How experiences fill the digital void:
exploring the relationship between experiential and digital

An Immerse white paper
Introduction

Digital is creating a void in human interaction for consumers looking to buy products and services.

Consumers are targeted via online advertising, where a brand’s offering is often presented through a banner ad, pop-ups or a video pre-roll. While this type of communication is great for reach and building brand awareness, it lacks the experiences that ignite a desire to buy a product.

When consumers view a product online without physically trying it out - and understanding why it might be the product for them - they might not experience the emotional response that drives purchase.

Reach without touch

Digital advertising has reach but it can’t engage all the senses. A survey by EventTrack into the effectiveness of experiential marketing revealed that 65% of the consumers surveyed said that live events gave them a better understanding of a product or service, outstripping digital efforts and TV advertising as methods of recognising and learning about a brand.

The poll also revealed that 98% of users felt more inclined to purchase after attending an activation, while 70% became regular customers after an experiential marketing event.

Online communication has a part to play in brand-building. However, relying solely on this channel to drive sales can be short-sighted. Now more than ever, when interactions between brands and consumers move into the crowded online space, brands need to find innovative ways of cutting through to the right customers.

Brands must re-inject fun and excitement into buying, yet still capitalise on the advent of digital.

“A lot of times people don’t know what they want until you show it to them”

Steve Jobs - Co-founder, Apple Inc
**The experience generation**

Just over three-quarters (77%) of marketers use experiential marketing as a vital part of a brand’s advertising strategy, according to the EventTrack survey. Marketers realise the importance of allowing a potential customer to experience a product or service before committing their hard-earned money, particularly if it’s a product that is new to market.

For example, immerse was tasked to come up with an activity for a well-known global tobacco brand. The company is committed to designing a smoke-free future and wanted to introduce a product that heats tobacco rather than burning it. An element of education was required.

immerse’s approach was to use virtual reality to bring the product to life, employing ambassadors to talk about the benefits. The activity featured HoloLens technology which gave visitors a 3D view of the product - right in front of their eyes - that they could examine using voice activation, hand gestures and head movement. It provided visitors with information via an experience, as they could dissect the various components of the product and interrogate the experts in real-time.

An experience allows human interaction to take place: a one-to-one conversation between a brand expert and a customer or potential advocate. A consumer can hold a product in their hands, taste it, or gain an understanding of what a brand stands for and what it can offer them.

“With so much digital noise overwhelming our lives, CMOs are seeing live events in a new light to better engage distracted audiences”

Greg Oates - Skift
Let's keep in touch

As marketing spend moves to digital it's vital that marketers don't ignore the customer experience and remove the human element that experiential can provide.

This has happened in the banking industry, where lessons can be learned from the move towards a self-service model. For time-poor consumers, banks began to automate the customer service function and move self-service machines outside of the store, so people wouldn’t have to physically visit a branch to get advice or use the machines. However, this immediate fix created problems in the long-term.

When those banking brands wanted to start selling products, they no longer knew who their customers were because of the lack of interaction between staff and people using the bank.

Brands then reverted to marketing the friendly face inside the store, where staff started to strike up conversations with customers about their needs, issues and future plans. It put the human element back into banking while keeping the digital options open for consumers who wanted to use that form of communication.

Brands should look to bring the online world, which can be clinical, into a welcoming offline experience. This completes the cycle of fulfilling what a brand should offer to consumers.

This is the experience generation. It's crucial to combine the digital and the physical to get in touch, and not lose touch, with people who are trialling, buying and using a brand’s products and services.

“Google only loves you when everyone else loves you first”

Wendy Piersall - Entrepreneur, Author and Professional Speaker
The three stages that connect digital and experiential journeys

Here’s how to get the most from combining digital and experiential:

1 **Pre-experience**
   In the lead-up to an event, digital can shine. A brand can reach out to the right people; gauge interest in real-time; get its event message out there; remind people with teasers; invite them to the event, and stimulate desire to experience the product in a live environment.

2 **The experience**
   The event itself should excite and inspire consumers to want to see, touch, feel or taste the product. For example, brands can engage consumers through an amazing piece of virtual reality or augmented reality content. Another tactic could see a demonstration that is also live-streamed so consumers can share the experience with friends and see themselves being a part of it; or a photo-sharing mechanic can be incorporated that enables people to take something away and post via their social feeds. These examples include an element of data capture, and use digital to make an experience tangible in terms of results.

3 **Post-experience**
   This is where brands can start to marry the consumer experience with the data captured via digital. Firstly, keep the conversation going and amplify the activity for weeks or even months after the event. Secondly, start measuring return on investment and the impact on brand awareness or sales, depending on the KPIs.

“Either write something worth reading or do something worth writing about”

Benjamin Franklin - The First American
A single holistic solution

The benefit for brands is that, when the best of both on and offline combine, cross-channel attribution can be achieved. It improves the ability to measure a campaign holistically — compared to running a standalone campaign. An example of the latter would be a sampling activation where the uplift in sales during the campaign cannot be clearly attributed to the experience.

Immerse ran an activation for Sunglass Hut during London Fashion Week. The brand was looking to create intrigue and interaction with fashion-conscious consumers. A simple, yet effective, mirror booth saw brand ambassadors engage Fashion Week visitors with the brand’s products.

To extend the activity using digital channels, visitors not only received a printout of their look, but they could share a rotating GIF with friends and family via social media. The sharing element was incentivized, as those that uploaded their gif were entered into a competition, offering the chance to win a £250 Sunglass Hut gift card. The booth also captured data: photo recipients were required to enter their email addresses to retrieve the images.

Through digital, in this example, a brand can track the conversations happening via social media, see the number of photos and posts shared from the experience and count the redemptions from vouchers sent to the email addresses captured at the activation.

Without a holistic approach to marketing, brands can make costly mistakes. When marketing budgets are split on and offline, and where digital activity goes to one creative agency but the offline, in-store and event activity goes to another, consumers will sense the chaos. The customer receives online brand communications that don’t correlate to what they experience offline. Such schizophrenic messaging undermines all marketing efforts.

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Top tips for digital and experiential success

Marketers are constantly bombarded with new ways of targeting consumers, whether it’s a new piece of technology, social platform or digital advertising format. It’s vital to remember the end recipient: the consumer.

Digital marketing budgets will keep rising. In fact, figures from the Institute of Practitioners in Advertising (IPA), show that the latest digital advertising budgets experienced the biggest rise in almost 10 years for the second quarter of 2017.

While digital marketing has the reach and creates awareness, marketers need to claw an element of humanity back into their brand communications.

Mixing messaging with methods that include human interaction and experiences is vital to cut through to consumers.

Here is how to maximise your opportunities:

- Make the most of online advocates by inviting them to an offline experience
- Always capture data during experiences to keep momentum post-event and measure success
- Where possible, use live streaming technology to extend the reach of experiential events
- Offer points or a code to redeem rewards to attract consumers and track usage
- Encourage social media-sharing to create buzz around the event and reach a wider audience

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Immerse is a creative agency specialising in brand experience and content marketing.

We’re nimble and streamlined. We can react fast to your needs. And whatever the challenge, you’ll find the immerse team has a refreshing ‘can-do’ attitude.

Most important of all, with immerse you get BIG agency experience at boutique agency costs.

Ask us about the value of combining experiential and digital – contact Jon Carson on 07887 847057 - jon.carson@immerse-agency.com