

EXPERIENTIAL MARKETING



ARE YOU EXPERIENCED?

Truvia is just one of many brands trying to make a splash using experiential marketing – often with a tangible impact on sales, says **Samantha Lyster**

With a cocktail in one hand and an iPhone in the other, Adam Stewart epitomises the new holy grail for marketers. He's at St Paul's Church in Birmingham, where Jameson Whiskey is hosting a Halloween screening of Alfred Hitchcock's *The Birds*. All the while Stewart is updating his followers on Twitter and Facebook. When the 24-year-old film buff gets home he'll blog about his experience at the Jameson Cult Film Club.

The club is one of a growing number of experiential marketing campaigns launched by food and drink brands. Next year, many more brands will target web-savvy consumers like Stewart through innovative event and social media-led campaigns – including Red Stag bourbon, Häagen-Dazs ice cream and Aunt Bessie's.

“Across the board food and drink brands are expanding their campaigns into next year, demonstrating the importance of event-led marketing,” confirms Chris Walsh, business development manager at RPM, the marketing agency behind Smirnoff's Nightlife Exchange Project.

So has a tipping point been reached? And if so, how have brands resolved the thorny issue of ROI – seen by many as low or impossible to measure and therefore the main barrier to investment in the channel?

There is no doubt that the relatively low cost of experiential marketing coupled with the ease with which it allows brands to target younger consumers has made it increasingly potent in the downturn. Its rise has also dovetailed with that of social media. The hope is that consumers like Stewart will go on to rave about their experiences with their online friends and become powerful brand advocates, says Sara Gil, strategy and insight director at marketing agency The Lounge Group.

“The world is changing because of social media – there is a hunger for content,” she adds. “Smartphones have fuelled our socialising any time, anywhere.”

We also expect to be able to interact more directly with our favourite brands. “Consumers are no longer passive spectators of marketing,” says Marcus Sandwith, MD of Haygarth. “They now demand to be active participants in brand conversations and campaigns.”

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ing the conversations. Black cherry Jim Beam brand extension Red Stag is lining up music-related events at O2 Academies across the country next year after becoming the music venues' official shot. And Aunt Bessie's is planning a campaign around its recently launched Twitter feed that could see TV ad characters Margaret and Mabel step from the screen into the real world for brand-building events.

The key to creating great brand experience is making sure it is relevant to the target audience and extending its engagement by following up with more communication. The best experiential marketing uses live and online tactics, believes Chris Cowman, head of experiential at Disrupt, the creative brand experience and events arm of marketing agency Reach.

“Social media has been used by brands to shape events with consumers contributing to what they want the experience at the live event to be,” he says. “We see this synergy between live face-to-face events, digital and social media continuing and believe it will begin to work harder for brands and retailers. Combining a deeper brand experience like an experiential live event with this immediate, more direct sales tactic gives brands greater opportunity to push shoppers from awareness, to consideration and conversion.”

Getting results

Of course, it's about more than just creating a buzz online. It's also about ROI and Sandwith feels that many of the old issues have now been addressed. “Things have changed quickly and significantly,” he says. “Increasing client accountability, competition for budgets and a proliferation of agencies entering the space have all played their role. The key questions of reach, impact and value can be answered accurately and quickly.”

Using footfall data and dwell times to move beyond the traditional “opportunities to see” data, as well as qualitative research to understand the impact on brand perceptions and consumer behaviour, brands can now robustly evaluate the impact of their campaigns across a broad range of metrics, says Sandwith.

“By accurately measuring the number of consumers engaged and overlaying this with the impact on future versus previous propensity to purchase, we are able to use average customer values, weight of

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**TRUVIA – A VOYAGE OF DISCOVERY**

In July madcap experiential markets and jelly sculptors Bompas & Parr flooded Selfridges' roof with emerald green water to create a boating lake, complete with a gushing waterfall. The idea behind the lake, which customers could row around on in one of 12 boats while munching sweetened strawberries, was to introduce the public to American sweetener Truvia, which is made from the green stevia plant. Elizabeth Fay, Truvia Europe's head of external relations and communications, says the event exceeded expectations and that it is looking to do more activity in the new year.

“ purchase and margin data to produce an ROI over set periods of time,” he adds.

The brands certainly believe they are generating tangible ROIs. RPM claims that Smirnoff spirit sales more than quadrupled when its Nightlife Exchange Project – a scheme in which 12 countries swapped their top clubbing nights with each other – brought a Miami pool party and rap act N.E.R.D amongst others to London venue Troxy in November 2010.

Pernod Ricard claims The Jameson Cult Film Club nights not only created great theatre, providing plenty of photo opportunities and entertainment for people to fill their social network pages with, they also contributed to a 7.1% rise in values sales and a 4.9% hike in volume through the grocery channel in the past year.

Patrick Venning, head of UK marketing at Pernod Ricard, says it's the most successful experiential campaign the company has ever run. “We've seen increases in sales in areas where the events have run and among consumers who have attended. Critically, the activity has shifted consumers' attitudes and driven new consumers to the brand. Through targeting cult film fans, rather than simply Jameson fans,

we've created an opportunity to influence consumer perceptions of the brand.”

With good campaigns, the sales spike is not necessarily temporary either. Havana Club's Mint Revolution – a campaign in which an app directed drinkers to pop-up 'mint field' gardens complete with Boom Bikes (bike/wheelbarrow/music decks contraptions) to sample a Havana Club mojito – yielded a 120% sales boost at participating bars. More importantly, Havana Club sales have remained up 50% since the campaign, says The Lounge Group, the agency behind the campaign.

Such results are prompting some to eschew the traditional advertising route.

“ The event has to suit the brand. People need to be emotionally involved because if it goes well it's just like a mass press trip ”

This summer, Maxxium UK elected to use party organisers End of the World and Underground Rebel Bingo to promote its new Red Stag brand, launched in May. By hosting events that would pinpoint the right drinkers, Red Stag reached 50,000 consumers directly and built a following through word of mouth. It also made it on to the shelves of all of the big four and smashed initial expectations of achieving listings in 500 stores – it's now in 1,350.

It wanted to put the limited resources available to smarter use, says Maxxium marketing controller Eileen Livingston. As well as teaming up the O2 Academies, Red Stag shunned TV, choosing instead to show its commercial online through Channel 4's 4 On Demand website. “We're a new launch and so we had to optimise our marketing budget,” says Livingston. “Research suggests our target market is watching TV through on-demand services.”

More established brands may prefer a more integrated approach. Indeed, says Sandwich: “Experiential campaigns are best used as part of, or at the heart of, a fully integrated campaign – providing an opportunity for consumers to engage with and influence events and for media

to amplify the campaign through bought and earned media coverage.”

He cites the recent Febreze Breathe Happy Experiment, in which real people were led blindfolded into situations (dirty kitchens, rooms in which dogs had been kept, etc) and asked what they could smell. Because the rooms had been sprayed with Febreze, the response was consistently positive. “Total footfall was over 700,000 with huge reach achieved through social media and the press,” he says, adding that the event resulted in a 37% increase in the consumer’s propensity to buy Febreze.

Another example of this approach can be found in this summer’s Häagen-Dazs mini-cups campaign, an integrated press and events initiative co-developed by Shaz Smilansky, co-founder of marketing agency Blazinsta. At events such as The Clothes Show and Goodwood Vintage Fair, Häagen-Dazs photographed women whom they considered had perfect taste. The nation can now vote for their most stylish women on Facebook.

Emotional involvement

The cost of such campaigns can vary wildly, of course. Sam Bompas – one half of oddball experiential marketing duo Bompas & Parr – says the cost of a live experience starts at about £20,000 but really it depends on how much the brand is willing to spend. In July, Bompas & Parr flooded the roof of Selfridges to create a ‘voyage of discovery’ for the US sweetener Truvia as part of a £5m campaign that included press ads. Red Stag, meanwhile, has forked out £1m on its marketing.

But Bompas sounds a note of caution. “The event has to suit the brand’s personality otherwise it will not connect with the consumer,” he says. “You want people to be emotionally involved in the experience because if it goes well, then it is just like organising a mass press trip.” If the event turns out to be a damp squib, negative blogs, tweets and other online feedback could easily damage a brand. If it’s a success it will yield incredibly valuable returns – positive word of mouth.

As Stewart blogged: “The Jameson cocktails were lovely. I enjoyed the complete production Jameson put on as well as the film itself. I would thoroughly recommend others to attend a Cult Film Club night.”

Now that’s the sort of feedback money can’t buy. ■

THE EXPERIENCE COMES TO LIFE



COURVOISIER’S DICKENS PUNCH TOUR

Courvoisier attributes its market share growth (last year it had 57% of the brandy market – this year it’s 65%) to its experiential-led push that put punch at the heart of its marketing tactics. Last year, it launched the Dickens Punch Tour, which has been brought back for a second run on a larger scale this December. The ticketed event involves an interactive hour-long walking tour of Dickensian London, culminating in drinks at Courvoisier’s very own Old Curiosity Shop.



GÜ – BRING OUT YOUR INNER ROCK STAR

This May, the chocolate dessert brand installed an oversized drum kit (an interactive poster) just off Tottenham Court Road in London for a day and invited the public to play it. It filmed people “auditioning” and uploaded the content to YouTube with the aim of getting the participants to encourage their social networks to view the footage. The person with the most views was then rewarded with a £200 Virgin Experience voucher.



MOËT’S FIREWORKS HIT MANCHESTER

Last November, Moët & Chandon partnered with Manchester City Council to put on a huge fireworks display during the switching on of the city centre’s Christmas lights. As part of this activity, a Moët branded light show was beamed onto Manchester Town Hall. The show was broadcast on regional television and video footage of the Moët content was uploaded to YouTube and Facebook by members of the public.



RED STAG – BOURBON BINGO

Red Stag, made with four-year-old Jim Beam bourbon whiskey and infused with a natural black cherry flavour, partnered with a series of cult party organisers over the summer, notably Underground Rebel Bingo. The bourbon was served at the nights from chilled shot machines in branded glassware and Rebel Bingo players were offered the chance to win Red Stag prizes. It was supported with a social media campaign on both the Red Stag and The Underground Rebel Bingo Club Facebook and Twitter pages.