

5 Situation and background

Up to this point we have gone through the BETTER brainstorm process, created the IDEA presentation(s), and shown them to the decision-making unit, boss or client. As a result, a decision has been made about which top-line idea is to be developed in further detail, since a more detailed idea, strategy and plan are required prior to implementation. This is where the SET MESSAGE model comes into play. SET MESSAGE is a more detailed planning system, which ensures that both your Experiential objectives and Experiential strategy are supported by built-in systems for systematic planning and Evaluation, enabling you to keep your campaign on track. These systems will allow the people responsible to assess the plans in depth prior to implementation and to gauge effectiveness during the campaign, as well as effectively evaluate it afterwards.

SET MESSAGE

The SET MESSAGE model stands for:

Situation and background;
Experiential objectives;
Target audience;
Message – key communication;

Experiential strategy;
Selected locations and Brand ambassadors;
Systems and mechanisms for measurement;
Action;
Gauging effectiveness;
Evaluation.

It is important to carry out a systematic planning process, so that once you've completed it you have a very straightforward framework to follow. The campaign plan becomes a blueprint for implementation success, in which delegating tasks and managing different segments of your campaign becomes simple. It has been said that 'If you fail to plan, you plan to fail.' This is definitely true for experiential marketing. The live brand experience should be at the core of the experiential marketing idea, and as with any live event, there are many more factors, both external and internal, to make things go wrong. Detailed planning is the only way to avoid the detrimental effects of unexpected eventualities occurring during a live brand experience. Also, by having a detailed plan that addresses every element of the campaign, you will have answers to many of the questions that will arise from those who may be sceptical about experiential marketing. Whether these inquisitive people are internal to your organization or part of a client team, it is important to show that you have covered all bases from the campaign's inception.

Consequences can be grave if planning is not carried out properly. As a busy individual, you will not have time to plan as you go along. If you fail to plan systematically, there are areas of your campaign that are doomed to be neglected, and sacrifices will have to be made. For example, if you do not decide what the measurement metrics for your campaign are in advance, then although your campaign may be successful, it will be impossible to prove that the benefits were a direct result of the campaign.

Imagine that you are working in an agency. One of your clients has a website and it has given you the task of creating an experiential marketing campaign designed to promote its website. If you failed to plan, how would you track visitors to the site? There would be no way of proving the direct correlation between the increase in site visitors and the consumers that engaged in the experiential marketing campaign. There is no guarantee that your client would not claim the increase was due to the £5 million it spent on traditional TV advertising. Even if you were sure that at least 60 per cent of this increase in traffic was due to the exciting and engaging experiential campaign you implemented, it is not a fact until you can prove it to your client or stakeholders. The Systems

and mechanisms for measurement part of the SET MESSAGE plan would have enabled you to plan how to communicate to stakeholders what portion of the increase in web traffic was due to the experiential marketing campaign. Something as simple as a promotional code or unique URL would suffice. Moreover, the client would have agreed to this form of measurement in advance and would, therefore, appreciate the significance of the results once the campaign has been implemented.

Not planning a live brand experience in detail can mean staffing inappropriate Brand ambassadors. No matter how amazing the idea for the live brand experience is, if the wrong team of Brand ambassadors interacts with the consumers, the concept behind the live brand experience could be nullified. Along with providing the right Brand ambassadors (to match the brand personality and target audience), detailed project management systems, budgets and schedules are essential in attaining success. If one were to miss important deadlines and have bad project management as a result, the campaign would inevitably lead to a below-par execution. Similarly, if the amplification channels are not properly integrated in the planning stages to maximize the impact of the live brand experience, a lot of money can be wasted on traditional media that does not contribute significantly to the overall success of the experiential marketing campaign.

The rest of this book is formatted according to the SET MESSAGE methodology, with each chapter focusing on a different letter of the planning system. By the time you finish reading, you will be able to see the importance of, and have a clear framework for planning an experiential marketing campaign in detail. The first step is discussed below.

Situation and background

The S in SET MESSAGE stands for Situation and background. This is the first category of your detailed experiential marketing campaign plan. The purpose of the Situation and background category is to give an overview of what the company and brand have been doing up until now and the relevance of this background to the current experiential marketing plan. This category should also detail information about competitors' previous experiential marketing programmes.

It is best to begin by including data on the history of the brand. For instance, there is a brand of energy drinks that targets people who play sport or live an active lifestyle. The energy drink was invented around 50 years ago and was originally targeted at sick children. However, after the

realization that the drink is more effectively targeted towards people with active lifestyles, the energy drink changed its positioning. This type of information is worth mentioning in the Situation and background part of the SET MESSAGE plan.

In addition to the historical background, you should also mention things such as the size of the market and the market share currently held by the brand. Any other key information about the philosophy and ethos of the brand, such as 'The brand is owned by a family business that operates with fair trade policies', would be excellent to mention in this category. It is also recommended that you look at the types of marketing carried out over the last five years and provide a brief summary, preferably in one or two paragraphs, indicating which marketing channels have been used (especially those that have been used with the most success or where there was a lack of impact on the brand performance).

Research the factors that have led this brand (your organization or client) to use experiential marketing. Where relevant, you should mention whether you or others have done any experiential marketing for this brand in the past, and if so, how successful the campaigns were.

For example, Jessica has been the brand manager of a denim company for the last five years. The majority of her marketing budget had gone into TV advertising, with some print advertising, and a bit of digital over the last year. The reason that she is now thinking of placing live brand experiences at the core of the marketing communications strategy is that the live experience channel is superb at driving word-of-mouth, can change the perception of the brand and reposition it as being trendier. After exploring tools like sponsorship, she has decided that an integrated experiential marketing approach will give the most credibility and the live brand experience channel, when amplified by the other selected channels, will be most effective in attaining her objectives. In Jessica's case, this is the first time she will be implementing an experiential marketing strategy. If, however, she had already done some experiential marketing for the brand, then it would be important to mention what the Strengths, weaknesses and insights report (this will be explained in detail later in the book) from the previous effort had shown.

Robert is a brand manager of a beer company. The beer is imported from Asia and has a very different taste to other beers. Robert has consequently run field marketing programmes to encourage product trial, which conveyed the strength of the product in the last three years. The previous field marketing initiatives have successfully driven

product trials, but they have not really succeeded in conveying the Asian heritage of the brand. Therefore, if you were Robert, at this stage in the SET MESSAGE method, you would explain that while the field marketing campaigns have been successful, they have not achieved all of the objectives. This is why Robert now wants to try an experiential marketing approach, replacing the field marketing with live brand experience programmes, and integrating the live brand experience into the other marketing communications channels to form the complete experiential marketing programme.

In the Situation and background, you should also mention any important changes that are relevant. Sometimes an experiential marketing methodology marks the introduction of a new strategy for the complete communications mix. The reasons for this could vary; for example, it could be a reaction to a customer experience management orientation developing throughout the organization.

In another example, Frank was the marketing director of a condensed milk drink brand. In response to a recent decision to adopt a market development strategy in which a new hard-to-reach audience of Caribbean males would be targeted, Frank decided that a traditional approach would not be appropriate. By using media, there would be a lot of wastage and Frank's market research agency felt that Caribbean males would not be as responsive to above-the-line methods. Therefore, he signed a significant portion of the marketing budget to a live brand experience programme and chose PR along with radio to amplify it and form the complete experiential marketing campaign. Frank explained this when he was preparing the Situation and background part of his SET MESSAGE plan.

Another element that should be included in the Situation and background category is research on your competitors and what experiential marketing they have done. When you were brainstorming using the BETTER model and presented the concepts using the IDEA format, you looked at competitors with the same type of Brand personality, product or Target audience, and what experiential marketing they have employed. This includes the Emotional connection they used and which senses they stimulated. Keep in mind: this is research that should have already been completed prior to coming up with the topline concept, so at this stage of your plan you are simply referencing it.

Summary

In summary, the Situation and background part of your SET MESSAGE plan should provide an overview of the brand's history, its current situation

or brief, what has happened before, why it was or wasn't successful, as well as any interesting and successful experiential marketing campaigns that other brands with similar Brand personalities or Target audiences have executed.