

Real experiences for real people



By [Lisa Cohen](#), issued by [OLC Through The Line Communications](#)

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Experiential marketing brings brands and people closer by delivering on what matters to consumers.

Smart brands are relying less on traditional marketing, and are awakening to a basic marketing truth: brands are about people, not products. Yet another marketing reality is that when it comes to connecting with consumers, nothing beats a real experience.

With an increase in consumers spending on "doing" rather than accumulating "stuff", and with a growing social currency being attached to more unique experiences, experiential marketing has become critical in not just simply exposing consumers to the brand, but making sure consumers "feel" the brand. Experiential marketing lessens the distance between the consumer and the brand. How so? Through relevancy and involvement, which yield memorable experiences.

Relevance is the intimate understanding of what matters to customers, and is essential in creating positive brand experiences - ones which not only entertain, but are profoundly meaningful to a person who comes into contact with a brand.

Human truths

Putting people at the centre of a brand means exploring human truths (chuck out the marketing fantasies please). It's to ask: How can I fit into my customers' lives and culture? What matters to them? Authentic insights into real people's needs have the power to unleash a unique experience offering, one that can't be replicated by competitors. And if they do, well, they're just sad copycats!

Coca-Cola's successful 'Share a Coke' global campaign is a glittering case study. When the soft drink giant replaced its traditional branding with popular names, there was much bustling in supermarket aisles as each consumer searched for their name or a friend's on a Coke can. The personalised Coke bottles became tweetpic-worthy, with a flurry of Favourites, Shares and Retweets on social platforms (#SideNote: Social media is a godsend to experiential marketing). Back to Coke's genius: What human truth did the brand tap into? It reached out to consumers and spoke to them as individuals. And we know most humans love that experience.

Locally, OffLimit Communications brought to life the [experiential arm](#) of the global 'Share a Coke' project, which opened the campaign to those whose names weren't on pack in-store. Through global learnings and an intimate understanding of time-poor teens, the agency further streamlined the process to help the consumer share a Coke in a fast and interactive way (twice as fast as any other market). Teens entered their names into a tablet and then stepped up to the vending machine to receive their can. Adding to the experience was that the machine not only talked to them, asking for their name, but it was their unique interaction (saying their name) that resulted in their can delivery. This well-oiled process cut down waiting times and enhanced consumer experience, setting a new global standard.

Putting customers centre stage

Yet another marketing "speak" that's become as unusable as a fax machine is that of getting the customer's "buy-in". Successful brands have realised it's not good enough to push messages and tell stories; they have a lucid understanding that consumers want to be part of the story. Consumers want to be written into the brand's script, they want to have a starring role.

The act of involving consumers in its story keeps great brands winning. The 'Fanta Surprise Box' an experiential stunt

complementing a much larger campaign, addressed the dearth of playing in young adolescents. Young people got actively involved in Fanta's world by playing various games and with their engagement, measured by the "fun-o-meter", unlocking the ultimate reward (a surprise performance by teen favourites Locnville) the result was not just a differentiated experience for teens that moved products for the brand, but a [YouTube video](#) that has kept racking up the views.

From a marketing spend point of view, experiential marketing is not cheap, and can be seen as an expensive gamble. Experiential marketing events are measurable, but with longer timelines than digital or TV campaigns. If a brand creates social currency and buzz, grows brand love and engagement, and moves sales, you can bet your bottom line it's headed in the right direction on the experience express!

ABOUT LISA COHEN

Lisa Cohen is a brand strategist specialising in the African market, and has been using her expertise and experience to drive strategy at Offlimit Communications over the past six years
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