



ITA GROUP EBOOK

# Growing Your Brand Through Immersive Experiences

*How to Engage Today's Customers  
and Keep Them Coming Back for More*

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# The Experience Economy

## Evolving Along With Consumer Priorities

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Would you give up your car to keep your smartphone?  
How about your house—would you go back to renting if it were the only way you could still scroll through Snapchat stories and post carefully styled brunch photos on Instagram?

You might be saying no to these unlikely ultimatums, but a growing proportion of the population would say yes. It's not that they don't want to own a car or a house; ownership simply isn't as essential as it once was. Nowadays, more and more people are prioritizing "doing" over "having"—and it's not just millennials.

Smartphones in hand, people are constantly, meticulously curating their personal brands. They share images and social posts to lend their online personas depth and dimension. But there's nothing compelling to share if they don't have memorable experiences to capture.

**That's where you come in.**



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**72%** of consumers surveyed by Eventbrite say they would like to increase spending on experiences rather than physical things in the next year.



## Engaging Experiences: Cadillac Brand Experience Center

Cadillac recently opened a center in New York called Cadillac House. The 12,000-square-foot space gives consumers a look inside the brand, within the context of a larger culture. Cadillac describes it as “a meeting place where innovators, creators and the curious can find inspiration—and one another.”

In addition to hosting events and showcasing vehicles, Cadillac House is also used for art galleries, film screenings and tech-talk events. You’ll never spot a salesperson on-site, though. It’s staffed entirely by brand ambassadors. This soft-sell approach lets visitors naturally associate the brand with a fun, immersive experience.

# Make It Memorable

## Perfecting the Art of the Experience

Over the past few decades, the demand for memorable experiences has quickly grown from a murmur to a steady roar. People crave the surprise and delight of something new, and the brands they trust to deliver the unexpected are the ones leading the way into this new era.

Though goods and services aren't the primary draw, the goal of any immersive event is still to drive business. Successful brands have discovered that if they want to connect with customers on an emotional level, they have to personalize the experience and make it truly unique. The best events integrate the brand's products and services in interesting and original ways, making them unforgettable—and highly sharable.



Emotionally connected consumers are less price sensitive and less likely to shop around.





# Things vs. Things to Do

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It's said that money can't buy happiness, but the truth is that how we spend our money actually plays a significant role in how happy we are. And most recently, psychological studies have revealed that people today are happier when their money is spent on *things to do*, rather than just *things*.

Perhaps that's why Mintel's American Lifestyles 2017 Report projects that experiential categories of consumer spending are expected to see the fastest growth over the next five years. While total spending will increase by 18% by 2021, restaurants, vacations and tourism are expected to grow by as much as 28%.



# Key Influences in the New Experience Economy



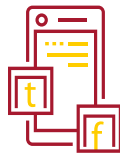
## Sharing

Ownership is no longer essential to a quality lifestyle. Borrowing, sharing and lending options are creating a culture conducive to focusing on the experience.



## Caring

People want to spend on ethical and sustainable brands because they share the brands’ values and feel like participants in their socially conscious efforts.



## Personal Branding

Social platforms allow consumers to curate their personal brand by documenting their path to purchase (dreaming, researching, purchasing, experiencing) in a way that reflects their individuality.



## FOMO

The fear of missing out is a catalyst to action—and experiences are more difficult to compare than material goods, making them easier to curate for optimal display on the social media stage.



## Love Local

In the “connected world,” virtual interaction is far more common than face-to-face relationships, leading consumers to crave local experiences where they can make human connections.



## Escapism

Hyperconnectivity also gives people the desire to escape from reality and immerse themselves in new and unusual experiences.



## Tribal Bonding

From music festivals to athletic events, people seek out events where their “tribe” gathers, so they can commune with those who share similar interests.



## Instant Awareness

The growth of e-commerce platforms and recommendation apps means customers are well-informed, living in the moment, and easily connected to events and experiences.



## Engaging Experiences: Airbnb Experiences

Airbnb recently launched Airbnb Experiences, a feature that encourages people to “embrace the unexpected” by trying new things in new places. From pasta making classes in Milan to salsa lessons in Miami, every experience is vetted by Airbnb and led by a local. Connecting consumers with local insight helps make these cultural touchpoints more authentic—and travelers remember that as something they can get with Airbnb.



# Creating Emotional Ties

## Show Them You Care

Your brand is defined by how consumers perceive it. It's the sum total of every interaction they have with your company throughout their customer journey.

It's how they feel about you, which is why it's essential to put emotion at the center of all you do. By fostering a deeper connection with your customers, one that goes beyond the transactional, you embed your brand in their lives. You become a part of *their* personal brand.

Companies that succeed in connecting with customers on an emotional level are rewarded with greater retention and bottom-line growth than their competitors. Plus, emotionally engaged customers are more likely to share positive experiences on social media, thereby attracting others to your brand as well.

# 85%

A business that optimizes for an emotional connection outperforms competitors by 85% in sales growth.



Innovative eyewear company, Warby Parker places their customers at the center of their brand. The retail experience features a showroom designed to reduce the wait for try-ons, and point-of-sale devices for faster checkout. Online shopping offers free, at-home trials and technology that allows "virtual try-ons." And, whether in-store or online, each encounter is personalized to the customer, resulting in an army of powerful brand advocates and a valuation of \$1.2 billion.

## The Value of an Emotionally Connected Consumer



Consumers are willing to  
**SPEND 83% MORE**  
on a product or service if they feel  
a personal connection to the brand.



**60%** of consumers are willing to  
**SWITCH BRANDS** for a better  
customer service experience.



Emotionally engaged  
customers are at least  
**3 TIMES MORE LIKELY**  
to recommend a brand's  
product or service.



## Engaging Experiences: Levi's Pop-Up Studios

Trying on jeans can be an emotionally stressful experience. Levi's recognized this, so when it launched its new Curve ID jeans, the focus was on empowerment. The company brought pop-up studios to college campuses and custom-fit students with jeans that made them look and feel great. Mini makeovers completed the experience, and coeds left feeling happy and confident.

Sure, Levi's could've just handed out coupons for free jeans and people would've snapped them up. But this more hands-on approach addressed a distinct, emotional pain point and transformed it into a positive experience. That's something customers will remember—and that will keep them coming back for more.



# Three Steps for Effective Engagement

## How to Make Sure They Remember You

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There are key points within the customer journey that can provide excellent opportunities to reinforce social connections.





# KNOW WHAT MOTIVATES YOUR CUSTOMERS

Surveys are the old standby here, but to really understand your customers, you have to dive deeper. Fortunately, so much of the consumer experience is now digitized that you should be able to dig up a good deal of data to work with.

Capture consumer feedback through social media, call center interactions and any other listening posts to help uncover your customers' true perceptions. Once you have a clearer idea of how they see your brand, look for behavioral patterns that can help predict future wants and needs. Deviations from these patterns can also serve as an early warning that your brand's aim is off its audience's priorities.

This information becomes the framework for the experience you want to provide. By understanding your customers' passions and what drives them, you can meet them where they are, show them you know what they want, and connect on a personal level.



## Real-World Example: Taking the Stress Out of Talking Money

When ING created its ING Direct Cafés, (now Capital One Cafés) it acknowledged that its clients want to feel comfortable when talking about their money. It transformed a stodgy banking environment into a relaxed coffee shop where clients could be at ease when discussing their needs. Clients even pay for the coffee and pastries themselves, because the experience is worth it.







# 2

## IMMERSE THEM IN YOUR BRAND

Every experience you stage should add value for both you and your customers.

The type of experience you provide depends on both your customers' motivations and your business goals. Together, those factors define your purpose, and your purpose should drive your vision.

Whether it's a group or individual experience, it needs to be purposeful, personalized and tied back to your product or service. Support more elaborate events with smaller, related experiences such as games, social campaigns or rewards programs.

### Opportunities for Immersive Experiences

- > Experiential brand activations
- > Training
- > Conferences/expos/tradeshows
- > Product launches
- > Sales kickoffs



## Real-World Example: From Pool Party to Winter Wonderland

At the 2017 Internet of Things (IoT) World Conference, T-Mobile sponsored a pool party to help announce its entry into the IoT marketplace and generate sales leads for post-event follow-up.

Declaring it an “unpool party” to tie in to its “uncarrier” tagline, the company transformed the pool area into an immersive winter wonderland, complete with magenta décor and themed brand activations, including:

- > **Branded cold-weather swag**—a play on how the network always has you covered
- > **Virtual-reality skiing**—demonstrating the speed of the network
- > **A snowglobe photo booth, complete with faux snow**—perfect for social sharing

Interaction and visual storytelling were a big part of the event, as well. An LED wall displayed live social polling and quiz answers; and afterwards, T-Mobile sent out thank-you notes with a link to photos from the event.







# 3

## MEASURE YOUR IMPACT

It can be tough to measure the effectiveness of an experiential event, which is why you need to determine up front how you'll gauge impact. Your goals for the event will determine your key metrics, but anything you can measure will help inform future efforts.

### > **Awareness**

Measure email open rates and site traffic to determine the success of your marketing efforts.

### > **Attendance**

Compare registrations to attendance, solicit feedback, and track demographics and purchasing behavior to determine how closely the actual attendees matched your target audience.

### > **Technology**

Analyze how people interacted with your app, quizzes, games, wearable tech, QR codes, hashtags or beacons to determine which they found most engaging.

### > **Social**

Learn more about your audience by looking at who talked about your event on social media, and what they had to say.

### > **Sales Impact**

How many leads did your event generate?  
Did you collect enough usable data?  
What did you learn about consumer preferences?



## Real-World Example: “Unpool Party” Results

One of the primary goals of T-Mobile’s “unpool party” was to develop a pipeline for sales-team follow-up after the event. In addition to being a brand activation element (representing the security T-Mobile offers), the RFID bracelets used for registration also helped collect attendee info during the event. The sales team was then able to personalize its post-event communications for greater impact.



**Other notable results included:**

**709** sales leads created

**17%** higher attendance than projected

**522** activation scans

**281,325** individuals reached via social





A man and a woman are sitting at a table, looking at a tablet. The man is on the left, wearing a grey sweater over a blue and white plaid shirt. The woman is on the right, wearing a dark floral patterned top. They are both smiling and looking at the tablet. On the table, there is a whiteboard with some drawings, a water bottle, and a yellow crayon. In the background, there are other people standing and talking.

Nothing connects with consumers like immersive experiences. Bring your brand to life with experiential events, and they'll seek you out again and again.

# Give them an experience they won't soon forget.

**Contact us today** to learn how.

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