



Every Experience Matters.

At least it should.

Pete Dufner

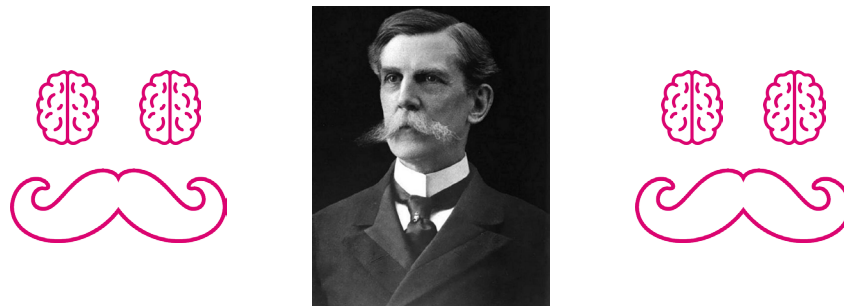
Experience Design Director, Creative Group

There's no such thing as a "Little" Experience.

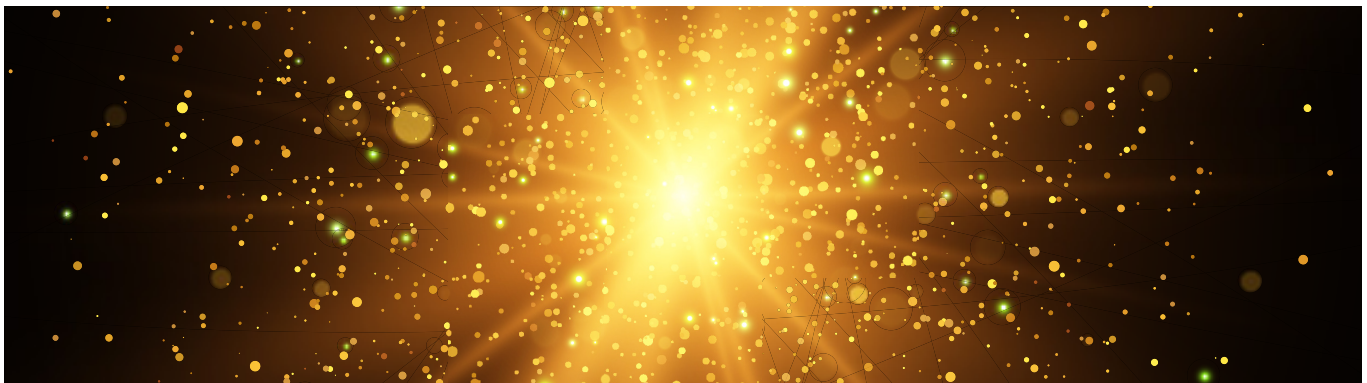
Even what you consider the most seemingly mundane activities matter and can leave a lasting impression, be it positive, negative or just plain "meh." (Case in point: When's the last time you left a porta-potty saying, "Well, that was certainly delightful.") Creating the right experience is critically important to you and your business and must be treated very carefully – because every experience matters.

***"A mind that is stretched by a new experience
can never go back to its old dimensions."***

Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr.



Did your last meeting, program or event stretch minds? Did it create a business-changing experience? Holmes, Jr, whose personal experience included one beast of a way-pre-hipster moustache, knew what he was talking about. Simply put, an experience has the power to create change. And it has the power to change your business.



The Incentive Research Foundation reports that across many studies over several decades, people consistently report more long-term satisfaction, happiness, and well-being from their experiential purchases than their material ones. And while people tend to 'adapt' quickly to new cars, raises, and bonuses (i.e., as B.B. King said, 'the thrill is gone'), the same is not true for experiences. People actually tend to upgrade their memories of trips, adventures and other experiences in retrospect, remembering the best elements and forgetting or downplaying the worst. Remember the way your Dad's stories got better and more elaborate over time? It's like that. ⁱⁱ

***"Psychologically, it is the experience that lives on and the possession
that fades away."***

Amit Kumar, PhD

Kumar's research goes on to point out that while few people can recall ever having any regrets in not buying a "thing," many can describe (in painful detail, I imagine) the regret that they still feel in missing experiences – even going back decades. Just think about being the sad punk that had to work at Burger King and wasn't able to make it to see the Clash on their first trip to the states in 1979? Or the "genius" who sold his tickets to Bob Marley in 1980 because he figured he'd see him on the next tour...the tour that (sadly) never happened. No concert, you cry. ⁱⁱⁱ

"It's better to regret what you have done than what you haven't."

Paul Arden

Love him or have no idea who he was, Arden was right. Especially when it comes to businesses. According to PwC, 73% of all people point to customer experience as an important factor in their purchasing decisions, just behind price and product quality. Yet only 49% of U.S. consumers say companies provide a good customer experience today. And while 43% of all consumers would pay more for greater convenience; 42% would pay more for a friendly, welcoming experience. And, among U.S. customers, 65% find a positive experience with a brand to be more influential than great advertising. It's real and it's not going away – these days it is all about the experience. ^{iv}



Consider American Express, who transformed their approach from treating customer service as a cost center into an opportunity to build customer relationships – and as a result they began to truly understand customer needs. At the same time, they made a tremendous effort to enhance processes, shift technologies, alter policy and modify products to drive that experiential shift. These efforts quickly led to a 400% increase in customer retention! By putting customer relationships at the core of their strategy, they enabled themselves to be positioned as more than just a credit card company – winning even more elements of a customer's life, from travel to concert tickets. ^v



Even closer to everyday life, think about your feet...a good friend of mine recently bought a few pairs of shoes from Bucketfeet. When they showed up, he tried them on immediately, and the way he tells it, “his dogs were barking” ...they were too tight! An email later, new (larger) shoes were on their way and they even suggested he donate the pairs that didn’t fit. No questions asked. Since that experience, he has gone out of his way to refer folks to Bucketfeet, which is easy because those kicks – The World’s Most Unique Shoes – are conversation starters. (Can you wear an experience?)



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One agency even went as far as to perform a social experiment to demonstrate how consumers are more willing to purchase a product if they’ve attended that brand’s live experience – even if the brand doesn’t exist. You read that correctly, Set Creative actually opened an immersive daylong pop-up brand experience for a faux orange non-alcoholic spirit brand (not really) named Sevillian. The environment was colorful, contemporary and fun, featuring quirky photography that showed people being buried in big piles of oranges. And participants got to not only enjoy the refreshing signature mocktail, but they were also able to create their own version of it – all while inhaling the pumped in smell of fresh mandarin orange. They proved their point, discovering that 73% of consumers (in the United States and United Kingdom) are more likely to purchase a product if they have participated in a brand experience. ^{viii}



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All these numbers are great, right? (I'm just checking in on your experience here, my dear reader.) Stick with me for another one – every employee at Ritz-Carlton Hotels has the freedom to use up to \$2,000 to rescue a bad guest experience. 2Gs without question, you must be kidding me, right? But when you consider that 60% of all consumers said they'd stop doing business with a brand if the service they received was not friendly, you get it. Employees today need to be empowered to “fix” bad experiences for their customers, or they risk losing them. ^x

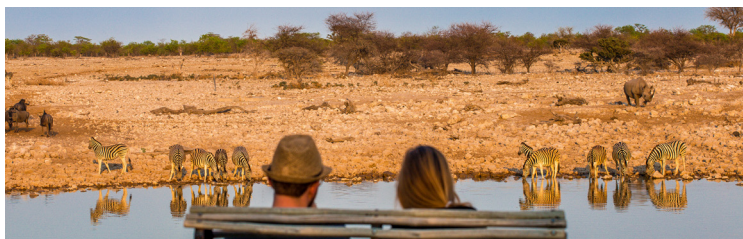
Even the concert scene is evolving – according to Fortune magazine, the hottest new act in the music industry is the curated experience. It's no longer about just attending the concert; it's about getting onstage and singing live-band karaoke with Wilco. Or going to Dinosaur Jr's rock and roll summer camp – Camp Fuzz – where you can attend workshops, performances, classes and more. “Where you're seeing a lot of growth in the festival market is in those smaller, boutique festivals, and particularly the ones that have a very clear point of view,” says Alex Crothers, whose company Higher Ground Presents books performers for many artist-curated festivals. ^{xi}



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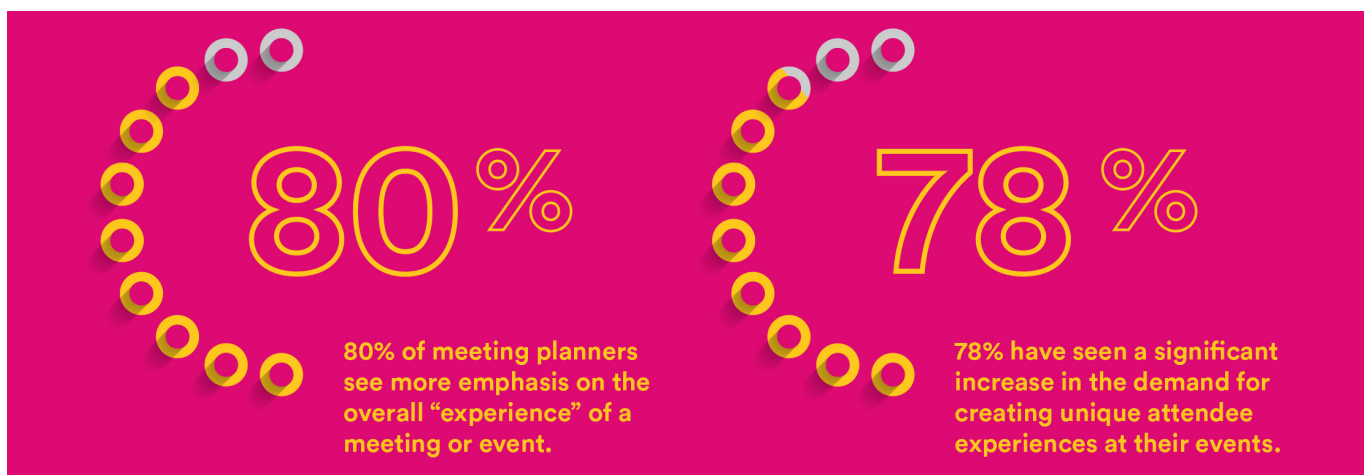
It's interesting to note that while companies are spending big money to save customer experiences gone wrong, they don't need to make the same investment to create memorable ones. Think about it, we often actually relate more with people around experiencing a 'hole-in-the-wall' restaurant than we do around fine dining. Another example would be a safari, which yields lifetime memories in whoever experiences it. If one person flies business class and stays in a Five Diamond resort and another economy at a Four-Star campground, the latter is very unlikely to lose any satisfaction of their unique experience in conversation with the former. They are actually more likely to bond over their shared experience. ^{xiii}

One of the most powerful truths about experiences is that they do not have to be extraordinary to generate similar results.



There's a reason that more than two-thirds (67%) of B-to-B brand-side marketers are anticipating an increase in experiential budgets within the next year and a half, a full 17% boost from 2018. Another report found that a growing number of marketers expect to allocate up to 50% of their marketing budgets to experiential over the next three to five years. The same study also discovered that over 90% of marketers agree that brand experience delivers strong face-to-face interaction and more compelling brand engagement. ^{xiv}

According to a survey conducted by the IACC (International Association of Conference Centers) regarding the future of meetings, 80% of meeting planners see more emphasis on the overall "experience" of a meeting or event. And 78% have seen a significant increase in the demand for creating unique attendee experiences at their events. ^{xv}



Still not convinced of the urgent need to create experiences? Think about this – 80% of consumers will not interact with a brand that does not offer personalized experiences. 71% of B-to-B customers want B-to-C like experiences. And an amazing 91% of consumers say they have more positive feelings about brands after attending events and experiences. ^{xvi}

"The best marketing doesn't feel like marketing."

Tom Fishburne



At this point, I have certainly provided you with enough stats to fill a page...you're welcome. But let's take a moment and think about our own experiences, those moments in time that have stuck with you. (What Disney calls "Branded Memories.") The family vacation where everything went wrong, the parties where you watched your parents dance like they had just fallen in love, the books you read over and over, the last-second shot your kid took...and hit. Why were they memorable? It's probably because they included these six elements: inspiration, immersion, interruption, intrigue, influence and impression.



At Creative Group, we utilize our proprietary, human-centered design methodology to compose experiences, and we call it i|xperience®. It's focused on one thing – changing participant behavior based on our client's goals. It starts with an ownable thematic, and then every aspect of the experience ladders back up to our unique theme. Every i|xperience is carefully curated to include all the elements that make up an amazing, memorable experience.

Inspiration – Create an engaging story throughout the experience journey – designed to inspire and achieve the desired goals.

Immersion – Move the audience from simply being present to being actively involved.

Interruption – Deliver memorable experiences by transporting participants away from the daily grind.

Intrigue – Lock-in and entertain the audience.

Influence – Change behavior by providing information and motivating participants to act.

Impression – Touch all five senses, engaging participants at every touchpoint.



When it comes to the importance of experiences, it's obvious that the time is now. (Actually, let's get real, the time was yesterday.) People crave experiences. And it's easy to see why – face-to-face events do what no other marketing touchpoint can do. They create memorable experiences that bring brands and users together – fostering trust, growing brand loyalty and creating real community. Businesses that understand this will thrive.

Sources

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Let's Talk

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