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AAD 610-Lexicon Essay  
January 30, 2016

## Lexicon Essay

Though marketing and advertising has existed for hundreds of years, one marketing strategy has recently become a front-runner in major companies like Coca-Cola, Pepsi, and Febreze. Experiential marketing, a type of guerilla marketing, invites consumers to use all senses to experience a brand, ultimately facilitating a deeper connection between the audience and the company. In the past ten years, generations seem to respond more positively to participatory experiences. I believe this is due to the influence of technology and social media allowing users to be involved and communicate at the click of a button; thus making it the obvious choice for successful promotion of products.

Although Gary M. Reynolds first utilized experiential marketing in 1979, it wasn't until 2006 that the Advertising Research Foundation recognized it as a definitive strategy (Marketing Genome Project, 2014). The ARF even devised a formula to calculate the brand impact results:

$$\begin{array}{c} \text{Engagement} + \text{Trust} \times \text{Targeted} = \text{Brand Impact} \\ \text{Contacts} \\ \begin{array}{c} / \quad | \quad \backslash \\ \text{idea} \quad \text{message} \quad \text{media} \end{array} \end{array}$$

David Moth simplifies the strategy by saying, “the premise is to create a closer bond between the consumer and the brand by immersing them in a fun and memorable experience” (2014). Several companies have used this format to promote new merchandise or gain a loyal customer base.

One example comes from HotCow Expertise. In order to promote Season 2 of the popular children’s television show Doc McStuffins, marketers recreated Doc McStuffins’ Check-Up Clinic, an office that included a waiting room and examining rooms. Children were given lab coats, tools, and large stuffed animals to diagnose. The displays were set-up in large retailers like Toys R Us and Tesco’s (a British chain retailer). Reports showed that parents traveled from all over the country to participate in the experience, resulting in an increase of sales, viewers, and positive word of mouth (2014).



A better-known example of experiential marketing is the ongoing promotion, “The Pepsi Challenge.” Since 1975 participants have blindly taste tested two sodas, one being Pepsi and the other Coca-Cola. To the consumer’s surprise he or she particularly enjoyed the taste of one of the sodas, which would be revealed as Pepsi. Participants were even given a souvenir pin (shown below) that stated, “I took the Pepsi Challenge.” It was a simple, inexpensive way to gain loyal customers, allow participation in a popular event, and gain momentum through word of mouth.



A current, and likely the most elaborate, experiential marketing ploy comes from Red Bull. In 2012 Felix Baumgartner completed the highest freefall in history called Red Bull Stratos, becoming the first man to break the speed of sound. The experience was livestreamed through a webcast, as well as 80 TV stations in 50 countries. Audiences watched as Baumgartner prepared his suit and equipment, flew 128,000 feet above Earth, and jumped to reach up to 833 miles per hour. The results were almost immediate as it sold 5.2 billion cans worldwide in 2012, resulting in a 13% increase from 2011; the U.S. alone increased sales by 17% (Natalie Zmuda, 2013)



I have chosen to implement the experiential marketing strategy due to the high success rate experienced by brands in the past. In addition, I would like to recognize the evolving participatory culture by offering participatory options for potential consumers. As Henry Jenkins says, “Not every member must contribute, but all must feel they are free to contribute when ready...” (2009, p. 7). I want to create an advertisement and promotional campaign to involve adults, as well as children, in a play experience. Jenkins piqued my interest in the concept of play becoming a necessary skill of the emerging participatory culture. He states, “play is the capacity to experiment with one’s surroundings as a form of problem-solving” (2009, p. 4). By utilizing Jenkins’ idea of

participatory culture and play, I want to emphasize The Port Discovery Children's Museum mission's element of life-long curiosity.

The lexicon terms I will use to critically analyze my marketing strategy are: environmental scan, accessibility, audience, alignment, play, and PLE. An **environmental scan** considers the political, economic, social and technological events and trends that influence a company or brand. I think this is one of the most important steps in completing a successful campaign because one must know what the wants and needs of their community entail. **Accessibility** can be defined in several ways, but for the purposes of my analysis, it is the availability of products and services to all people, regardless of socio-economic background. If the consumer feels the item is inaccessible, whether it is too expensive, irrelevant to their needs, or unrealistic, they will not attempt to seek out the item at all. It is the marketing department's duty to ensure products are accessible to the widest audience possible. The **audience** is the specific group of people a brand is trying to reach. I believe the audience is the most important element to any marketing strategy. Not knowing the needs or wants of your audience will result in a waste of time and money. **Alignment** is the arrangement of a group in relation to one another. Without alignment, the audience may not understand what the product is or how it may fit into their lives. **Play** is the spontaneous action of an individual. Because I am creating a plan for a children's museum, I believe this is an integral component to my marketing plan. A **PLE**, or personal learning environment, is the environment in which one learns most efficiently. Understanding the community's general learning environment will allow for the creation of the most relevant experience.

There is a fluid connection between each of the lexicon terms to one another as well as in relation to my marketing strategy. My chosen audience for my marketing plan will be working class parents or caregivers, specifically those in urban Baltimore, and their children. Last term, I conducted an environmental scan, which helped me to better understand this specific audience. From this understanding, I crafted a general personal learning environment that included physical and digital areas. I deduced that my target audience would likely encounter ads while commuting to work, either through public transit or on busy interstates and highways. Further, I wanted to ensure that the marketing displays were accessible to my audience by making them simple, eye-catching, and easy to use. I wanted to include an element of play in my marketing strategy because not only is it a necessary skill for a participatory audience, it encompasses the purpose of a children's museum. Each of these elements is in alignment with my experiential marketing plan.

The overall goal of the plan is to increase awareness of the Port Discovery Children's Museum, which would (hopefully) result in increased attendance of families, as well as an increase in sales of memberships. To connect my audience with the brand of the museum, I will create various play experiences, where consumers can choose to participate in childhood games like hopscotch, jump rope, Simon says, word jumbles, or hidden picture puzzles. I will place them on buses, in bus stops, and on billboards along major highways and interstates. Each ad will include a slogan that says, "Rediscover your inner-child...come play with us at the Port Discovery!" Through these ads, adults would be able to fulfill the museum's slogan of "Play with a purpose." These play experiences would likely brighten up the daily monotony of commuting, as well as connect

emotionally with consumers by stirring up childhood memories. Consequentially, parents will want to create memories for their children by giving them the opportunity to play productively at the museum. As discussed in *Participatory Culture*, when parents participate in play they encourage and foster the necessary “skills for new media” (Jenkins, 2009).

Besides connecting with the audience emotionally, there are several other benefits to implementing an experiential marketing strategy. The overall expense of the campaign will be minimal. The promotional materials will include rope, paint, illustrated signs, and posters that could be easily replicated and distributed throughout the city. If executed successfully, the awareness of the museum would increase significantly. Involving the consumers both physically and emotionally would create a memorable campaign, which would eventually spread by word of mouth. Like the Pepsi Challenge or the Doc McStuffins medical lab, consumers would likely begin to seek out these play experiences, traveling the area to participate or simply take photographs. Additionally, audiences would be leveled, meaning there would be no expectation of education, economic, or social status. Each adult would have the equal opportunity to experience being a kid again. Lastly, consumers would be face-to-face with the Port Discovery, creating monumental awareness and attention.

However, there are some constraints and challenges that come with initiating an experiential marketing plan. The most evident challenge is the unreliability of adults choosing to participate in the activities. Because there will not be a spokesperson present to engage potential consumers, there is no guarantee that anyone will understand the activities or choose to play with the games. Also, there is no way to measure audience

participation for the ads that require only visual engagement. In order to measure success, the museum may want to consider completing surveys after the ad campaign or placing representatives near the ads to observe participation. Adult guests could answer questions about if they encountered any of the ads and whether it influenced their attendance for the museum. Unfortunately, this would increase the time involvement, and, ultimately, the cost of the marketing plan.

Another factor to consider is the location of each ad. The environmental scan quickly reveals the lack of security at the bus stops and other public areas where the ads will be displayed, making each installation subject to theft or vandalism. As in any city in the United States, there are some areas more susceptible to vandalism, particularly those in the inner city. I do not want to alienate or exclude any audiences, therefore it may be more practical to place the more permanent ads, like the hopscotch or jump rope games, near the bus stops while keeping the visual displays inside buses and on billboards. Although the bus stops will not be entirely safe from theft, the materials would be low-cost and easily replaceable if in high traffic areas. An assessment would need to take place to investigate which areas in the city the displays are having the most success and are the most in tact.

While there are many opportunities and challenges with the experiential ad campaign, I believe it is an excellent strategy that compliments the purpose of the Port Discovery Children's Museum. As described in the above sections, it is imperative that the museum reaches a larger audience, especially the working class parents and caregivers. The ad displays are emotionally and physically engaging, making them accessible and relevant to children and parents alike. With appropriate monitoring and

assessment, the displays will offer exceptional brand awareness, engagement, and sustainable marketing.

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