



Experiential Council
Thursday, January 17, 2008
2:30 – 4:30PM

Chair
Dan Belmont / The Marketing Arm

Reports on B2B and B2C Studies

Dan Belmont of The Marketing Arm and the Experiential Council Chair shared his excitement to see the results of a project that has been in the making for almost three years. (The TEMSC group had been working on the project for 1 ½ years prior to meeting with the ARF.)

Dan then introduced the sponsors of the study, and turned the floor over to Scott Purvis of Gallup & Robinson (G&R) and Skip Cox of Exhibit Surveys (ESI) to present the findings of the B-to-B event research. Their study aimed to tackle several issues, with the overall question being whether trade shows drove a strong connection and whether they are more engaging than traditional channels.

G&R/ESI studied fourteen brands from four B-to-B events. For each tradeshow, some attendees were surveyed online immediately before the event. A set of post-event surveys of event attendees was also completed. All post-event survey respondents were contacted 4-6 months later to determine how many of them actually converted to sales. Metrics including brand consideration, purchase intent, likelihood to recommend, top of mind awareness, brand fit and emotional connection were collected in the pre – post surveys.

It was determined that purchase intent is most positively correlated to reported sales. However, because purchase intent is a result of engagement but does not capture the concept of engagement itself, it was recommended that it

should not be used as the only engagement measure. Skip and Scott then pointed out that cognitive and emotional components of exhibit engagement exist that also drive results. Thus, a main takeaway of the learnings was that the communication about the brand in the exhibit is key. For this to happen, an “experience” needs to be created for the tradeshow attendees, which reflects the positive attributes of the brand.

Following G&R/ESI, Marianne Foley of Harris Interactive presented the results of the B-to-C component of the study. This study tackled the same main question as the B-to-B project -- whether events, including sponsorships, are more engaging than traditional forms of advertising.

Six events were studied in the B-to-C research, representing various categories and type of events. Immediately after an event occurred, Harris used its large online panel to conduct interviews regarding brand image, brand fit, likelihood to recommend, intent to purchase, and four facets of consumer connection: 1) emotional connection to the brand; 2) brand fit; 3) the aspirational fit between the brand and their desired or ideal selves; and 4) cognitive connection.

The study demonstrated that events drive engagement with the brand, and that awareness of the event among those favorable to the type of event can also drive engagement. Furthermore, there is an incremental gain in intended behavior toward the brand due to the event. Thus, brands must do their best to attract and bring people into events – as knowledge that a brand is sponsoring a likeable event increases the favorability toward that brand. Furthermore, the relationship between the brand and the visitor must not end at the event. Brands should follow up by re-engaging the emotional connection via brand communications through the internet and other channels.

Following Marianne, Ray Pettit of the ARF explained the overall conclusions of the completed study. He synthesized the B-to-B and B-to-C study findings with studies reported in his research review. Fit (congruent perceptions of the event and brand) and involvement in the event itself are strong positive drivers of post-event purchase intent and actual purchase.

It was observed that engagement is a driver in the B-to-B event and sponsorship marketing process. That said, it is more subtle and intertwined with rational and experience elements. This fits with a more transactional-orientation of B-to-B in general. However, it is difficult to generalize at this point, since event and brand uniqueness have to be taken into account. With the B-to-C study, it was observed that engagement elements are very important. In fact, generating awareness of the event is *almost* as good as driving attendance. Furthermore, the engagement elements were quantified and validated through purchase intent lifts, factor analysis, and simple regression analysis that supports additional complexity science results.

Following the presentation, Scott Purvis, Skip Cox, and Marianne Foley discussed practical application of the learning from the study. Specifically, they stressed the importance of the event being a good fit for the brand. Scott and Skip pointed out that because the study demonstrates the importance of the visitor experience, marketers should select a well-defined target audience, and not just try to have as many people as possible at the event. Companies frequently either over-invest or under-invest in spending on events, and it is necessary to ensure that you're after the right people, and are in the right show. Marianne Foley added that currently marketers choose an event because they believe that it fits with the psychological profile of the target audience. However, they should also be looking at the location, and finding an event that is a good fit with that geographical area: for instance, understand whether it is a weak or a strong area, and develop tactics to approach it. Specific geographies should be focused on, and money should be allocated for activities beyond the event to maintain the emotional connection, and not only for the event itself.

The panel concluded that media spending to promote sponsorships prior to the event was shown to pay rich dividends in B-to-C and B-to-B. Post-event direct marketing contacts will be more effective when they bring the emotional reactions to the event or exhibit participation.

Dan Belmont adjourned the Council by announcing the next meeting date of Thursday, April 17th. The two following meetings will take place on July 17th

and October 16th, respectively. Dan asked that anyone with ideas for potential meeting topics please contact him directly (dbelmont@themarketingarm.com).