



Let's Get Real

The brand activation and experiential events market remains buoyant with brands recognising the major benefits that in real life experiences can deliver. Here, N2O, TRO, Sense Marketing, Chorus, and 2Heads speak

Superdrug was looking for an innovative way to engage and excite Gen Z and Millennials when it turned to N2O, the brand experience agency. The retail giant wished to establish itself as the first choice for all things health and beauty. So N2O created Superdrug Presents, a live event in the form of a highly-sharable and consumer-focused health and beauty playground that enabled people to discover new products in a fun environment with zero pressure to purchase.

The goal was to create something the target audience couldn't experience anywhere else, with the key element being focused on exploration, play, trial and experimentation. N2O designed an event that was not just a showcase of products but an immersive experience that allowed its audience to sample products away from a normal retail setting.

Superdrug Presents took place at The Truman Brewery and saw 48 diverse brands come together under one roof to interact with 4,412 attendees, of which 72 per cent were Gen Z or Millennial customers.

"Within a week of going on sale, all tickets sold out, demonstrating that we created a highly desirable event appealing to the target audience," explained Clare James, chief operating officer at N2O. "Ninety-six per cent of attendees intended to purchase products they discovered at Presents, with 96 per cent planning to buy products they'd sampled. We secured an outstanding 81 Net Promoter

Score, showing we successfully hit our brand advocacy objective, engaged the target audience and improved purchase intent."

CRAVING IRL

N2O worked with Kamset, DHB, Event Prop Hire, Visions, Top Embroidery, Fuel 4, and Bulldog on Superdrug Presents, which returns to The Truman Brewery in May 2024.

It's indicative of the market. The number of brand activations and live events is not only increasing but their significance is being recognised more and more as fundamental, especially in the current marketing landscape dominated by social and digital campaigns.

James continued: "It's essential to recognise the effectiveness and benefits of in-person brand activations, especially with the up-and-coming generations who crave IRL (In Real Life) experiences. There is a growing desire to be immersed in environments where visceral interactions with products are possible, getting back to brand experiences that online platforms simply cannot replicate. However, the ideal scenario is developing IRL experiences and digital marketing strategies that complement each other - an in-person event bolstered by a well-executed digital and social campaign is a winning combination."

TRENDS TO WATCH

According to figures by CIGNA, Gen Z has been dubbed the "lonely generation" with 73 per cent of Gen Z reporting they feel alone.

James said that there is a real desire to get back to IRL activations as a direct result of being forced to live predominantly digitally. This was particularly true with Gen Z and Millennials (the target demographic for Superdrug Presents), who live for real-life experiences (and were the generation whose schooling and socialising were taken in an online-only setting during the pandemic).

Sense Marketing's 2024 Trends Report echoes James and N2O's findings and points at how Gen Z is hyperconnected in the virtual world but socially disconnected.

Digital interactions cannot connect people on an emotional level. Therefore, Sense's first prediction for 2024 centres around the growth of shared human experiences, yet the agency also forecasts the growth of gaming experiences too.

Deloitte says that gamification can help a company increase customer interactions by up to 40 per cent so there's no doubt that it will feature in upcoming brand activations. It's not the only trend that Sense foresees.

The brand experience agency also suggests that kidulting (experiences that let adults act like kids) will rule, AI will play a huge part in live experiences, and brands will seek to cultivate communities that champion good causes, cultivate interests, and offer support. Plus, the use of influencers in B2B activations will increase and collaboration between luxury and high street favourites will be more evident also. ▶

“The market for brand experiences is more exciting than ever,” explained Hayley James, associate director at Sense. “Since COVID there has been an explosion of creativity and brands that never would think about doing experiences now are.”

BUSINESS TO HUMAN

Brands such as Revolut, a fintech company, and TikTok - brands that are digitally native but not active in a social setting or retail space - have recently turned to Sense to create brand campaigns and media moments. This is indicative of another increasing trend; a desire for B2H or business to human events. Traditional corporate events could become a thing of the past because there is a demand for more “human experiences”.

However, whether you are creating B2B, B2C, or B2H campaigns, one thing is paramount. “Ensure that the core idea is understood immediately,” commented Andrew Harrison, director of Hopper, which is delivering more brand experience projects than ever before.

Hopper, the brand activation and agency, recently produced a Toblerone Truffle experience for Ogilvy PR and Aldi’s Pigs in Blankets Restaurant, reporting to Clarion Communications. Both activations had to create consumer and media buzz.

The Toblerone activation comprised a Toblerone Diamond Truffles vault, an interactive brand experience where consumers were invited to crack the code of the Toblerone Truffles Vault to win a box of the new chocolates. Whilst Aldi’s Pigs in Blankets Restaurant made one of the most-loved elements of the traditional Christmas dinner the star of the show and was an opportunity to showcase Aldi’s huge range of pigs in blankets.

Hopper’s brief was to set Aldi apart from competitors during the key Christmas trading period, drive new and existing shoppers into store, and create talkability.

Aldi’s Pigs in Blankets restaurant achieved 540 pieces of press coverage with a reach of 110 million and delivered huge amounts of content on social media thanks to its fun and appealing nature.

CHILDLIKE HAPPINESS

Last summer, a giant ball pit featuring 700,000 balls opened at Bluewater Shopping Centre in Kent, providing families with a fun summer experience. The Hide N Seekers activation from Haribo - created by Sense Marketing with the help of Ball Mania - enabled visitors to win prizes, but only if they could find specially branded balls hidden in the pit.

This fun summer experience is the perfect example of kidulting. With nearly 40,000 visitors, the event was a resounding success and was bolstered by additional Haribo experiences including a pop-up shop, GoldenBear photo opportunities, car journey game packs, and social blooper reels.

The Hide n Seekers activation brought to life Haribo’s brand purpose of delivering childlike happiness to all and was supported ▶



with below-the-line marketing activity including PR, influencer engagement, content and social media.

AUTHENTICITY

Chris Booker, business development manager at TRO, says that brand spend on events remained pretty resilient during 2023 and he expects 2024 to be the same too. He said: "As brands start to look towards longer-term brand building, we're seeing more attention paid to experiential techniques to truly stand out, complementing continued investment in social and video platforms.

"Look at the cultural phenomenon of Barbie and the breadth of experiential thinking involved in that promotional campaign, brilliantly showcasing the diversity of the channel. With the rise of AI and trust issues continuing to prevail, bringing brands to life in the real world, can deliver the authentic connections needed to fuel brand fandom."

Booker suggests that ROI will remain high on the agenda, so it will be necessary for event organisers to work closely in partnership with brands, understanding their individual needs and recognising how each can complement each other to maximise investment and impact.

Cassidy Knowles, director of operations and events at Chorus, describes the current experiential marketplace as a "buyer's market" and says that lead times are shorter, but expectations remain higher than ever. This can be difficult when agencies wish to build strong relationships - ones that allow the time to have the challenging conversations with clients that are sometimes needed as well as the time to deliver high standards.

In October, Chorus unveiled an exclusive activation for the Scotch whisky brand, The Macallan, and its partnership with the Rosewood Hotel in London's Covent Garden. The Chorus team led the creative and production on the project, drawing inspiration from the surroundings of the Macallan estate, to recreate a Scottish meadow at golden hour in the central London location.

The three-week outdoor activation in the hotel's courtyard, which also featured a four-metre-wide circular lighting installation, saw guests enjoy the whisky in an "authentically created" meadow featuring real grass, rolling hills, a real stream, wild Scottish flora, tree trunks and boulders to perch on.

Andy FennHiggins, director of technical production at Chorus, said: "It's all about quality over quantity. Our client [The Macallan] had a real passion for keeping the experience authentic. So, for example, we looked at building the activation's drystone wall sympathetically, but we wouldn't have created the aesthetic that the client wanted so we went with it and created a traditional drystone wall."

It's a good example of the attention to detail that brands are looking for and how creative and production are being championed with both seen as essential in the creation of successful brand activations and experiential events.



FRESH APPROACH

2Heads recently reimaged ITV Studios House at MIPCOM Cannes, which is one of the largest gatherings of TV and entertainment executives who are looking to buy or sell new TV programmes and content.

In October 2022, 2Heads pitched to reimagine ITV Studios House and in early 2023, was awarded a three-year contract. The activation was delivered in October 2023 and comprised four out of the original 11 shipping containers used. The experience was redesigned to a high standard to create a destination space for the media industry to fully experience all ITV Studios had to offer.

Abs Patel, global account manager at 2Heads, led the account and reported to Jo Morris, VP of brand experience at ITV Studios. In total, 2Heads had a team of 20 working on the activation, which moved ITV Studios House from "a house to a home".

ITV Studios House took four days to build and its complex location on the Croisette in Cannes meant meticulous planning and logistics were paramount.

The house's interior went from industrial to "boujee" with a significant amount of the budget spent on décor to achieve a "well-appointed" interior look and feel that would give ITV Studios more usable hospitality areas and open spaces for customer events and press briefings.

2Heads took a fresh approach to the ITV Studios' brief. Furthermore, the architecture of the new house radically reduced the event's carbon footprint, from storage and transport to heating and furniture.

ITV Studios House 2023 was a success and now 2Heads is developing the destination space in readiness for MIPCOM 2024 (October 21-24).

James Simpkins, global chief growth officer at 2Heads, commented that experiential events are still effective, and the experiential market remains buoyant.

James (Clare) concurred and concluded: "Looking ahead, we predict a continued rise in brand activations across various product categories, recognising their vital role in the decision-making process." ■