

14th February 2007

Highlights how events complement new media

Digital Media Gets An 'Experience' Bedfellow

Of all other media at brand owners' fingertips, it is event marketing that is not suffering ill effects from the digital revolution. In fact, evidence shows that the industry is being thrown to the fore of brand campaigns, in part because of its symbiotic relationship with online, writes EIA's Trevor Foley

The second coming of digital media has taken the form of a tsunami of a wave, as the January (Q4) IPA Bellwether confirms, sucking the traditional, mass media sectors under its pull. This isn't just because today's consumer wants to "consume" what they want, when it suits, but also because TV, radio, magazines, et al, can all be replicated online.

Ironically, it is event marketing, the oldest kid on the block that is riding the digital wave. It's not just that event marketing is complementary to digital, but that the two have so much in common, to the exclusion of the traditional mass-market media.

The key characteristic of both digital and events is "pull" rather than "push" media. Unlike the interruptive push techniques of broadcast, direct mail and other media forms, pull, or permission marketing, is exclusive to digital and live marketing formats.

In 2007 "engagement" will take "centre stage" for marketers and brand managers in our increasingly fragmented world, where consumers need to be able to make sense of the messages they are bombarded with. Taking a brand into a live, face-to-face environment allows the consumer to build a relationship with that brand beyond what is achievable online, or in any other media form. Where communities and relationships can be built online they can be consummated face-to-face.

So, event marketing, which for so long has not even been regarded as a mainstream marketing medium, now joins digital on the stage as a "now media" star.

Now for the evidence....

Among the greatest users of event marketing are online or airtime brands such as Microsoft, Google, e-Bay, AOL, O2 and Orange. O²'s use of events is a detailed and multi-faceted case study of effective brand positioning and relationship building, through countless touch-points with consumers. The re-naming of The Millennium Dome as The O² in the summer will be a lesson for all brand managers in extending and building trust in a brand.

In October 2006, Channel 4, with more than one eye for 2010's digital conversion, bought 50% of Taste Events, a programme of food and drink festivals. Michael Hodgson, managing director of Channel 4 Rights, had the following comments on this significant move:

"C4 sees live events as a great way to give our 4 and programme brands the ability to create a direct connection with consumers. They offer advertisers opportunities to deepen their advertising spend with us and again interact directly with their audiences. I believe a direct one-to-one relationship with a consumer is only going to become more important in a fragmenting digital world."

Mobile phone company Motorola showed live marketing's ability to achieve multi-objectives, at its 3GSM World Congress 2006 in Barcelona. The company achieved a tour de force in interactivity that included a creative show stand, a major press event, a "guerrilla marketing" campaign at the city's Pacha nightclub and a mobile marketing trailer outside the event venue.

Leslie Dance, corporate vice president of global marketing at Mobile Device Business says:

"Consumers want to interact and experience a brand personally. That is why Motorola is increasingly focusing on experiential marketing."

Timothy Ryan, director of brand marketing at AOL (UK) believes digital and live marketing work effectively when implemented side-by-side. AOL's involvement with prestigious events like 2005's Live 8, conveyed to Ryan how these media can feed off one another, to the benefit of the brand:

"Live events offer a forum to demonstrate our wide range of products, allowing us to alter perceptions of what AOL has to offer. For example, showcasing a live Web chat with Robbie Williams is a great way to convey AOL's music content. Digital and live marketing work well together. There is something about an event that people want to be part of, and digital has the ability to extend a live experience before, during and after the fact."

The statistics back him up. George P Johnson's *EventView 2006* research (which surveyed 900 marketing managers from across the globe) identified that 49% of respondents say the importance of event marketing is increasing. According to the research, event marketing represents 25% of global marketing budgets, and rates as producing the greatest ROI.

MICE Group's *Experiential Marketing : It Works* project (another global study) evidenced 62% of respondents predicting "experiential" to be one of the big marketing growth areas over the next five years. And growth is well underway, with 58% claiming to have increased experiential budget over the past two to three years. Add the convenience of digital media to the "trust" building qualities of the experience and you have a compelling media platform for years to come.

Trevor Foley is chief executive of Events Industry Alliance

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---NOTES TO EDITORS---

About the EIA: www.eventsindustryalliance.com

The Events Industry Alliance (EIA) is the new marketing arm for the exhibitions and events industry, tasked with telling business leaders and media planners about the huge prospects for business growth through the medium of "Face to Face Marketing", and increasing recognition in Government of the considerable value of the industry to the UK economy.

This new body has been formed by and is equally owned by members of three associations that have increasingly worked together to speak with one powerful voice for the industry:

- The Association of Exhibition Contractors (AEC)
- The Association of Exhibition Organisers (AEO)
- The Association of Event Venues (AEV)

The EIA aims to:

1. Provide a single stronger voice for the industry
2. Better resource industry promotion activities
3. Enable greater sharing of information and intellect between existing association parties and new communities
4. Increase professionalism within and knowledge of the industry at all levels within member companies, In order that all members can run existing events more successfully and win more exhibition/event business.

For more information, visit the website at www.eventsindustryalliance.com

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