brand experience: a new era in marketing

New Data from the 2017 Freeman Global Brand Experience Study
Brand Experience: Defined

The art of bringing brands and organizations to life by designing a sensory experience that creates a lasting and meaningful relationship between the brand and an individual. Brand experience can encompass everything from events, trade shows, sponsorships, virtual and hybrid events, and exhibits to permanent installations, virtual or augmented reality experiences, and cutting-edge pop-ups — and the list goes on!

Each and every audience touchpoint is an opportunity...

An opportunity to engage, to educate, and to build brand affinity. The more personalized and relevant, the better.

After all, at its core, marketing is about showing people how your brand or organization can solve their problems, anticipate their needs, or make their lives better. The marketing landscape, though, has changed at dizzying speeds. Competition is steep, demographics are changing, and technology is making it easier for consumers to tune out marketing messages.

Which is why marketers are increasingly relying on brand experience to create meaningful relationships, engage target audiences, and deliver against goals and objectives. Brand experience is that beautiful point where an organization’s goals and its audience’s needs intersect, creating a user-centric, two-way, immersive experience.
At Freeman, we believe meaningful experiences have the power to evolve brands, build relationships, inspire action, and create bold new economic opportunities for businesses, communities, and individuals. Brand experience connects people, organizations, and cultures in ways that create positive change on a global scale. Brand experience also teaches us what our audiences value. And increasingly, they’re valuing experiences over consumption.

To better understand how marketers see brand experience in the context of the overall marketing mix, we commissioned SSI to conduct an independent, global study. Over 1,000 marketers in a range of roles across North America, Asia, and Western Europe participated. In the following pages, we share highlights of the insights we gained. These insights can be used by show organizers, associations, corporate marketers, and exhibitors looking to better understand why brand experience truly is the next era in marketing.
Brand experience connects people, organizations, and cultures in ways that create positive change on a global scale.
Marketers Realize the Importance of Brand Experience

Across the board, more than two-thirds of the surveyed marketers agree that brand experience is an effective way to reach their organization’s goals.

But what are the goals that brand experience is the most effective at achieving? By and large, marketers felt that brand experience is great for building loyalty. This should not be surprising: when you treat people well and provide them with experiences they could not find elsewhere, loyalty grows. That's the promise and the power of the channel.

Percentage of CMOs who recognize brand experience for its ability to create ongoing relationships with key audiences

59%
Beyond that, brand experience was ranked as effective at achieving these important goals:

- **Lead generation**, indicated by 54 percent of B-to-B marketers and 53 percent of brand managers.
- **Growth in brand advocacy**, according to 58 percent of CMOs surveyed.
- **Making customers feel valued**, ranked with 61 percent of North American marketers and 56 percent of Western European marketers.
- **Increased sales**, indicated by 56 percent of North American and 50 percent of Asian marketers.

Additionally, more than nine out of ten marketers agree that brand experience delivers strong face-to-face interaction and more compelling brand engagement.
Case Study: New York Comic Con

Learn how ReedPop connects fans with the brands they love at New York Comic Con.
As marketers realize the value of brand experiences, they’re shifting their spending.

A growing number of marketers expect to allocate up to half of their budgets to brand experience in the next three to five years, although the numbers follow some interesting patterns:

**By role:** More than one in three CMOs expect to set aside 21 percent to 50 percent of their budgets for brand experience.

**By industry:** 28 percent of B-to-B marketers and 18 percent of B-to-C marketers will set aside that same amount.

**By geography:** Although all three regions are planning budget increases in brand experience, 32 percent of Asian marketers anticipate spending more than one-fifth of their total budgets (double the number of Asian marketers currently allocating that amount), versus 23 percent of European marketers and 27 percent of North American marketers.

**If your brand experience budget is increasing, here are some tips to spend your investment wisely:**

- **Start with strategy.** Develop a strategic road map: Discuss where you are today, where you want to be, and how brand experience can get you there. A clear strategic plan will ensure connection with your audience.

- **Know your audience.** Take the time for audience research. Once you know their needs, you can create experiences that deliver.

- **Develop a portfolio plan.** Make sure to vet every event before investing. Does it deliver on your business objectives and marketing efforts?

- **Invest in measurement.** Clear goals and metrics help prove the value of what you are doing. An event audit can give you a good baseline measurement.
Technology Makes Brand Experience More Personal

To create stronger connections, customization is key. Personal relevancy is what creates the engaging and memorable experiences that boost brand loyalty and sales.

However, marketers might not be moving fast enough.

The top three tactics marketers are currently using to drive brand experience are standard: website (58 percent), social media (57 percent), and email marketing (51 percent). And yet, when it comes to immersing an audience into a brand, there's an entire toolbox of game-changing tech out there. For example, only 22 percent of those surveyed are using some form of interactive touch screen technology and just 8 percent tap into virtual reality to augment the live experience.

When it comes to integrating technology, the organizations who are involved in many events (20+ per year) seem to be smarter about taking full advantage of these tools:

- 29 percent of them use interactive touch screen technology
- 21 percent take advantage of location mapping/beacons
- 16 percent use virtual reality
- 15 percent add gamification elements to their events
Case Study: Jeunesse

A 360-degree revolving stage, 24 video screens, 21 LED screens — one unforgettable brand experience.
In Asia especially, marketers appear to be early adopters of more immersive, interactive technology:

- 42 percent of Asian marketers tap into sensory interaction as a way to personalize brand experience, compared to 28 percent in North America and 13 percent in Western Europe.

- 31 percent of Asia-based companies are using virtual reality, compared to a meager 9 percent and 7 percent elsewhere.

- 30 percent of companies in Asia are deploying interactive touch screens to drive brand experience, compared to 20 percent and 26 percent in the other geographies.

- 22 percent of companies in Asia are using some form of gamification, versus only 9 percent and 13 percent for their respective counterparts.

It’s interesting to note that Asian marketers are growing their brand experience budgets at faster rates, and — not coincidentally — they’re more likely to see major results. It’s not just about total dollars spent either; it’s about focusing those dollars on a more strategic approach to personalized technology.

Today’s audiences expect digitally driven customization. So how can you bring more personalization into your own brand experiences?

**Case Study: Warner Bros. Fantastic Beasts Launch in China**

3-D paintings, set and prop displays, interactive augmented reality (AR) activations, social media sharing, and an HTML5 scavenger hunt hosted on WeChat all came together to activate a phenomena. [Read the full study.](#)

**Start small.** Try tapping into existing tech. Mobile apps, social media, and interactive touch screens are a great place to begin.

**Power up.** For increased personalization, turn to more sophisticated techniques. Gamification can be a fun experience, while second screen technology fills people’s need to interact.

**Go big.** Beacon technology can deliver customized messages, while virtual and augmented reality can take audiences on an intensely personal experience.
All the groups surveyed agree that brand experience marketing adds a high degree of value; however, they had different perceptions of where that value comes from.

- 48 percent of CMOs place high value on brand experience for showcasing the organization’s thought leadership — whereas only 33 percent of brand managers and 28 percent of event planners do.

- 58 percent of CMOs feel that brand experience helps increase advocacy — yet those numbers drop by 13-18 percent when considered by brand managers and event planners.

- Meanwhile, more than a third of brand managers and event planners realize the value of brand experience as content generators to share with stakeholders who cannot attend in person — yet that ranks high for only 21 percent of CMOs.

With any good marketing, the brand strategy should support the overarching business strategy of the organization. All marketing disciplines and plans should revolve around and support a unified view of the customer with a high degree of integration and collaboration. The role of the marketer is in a state of constant change. Data and customer experience integration can help a marketer make informed decisions and influence the total experience of a brand in new and important ways.
A CMO’s Guide To Driving Alignment

By Chris Cavanaugh, EVP & CMO, Freeman

One of the most important things a marketer can do is to use data to inform a view of the customer and then work with executive leadership to formulate a unified and integrated strategy for connecting to audience members when, where, and how they want. All teams across marketing, brand, communications, advertising, customer experience, data, and marketing automation must have a clear understanding of what they are striving for with straightforward and measurable outcomes.
The best way for a brand to be remembered is to be memorable.

As a result, more marketers are relying on brand experiences to create connections that resonate deeply with target audiences. All audience touchpoints are an opportunity to bring people into the fold in a meaningful and personalized way. Truly great brand experiences enable your brand to engage directly with consumers on an individual level — not just with generic buyer personas, but personally, with every human being who touches your brand.
Want more?

Request a consultation to discover how you can turn your marketing into a brand experience powerhouse.

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About Freeman
Freeman is the world’s leading brand experience company. We help our clients design, plan, and deliver immersive experiences for their most important audiences. Through comprehensive solutions including strategy, creative, logistics, digital solutions, and event technology, Freeman helps increase engagement and drive business results.