13 Gauging effectiveness

As we have seen, there are many unpredictable events and variables that can contribute to the success or failure of a live brand experience. If you plan a TV advertising campaign, once the advert has been created, approved and scheduled there is not much that can come in the way of it being aired as planned. It is pre-recorded, controllable and reliable. A live brand experience, on the other hand, has people's free will (along with all the previously discussed risks and external factors) to contend with. Methods that allow you to gauge the effectiveness of the live brand experience part of the experiential marketing campaign during its progress are of ultimate importance, and allow you to monitor the results of the experience and react accordingly. Even though careful action planning and contingencies can contribute greatly to the success of the activation of this plan, there will always be some completely unpredictable dynamics. Sometimes these dynamics are positive and sometimes they are negative. Gauging effectiveness is about telling the difference and reacting appropriately; this is achieved by reviewing the results of the systems and mechanisms for measurement and ensuring flexibility options are in place.

Live brand experiences, especially when implemented face to face, can require a certain amount of improvisation. Because things can go wrong, and many unpredictable positive opportunities can also be created during the process, it is wise to be mentally and emotionally prepared. If you are on the agency side, it is your duty to ensure that the client is also prepared for the unpredictable.

It is true that the more careful action planning you do, the more you will be in control. But because so many factors come into play and relate to each other in a multitude of combinations, there will be things that are out of your control when you are action planning and that will only be discovered during the live brand experience.

The Gauging effectiveness stage will ensure that not only do you plan methods that allow you to react quickly to the fluid reality of your live brand experience, but that you have a way to monitor the campaign while it is live, using those methods. Such methods include real-time reporting of results from the live experience team (Brand ambassadors, team leaders and event managers) to the experiential marketing agency, and online real-time reporting from the experiential marketing agency to the client. Flexibility options are important and allow you to adapt to the findings, such as ensuring scalability in terms of staff and locations. The systems and mechanisms for measurement that you built into the plan already will ensure that the people who are present at the live brand experience are feeding back all the relevant data. During the evaluation stage you will be estimating the outputs of those systems and mechanisms. When you are gauging the effectiveness of the live brand experience during its progress, you will compare the data that is fed back with the estimates in the plan. This way, if something turns out better than expected, the insights and learning that can be gained will be available instantly to leverage the results of the rest of the campaign. Likewise, if something is working less well than expected, or if unpredictable circumstances arise, then instant changes can be made and damage is minimized.

Systems and mechanisms for measurement and how they enable Gauging effectiveness

For a system or mechanism for measurement to be of any value, there must be a way to accurately define and measure it. After you complete the evaluation scorecard, which will be covered in the evaluation stage of the plan (see Chapter 14), quantifiable estimates will be associated with each of the mechanisms for measurement that you have built in to your plan already (each corresponding with an experiential objective), as discussed in Chapter 11. The quantifiable estimates will act as targets and will allow continuous Gauging effectiveness of the live brand experience during its progress. For example, a live brand experience for a washing powder, held in shopping malls across Europe, had a mechanism for measuring word-of-mouth that was based on the number of interactions.

The estimated number was 2,000 participant interactions per location, per day. This was calculated by dividing the total number of interactions (as logged in the experiential scorecard during the completion of the evaluation stage) by the number of locations and days. In this case the estimate of 2,000 participant interactions per location, per day became a target. The event managers at all the locations would fill in a PDA survey every few hours, each day, and part of that survey involved logging the number of participant interactions. When the number of interactions was far higher or lower than expected, the agency and client would know immediately, get to the bottom of why there had been a dramatic variation, and be able to react fast.

As previously discussed, the Systems or mechanisms for measurement relate to the Experiential objectives. In some instances two of those systems are linked to each other. For example, the System for measuring the word-of-mouth reach (multiplying the number of interactions by 17 and then adding the initial number of interactions) is interlinked with the System for measuring the participation of the live brand experience (counting the number of interactions). Therefore, since the word-of-mouth reach cannot be estimated or measured without the number of interactions, it would be useless to set the Experiential objective of driving word-of-mouth without following through by gauging the effectiveness of the live brand experience in that respect (using the System or mechanism for measurement data).

Deciding in advance how the data gathered from the Systems or mechanisms for measurement will be communicated quickly, and establishing what percentage of positive or negative variation is considered to be poor, acceptable or exceptional, is crucial. Defining how far above or below the estimate you should go before adapting the live brand experience is very important. The experiential scorecard will provide the estimate across the whole campaign, and you will need to divide that estimate by the number of locations and days to get the unit estimates (which act as targets); then during the actual campaign, you will need to know how the real results compare to those targets.

Whether these targets are to be measured qualitatively or quantitatively should have already been specified during the Systems and mechanisms for measurement part of the plan. Moreover, it is important that the experiential marketing agency and client stick to these definitions and acceptable or not acceptable variations during all ongoing live brand experiences from month to month, or year to year, to allow for benchmarking and realistic comparisons. Likewise, if a client is switching experiential marketing agencies, it should ensure that the new agency applies the same systems or mechanisms for measurement to its plans that the previous agency did, to allow easy gauging of effectiveness during a campaign and to enable clear understanding of what is a positive or negative result. If the actual results of several Systems or mechanisms for measurement on a specific day or location of a campaign are poor, then the agency should quickly try and gauge why and, if relevant, propose adequate changes to the client. Changing and adapting quickly is essential to the positive outcome of a live brand experience programme.

Real-time reporting and online client access pages

By monitoring the results of your live brand experience in real time, you can continuously aim to improve and adapt it by learning from the variations between the actual outputs of the Systems or mechanisms for measurement (such as consumer feedback and data collected) and the estimated outputs. You can also learn from the event manager's feedback. The Brand ambassadors and team leaders should feed back the data to the event managers, who should regularly and systematically communicate back to the experiential marketing agency. There are several ways that technology can enable this process to happen efficiently and reliably. One option is that the event managers report the feedback and data into survey forms on their smart phones (such as a palm pilot or BlackBerry) or PDAs, and instantly transmit from the devices to the online client access page, which should be on the experiential marketing agency's website. Another option is that a telephone survey line is set up with multiple-choice and qualitative answer options and that the event managers and Brand ambassadors call the line at regular intervals, and their responses are automatically processed and accessible on the experiential marketing agency's online client access pages.

It is important that the internal agency team, the client and its stakeholders are able to view the results of the Systems or mechanisms for measurement with ease throughout the live brand experience's progress. This is why it is important that the experiential marketing agency designs bespoke online client access pages on their website, and tailors them for each individual campaign's reporting needs. That will allow the internal agency staff and the client to log on to the campaigns page, and gauge the effectiveness of the campaign during progress, reacting and adapting as necessary.

There are many types of online client access pages, but all should allow users to log on with a unique password and view web-based or telephone-based survey results, which can include distribution data, interaction figures, consumer feedback, and all the results from Systems or mechanisms for measurements. Any other change requests, issues or information that the client should know about should also be posted manually onto the client access page by the internal agency staff responsible for doing so. The experiential marketing agency should have the facilities to upload results in real time so that the client is always up-to-date. As well as results in real time, the experiential marketing agency should be able to upload visual evidence (such as photos and video clips) onto the same client access page within 48 hours of a campaign going live and any other documents or files that they want the client to download.

Flexibility and change management solutions

There may be areas that need quick adaptation, scaling up, down or amending, depending on the variations between actual results (discovered through the real-time reporting) and estimated results (calculated by dividing the broader estimates in the experiential scorecard). If the experiential marketing agency notices a variation that is either a problem or opportunity, and wants to propose a change to the client, then there needs to be a planned and agreed procedure for doing so. At this point in the plan, it is important to include procedures for approving changes during a live brand experience's progress. The recommended method of doing this is to create forms like those shown in this chapter and to ensure that all relevant members of the client decision-making team are aware of the possibility of a change request during the campaign. A sample change request form is shown in Table 13.1.

The change request form can be uploaded onto the client access page or e-mailed, as long as it is sent in a way that allows quick decision making and reaction. The chances of the live brand experience succeeding can directly relate to the speed with which the results and any corresponding change requests are shared (by the agency) and the speed with which the receivers can react (the client).

Once a change request form has been approved, there will need to be a log of that change and any other changes that are requested and approved. These changes can easily be logged in a form such as the change control log shown in Table 13.2, which will prove useful when conducting the final Evaluation of the campaign.

Table 13.1 Change request form

<table>
<tr><th colspan="3">CHANGE REQUEST FORM</th></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">Live brand experience name:</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">Project manager name:</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">Live brand experience location:</td></tr>
<tr><td>Agency originator name and phone:</td><td>Date of request:</td><td>Change request no.:
allocated by Change controller</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Items to be changed:</td><td>Reference(s):</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">Description of change (reasons for change, benefits, date required):

Estimated cost and time to implement (quotation attached? Yes/No):

Will this cost be additional, or part of existing contingencies?</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">Priority/constraints (impact on other deliverables, implications of not proceeding, risks)</td></tr>
</table>

<table>
<tr><td colspan="6">CHANGE EVALUATION</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">What is affected:</td><td colspan="3">Work required (resources, costs, dates):</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">Related change requests:</td><td colspan="3"></td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">Name of evaluator:</td><td colspan="2">Date evaluated:</td><td>Signature:</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="6">CLIENT CHANGE APPROVAL</td></tr>
<tr><td>Accepted/Rejected/Deferred</td><td colspan="2">Name:</td><td colspan="2">Signed:</td><td>Date:</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="6">Comments:</td></tr>
</table>

CHANGE IMPLEMENTATION			
Asset:	Implementer:	Date completed:	Signature:

Table 13.2 Change control log

CHANGE CONTROL LOG					
Live brand experience:		Date (from/to)			
Project manager:		Client:			
Change number	Description of change	Date Received	Date Evaluated	Date Approved	Date Completed

Summary

In summary, the ever-changing environment of the real world and the force of individual free will are bound to create unexpected circumstances. Just imagine if, during a live brand experience that was being executed face to face, a group of radical political protestors decided to march with picket boards in the same location. Would the client be happy to be affiliated with this radical cause? Would the experience's Brand ambassadors and participants be safe in such as volatile environment? The answers are 'probably not'. Though the client is likely to want to move the campaign, they would not be happy if they were not informed of what was going on, and they didn't have the opportunity to participate in deciding on the solution. If the proposed solution were to change locations, they surely would want to be involved in that decision.

If a client hoped that their live brand experience channel, with the objective of increasing sales, would result in a big sales uplift in the stores where the experience was positioned, and some of those stores ran out of stock during the first hour of the experience, the client would want to know about the problem and decide on an appropriate solution. Depending on circumstances, they might want to attempt to transport stock from other stores to the affected stores, relocate the experience to a store that had sufficient stock, or postpone the experience to another day. Regardless of which solution they would have preferred, the client would not have been happy if their experiential marketing agency hadn't informed them of the problem until it was too late to react. If the experiential marketing agency didn't have real-time reporting in place, then it is not likely that the client would be informed in time.

There are plenty of examples of unpredictable circumstances which, when addressed swiftly, can be dealt with in a manner that optimizes the results of the live brand experience and ensures maximum achievement of Experiential objectives. By building Systems or mechanisms for measurement in the plan, completing the experiential scorecard in the evaluation stage, and Gauging effectiveness of the campaign by comparing actual outputs with estimated targets and using a combination of real-time reporting facilities and change management solutions to adapt and react, optimum results can be achieved. The Gauging effectiveness part of the SET MESSAGE plan will enable you to create a smooth and clear process for optimizing the live brand experience part of your experiential marketing campaign for best results.