



b-to-b events

The Top Challenges That Keep Marketers Awake at Night



Consumers receive as many as 10,000 brand messages each day, according to some estimates, via email, text, and traditional advertising. As such, face-to-face marketing is one of the most important ways to connect with existing clients and engage prospective ones in our digital era. Brand experiences showcase a company and tell a complicated story in a meaningful and direct way that just doesn't translate over email or social media. By creating a "wow" factor that touches the senses and draws people in, brand experiences instill positive emotions that attendees associate with the brand.

But brand experiences are often high-stakes undertakings, with many moving pieces all converging at a single moment in time — it's no wonder they can make even the most seasoned B-to-B marketer lose sleep at night.

"Events are a critical part of the overall marketing mix when it comes to identifying opportunities, progressing opportunities, and, ultimately, closing opportunities."

—Colleen Bisconti, VP of global conferences and events, IBM

We talked to members of the Event Marketer B-to-B Dream Team, representing some of the top marketers in the industry, to find out what they feel are the biggest challenges and opportunities when it comes to brand experience.

Without question, their responses fell into a few critical components of a successful event outcome: measurement, engagement, and personalization.



Measurement

Measurement is essential for B-to-B marketers who want to prove ROI and the impact of the event on sales, or who want to defend or grow their budget. Measurement can gauge whether or not the event attracts and provides value to your target audience, tells the right brand story, offers the right brand experience, showcases the appropriate products, and delivers marketing results and business impact. Event-scoring methodologies take into account where, when, and how prospects in the sales funnel engage at events. They also measure media coverage, social amplification, analyst reports, and impact on buying decisions, as well as impressions and feedback from attendees.

Greg Schneider, marketing director for global events at Dell, explained that his team developed proprietary methodologies that combine quantitative data with qualitative insights to shape a road map for which events to amp up, which ones to reassess, and which ones to opt out of altogether. On-site surveys, small customer insight groups, and measurement against seven or eight top-level KPIs also provide helpful information.

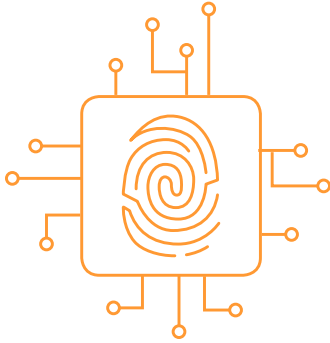


Engagement

Brand experiences generate rich, deep engagement with attendees. They provide insights into the topics, products, and services that audiences most care about. Smart marketers parlay this information into year-round engagement, using the rich content developed for and at the event to drive the marketing mix. By integrating as a channel within a broader framework before, during, and after a trade show or conference, brand experiences become much more than a single moment in time.

Year-round engagement can come in the form of articles, social media, subject-matter communities, regional events, advertising, and more. Microsoft's Worldwide Partner Conference, for example, provides compelling content that engages its community long after the event. "I don't just think 'sessions,' I think year-round content," says Shantel Gascoigne, digital marketing manager at Microsoft.

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Personalization

“We live in a personalized world; attendees expect event experiences to fulfill their individual needs,” says Kate Lechowicz, senior marketing manager of enterprise marketing and events at NetApp. And thanks to technology, mass personalization is a possibility. Marketers can now deliver custom messages and experiences to individual people based on their unique wants, needs, and preferences. As a result, events are more focused on targeted goals such as customer acquisition, awareness, and sales rather than broad PR opportunities. Using business intelligence systems to generate reports and information can help fine-tune audience acquisition strategies and the on-site experience through customized content, explains Heather Henderson Thomas, senior manager of strategic ops at Cisco.

Opportunities for personalization via your event website, email marketing, and social media begin long before the first attendee arrives at your event. When on-site, event apps and mobile solutions such as customized interactive games, QR codes, and other consumer-centric experiences offer that needed one-on-one engagement, while location mapping through beacons allows marketers to deliver customized information based on attendee behavior and interests. Interactive second screen technology can involve attendees in a two-way conversation during education sessions, while virtual reality can create an immersive and personal experience like no other. Finally, basic technologies like digital signage and simultaneous interpretation help attendees feel like the program is customized specifically for them.

Addressing personalization, along with measurement and engagement, will ensure a successful brand experience outcome — and a better night's rest for B-to-B marketers.



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