lifestyle.
- The Brand personality and the Experiential objectives.
- Contingency Brand ambassadors.

Recruiting Brand ambassadors

- The communication skills of the individual.
- Their experience.

- The geographic locations that they cover.
- Their willingness to travel.
- References from other agencies.
- Their availability.
- Their tax status (self-employed or otherwise).
- Whether they drive or own a vehicle.
- Whether they own a camera.
- Whether they have internet access.
- How easy they are to get hold of (do they usually answer the phone straight away?).

Briefing Brand ambassadors

The agency should always send a briefing manual or document to the Brand ambassadors prior to their attending or participating in the training. The briefing manual should cover:

- legal issues;
- code of conduct;
- background information on the brand;
- the live brand experience's objectives;
- a description of their role and what is expected from them;
- the elements of the Message – key communication they should say;
- the Target audience;
- practical information such as times, dates, locations, routes or transport schedules;
- their rate of pay;
- a summary of any bonus scheme or fines;
- the agency's terms and conditions;
- rules prohibiting Brand ambassadors from poor conduct or last-minute cancellations;
- contact information;
- a confidentiality agreement (to ensure that information about a launch or live brand experience does not leak to the public prior to the intended date).

Training Brand ambassadors

Training Brand ambassadors and event managers prior to a live brand experience going live is extremely important and usually a necessity. In some cases, face-to-face training is not feasible due to budgetary

restrictions. Though this is not ideal, in this instance I highly recommend intensive remote training. Remote training should include online webinars, teleconferences and one-to-one phone training, supported by an automated quiz. It is important to remember to train the reserves and back-up staff as well as the main team, so that if somebody cancels, the replacement is of an equivalent standard.

A key part of training is that the Brand ambassadors have the opportunity to trial the product or service sufficiently. This ensures that their positive attitude towards a brand is genuine, and participants will be able to 'buy into' the real enthusiasm that the Brand ambassadors have for the product.

When holding a face-to-face training session, there is a format that has proved highly successful. It should be conducted only after the Brand ambassadors have received and had a chance to study their briefing manuals. The face-to-face training format should include:

- Brand information (an overview provided by a member of the client team).
- Demonstration or trial if relevant.
- Message – key communication training by a representative of the agency.
- Role-play. The Brand ambassadors are split into small groups, some taking on the role of the consumer and others taking on their actual role as Brand ambassadors. This should be supported by constructive feedback provided by at least one agency representative.
- A mini-performance from each of the small teams to the larger group. The team should swap so that everyone has a chance to perform as a consumer and as a Brand ambassador.
- A quiz game with a prize for the highest-scoring Brand ambassador.
- A question-and-answer session where a member of the client team and a member of the agency team address any queries from the Brand ambassadors.
- The trying on of uniforms to ensure good fit.
- A brief lecture from the agency member on the code of conduct and physical appearance.

Managing Brand ambassadors

When a live brand experience is active, Brand ambassadors will need an experienced event manager to oversee them. The role of the event manager can be varied but usually includes:

- Rating brand ambassadors' performance.
- Giving constructive feedback and on-location coaching.
- Positioning the team-members strategically in high-footfall positions, and away from each other to prevent chatter.
- Managing the budget and expenses.
- Giving a briefing and pep-talk prior to each shift.
- Managing the uniforms and stock control.
- Monitoring distribution data and data capture.
- Noting results, consumer feedback and qualitative surveys.
- Taking photos and video footage.
- Filling in reports and feedback forms.
- Driving vehicles or rigging sets.

Event managers are usually paid around double the rate that the Brand ambassadors are. Team leaders, who are like senior Brand ambassadors, are a good idea for most live brand experiences. They support the event manager and act as motivators for team spirit and positive moral, and they usually get paid 50 per cent more than the Brand ambassadors.

A loyalty scheme on each live brand experience, to incentivize successful individuals, is a big motivator. Points should be given to reliable, punctual and high-performing Brand ambassadors, team leaders and event managers. This can be very effective at encouraging loyalty among a live brand experience team. Inside an agency, the bonuses of its staff bookers and staffing managers can also be linked to the positive performance of the Brand ambassadors.

Summary

In summary, Brand ambassadors are like the face or identity of the brand during the live brand experience, especially when it is executed face to face. Their attitude, communication, appearance and morals represent your brand to your Target audience. Adequate selection, product trial, briefing, training and management are all important phases in ensuring the right human touch for your live brand experience. Brand ambassadors are a very important consideration when selecting an agency, whose approach to this matter should be a major consideration. By applying the best practice guidelines detailed in this chapter, you will be doing everything possible towards achieving the ultimate goal: that the Brand ambassadors speak from a perspective of personal recommendation, form a genuine connection with your Target audience, and inspire the participants to become brand advocates who spread positive word-of-mouth.

As well as providing an exceptional face for your live brand experiences, this part of your SET MESSAGE plan will ensure that the Selected locations (whether face to face or remote) are ideal in regard to the Target audience, their state of mind, practical considerations, and the reach of your live brand experience. This chapter will have guided you in planning a live brand experience that achieves ‘the right experience for the right people’.