

# 2 Outsourcing vs in-house

When thinking about planning an experiential campaign, you might be considering whether you want to try and organize it in-house or hire either your normal agency or a specialist agency. Additionally, you may consider sourcing an experiential agency specialist to do the planning and implementation. Usually, it is important to use experts in this field who have set up infrastructures and systems geared towards handling the complex environments that many live brand experiences tend to have. Live brand experiences require not only great attention to detail in the planning stages, but also great knowledge of footfall and demographics in a plethora of locations, as well as the need for your agency to have good relationships with specialist suppliers and experienced promotional staff. All this requires a very specifically trained and experienced team to manage effectively the smooth running of campaigns, which have so many external factors that can potentially cause things to go wrong.

If you compare live brand experiences to adverts, the process of logistical planning is very different. An advert has to be designed and improved sufficiently before it is scheduled for broadcast. But once it is scheduled, there are very few things that can stop it from happening. On the other hand, a live brand experience can involve hundreds of thousands of people interacting in real time, and there are many things that can go wrong. In addition, many external factors come into play – political, economic, social, technological, environmental and legal (PESTEL), and, of course, the weather. Every aspect of the PESTEL mix can, at any point during the live brand experience, place things in jeopardy (this will be addressed in detail later in the book).

Even though it is advisable to appoint an experiential agency that is expert at successfully handling these variable environments, there are nonetheless several options to consider. While at brief stage, you may want to evaluate what you want to do in-house and what is more effectively done externally. It is usually best to employ people in-house for the customer experience management (CEM) programme and to employ an experiential marketing agency for the live brand experiences. The other agencies can then work in partnership to amplify the live brand experience, forming the integrated experiential marketing campaign.

Companies go to many different types of agencies with live brand experience briefs. Frequent choices include PR agencies, advertising agencies, media agencies, direct marketing agencies, field marketing agencies, sales promotion agencies and, obviously, experiential marketing agencies. They sometimes even go to creative shops or event-planning agencies. In other words, companies have been known to invite pretty much any of their agencies to pitch for the live brand experiences they want to implement. Therefore, it should be of no surprise that the experiential marketing medium as a whole has been subject to criticism when at least half of the time, live brand experience campaigns are implemented by non-specialist agencies rather than experiential marketing experts. With that said, a lot of the time the live brand experience part of the experiential marketing campaign will eventually be outsourced to an experiential specialist anyway for activation.

There are pros and cons to every approach, and when considering each different agency type for experiential marketing, we need to be aware of what those are. It is of ultimate importance to make the right choice in terms of which agency to appoint to run your live brand experience campaigns. If live brand experience becomes the core of your experiential marketing strategy as a brand, you will need to consider whether you will invest in the resources required to bring experiential marketing in-house. But this discipline is complex for internal management, and an internal team of sufficient experiential marketing capability in terms of creative strategy, activation of live brand experiences and evaluation, may prove too expensive in resources compared to using outside expertise.

This chapter looks at the external factors that inevitably put at risk the success of every live brand experience campaign. When it comes to the creative process, there may be similarities with the activities involved in other marketing communications channels. You can look at a brand personality and come up with an emotional message, and likewise, you can look at a product's features and benefits and come up with a more rational message. The creative approach that reflects the brand, the target audience and the product, taking into consideration the

situation, can be applied across all channels. But while we can probably apply a similar creative process in a way that is relevant and relates to many forms of marketing and advertising, we cannot apply the same execution or evaluation processes. Therefore, the creative process is where the similarities between planning live brand experiences and planning other communication channels ends.

Live brand experiences are very different to any other forms of marketing, in terms of the number of different factors that come into play and affect the outcome of a campaign. To understand the difference, think of a magazine advert that is due to be printed, or a TV or radio advert that is due to be broadcast, and think of how many things can go wrong (technically) once that creative has been produced, the advert shot or designed and slotted into the media schedule. It is very likely that it will be printed or broadcast as planned, as there are not a huge number of things that can happen to interrupt that process. In contrast, while a live brand experience campaign can be planned creatively, then logistically, once the campaign goes live there are so many things that can then still occur to affect the success or failure of the entire venture.

Successful live brand experience planning and execution requires a complex mix of individual skill sets and existing relationships. It needs to be in the hands of the right people to bring results, rather than potentially becoming a logistical nightmare. In the hands of the wrong people, campaigns can become impossible to execute effectively, with so many complexities factoring into the equation. Activation requires careful operational logistics planning, detailed execution schedules, and a fanatical attention to detail to be a success. This is of course additional to the fact that the experiential idea should be powerful in the first place. It should also carry strategic insights from previous campaigns, regarding selection of the locations and people. This type of specific planning is something that we will examine in detail later on in the book. The planning system, SET MESSAGE, which forms the structure of this book, is geared around integrating the right systems into your experiential marketing plan; systems that have been tried and tested by leading experiential marketing agencies.

Once you decide that you want to change your approach and use live brand experiences at the core of your communications, using the other communications channels to amplify the live brand experiences, you might consider the possibility of bringing the live brand experience team in-house. Alternatively, when you outsource the live brand experience programme, do you outsource it to a full-service, specialist or experiential agency?

If you are on the client side, working for a brand, or in a full-service agency, it is very likely that you are already working with a wide array of agencies. Maybe you have a PR agency that handles your below-the-line marketing and an advertising agency that you work with to raise awareness. Or maybe you work with integrated marketing agencies who manage the other agencies for you. No matter what your situation, if you have decided that you would like to use live brand experiences, and place them at the core of your marketing communications, you will need to decide who will be responsible for them. This is crucial, because for your experiential marketing to be most successful, the selected channels should be in place to amplify the live brand experience channel, with appropriate people accountable for it. Let's look first at some of the pros for a large organization bringing an experiential marketing team in-house.

## In-house

### *Pros*

You understand your own industry and products better than an external entity. You understand the decision making and buying process in your organization very well. If you recruit a skilled specialist experiential marketing team to work in-house, they will work only for you, because you are their only 'client'. The people who you bring in to be responsible for experiential marketing will get to know key players within your organization and have a greater understanding of the internal politics.

On the other hand, bringing an experiential marketing team in-house is not usually advisable because you would need an experienced team with backgrounds in live brand experience creative, strategy and activation. This is something that should only happen if, after spending several years heavily committing to customer experience management and experiential marketing, you are ready to make a big investment of time, money and people. With that said, there are obvious advantages in doing so. If you are looking to make this serious move and bring experiential marketing teams into your organization, this commitment is representative of the overall orientation and philosophy of the organization. We have seen in Chapter 1 how businesses and brands have differentiated themselves from their competitors by shifting from a product orientation, to a service orientation, to a customer relationship orientation. It is clear that now we are at the dawn of an era where organizations are differentiating by shifting once again, this time to a

customer experience orientation. By bringing experiential marketing teams in-house, not only will your external marketing communications benefit, but your internal marketing will too.

If your experiential marketing teams are in-house, then it should become their responsibility to ensure that all the departments within your organization have an understanding of the importance of the customer experience, and that management understand how the employee experience will filter through and affect broader stakeholders and the public. This focus on the customer experience is not only one for the marketing and sales department. It should apply to everyone, from the call centre personnel who answer your phones, handling customer service enquiries, to the staff in the retail environment, right through to the finance department. No matter which sector or industry your organization focuses on, or which department your employees work in, collectively they form the orientation of your organization, and they need to be trained by working with the experiential marketing (or customer experience) part of your organization. This will enable them to complete the shift to a customer experience and experiential marketing focused outlook.

Many of the agencies that you work with are aware of the experiential marketing revolution, and they are noting a high demand for live brand experiences from their clients. That is why many of them have adapted their agencies, to enable the provision of live brand experience services to their existing clients. Though these agencies may apply an experiential marketing philosophy to the channels they were already offering, the live brand experience channel is one that they are still likely to outsource to an experiential specialist (after marking up the fees). Another phenomenon, in a smaller number of cases, is that agencies are recruiting teams of specialist personnel who are experienced in experiential marketing, or buying existing independent experiential agencies, allowing the integrated agencies to provide their clients with experiential marketing solutions.

The main advantage of bringing an experiential marketing team in-house is that they will know the key players within your organization much better than any agency ever could. This results in them being far more familiar with the buying and decision-making process. Intimate with key players, stakeholders and politics within the organization, they will be able to adapt the customer experience to be in line with the overall organizational goals, as well as designing the experiential marketing programme to achieve marketing communication objectives. In-house staff will be more familiar with the organization's ethos, plans and goals, as well as with who makes which decisions when, why and how. Obviously these considerations are of key importance because this

information can help the team to integrate an experiential philosophy into many facets of the organization.

Another positive factor is that the in-house experiential marketing team will spend every working day and all their energy focused on the organization and its goals without other commitments or priorities. Their 'clients' are all internal, and therefore the experiential team's energies are divided only between the key decision makers and satisfying them and the agreed projects at hand. The alternative is an agency scenario where the agency teams will have to focus on many different clients, of which your organization is only one.

Another factor to look at is the proprietary rights or the intellectual property of the experiential strategies. Imagine a situation where your experiential agency team comes up with creative strategies for a campaign, and you want to approve these plans because the ideas are good, but you cannot go ahead with them until the following financial year (for copyright or contractual reasons). You would want to put the strategy on hold for reconsideration 12 months down the line, or maybe you would like to test the water with market research and pilot the idea before committing to it on a large scale. If the ideas and intellectual rights belong to your organization, you would have full confidence that you could implement them now or at a later stage without much risk of the ideas going to your competitors. It doesn't matter whether you are ready now or later, because the team that developed the strategies is yours. If the ideas belong to the agency and the concepts were proposed to the client, then the client would have the opportunity to go ahead or not. There are many people at the agency who would have already been exposed to these strategies and would have the opportunity to talk about them to other clients; therefore, the chances of the ideas escaping into the public arena prior to execution are far greater.

## Cons

As previously stated, this approach is not recommended unless you are willing to invest a huge amount of time, money and people in the process. It is extremely costly to set up experienced internal teams and systems, and this part of this chapter will focus on why.

First, for live brand experiences you will need a creative team and an operational or project management team, as well as the large numbers of specialized Brand ambassadors and suppliers that require an enormous amount of management. Therefore, you would also require a promotional staff booking team, and in many cases warehousing, storage and logistics facilities, so the investment should not be underestimated. And the cons are not only financial but resource-based.

Another con is that if you are not running live brand experiences all the time, the logistical and activation part of the team will be doing nothing in the interim period. If you have experiential campaigns on all summer long, and then there is a break for three or four months, the activation part of your experiential team, with maybe five or more employees, will have nothing to do apart from attempt to assist those people in the experiential marketing team who are responsible for CEM. In this case, you will have invested a great deal of time, money and effort, but when there are no live brand experience campaigns running, many members of the activation and staff-booking teams will become idle.

Understandably, if you do decide that you want to bring your experiential marketing in-house, then you will want the best people to be part of the team. However, can you find those best people straight away? Not only will this major specialist recruitment become a challenge, but you will face other issues. Competent executives with superior creativity in experiential marketing will be less likely to want to join an organization as an employee, because they are likely to already own or manage an experiential agency, or be in a senior role where profits will be higher for them. In addition, creative people within experiential marketing are more likely to want to work on the agency side than be an employee in an organization. They will want to be more senior in an organization, and it is unlikely that you will be able to offer senior roles when experiential marketing is such a new division within your company. Therefore, the types of people that you are likely to attract for an in-house experiential marketing team are going to be comfortable working in middle-level positions and as a result not the highly creative executives you seek.

It is important to note that it is not only the profits and seniority that will attract these individuals to work in the agency side but also the variety of work. By working with a range of clients across many different sectors, creative experiential marketing executives will have the excitement and fluidity that they desire. On the other hand, working for one brand or company requires a very different type of person who is attracted to that type of role and has typically come from a client-side background.

In summary, it is important to remember that unless you would like experiential marketing and customer experience management to be at the centre of your organizational marketing strategies, then bringing it in-house is a massive investment that is not likely to be right for you. It is usually preferable to find a specialist experiential marketing agency to work with you or to use your integrated agency on your experiential marketing (especially the live brand experiences). If you do think that experiential should be at the core of your organizational strategy, then it could be worth the time, effort and investment in the long run to

bring specialists in-house for the CEM programme. Even in this case, it would still be preferable to hire specialist experiential agencies to work in partnership with the in-house team.

There are companies for whom customer experience is a key part of their organization and identity. Disney, PlayStation, Red Bull, Sony, Nike, as well as brands that originated as start-ups, such as Ben and Jerry's and Innocent Smoothies, are organizations that pride themselves on positioning positive, brand-relevant customer experience at the core of their company ethos. Their CEM focuses on the customer's touch points with the brand, where an experiential strategy leads the way. As a result, these organizations invest heavily in their in-house teams responsible for CEM. Many of these companies still regularly supplement their in-house activities by working with specialist experiential marketing agencies that have benefited greatly from the in-house involvement and importance placed on experiential marketing.

Some companies already have an excellent relationship with the specialist agencies they work with; their media agency or their PR agency, for example, know them very well and understand their brand. The next section of this chapter looks at the pros and cons of outsourcing the live brand experience aspect of experiential marketing to some of the agencies with which you may have an existing relationship.

## Outsourcing to your media or full-service agency

### *Pros*

The obvious pro is that the agency will be more familiar with your brand and will have run previous campaigns for you, and therefore have a deep understanding of what you like, the approach of the organization and your brand as a whole. It will also be able to put things into context very well, as it will have been responsible for, or involved in lots of previous strategies for marketing your brand.

Another pro for implementing experiential marketing through your media agency is that it will be easier for it to have control of the integration of the live brand experience strategy into the above-the-line media (advertising). A further pro is that it may be responsible for implementing an integrated campaign with global reach. It will be easier for it to ensure that your live brand experiences also have a consistent global reach by managing consistency across campaigns executed by many experiential agencies. Due to its international resources, it would

potentially be easier for it to ensure quality control on such a large scale compared to a smaller specialist experiential agency, which may struggle.

### Cons

Media or full-service agencies that you have an existing relationship with are very likely to do their own outsourcing. They will want to move at least the majority of the live brand experiences to experiential agencies or other agencies (such as outdoor specialists) that they work with. There is a certain lack of control in this type of situation, because the agency that you are paying to handle your experiential marketing is not the agency that is actually carrying out the work or managing the campaigns' strategies as a whole. The people that are your client contacts in the media agency will not be as well-placed to give you a realistic picture of what is happening, because they are clients to the experiential agency that is really handling the live brand experience campaign. The experiential agency may paint a certain picture to its client, the media agency, and the media agency may paint yet another picture for you as a client. The more agencies involved in the outsourcing chain, the more honesty and control are in jeopardy.

Another factor is cost. Obviously, the media or full-service agency will mark up unit costs significantly, not to mention the agency commissions on top, so you will be paying more for your live brand experiences than you need to, especially when several agencies are involved.

Large media agencies are used to doing things on a large scale. Therefore, they will usually recommend that your live brand experience should be on such a scale and similar to your media. You may not have done any live brand experiences in the past, and if you want to start then it may be better to test your ideas on a relatively small scale.

Most important, experiential marketing is not the media agency's area of expertise. In fact, people who are trained, educated and predominantly have experience in media are not likely to be people who have significant experience in live brand experiences. It is therefore not ideal to assign them as the agency responsible for managing your experiential strategy as a whole because they may be less likely to position the live brand experience at the core of the campaign.

Another factor is that media people are less likely to appreciate live brand experience as a serious discipline and internalize an understanding of its true benefits and fantastic future in marketing. Media agencies win prizes for advertising, and historically they tend to see live brand experiences as a part of the field-marketing arena, a discipline perceived

as tactical and unsophisticated. For the average media professional, there are too many uncertainties in live brand experiences, and it can sometimes be too small scale to interest them

Media agencies are used to media metrics and try to measure live brand experience campaigns similarly, without taking other factors into consideration. It is unlikely that media agencies will note things such as the effect-per-interaction and the word-of-mouth reach. It is more likely that they will use opportunity to see (OTS) and cost per thousand (CPT). If only 50,000 people can directly interact with a live brand experience compared to 5 million people watching an advert, it is likely that, from a media perspective, the live brand experience campaign will appear to have a less effective reach. In comparison, an experiential marketing agency or an experiential marketer will understand that not only do those 50,000 people interact with the experience, but that each of them is likely to tell an average of 17 other people about it, and therefore the overall reach of the campaign becomes significantly larger.

An experiential marketer will also understand that the effect per interaction is very significant, that many of the people that interact with the experience are converted into brand evangelists, and they will understand that this dynamic results in increased customer loyalty and positive word-of-mouth. The experiential agency would be able to demonstrate these results, showing how the campaign is achieving objectives that advertising simply cannot currently achieve.

The final con for placing experiential strategy and live brand experiences in the hands of your media agency is that they will be more used to budgets that are based on simple unit costs, which are multiplied based on the number of exposures or display opportunities. For example, they know what it costs to broadcast adverts in 30 seconds on a specific scale, with a specific media owner. They can then multiply that unit cost by the number of times it will be displayed or broadcast on that channel, add in agency commissions, and they have the cost. This is something they will do regularly, with the same costs applying to many of their clients. They will do this across all the media channels that the advert will broadcast. It is a simple mathematical multiplication. On the other hand, costing the live brand experience part of experiential marketing campaigns requires a far more detailed, complex and variable approach. An experiential agency knows this complex and bespoke costing process is a necessity, and will not be fazed by it, while the media agency will be daunted as it will not be part of the normal parameters it is used to when budgeting.

## Working with a PR agency

### *Pros*

The next option is the PR agency. For many companies, this is the first point of call when they think of experiential marketing. To begin with the pros: obviously the company can integrate the live brand experience with the PR strategy and therefore maximize the reach of a campaign, which is fantastic.

For example, a UK-based PR agency managed the strategy of an experiential marketing campaign for a popular brand of chocolate bars, and outsourced the activation of the live brand experience to an experiential agency. The experiential agency's staffing division deployed 30 'hunks' dressed in branded outfits with the chocolate bars attached to their chests, to amplify the above-the-line campaign whose intention was to target a new audience for the chocolate. The target audience was females aged 20–35. This was at a time when it became illegal to advertise certain foods to children, and the company had to completely shift its marketing to a different audience and reposition the brand.

The hunks were kitted out and hit the streets of London, distributing 60,000 chocolate bars and engaging the female consumers with the key communication message: 'A little bit of what you fancy' while inviting them to rip the chocolate bars from their chests. They reinforced the above-the-line message and visited media houses with a campaign finale at the famous Eros statue in Piccadilly Circus. The finale, which was a publicity stunt drawing in many members of the press, saw photographers snapping away at the hunks, who were catwalking up and down Piccadilly, chocolate bars strapped to their chests, female members of the public trying to grab the chocolate. The coverage that resulted was enormous because the PR agency secured millions of pounds worth of press coverage, including an appearance on the news that night (one of the key terrestrial TV channels in the UK). Not only did the campaign gain national television coverage on the news, it also gained a front-page spot on a London paper, as well as other relevant press mentions in media that catered directly to the target audience (such as a leading online woman's e-zine).

This campaign is just one example of hundreds showing how when a PR agency is appointed to manage the experiential marketing channel, it can deliver a successful campaign, even if it is outsourced. The benefit of doing this through the PR agency is that it can utilize press and media contacts to expand the reach, so that the campaign is exposed to millions of people, in addition to the people that actually interacted

with the experience (and spread word-of-mouth). As you can see from this example, the activity was still outsourced from the PR agency to a specialist experiential marketing agency, marking up costs along the way, but there was added value to be gained.

As well as the fact that the experiential campaign can be integrated with the PR campaign, you will also maximize the value for money. In the example of the chocolate bar campaign, the PR agency spent a relatively low amount with the experiential agency to execute this short-term campaign. The reach of the campaign was nonetheless huge, providing a great return on investment for what they spent. Ferrero achieved optimum results by appointing a PR agency for the Bueno campaign.

It is assumed that if you are thinking of outsourcing experiential marketing to a PR agency, this is likely to be because you already have an existing relationship with them, and therefore similar and comparable benefits can be gained as in previous strategies and campaigns. Because you and the agency will be familiar with each other, it will understand your brand and already work with you on other campaigns, creating a good understanding of the context of the live brand experience that should be at the core of the experiential marketing campaign.

Another positive element in favour of outsourcing to PR agencies is that they tend to understand word-of-mouth dynamics very well, because they are used to targeting key influencers and opinion leaders. By reaching key people in specific communities or the public eye, they succeed in disseminating information and positioning brand messages through specific peer-to-peer, celebrity or expert channels. This understanding of social networks is in line with some of the specific skills required when planning successful experiential marketing strategies. They have already come a long way in understanding how experiential marketing, when correctly targeted, triggers the exponential dissemination of information from specific seed groups of people to broader target audience groups and the public.

PR agencies are usually in tune with and understand how celebrities can play a key role in influencing the perceptions that specific publics have of a brand. The PR agency will have the relevant contacts with agents, and know which stars are already positioned similarly to a positioning that the brand desires to achieve in the eyes of the same target audience. The PR agency understands that credibility can be given to a brand by affiliating it with something or someone that is perceived in this desired way. Therefore, they can integrate celebrities, star appearances or sponsorship into experiential marketing campaigns, greatly helping to achieve objectives such as changing public perceptions or positioning the brand for desired effect.

PR agencies understand how a live brand experience activity (or stunt) implemented on a small scale can influence and reach a massive number of people. It is likely that the PR agency will be flexible in its planning approach because it is usually experienced in running face-to-face campaigns, whether in the form of live events and parties or a press meeting, such as a launch or photocall. Therefore, it will be familiar with the process of catering for and aiming to predict uncertainties and external factors that must be taken into consideration, ensuring contingencies are in place for impeccable execution.

Many brands turn to their PR agencies when outsourcing live brand experience activity because PR agencies are often assigned responsibility for all the events, sponsorships and live consumer interactions that the brand is involved with. PR agencies will have good relationships with many of the relevant suppliers needed. If they can't run the live brand experience campaign in-house, they will already know and have relationships with experiential agencies to outsource to. Sometimes they may choose to outsource different sections of the campaign activation to different suppliers, after doing the strategy part in-house. For example, they might outsource the promotional staff to a staffing agency, the production to a set building company, and so on. They are likely to know what they need to achieve best prices from individual suppliers, and will have internal project managers or event coordinators who could coordinate the process effectively.

Another positive point in favour of outsourcing experiential marketing to PR agencies is that they are familiar with crazy deadlines, working around the clock and doing things for clients at the last minute. They will have the ability in many cases to handle out-of-hours live brand experiences with high levels of uncertainty and will be more likely to have the problem-solving skills required than an above-the-line agency. Planning contingencies and looking at all the potential problems that need to be addressed in advance contribute greatly to the effective activation of live brand experience campaigns.

## *Cons*

Having carefully examined the positive side of outsourcing experiential marketing to a PR agency, it is time to flip the coin and take a careful look at the cons involved in this mode of delegation. The first negative is that most successful PR agencies in the UK are based in London, where the main media owners, publications and journalists are. It is the obvious place for all the media to be located, and certainly all the national media are based in the capital. As a result of this geographic

limitation, PR agencies will not have the same level of expertise and understanding of the complexities of executing a national live brand experience campaign.

The same can be said for all big cities around the world. A New York City PR agency will be much less likely to successfully handle a live brand experience campaign across 20 states, from a logistical perspective, than an experiential agency. This is because the PR agency will be familiar with working within New York City and not have as much relevant expertise when it comes to working nationally across the whole of the United States.

This leads us to the second con. PR agencies are focused on small 'important' groups of people such as key members of the press or highly influential individuals. They are much less comfortable with focusing on reaching consumers directly and achieving volumes of direct consumer interaction on a large scale. Live brand experiences have the effect of driving word-of-mouth. Therefore, the consumer is king and the media is prince, and should only be used to amplify and maximize the reach of a campaign. The press should not be prioritized above personal recommendations, which are the most valuable form of marketing. This is an approach to experiential marketing that some PR agencies will find hard to grasp, and will have less understanding of when compared to an experiential marketing agency.

PR agencies also have a tendency to pigeon-hole the live brand experience campaign as 'content' for a broader PR campaign. They place higher focus on the media coverage than on the initial campaign and the brand relevant two-way interactions with the consumers who experienced the campaign first hand.

## Working with a sales promotion agency

Many marketers misunderstand experiential marketing and think of it as purely live brand experience or field marketing (which is part of sales promotion). This misunderstanding arises because they are used to field marketing activities, designed to support sales in retail, and tend to place experiential marketing and field marketing in the same category. This confusion stems from the fact that direct contact with consumers is normally the responsibility of the sales or customer services departments, and live brand experiences are sometimes funded by the sales promotion budget, especially when they feature special offers or discounts.

## *Pros*

A sales promotion agency will have an existing relationship with the sales department in your organization. The fact that the sales department and therefore the sales promotion agency would, in this case, be responsible for the experiential campaign should not necessarily mean that the marketing department will not play a role. The sales department is likely to communicate with the marketing department to a greater or lesser extent, and can potentially have more flexibility with its budgets, providing an opportunity to spend more on experiential marketing by using budgets specifically allocated to achieving sales objectives where there may be more room for movement.

Moreover, your existing sales promotion agency will have solid relationships with the outlets where the product is sold (assuming your product is sold in a retail environment). The live brand experience part of the campaign could then be positioned in the same or in neighbouring locations to where the product is positioned, and therefore have a greater chance of directly influencing the sales of the product. Because consumers will participate in the live brand experience in close proximity to the point of sale (POS), they are provided with the opportunity to purchase the product while the experience they had is still memorable, with a significant and lasting impact on their thoughts and feelings.

## *Cons*

A sales promotion agency will have a strong sales orientation and therefore will be less interested in achieving marketing objectives that are complex and more elusive. These benefits include word-of-mouth, bringing brand personalities to life, as well as more long-term objectives such as customer loyalty. Moreover, by having a sales focus, the sales promotion agency may not design the experiential campaign in a way that is integrated properly with selected channels and geared towards reaching the optimum potential of the campaign.

## Summary

In summary, there is no clear recipe for appointing a non-experiential agency to handle your experiential campaign, because every situation, relationship, company and agency is different, with each type of partnership having its unique pros and cons.

The safest option is the experiential marketing agency. With that said, experiential marketing agencies differ greatly from each other, some specializing in strategy with others having originated and evolved from being staffing or logistic specialists. These days many small creative shops and suppliers are repositioning themselves as experiential marketing agencies, and it is hard to know which agency can really offer a full service, from strategy and creative to activation and evaluation. There are experiential agencies that have spent many years preparing and improving every area of their organization around ways to best design, implement and evaluate successful experiential campaigns. These specialist experiential marketing agencies work in close partnership with the other channel agencies and therefore they can ensure seamless integration, with the live brand experience at the core of the overall strategy. Experiential marketing agencies with a long history of successful live brand experiences have systems and mechanisms for measurement in place, and they have long-term relationships with locations, suppliers, Brand ambassadors, etc.

When choosing an agency, ensure it has case studies of other campaigns and strategies it has implemented across brands. These could be your competitors or be in a relevant sector, have a comparable brand personality, or target a similar audience to yours. A good experiential marketing agency can inspire your overall marketing strategy to become experiential, as well as ensure smooth, flawless delivery, because it will be familiar with all the external factors that can arise within the complex arena of live brand experience (especially those that are delivered face to face).

As organizations continue to move from a service orientation to a customer relationship orientation, and on to a customer experience orientation, we will continue to see a growth of investment in experiential marketing. Gradually, the practice of bringing customer experience management programmes in-house, and working directly with specialist experiential marketing agencies, will accelerate.