

# IMPACT

## Marketing in the Experience Era

Q4/2024

Presented by GRADIENT

# WELCOME

From the beginning, my mission has been to create remarkable, connective experiences that inspire everyone to live stories. With this vision, I founded Gradient over 15 years ago, collaborating with the world's leading brands. Our vision adapts to evolving consumers and technologies to enhance client experiences.

At Gradient, we see experiences as the core of a consumer's journey. Events become truly experiential when they create ripples throughout the ecosystem, acting as connective tissue. Bonding with a brand occurs through meaningful, connected moments.

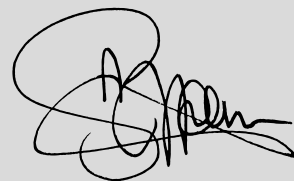
We're in a groundbreaking era. The evolving technological landscape offers unprecedented opportunities to measure and scale

experiential marketing. Robust metrics now prove its power, yet many brands and executives lack the understanding or hesitate to fully embrace these innovations.

This paper will change that. We spoke with industry-leading marketers, surveyed the marketing community, and gathered compelling data to create an actionable framework. We hope you find value in this open-source document to navigate the cutting-edge world of experiential marketing.

Now is the time for experiential marketing to claim its rightful place, evolving from a mere extension of a campaign to a key player in shaping the broader conversation.

Welcome to I.M.P.A.C.T.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Anthony Coppers', with a large, stylized initial 'A'.

Anthony Coppers  
Founder  
GRADIENT

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# SUMMARY

## THE POWER OF EXPERIENTIAL

Consumers today crave memorable, in-person interactions. Experiential marketing now represents nearly half of budgets, with over 80% of brands increasing investment. Traditional metrics often miss experiential's impact, underscoring the need for innovative measurement.

## THINKING BEYOND EVENTS

Experiential marketing isn't about one-off events—it's about ecosystems that seamlessly blend digital and physical touchpoints to create unforgettable brand moments.

## CONNECTING THE PIECES

Every interaction matters. Great experiential marketing unifies campaigns, channels, and content to amplify impact and forge lasting connections.

## PLANNING AHEAD

Experiences must lead the strategy. By embedding experiential early, brands can craft bold, cohesive campaigns that truly resonate.

## REDEFINING EXPERIENTIAL

This is storyliving: immersive, participatory moments that move hearts, build communities, and transform brands into unforgettable experiences.

## I.M.P.A.C.T. MODEL

Informed by extensive qualitative and quantitative research the I.M.P.A.C.T. model is a framework that offers a strategic roadmap for brands ready to make experiential marketing a core part of their storytelling and engagement.

- I.** Integrated
- M.** Measurable
- P.** Participatory
- A.** Affective
- C.** Community building
- T.** True to brand

“Brands that don't invest in *experiential* fall off the map.”

– **Chris Schmicker**  
Director of brand marketing, Shopify

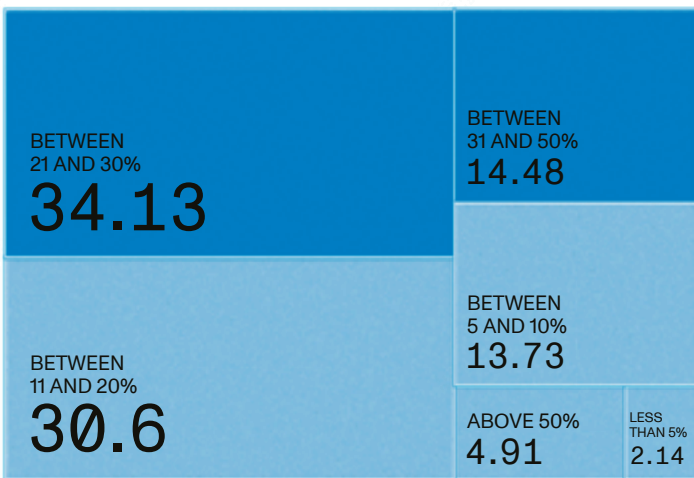
# INTRODUCTION

In today's hyper-connected world, we're more digitally linked than ever,

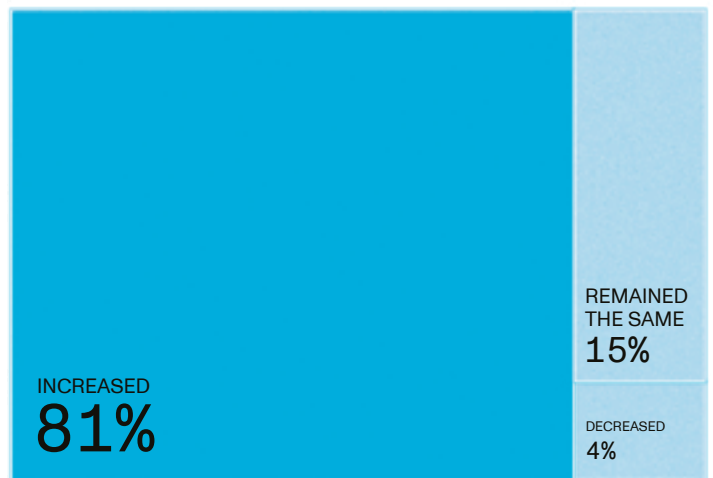
yet technology has also made us feel more isolated. The pandemic taught us a powerful lesson: Nothing replaces the value of in-person interactions. While technology kept us connected during those isolating times, it underscored our deep craving for genuine, face-to-face connections—especially among younger generations, who prioritize unforgettable experiences over mere product consumption.

## Percentage of overall budget in experiential/events

*Close to half of the respondents invest 21% to 50% of their budget in experiences or events.*



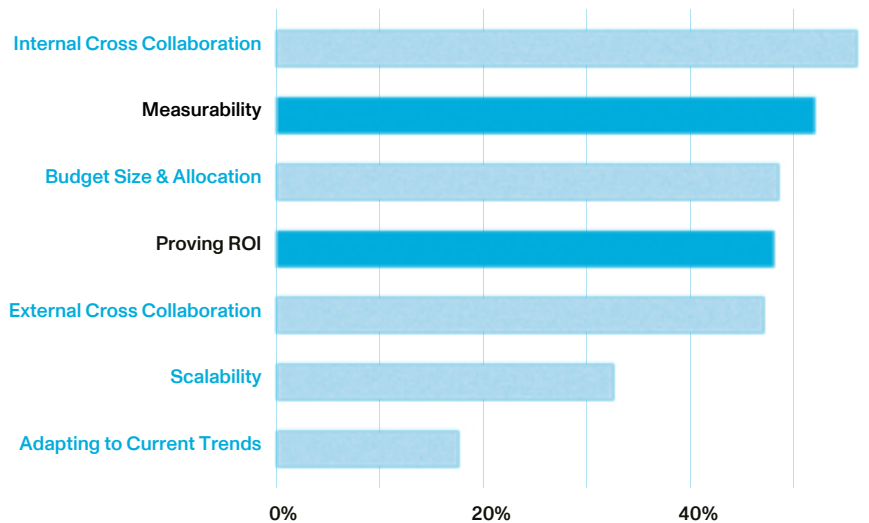
## Over the past 3 years, how has your experiential marketing budget changed?



It's clear: The digital and physical worlds are intertwined, transforming experiences into meaningful stories to live, share, and remember. Welcome to the Experience Era. Leading global brands are embracing this shift; according to Gradient's 2024 survey, 35% of senior marketers allocate 20-30% of their budgets to experiential marketing, with over 80% increasing their budgets in the past 3 years.

However, proving ROI for experiential marketing remains a challenge. Whilst foot traffic is among the most cited metrics in experiential marketing, it was the lowest priority objective according to the marketers we surveyed. This lack of alignment between KPIs and objectives makes it hard to justify investments.

## Biggest challenges faced with experience and events



“The money I’m investing has to *deliver in the short term.*”

– Musa Tariq

Former chief brand officer/head of marketing,  
Ford, Airbnb, & Apple Retail

“THE STORES REQUIRE A  
*MANIACAL FOCUS* ON THE  
*CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE.*”  
THEY SHOULD BE  
“*EXPERIENTIAL* RATHER  
THAN *TRANSACTIONAL.*”

– **Howard Schultz**

Main shareholder  
at Starbucks



Maison Margiela  
*Afternoon Delight*

“Brands must take a long-term view on *brand building*. Without investments like *experiential*, brands fall off the map.”

– **Chris Schmicker**  
Director of brand marketing, Shopify

Marketers face immense pressure for short-term, measurable results. As Musa Tariq, former chief brand officer and head of marketing at Ford, Airbnb, and Apple Retail, noted, “There is probably the greatest pressure on everyone to succeed and succeed fast. The money I’m investing has to deliver in the short term.” This focus can overemphasize digital performance, diluting the brand’s impact. While data-driven advertising seems irresistible, it often results in forgettable messages.

To rise above the noise, brands must diversify to build a robust presence. As Professor Scott Galloway of NYU Stern asks, “In addition to big, tall walls, where can we build deep moats?” The answer rarely lies in digital marketing alone. Shopify brand marketing director Chris Schmicker emphasizes, “Brands

must take a long-term view on brand building. Without investments like experiential, brands fall off the map.” Howard Schultz of Starbucks criticized over-reliance on mobile ordering, stating, “The stores require a maniacal focus on the customer experience,” urging a shift to being “experiential rather than transactional.”

Experience is crucial, yet misconceptions about scalability and measurability hold marketers back. By leveraging experience-based content and social media amplification, brands can create global experiences that captivate, convert, and build lasting loyalty.

Dive in to learn how to craft unforgettable and measurable experiences that drive results.

**47%**  
of leaders report difficulties in proving ROI.

# Methodology

With 15 years of crafting exceptional experiences for top brands, Gradient took a dual approach for this paper.

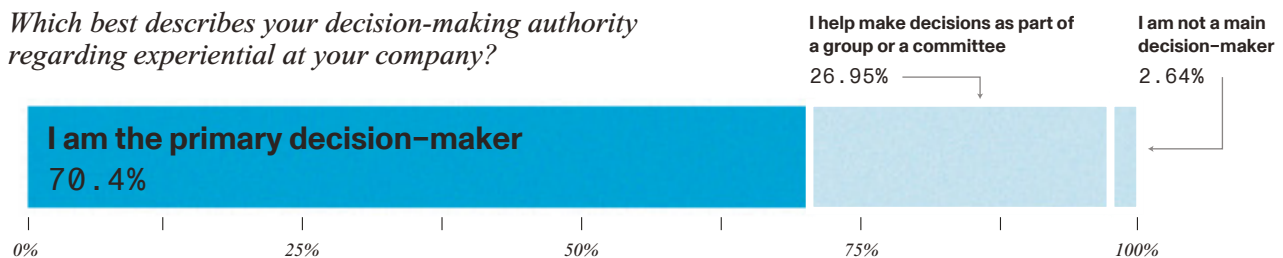
We conducted in-depth interviews with fourteen C-level marketers and brand presidents across diverse sectors. These insightful

conversations shaped our thesis and provided actionable takeaways woven into our writing with direct quotes.

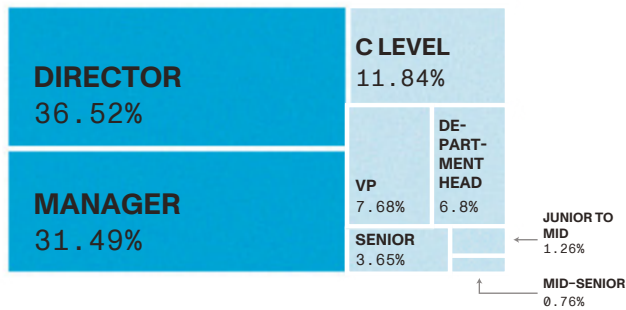
Additionally, we surveyed 750 senior-level marketers to validate our theories. These decision-makers in experiential marketing represent the following:

- Various company sizes (in terms of people and revenue)
- Diverse budget allocations
- Multiple industries and regions worldwide

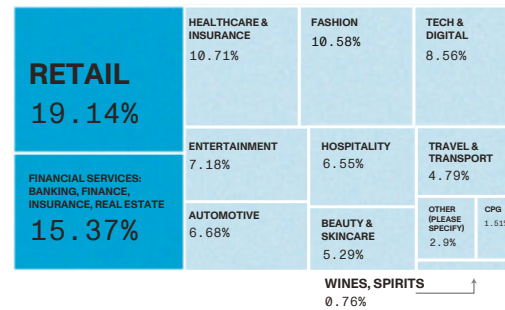
*Which best describes your decision-making authority regarding experiential at your company?*



*What is your role?*

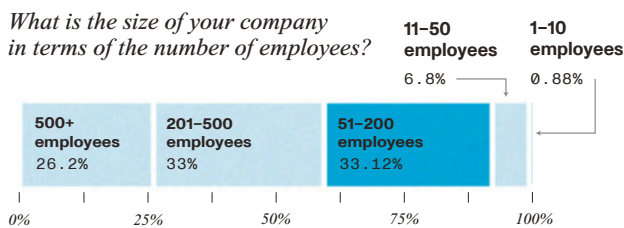


*What industry do you work in?*

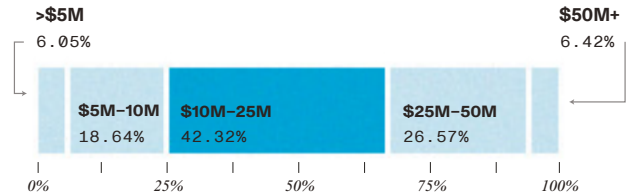


## DECISION-MAKING & INDUSTRY

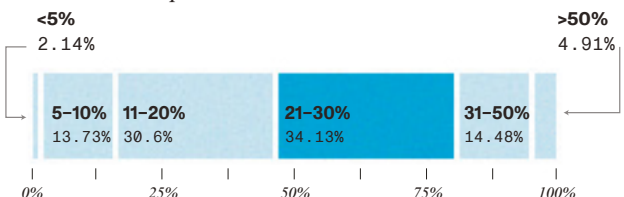
*What is the size of your company in terms of the number of employees?*



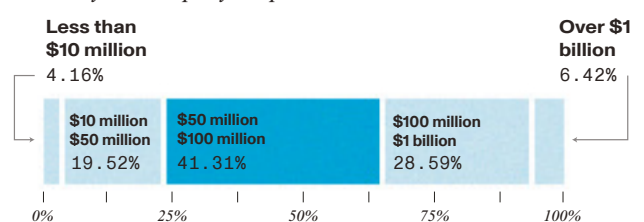
*What is the marketing budget of the company?*



*What percentage of the overall budget is allocated to experiences or events?*



*What is your company's top-line revenue?*



## BUDGET

*Shifting to an*

**EXPERIENTIAL  
ECOSYSTEM**

# 80%+

of respondents believe experiential marketing should be integrated more holistically within the campaign to avoid leaving ROI on the table.

## THINK BEYOND EVENTS

The phrase “experiential” was once a marketing term for events. While events can be valuable, this definition is now limiting. Why? Because as technology evolves, so does the integration of physical and digital experiences.

Marie Gulin-Merle, GVP for Ads Marketing & Centers of Excellence at Google, states, “Experiential is undergoing a second significant transformation. The first shift happened with social media—physical events connected with digital audiences and platforms via influencers and UGC. With the advent of AI and more connected online cultures, we are amidst another major transformation.”

Today’s technologies enable brands to scale, measure, and evaluate experiential marketing by embracing innovation. Olivia Crouan, chief brand officer at Audemars Piguet, adds, “I need to push innovation

in experiential now. My objectives are creative consistency, team efficiency, impact measurement, and innovations on and offline.”

## CONNECT THE PIECES

Don’t produce a series of events; create an experiential ecosystem.


What truly makes a difference is connection. Matthieu Rinville, former president of Americas at Moncler, captures it well: “Events need to be connected. They need to be part of a journey.” When marketers integrate physical experiences with lead campaigns and content marketing, the purpose and value increase dramatically.

Reframing customer acquisition, retail rituals, and point-of-sale through an experiential lens unlocks opportunities. Every brand interaction is an opportunity for experiential marketing, and when used effectively,

“Events need to be *connected*. They need to be part of a *journey*.”

– Matthieu Rinville

Former president,  
Americas, Moncler



“EXPERIENTIAL IS  
UNDERGOING A SECOND  
*SIGNIFICANT*  
*TRANSFORMATION.*”

– **Marie Gulin-Merle**

GVP, ads marketing & centers  
of excellence, Google

it connects brands to consumers. It goes beyond individual activations, curating every touchpoint with a holistic view.

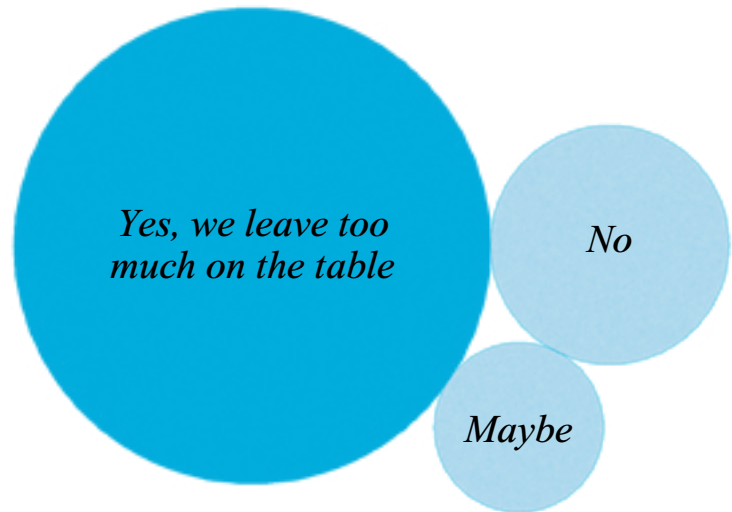
Experiential marketing doesn't replace other efforts; it connects them. Julie Bourgeois, former SVP, global head of Retail and Experiential Signature at Four Seasons Hotels & Resorts, notes, "Strategically, we place experience at the top of the pyramid."

High-performing brands view experiential marketing as an ecosystem that supports every channel, creating an immersive brand presence. This strategy integrates experiential elements into existing touchpoints, which boosts awareness, engagement, and loyalty.

#### **PLAN AHEAD**

Over 80% of respondents believe experiential marketing should be integrated more holistically to maximize ROI. This requires proactive planning from the start of campaign development. Experiential specialists should be involved early, much like brand strategy experts.

## **Should experiential be integrated earlier?**



“We always looked at [experiences] as an *ecosystem*.”

– **Avery Baker**

Former chief brand officer & president,  
Tommy Hilfiger

“Strategically, we place *experience* at the *top of the pyramid.*”

– Julie Bourgeois

Former SVP, global head of retail and experiential signature,  
Four Seasons Hotels & Resorts

#### **REDEFINE EXPERIENTIAL**

Experience. Experiential. Events. These terms are often used interchangeably, which can lead to confusion. A clear, actionable definition is imperative.

Experiential marketing is more than events, but is not as vast as “experience.” At its heart, experiential marketing (XM) leverages events and experiences to create moments that engage customers in memorable, personal ways. Physical events play a crucial role but only become true XM when they connect to the brand’s message, media, and mission.

John Schoolcraft, global chief creative officer at Oatly, puts it perfectly: “Every single contact and conversation is a brand experience—whether you like it or not.” Olivia Crouan of Audemars Piguet echoes this sentiment: “Experience is the whole consumer journey. Events are a part of it, but experience is the whole thing.”

Not all experiences fall under experiential marketing. While brand experience can drive innovative XM, focusing too much on customer experience (CX) or user experience (UX) can be distracting. Experiential marketing integrates these ideas with actionable components for modern marketers. It’s all about fostering ongoing engagement through interconnected touchpoints that create a signature brand presence.

This whitepaper presents a guiding methodology for experiential marketing: the IMPACT model.

As with all great experiential marketing initiatives, this model will improve with collaboration. Use it—and its accompanying IMPACT Worksheet—with your teams, and provide feedback for ongoing enhancements. We welcome all constructive feedback at [impact@gradientexperience.com](mailto:impact@gradientexperience.com). The IMPACT model is meant as an open-source tool to thrive in the Experiential Era.

## OVERVIEW

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*The*

# I.M.P.A.C.T. MODEL

**Welcome to the  
IMPACT model.  
An acronym that  
will remind you of  
everything that  
matters in your  
experiential project,  
campaign, or event.**

Effective marketing creates impact. This forms the acronym for our actionable model. How can marketers transition from producing events to crafting an experiential ecosystem without losing focus?

Apply the IMPACT model. Consider an experiential project, campaign, or event. Then ask yourself if it is:

- I.** Integrated
- M.** Measurable
- P.** Participatory
- A.** Affective
- C.** Community building
- T.** True to brand

The IMPACT model empowers marketers to unlock the full potential of experiential marketing, starting from a strategic vision and breaking it down into precise, actionable components and measurable criteria.

# I INTEGRATED

Effective experiential marketing is omnichannel and deliberately integrated into the broader marketing and sales efforts of a brand. Marketers should identify where experiences intersect with mediums beyond events, connecting with the entire marketing ecosystem.

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- Questions to consider**
- How many channels are involved?
  - How scalable is the idea across different formats?
  - What content (curated and UGC) can be generated?
  - What media (earned and paid) can be leveraged?
  - How does this connect with the brand story, strategy, and calendar?

# M MEASURABLE

Experiential marketing must be measurable to be meaningful. Marketers must be proactive, thorough, and innovative in creating KPIs and connecting reporting tools. Precision and diligence are essential to assess and amplify value, guiding informed future decisions effectively.

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- Questions to consider**
- What is your primary business objective, and how does this initiative impact it?
  - What are your key performance indicators (KPIs)?
  - How can technology enhance measurability?
  - How can captured data create future value?

# P PARTICIPATORY

Advertising is about storytelling; experiential marketing is about storyliving. It involves two-way interaction, not just one-way messaging. Marketers should craft interactive, immersive, and shareable moments. When consumers become characters in a journey, the experience transforms into an organic, evolving entity with greater depth and breadth.

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- Questions to consider**
- How is the experience personalized?
  - What decisions or actions are required, and how do they impact the experience?
  - Is there two-way communication?
  - Is there a reason to create and share content?

# A AFFECTIVE

Hearts move minds. People are motivated first by emotion, then by logic. Experiential marketing offers an unparalleled chance to create visceral, emotional connections that build lasting relationships. A well-designed experience resonates personally and sensorially with consumers.

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**Questions to consider** Who is our target consumer, and what do we want them to feel?  
Will this speak to them and trigger the right emotions?  
What will they remember?  
What will they want to talk about or share?

# C COMMUNITY BUILDING

Experiential marketing should foster group interactions to amplify the shared nature of the moment. An activation should create, strengthen, leverage, or grow a community, fostering shared memories and building culture, enhancing the personal experience.

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**Questions to consider** Is this experience designed for or enhanced by group participation?  
Are key cultures, subcultures, or fandoms engaging with this experience?  
How can online communities connect through this experience?  
How will people at this experience connect with each other?

# T TRUE TO BRAND

When engaging directly with consumers through experiential marketing, a brand must discover a distinctive, genuine expression that resonates across all touchpoints and iterations. Imitation and insincerity are swiftly recognized, but authenticity and personality foster invaluable connections. Experiences should reinforce your brand's moat.

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**Questions to consider** Could your main competitor have created this experience?  
What are your brand values, and how will people truly experience them?  
What are your brand codes, and how do they manifest aesthetically and physically?  
Is this experience truly authentic?

**IMPACT**

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**INTEGRATED**

*Through Channels,  
Across Touchpoints*



YSL Beauty Hotel

## **Experiential marketing is crucial yet complex, demanding integration in two main areas.**

First, experiential marketing must be an omnichannel effort, enriching existing campaigns and messaging with cross-platform content. Brands should seamlessly weave experiential elements into their overall marketing strategy.

Second, experiential marketing should transcend events to encompass every consumer interaction as a touchpoint. Julie Bourgeois indicates, “Many top luxury brands are putting experience at the center of their strategy,” emphasizing a shift toward a customer-centric approach. Over 50% of marketers now incorporate in-retail rituals and

influencer content into their strategies, with more than 20% considering experiential marketing as spanning all consumer journey touchpoints.

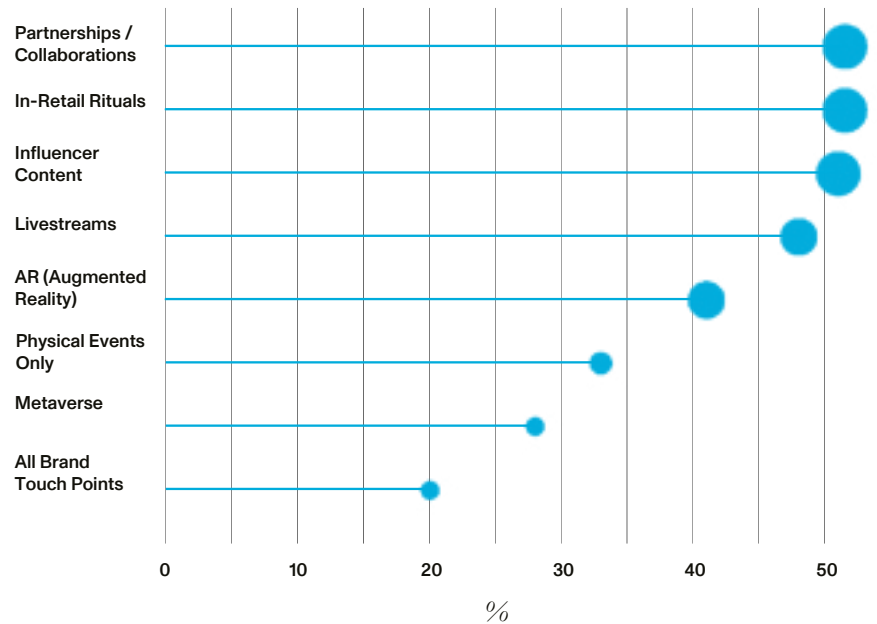
Olivia Crouan of Audemars Piguet stresses the need for “creative consistency,” aligning messages across touchpoints. By expanding experiential efforts, brands can build loyalty and long-term value. Jessica Spence, former president of North America at Suntory Global Spirits, adds, “Brands are just collections of memories,” highlighting the importance of curating every interaction.

Experiential marketing should complement rather than replace existing efforts, creating an ecosystem that enhances investments. Leading marketers use experiential elements to boost awareness and engagement,

treating each channel as part of an immersive experience. Avery Baker, former chief brand officer and president at Tommy Hilfiger, notes, “We always looked at [experiences] as an ecosystem” of consumer interactions.

The “Rule of 7” suggests that consumers need around seven interactions before purchasing. Since 73% of consumers might abandon a brand after a single negative experience, viewing every touchpoint as part of the overall experience is crucial. Large-scale events and memorable retail experiences can cultivate lasting brand advocates. Matthieu Rinville of Moncler remarks, “The consumer journey is a loop, and we have to find ways to keep consumers coming back.”

## What do you consider experiential marketing?



“Brands are just *collections of memories*, and you don’t get to pick the memories, so you must *curate every touchpoint* and moment.”

– Jessica Spence

Former president of North America,  
Suntory Global Spirits

Cartier Time Unlimited

“THE CONSUMER JOURNEY  
IS A *LOOP*, AND WE HAVE  
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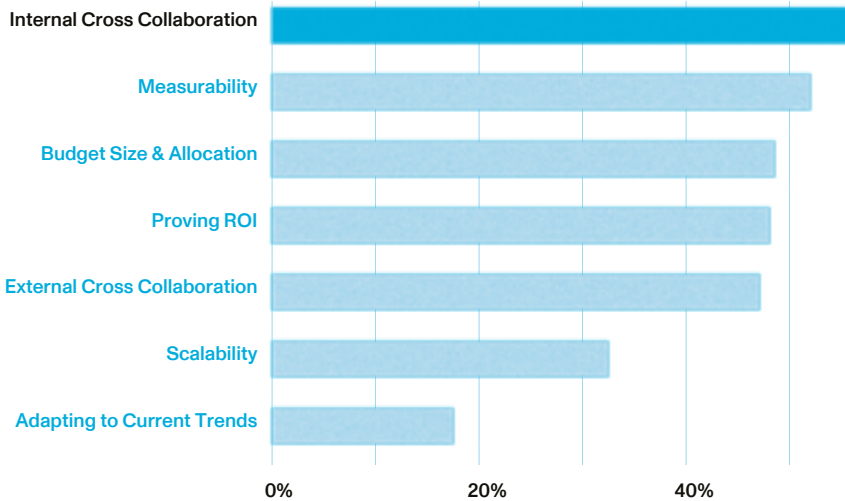
– **Matthieu Rinvile**

Former president,  
Americas, Moncler

# 56%

of marketers identify cross-collaboration between teams and departments as their top challenge in experiential marketing.

## Biggest challenges faced with experience and events



### INTEGRATE CONTENT

Chris Schmicker of Shopify says, “Part of the challenge we grapple with as marketers is creating experiences that can have great scale...that’s where the IRL to social connection is super important.” Experiential activations can transform the traditional marketing funnel into a continuous advocacy cycle. Content from these experiences—videos, photos, testimonials—captures authentic connections.

This content can enhance lower-funnel ads, leveraging authenticity to maximize investment. Yann Joffredo, global brands president of L’Oréal Luxe in the United States, says, “We need to listen to the convo, hack the convo, and make sure we’re part of that convo.” Experiential content often proves more efficient and genuine

than traditional methods. Joffredo adds, “If you want to create culture, you need to work with culture creators.”

Brands should view experiential marketing as less of an extension and more of a leading expression, inspiring campaign ideas and fostering authentic connections. For example, GoPro’s user-generated ad content exemplifies how effective experiential marketing can span multiple channels.

### INTEGRATE THE TEAMS

Gradient’s research shows that 56% of marketers find cross-collaboration to be their top challenge in experiential marketing. Successful integration requires breaking down silos between strategy, content, and retail. So, start conversations across your teams instead of disseminating directions top-down.

Dom Pérignon  
Exploration of Tactility



Marketers should engage integrated agency teams, blending expertise from creative, media, experiential marketing, and data analytics. This collaboration ensures alignment with brand goals and enhances overall strategy. Jessica Spence of Suntory Global Spirits stresses that big ideas should emerge collectively, not from a single agency. “I need a brilliant idea,” she says, “but my judgment will be how it translates into every touchpoint, not just a piece of content.”

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*For further actionable guidance on integration, deep dive into the “Integration Worksheet” accessible at the back of this document.*


## *Integrated Experiential Example*



### **Every Counter Counts**

La Mer, a leader in luxury skincare, sought to elevate every touchpoint to reflect its brand ethos. By reimagining beauty counter experiences and leveraging key marketing dates like Valentine’s Day

and Mother’s Day, La Mer transformed sales moments into immersive, brand-aligned encounters, enhancing customer interactions, driving sales, and deepening brand affinity through a cohesive consumer journey.



“TOP LUXURY BRANDS  
ARE PUTTING *EXPERIENCE*  
AT THE *CENTER*  
OF THEIR STRATEGY.”

– **Julie Bourgeois**

Former SVP, global head of retail  
and experiential signature,  
Four Seasons Hotels & Resorts

Tiffany & Co  
*Masterpieces*

**IMPACT**

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# MEASURABLE

Clear, Calculable,  
*Connected*

# Quantification is the greatest obstacle that brands encounter in the experiential marketing journey.

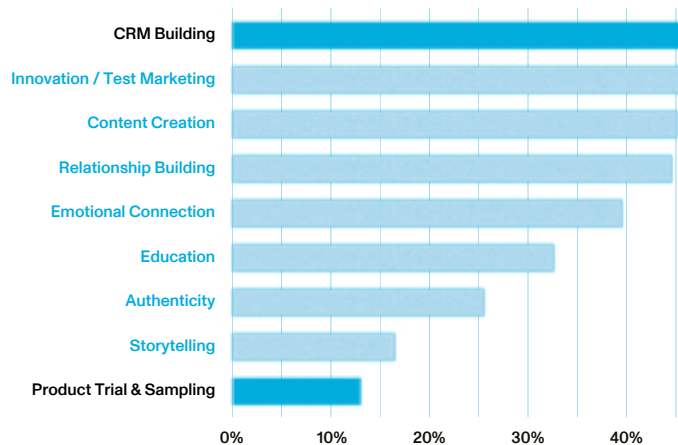
Data is essential to prove ROI and justify ongoing investment. It's also pivotal to understand the value and opportunity of experiential marketing and develop new ways to capitalize on it.

Rapidly evolving technology creates exciting ways to measure complex and abstract aspects. However, integrating experiential into the broader marketing measurement ecosystem remains critical to demonstrating both short-term demand and long-term brand growth. In both instances, clarity of intent is vital.

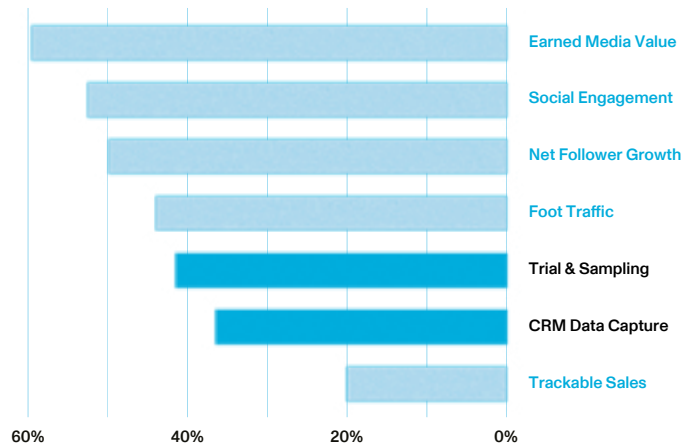
Marketers with clear objectives can be far more intentional with experiential marketing. Yet, research shows a significant gap between objectives and success metrics. For example, although product trials and sampling are among the least prioritized objectives, 40% of marketers use them as success metrics. Conversely, CRM building is a top objective, but CRM data capture is often neglected as a metric. Integration with retail is also lacking, with only 20% of marketers merging experiential efforts with sales, despite increased sales being a key ROI measure. This issue is highlighted by the trend of retail becoming content-driven.

This scattered data speaks to the need for more integration within experiential marketing. When viewed as standalone "events," brand experiences are often evaluated with metrics available on-site, with little consideration of how this

## What are the main objectives when hosting events or brand experiences?



## What are your current metrics to measure the success of your experiences?



“THE AMOUNT OF *COVERAGE* AND *CONVERSATION*... THAT HAPPENS AROUND THAT EVENT IS *MASSIVE* AND THE *BIGGEST PEAK* FOR THE BRAND.”

– **Christine Guzman**

Head of consumer engagement  
& digital, Moët Hennessy

– **Adriana Angulo**

Head of marketing NA,  
Veuve Clicquot



connects to the bigger picture or parallel efforts. To be truly effective in experiential marketing, marketers must use the necessary measurement tools that tie back to the actual objectives of the investment, just as they aim to do for all their marketing efforts.

Successful brands are refining their approach to measure the impact of experiences against well-defined goals. Chris Schmicker of Shopify notes, "The ROI that we're gleaming from our experiential investment is measured through earned social reach, not through lead gen."

Similarly, Christine Guzman, head of Consumer Engagement & Digital at Moët Hennessy, states, "The amount of coverage and conversation that we have, press coverage, and social media conversation that happens around that event is massive and the biggest peak for the brand."

Earned Media Value (EMV), as expressed by Schmicker and Guzman, is a leading KPI for most marketers. However, other brands infuse more performance focus into their thinking. Gordon Devin, president of Wilson Sportswear, explains, "We measure through traffic engagement, which ultimately equals transaction." In the case of Wilson, the company started from the business objective and worked backward to the ROI they needed before establishing the measurements required.

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*For further actionable guidance on measurability, deep dive into the "Measurable Worksheet" accessible at the back of this document.*

## Measure More Effectively

- 1. Begin at the End**  
Define the end goal, and link KPIs to objectives, balancing brand and demand metrics to measure both immediate returns and long-term benefits.
- 2. Measure the Multi-Channel Ripple Effect**  
Link experiential marketing to other channels like social media and digital ads, allowing measurement of their broader effects through engagement and sales metrics.
- 3. Transform Spikes into Steps**  
Convert short-term engagement spikes into long-term growth with follow-up campaigns, content marketing, CRM data utilization, and related analytics.
- 4. Plug into Greater Measurement Tools**  
Integrate experiential marketing into comprehensive measurement systems like Marketing Mix Models. Develop standard metrics, convert qualitative data to quantifiable insights, and collaborate across teams to enhance ROI measurement and justify further investment. Today's technology (AI and facial recognition, for example) allows for tracking that was unimaginable years ago. Embrace the future of measurement.  
  
A systematic approach to measuring the value of experiential marketing involves integrating meaningful metrics and multi-channel measurement. By leveraging cutting-edge measurement tools, this approach secures its place in tight budgets and drives long-term brand growth.

# Measurable Experiential Example



## Deeper Data

Suntory Global Spirits meticulously measures marketing investments, as seen with its U.S. festival tour for Basil Hayden's bourbon. In 2023, Basil Hayden enhanced its strategy by tracking samples, earned media, and regional sales,

linking over \$63K in cocktail sales to its efforts. Advanced measurement technologies also offered demographic insights, enabling Basil Hayden to refine communication strategies with wider audiences.



Golden Goose  
Golden Spirit



“HOW CAN YOU *CREATE AN EXPERIENCE* FOR CONSUMERS WHERE THEY GET TO EXPERIENCE SOMETHING *VERY PERSONAL TO THEM?*”

– **Melissa Mendoza**  
Vice president marketing NA, Lindt

**IMPACT**

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# PARTICIPATORY

Immersive, Interactive,  
*Personalized*



Prada  
*Paradoxe Intense*

## **Experiential marketing empowers brands to shift from storytelling to storyliving.**

This transformation isn't merely about hosting an event but about turning consumers from passive spectators into active participants. Invite them to touch, taste, learn, create, decide, and share, ensuring that each guest enjoys a unique experience shaped by their actions.

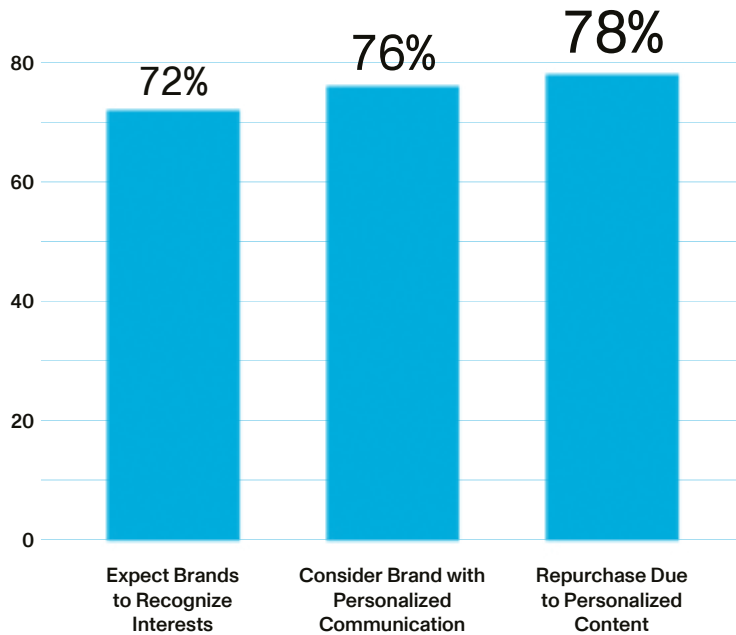
Participatory experiential marketing must be immersive, swiftly transporting attendees into the moment and freeing them from external distractions. By leveraging creative techniques and

the 360-degree, multisensory nature of experiential marketing, brands can captivate consumers and achieve what they crave most: undivided attention.

However, immersion alone isn't enough. According to a McKinsey Report (2021), 88% of consumers feel motivated when brands engage them interactively. Experiential marketing allows brands to have two-way conversations with consumers. Leading brands can infuse education, gamification, and co-creation into their experiences, ensuring that guests stay active and invested.

Interactivity must serve a purpose. Melissa Mendoza, vice president of Marketing NA at Lindt, questions, "How can you create an experience

## How can you create a personalized experience for consumers?



for consumers where they get to experience something very personalized to them?" Data reveals that personalization is a highly sought-after trait, with 72% of consumers expecting brands to recognize their interests, 76% being more likely to consider a brand with personalized communications, and 78% being more inclined to repurchase due to personalized content<sup>1</sup>.

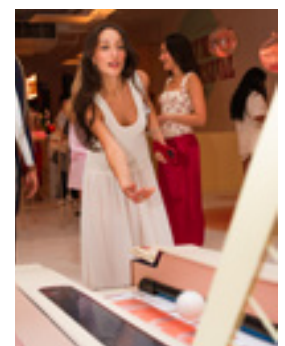
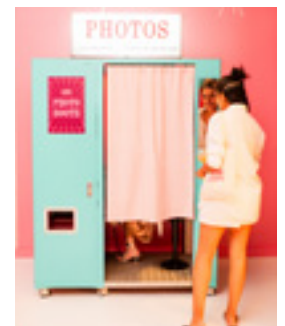
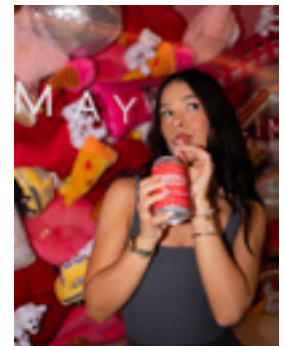
Customizable touchpoints foster individual expression, igniting content creation. Experiential marketing should empower guests to live stories worth sharing. With technology facilitating rapid, personalized content creation, brands can forge

deeper consumer connections. While this paper embraces a forward-thinking perspective, it's important to acknowledge the timeless craft of experiential marketing, which includes personalized product samples, bespoke food and beverage moments, and even Polaroids. Technology creates exciting avenues, but the core principle remains: The more opportunities that consumers have to engage and create, the richer and more complex their relationship with the brand becomes. Participation fosters connection.

*For further actionable guidance on participatory elements, deep dive into the "Participatory Worksheet" accessible at the back of this document.*

## PLAY WHILE YOU WAIT

The Maybelline Summer Carnival in NYC transformed waiting lines into an interactive experience with exclusive video games, rewarding high scores with product giveaways. This innovative twist turned a passive queue into an engaging adventure, reimagining the vaudeville atmosphere.



# Participatory Experiential Example



## Break the wall

For its first global launch, ZTE made a bold impact with the Axon M, the first dual-screen smartphone. After the keynote, the LED wall dramatically split, unveiling an interactive zone where oversized phone

models created an immersive playground for guests to explore the product firsthand. This innovative launch strategy increased the product resale price by 20%, more than offsetting the event costs.



**IMPACT**

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**AFFECTIVE**

*Emotional, Evocative,  
Resonant*

# Experiential marketing must be affective to be effective.

The experience won't generate the desired results if it doesn't evoke the targeted emotion.

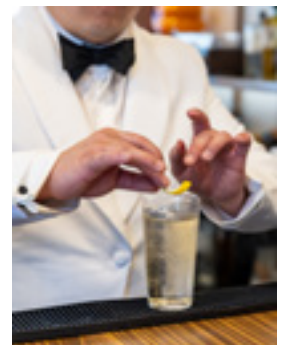
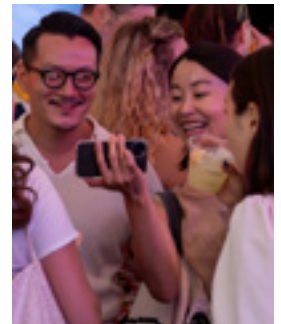
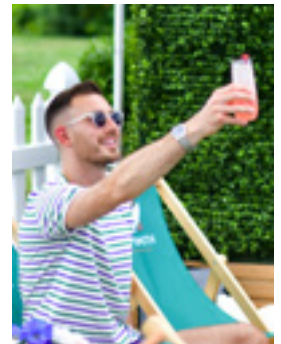
50% of customers spend more if they feel emotionally connected to a brand, with 57% spending double when emotionally engaged. Additionally, 76% choose their emotionally connected brand over competitors, and 70% of emotionally engaged consumers spend at least double on brands to which they are loyal<sup>2</sup>.

Ironically, creating effective emotional connections begins with strategy. Marketers must deeply understand their consumers and clearly define their emotional journey. Put simply, who are these people? What do we want them to feel?

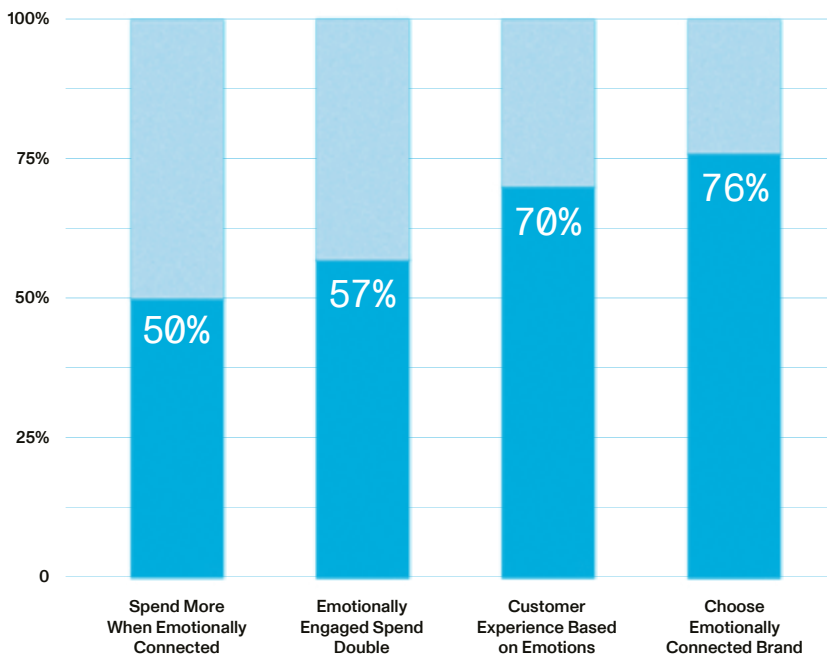
Once the intent is clear, creative direction and execution create the magic. Experiential marketing engages consumers far more than traditional media. While tropes like lighting and the hero's journey can help, it's essential to let creativity flourish. Relying solely on data can cause one to overlook powerful ideas driven by gut feelings and experience.

## YOU CAN'T TASTE AN AD

For spirits brands, tastings are essential for building emotional connections, with the "liquid-to-lips" moment creating lasting memories. By blending product history and serving rituals, brands inspire consumers to craft and share their own experiences.



## The Role of Emotion in the Consumer Experience



“I don’t measure the success of our campaigns. But if I did, and it performed well, *I would not repeat it.*”

– John Schoolcraft

Global chief creative officer, Oatly

**70%**  
of customer  
experience is  
emotion based.

For example, while data might suggest spending X to achieve Y, a bold concept that leverages gut instincts and requires spending Z could yield even better results. Here, creativity and gut work together, guided by tropes yet open to innovation.

### **BE EMOTIONAL**

To evoke the emotions of consumers, marketers need to tap into their own. Data and research are essential, but marketers must trust their instincts, embrace risk, and encourage bold ideas. As Rick Rubin says, “The audience does not know what they like; they only know what has come before.”

John Schoolcraft of Oatly takes this further: “I don’t measure the success of our campaigns. But if I did measure something, and it performed well, I would not repeat it.” This perspective highlights two key takeaways: originality and talent. Creating experiences requires originality. If it’s been done before, it’s been seen before. Genres and trends

should be for inspiration, not iteration. Audiences desensitize rapidly, and familiarity diminishes the ability to create emotional connections.

The Schoolcraft perspective isn’t for everyone, but that’s the point. Good marketers ensure that their teams have bold thinkers and the risk profile to back their visions, even without data validation.

Experiential marketing can be a playground for new ideas and even absurdism. If it resonates with consumers, it can fuel larger campaigns. Experiential doesn’t have to be a stage of execution; it can be where the idea is born. That idea then evolves into a powerful, cyclical form of storytelling. As consumers live the experience, again and again, it shapes the storytelling of tomorrow.

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*For further actionable guidance on affective elements, deep dive into the “Affective Worksheet” accessible at the back of this document.*

# Affective Experiential Example



## Theater at Tiffany's

Tiffany & Co. redefined expectations with its Rodeo Drive boutique reopening. Instead of hosting a typical celebrity event, Tiffany & Co. transformed the storefront into the breathtaking backdrop of a projection-mapped theater, where ballerinas gracefully performed a story of transformation, leading to an

electrifying performance by Ariana Grande. The experience was designed to turn the boutique's exterior into a jewel box, unfolding a powerful story before leading guests inside the new boutique. This shift from storytelling to storyliving forged a deep emotional connection with attendees, driving record-breaking U.S. opening-night sales.



*“COMMUNITY NOW IS AT THE FOUNDATION OF EVERYTHING WE DO. IT’S REALLY ABOUT THE SOCIAL CAPITAL AND THE DEPTH OF INTIMACY WITH YOUR CONSUMERS.”*

**– Yann Joffredo**

Global brands president US,  
L’Oréal Luxe

Shopify Zero Proof  
Leisure Club

**IMPACT**

# COMMUNITY BUILDING

*Connective, Fanatical, Local*

## Stadiums didn't stay empty, and streaming didn't kill the box office. Humans, as social beings, thrive on shared experiences.

The collective energy of a crowd elevates emotions, creating irreplaceable moments that deepen our connection to each other and the event.

Ironically, this same craving for connection drives social media. You immediately comment when your friend finishes their first marathon, or you hit “like” on your colleague’s vacation snaps. These interactions mirror real-life gatherings, drawing us into digital communities based on shared interests. As Yann Joffredo of L’Oréal Luxe US notes, “Community now is at the foundation of everything we do. It’s really about the social capital and the depth of intimacy with your consumers.” Thriving experiential marketing taps into

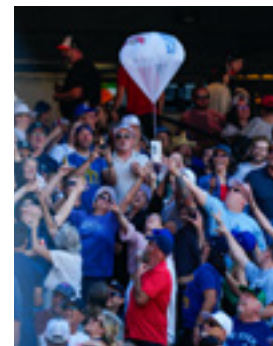
these connections, blending the physical and digital worlds to build bonds between people and brands.

Consumers enter an enhanced state when part of a collective moment. Feelings intensify, memories linger, and content spreads further. Unseen forces connect strangers at events like Coachella or the Olympics, reminding us of the power of crowds. Brands that harness these emotional, participatory environments can create lasting impact.

Yet, even more important are the personal communities—friendship groups—that shape experiences. Most branded events are attended in small groups; a fact that marketers must embrace when designing activations. These tight-knit groups wield even more power online, where 89% of consumers trust recommendations from those they “know” over traditional ads<sup>3</sup>. The earned reach is astonishing as these groups share content within their overlapping networks. Marketers must explore new measurement techniques to track these social metrics and patterns.

### HARNESSING THE POWER OF FANDOM

A great example of physically and digitally connecting with fandom is the Mariners’ “Hot Dogs From Heaven” stunt. Hot dogs were dropped from mini parachutes during the game, uniting fans in a memorable, shared experience.



“Fandoms are an inch wide *but a mile deep.*”

– Chris Schmicker  
Director of brand marketing, Shopify



### **DO IT FOR THE FANS**

Fans, once tied solely to sports or music, now present massive opportunities for brands. “Fandoms are an inch wide but a mile deep,” Chris Schmicker of Spotify says. Though hard to penetrate, fandoms thrive across physical and digital spaces, offering a goldmine for experiential marketers who understand how to engage respectfully.

Today, brands also have fans. It’s no longer just sneakerheads chasing Jordans. Skims drops sell out instantly, Maybelline pop-ups draw huge crowds, and Supreme fans camp overnight. Experiential marketing fuels these fandoms, blending physical anticipation with digital excitement to create must-attend moments. Integrating content creators who are already fans of the brand into experiential efforts elevates the brand experience uniquely, spreading the message widely while maintaining deep interaction.

Celebrities, once brand ambassadors, are now founders. Whether from Hollywood, YouTube, or TikTok, A-listers are building their own brands, and experiential marketing offers a direct channel to connect with fans and turn them into brand champions.

### **ACT LOCAL**

In a globalized world, it’s easy to overlook the power of local communities. Local influencers, like your tennis coach, often carry more weight in purchasing decisions than global ads do. Experiential marketing at the grassroots level builds trust, and brands that engage with meaningful local causes often see organic reach skyrocket.

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*For further actionable guidance on community building, deep dive into the “Community Building Worksheet” accessible at the back of this document.*

# Community building Experiential Example

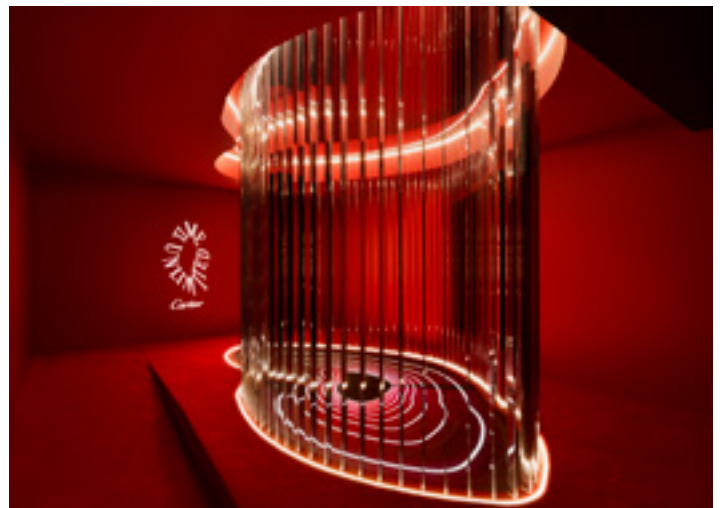


## Cartier Time Unlimited

At Art Basel, Cartier captivated with its *Time Unlimited* exhibition, a masterful celebration of its watchmaking legacy and the vibrant community that surrounds it. The space seamlessly blended luxury and innovation, offering a mesmerizing journey through time.

Exclusive content played a pivotal role, and the true magic came from the way that Cartier engaged with its watchmaking community. Celebrities like Kaytranada and Emma Chamberlain contributed

bespoke pieces, while A-listers and influencers generated buzz. Yet, the real highlight was the targeted content for watch enthusiasts. *Killing Time with Brynn and Melika* filmed a special episode with Cartier's experts, shared exclusively on the brand's "Watch Community" channel. This approach strengthened bonds with collectors, reinforcing their essential role in Cartier's story and future, making the community not just feel like part of the brand but central to its evolution.



**IMPACT**

# TRUE TO BRAND

*Authentic, Consistent,  
Reliable*

## **A brand transcends mere products; it's a story that inspires consumers to engage and live it.**

Owning the product allows consumers to claim a piece of that narrative. While the product matters, its true value lies in the feelings it evokes.

Authenticity is the holy grail of branding, yet it's often elusive. Experiential marketing captures the essence of a brand, enabling vertical and lateral success. Instead of asking, "How should the brand be perceived?" the storyliving model focuses on "How does our brand come to life?" This approach fosters a deeper connection, making the brand integral to the experiences of consumers.

### **KNOW YOURSELF**

"Brands need to first think about what is truly based on their codes and

DNA and how that translates to experience," explains Julie Bourgeois of Four Seasons.

Experiential marketing isn't just a facade; it's an authentic portal into the brand's ethos. Brands with strong, clear codes can easily translate them into immersive experiences. In contrast, brands that are still evolving can use experiential marketing to test, learn, and refine their identities.

### **KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE**

At its core, experiential marketing is a two-way conversation between brand and consumer. Simply slapping a logo on a space doesn't cut it: You need to bring the brand to life in a meaningful way. Gordon Devin of Wilson Sportswear says, "The goal is to ensure that our brand is experienced as a performance brand rather than just selling something or telling you something." Wilson's experiential marketing centers on putting rackets, bats, gloves, and balls directly in the hands of consumers, creating an authentic interaction with the product.

“Brands need to first think about what is *truly based on their codes and DNA.*”

– **Julie Bourgeois**

Former SVP, global head of retail and experiential signature, Four Seasons Hotels & Resorts



Diplomático  
Rum Revelation

This hands-on approach not only engages users but also taps into the inspiring stories and performances of athletes. By connecting consumers to these narratives, Wilson allows them to feel like the athletes themselves when playing, transforming the product into a means of owning a piece of that journey.

### **BE CONSISTENT**

True authenticity is rooted in consistency. Too often, even the most powerful ad campaigns fall flat when the in-person brand experience feels disconnected. Experiential marketing bridges this gap, ensuring that the brand's message stays unified across every touchpoint—from grand launches to point-of-sale interactions.

Consumers aren't concerned with marketing strategies or targeted demographics; they respond to what they see, feel, and experience, from one touchpoint to the next. Inconsistent messaging dilutes the impact. By aligning experiential moments from top-of-funnel campaigns to sales interactions, brands ensure a cohesive connection with the customer journey. Integrating sales teams into the experiential narrative further strengthens this bond, creating a seamless and authentic brand experience at every point.

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*For further actionable guidance on true to brand elements, dive deep into the "True to brand Worksheet" accessible at the back of this document.*

# *True to brand* *Experiential Example*



## **The Power of Sanctuary by Lincoln**

Lincoln transformed luxury at New York City's South Street Seaport, offering consumers a taste of its signature "power of sanctuary." A luxury-adorned shipping container was the centerpiece, embodying the Lincoln Navigator's

sophistication. The experience featured a meditation garden with an app partnership and thoughtful hospitality, while genuine influencer collaborations amplified the brand's promise of serenity in the urban bustle.



**CASE STUDY**

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# GOLDEN GOOSE

Perfect Imperfection  
*in Motion*



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## Integrated

Golden Goose brought its “Perfect Imperfection” ethos to life with a high-energy skatepark fashion show in the performance of LA skater Cory Jeanau in a custom bowl, which showcased a blend of skate and couture, fueling content creation and amplification across digital and physical channels. This activation boosted visibility and directly drove sales in targeted regions.

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## Measurable

Golden Goose set clear goals for brand awareness, likeability, and regional sales. The campaign delivered over 1 billion impressions, a boost in Gen Z followers, a 28% increase in retail traffic, and a 32% rise in hero shoe sales, surpassing all business objectives.

---

## Participatory

While the live skateboarding show was the event’s centerpiece, Golden Goose ensured that attendees played an active role. Key UGC moments and interactive displays allowed guests to engage with the brand in a personal way, visualizing themselves in the fashion collection. This two-way interaction brought fans into the experience, enhancing both live and digital participation.



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## Affective

Golden Goose took a creative risk, transforming the iconic Pink Motel into a gritty, unexpected venue that resonated with its younger, edgier target. This choice paid off, elevating the experience, enhancing message authenticity, driving deeper emotional connections, and increasing brand affinity.

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## Community

By tapping into LA's skateboarding and cool-kids scene, Golden Goose created a space where its community could shine, connect, and create content. These moments were amplified across social media, generating over 1 billion impressions and strengthening the bond between the brand and its audience.

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## True to brand

Staying true to their "Perfect Imperfection" DNA, Golden Goose embraced the quirks of the event, community, and venue. The experience was as elevated as their product, with purposeful off-kilter elements, turning the brand message into a lived experience.

**CASE STUDY**

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# THE BARBIE MOVIE

*A Masterclass*  
in Experiential Marketing\*

\*Not a Gradient project



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## Integrated

The *Barbie* movie campaign integrated over 100 brand collaborations, from ZARA and Xbox to Krispy Kreme, securing Barbie's presence across retail, tech, and lifestyle sectors. The seamless blend of digital and in-person activations, like the viral Barbie Selfie Generator and Airbnb Dreamhouse, created an immersive brand experience. Cast members Margot Robbie and Ryan Gosling embodied their characters throughout the campaign, extending the film's presence into the press and social media.

---

## Measurable

The campaign was a viral success, with the Barbie Selfie Generator used over 13 million times and with a 119% surge in Instagram engagement. The real triumph was at the box office, where the film grossed \$1.446 billion, cementing the campaign's ROI and proving its unparalleled reach.

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## Participatory

From the viral Selfie Generator to thousands of IRL experiences worldwide, the campaign encouraged fans to step into Barbie's world. Fans could even create their own personalized Barbie doll, reflecting the film's message of self-expression. Margot Robbie and Greta Gerwig extended the conversation beyond the movie, hosting open dialogues at fan events and making Barbie's story a global conversation.



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## Affective

The Barbie campaign struck an emotional chord through nostalgia, blending the past and present. With retrospective museums and re-released product lines, Millennials and Gen Xers reconnected with their youth, while younger audiences were captivated by the film's vibrant visuals. The campaign's feminist narrative resonated across generations, making it emotional and impactful.

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## Community

The campaign tapped into diverse communities, from beauty to fashion, making Barbie accessible to all. Collaborations with NYX Cosmetics and L'Oréal allowed fans to recreate their favorite Barbie looks, while partnerships with brands like ZARA and Forever21 made the Barbie style a cultural phenomenon.

---

## True to brand

The Barbie campaign didn't just celebrate the doll's iconic past; it reframed Barbie's cultural narrative, aligning with creator Ruth Handler's original vision. Through authentic filmmaking and a participatory, experiential strategy, the campaign allowed consumers to discover and celebrate their own Barbie stories.

**TAKE ACTION**

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*Use the*

**I.M.P.A.C.T.**  
**WORKSHEET**

# Experiential marketing shouldn't just impress; it should make a real IMPACT.

Use the IMPACT scoresheet to turn insights into action. It will help you plan, evaluate, and supercharge your experiential marketing efforts.

## **BREAK DOWN BARRIERS**

Traditional marketing structures fall short of delivering top-tier experiential marketing. You must break down the walls between strategy and execution, experiential and content, and marketing and retail. Though it may seem daunting, taking small, actionable steps in creating tie-ins across the

silos that separate these groups can drive significant transformations.

## **ENGAGE EXPERIENTIAL EARLIER**

Make experiential the cornerstone, not the afterthought. Bring experiential expertise to the table at the onset of your creative planning, ensuring that the consumer experience is thoughtfully designed with experiential strategy in mind. By doing so, you create a seamless, authentic journey where every touchpoint reinforces the brand's story and message.

## **BALANCE LOGIC WITH INSTINCT**

Data is powerful, but it can sometimes hinder creativity. Trust your instincts, or make sure you have team members who do. Listen to them, even when the data suggests otherwise.

Click to view or download the IMPACT worksheet



# CONCLUSION

**THE EXPERIENCE ERA ISN'T JUST** a trend; it's a strategic imperative. Younger generations *crave experiences over products*, and leading brands are responding with increased investments in experiential marketing. They're embedding it into their core strategies, not just as a tactic but as the foundation of consumer engagement.

Success comes from integrating experiential elements across every channel, creating a holistic brand presence that fosters community and stays true to the brand's identity.

The IMPACT model offers a clear framework: Integration, Measurability, Participation, Affectivity, Community, and True-to-Brand Authenticity.

Breaking down barriers, blending data with instinct, and embedding experiential marketing early in the process will transform isolated events into ecosystems of experiences. When executed with intention, experiential marketing creates deep, lasting connections that amplify the brand's message and set it apart in a competitive marketplace.

**Don't just produce events.  
Create an ecosystem of experience.**

**Make an IMPACT.**

# SPECIAL THANKS

This white paper would not have been possible without the incredible insights from our interviewees:

Adriana Angulo, head of marketing NA

Avery Baker, former chief brand officer & president

Chris Schmicker, director of brand marketing

Christine Guzman, head of consumer engagement & digital

Gordon Devin, president

Jessica Spence, former president of North America

John Schoolcraft, global chief creative officer

Julie Bourgeois, former SVP, global head of retail and experiential signature

Marie Gulin-Merle, GVP, ads marketing & centers of excellence

Matthieu Rinvile, former president, Americas

Melissa Mendoza, vice president marketing NA

Musa Tariq, former chief brand officer / head of marketing

Olivia Crouan, chief brand officer

Yann Joffredo, global brands president US

**Veuve Clicquot**

**Tommy Hilfiger**

**Shopify**

**Moët Hennessy**

**Wilson Sportswear**

**Suntory Global Spirits**

**Oatly**

**four seasons  
Hotels & Resorts**

**Google**

**Moncler**

**Lindt**

**Ford, Airbnb,  
& Apple Retail**

**Audemars Piguet**

**L'Oréal Luxe**

Many hands from Gradient worked on this project, and much of the perspective is that of the group, but this small team drove this project from inception to completion:

Anthony Coppers, founder and head of innovation  
Colin McKenzie, chief client officer  
Lauren Buys, VP of creative strategy and insights  
Magali Ducornet, art director

Melissa Maney, copywriter  
Naya Palacio, associate business manager  
Pauline Oudin, chief executive officer  
Sam Egan, creative director

# GRADIENT

Gradient is a future forward experience company. We don't just produce events, we create experiential ecosystems that drive meaningful consumer engagement.

Guided by our IMPACT framework we craft emotionally resonant experiences that amplify across channels and deliver business results.

Combining creativity with innovation, Gradient helps brands move beyond storytelling to embrace storyliving, creating deeper connections and lasting growth.