

Sales & Marketing eBulletin

*A quarterly eBulletin from the people who bring you the
Sales & Marketing Executive MindXchange*

September 2008 Vol1/Issue 4

Businesses Don't Have Experiences, People Do: Creating More Memorable Brand Experiences

*By Mike Brown
Vice President
Strategic Marketing
YRC Worldwide*

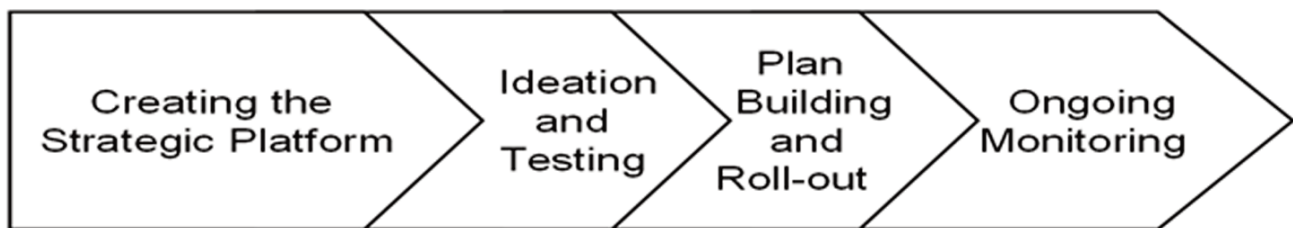
The term “business-to-business” works well for describing industrial business models, but obscures an important marketing reality: businesses don't have experiences, people do. Miss that point, and you'll miss the tremendous benefits of memorable brand experiences.

Examples of great experience marketing abound in consumer markets. B2B marketers can tap into this business-building opportunity, too, by using a strategic approach for experience design.

Approaching Experience Design Strategically

The four-step “Strategic Approach to Designing Customer Experiences” can help you develop and implement a customer experience strategy in a B2B setting, with questions that expand traditional thinking.

Strategic Approach to Designing Customer Experiences (Figure 1)



The following list highlights descriptions of each phase, as well as key questions to answer within each one:

1. Creating the Strategic Platform - Brand strategy & opportunity identification for more personal brand connections

- What's the brand's vision?
- What does it stand for?
- What's the underlying brand strategy - now and in the future?

2. Fundamental Ideation Starters - Focuses on key audiences and personal motivations

- Who are the direct & indirect audiences?
- What's important to each audience?
- What should the experience accomplish with each audience?

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3. Plan Building & Roll-Out - Sets a specific customer experience strategy and its related tactics

- What is the desired result?
- How can we accomplish it?
- How will we quantify success?
- What must be in place to enable success?

4. Ongoing Monitoring - Use varied listening posts to gauge the strategy's impact

- What are our customer experience-related listening posts?
- What are the opportunities to increase the number of qualitative & quantitative listening posts?

Managing Experience Memorability

The three elements of the “Creating Memorable Experiences” model correspond closely to the first three strategic planning phases. This model addresses dimensions that affect brand memorability:

1. **The Brand as Enabler** – How can all aspects of your brand potentially be involved more integrally in creating memorable customer experience?
2. **Personal Needs & Interests** – How can your brand experience cater more directly to key audiences' personal motivations and interests?
3. **Brand Experience Intensity** – How can the experience's intensity be increased through using various factors, including emotions, challenges, surprise, scarcity, benefits, and exclusiveness, among others?

The bigger the intersection of the three variables, the more memorable the experience. This model has been used successfully in a variety of venues – ranging from central brand interactions to more tangential experiences, such as sponsorships.

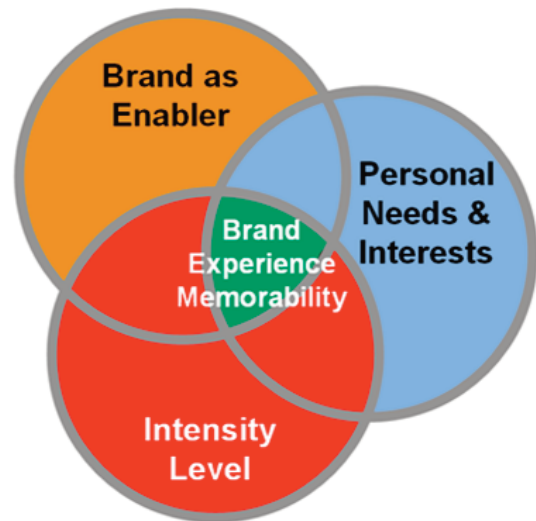
Avoiding Customer Experience Pitfalls

Along with helping you create memorable brand experiences for your customers, the planning phases can guide you past potential pitfalls in customer experience marketing.

Pitfall #1 – Thinking Narrowly About the Brand Remedy: Consider a Broad Brand Definition

In business settings, customers often buy predictability. They're looking for long strings of uneventful, quickly forgotten transactions – not memorable ones. That's a reason to think more broadly about branding to extend the brand's reach to experiences at all customer touch points. Consider how each of these areas contributes to your brand promise:

Creating Memorable Experiences (Figure 2)



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- People, culture, and values
- Service or product definition, quality, and customer service
- Related elements that signal and reinforce the brand promise
- Communication efforts that help key audiences recognize & understand brand promises

If a product or service doesn't seem memorable, there may be opportunities to use customer service, facilities, sponsorships, or other elements to create a lasting, positive brand experience.

Pitfall #2 – Thinking about a Brand as Only B2B

Remedy – Explore a Brand's P2P (Person-to-Person) Dimensions

Business decisions are made by people in businesses. Creating memorable experiences requires recognizing that people (customers) buy services or products and people (employees) create them. Within the ideation phase, don't take B2B too literally. Think about your business as P2P, or Person-to-Person, recognizing individuals' personal motivations, hopes, and concerns. These questions can help the exploration:

- Where are opportunities to make people and relationships more prominent in our brand experience?
- Are there new ways to help grow brand relationships?
- To create memorable experiences, how do we align audience needs, experience intensity, and our brand as an experience enabler?

Pitfall #3 – Only Looking for Ideas in Your Own Industry

Remedy – Look Outside for New Customer Experience Possibilities

Look at other industries, particularly strong consumer-oriented experience brands. Consider how they approach memorable experience design and delivery, knowing that their conventional approaches can likely be adapted (within ethical, moral, and legal restrictions) to become novel, memorable experiences in your market.

The first step is to articulate your experience opportunity in a generalized way and then to address the following:

- Who is facing similar or analogous challenges to ours, and how are they addressing them?
- What are the best, most successful companies – regardless of industry – doing to successfully grow their customer relationships through memorable experiences? What could their approaches look like for us?

Pitfall #4 – Ignoring ROI Metrics or Defining Them Only Quantitatively

Remedy – Use Whole-Brain ROI Metrics

While monitoring is shown as the final step in the experience design process, it's beneficial to consider ROI assessment metrics near the start. Focusing on the end result (maximizing ROI) and then looking at what elements will drive ROI (both benefits and investment) helps spotlight how each brand variable can be managed throughout the experience development and implementation process.

To understand the benefit and investment drivers behind the customer experience and how to aggressively manage them, ask:

- What elements drive brand benefits?

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- What opportunities are there to manage and minimize our investment in smart ways?
- For both areas, what brand levers can we manage to maximize ROI?

Summary

Asking and answering fundamental questions is at the heart of delivering memorable brand experiences. The strategic planning approach works, and by clearly articulating what your brand stands for, keeping people and their needs in focus, building and implementing the plan, and monitoring progress throughout, you can create more memorable brand experiences – and your business will reap the benefits.

About the Author

Mike Brown is VP-Strategic Marketing at YRC Worldwide, a Fortune 300 company based in Overland Park, KS and one of the world's largest transportation providers. He has extensive experience in research, market analysis, communications, and increasing strategic planning success and has produced award-winning NASCAR and conference sponsorship marketing efforts. He's a frequent keynote speaker and workshop facilitator for organizations, associations and universities on branding, innovation, and strategy planning. He authors a daily website on innovation and strategy at <http://mikebrownspeaks.blogspot.com>.

Managing the ROI Equation (Figure 4)

