



Exhibits: Four Dimensions of Interactive Marketing

Please note that this paper was simply meant to be an outline for an oral presentation. It by no means is meant to represent complete thoughts throughout.

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Publication Statement

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Introduction:

Good afternoon. My name is Michelle Berryman. My presentation today will identify four dimensions of interactive marketing as they relate to exhibits and exhibiting. These are strategic dimensions rather than tactical dimensions and as such, I'm going to discuss exhibiting in a very broad manner.

First, I'd like to tell you a little about my background. I am a founding Principal in the design consultancy, Echo Visualization in Atlanta, Georgia. We specialize in designing media, exhibits and broadcast sets that emphasize user interface and human interaction. I've been designing exhibits and interfaces since 1993 when I worked for Siemens. Since that time, I've worked for Design South and IDEAS which later became Folio prior to opening Echo Visualization in 2002. My business partner, Brian Lynn, and I have designed corporate interiors, traditional tradeshow exhibits, museum exhibits and special corporate events. Our combined experiences have shaped our corporate philosophy about immersion and interaction within dimensional marketing environments and are the basis for my presentation today.

Definition of Exhibit:

Speaking to you today, in this environment, I would imagine that everyone has a notion of what an exhibit is conceptually. Most of you have already been in the show halls this morning and you've seen exhibits. Perhaps you've been in a few of them and walked around already. Your company might even have an exhibit. Most of you are tradeshow veterans. As I mentioned earlier, I would like to take a step back from those conceptions and explore an holistic approach to the notion of exhibiting, however.

The American Heritage Dictionary defines exhibit as follows:

ex·hib·it - (ĭg-zĭb'ĭt, ěg-)
*A public showing; an exhibition;
To present for others to see*

Webster's Revised Unabridged Dictionary defines it this way:

ex·hib·it - (ĭg-zĭb'ĭt, ěg-)
*Any article, or collection of articles, displayed to view, as in an industrial exhibition; a display;
To hold forth or present to view; to produce publicly, for inspection; to show, especially in order to attract notice to what is interesting; to display; as, to exhibit commodities in a warehouse, a picture in a gallery.*

These definitions do not confine the concept of exhibit strictly to the tradeshow environment and that's an important observation. I will conclude my presentation today by presenting two case studies that explore exhibiting in a variety of environments including the tradeshow floor and I will focus on how the four dimensions of interactive marketing can be consistently and masterfully applied across an entire spectrum of exhibiting.

The exhibit industry in the United States is more than 100 years old. Over the years, it's grown into a \$60 billion industry. There are more than 11,000 tradeshow events in this country every year. CEIR, the Center for Exhibit Industry Research, headquartered here at McCormick Place, estimates that 85% of all tradeshows are business to business events. CEIR's research indicates that 83% of all attendees have influence over purchasing decisions. Further, the research also indicates that 64% of attendees return to their offices and share show information with four or more people. 20% of attendees share show information with eleven or more people. This year's Housewares Show is expected to attract over 60,000 people - almost 18,000 of them will be qualified buyers. If we apply CEIR's percentages only to the buyers attending this show, more than 68,000 additional people will be impacted and influenced without actually being here. Tradeshows like this represent an invaluable opportunity for interactive marketing that reaches targeted customers on a personal level.

Customer Demographics:

Before we can really delve into the four dimensions of interactive marketing, there is still another component of exhibiting that must be explored. Look again at Webster's definition of exhibit:

To hold forth or present to view; to produce publicly, for inspection; to show, especially in order to attract notice to what is interesting; to display.

Why do we exhibit? To attract notice to what is interesting. Interesting to whom? To your customers? Who are your customers? Exhibits are expensive to purchase, to ship and to maintain. They are most often considered capital expenditures and are subject to general accounting rules of amortization. This means they will appear on the books for four to five years before they are fully depreciated and can be discarded or retired. This also means that an exhibit will probably have a projected life span in excess of four years – perhaps as much as seven or eight years. Do you know the demographics of your customer base well enough to know who your customers are today and who they will become in the next four to six years?

There are roughly 76 million Baby Boomers in the United States. They are between 40 and 62 years old. They have a strong, traditional work ethic. They are optimistic and competitive. They tend to be a bit rigid and set in their ways. They have borne a lot of responsibility throughout their lifetime and expectations have been very high for them. In January 1967, *Time* magazine actually gave its prestigious "Man of the Year" award to the baby-boom generation, proclaiming them as the generation that would clean up our cities, end racial inequity, find a cure for cancer and the common cold, and prevent poverty and war. Their lives have been marked with a decline in traditional families, expanding government and government debt. They are facing retirement with a nearly bankrupt Social Security system. Within the corporate world, they have great influence on budgets and purchasing decisions. They have become computer literate in their adult years. Most of them use e-mail and the internet. But they are also easily frustrated by computers and technology.

Generation X is the second largest component of the American workforce. There are anywhere from 45 million to 52 million Gen-Xers in the United States. They range in age from 26 to 39. They are bold, motivated, highly skilled and well-educated. They spend \$200 billion annually. They have grown up with technology and can't imagine life without it. They entered the workforce with the fax machine. They were early adopters, even pioneers of e-mail, the internet and video games. Gen-Xers have grown up with corporate downsizing. They work to live. They aren't afraid to change jobs or careers. They want fun and adventure – even at work. They are fiercely independent and rebel at excessive supervision. They can be tougher to motivate but, they generally know what they want and they aren't afraid to ask for it. They are accustomed to a turbulent world. They expect change continually in all aspects of their life from fads and fashion to the economy. They want information delivered on-demand. Douglas Rushkoff argues that many of the things for which this generation is maligned, such as short attention spans and lack of ability to concentrate on a single task at once are not problems but actually brilliant coping mechanisms for a world overloaded with information. "The skill to be valued in the twenty-first century is not the length of attention span, but the ability to multitask - to do many things at once, well.... [and] the ability to process visual information very rapidly." Generation X is media savvy and fully aware of how easily media can be manipulated. They spend \$200 billion annually.

The youngest generation in the workforce is the Echo Boomer or Millennial generation. Numbering 60 million to 70 million, they will eventually rival the Baby Boomers in size and economic influence. The oldest Echo Boomers are 25-27. They are racially diverse. They are team oriented and civic minded. They are confident and brash and are not easily scared or intimidated. They seek career stability. They've already accepted a great deal of financial responsibility at very young ages. They've grown up with technology and media. They accept it easily. They learn it quickly. Most have been using computers since very early childhood. They are brand conscious and they aren't used to waiting for anything from food to information. They embrace the portability of technology and on-demand access to music, information and each other. The internet is their primary source for news. Video-gaming and text messaging are integral to their life experiences. They've been described as a sound-bite generation that has yet to learn "the art of reflection."

The Four Dimensions of Interactive Marketing:

Once you've identified your customer base, you can begin applying the four dimensions of interactive marketing to your exhibit program. Simply put, the four dimensions of interactive marketing are as follows:

1. **Identify** who you are and what you sell.
2. **Educate** attendees about your products or services.
3. **Entertain** attendees through demonstrations of products and services.
4. **Immerse** attendees in your exhibit, your corporate culture and your brand.

Identify who you are and what you sell.

The first goal of interactive marketing is to identify your company and your products or services. With the visual and auditory competition on the show floor, you have as little as three seconds to identify your company and your offerings. Within six seconds, passersby will have focused their attention elsewhere. Your exhibit must make a powerful and convincing statement about your company. It should have a strong focal point and an evident informational hierarchy that reinforces the brand from top to bottom. Less is more. This is a sound bite not a catalog of all of your offerings.

Your exhibit should be a three dimensional representation of your company's branding and marketing messages. The form, colors, and graphics should visually tie together with your literature and your television ad campaigns. If the attendee is already familiar with your brand, recognition in the exhibit venue should be instantaneous. If the attendee has never heard of your company, a three second scan of your exhibit should be all that's required to identify your brand and your product offerings.

Educate attendees about your products or services.

Attendees value the exhibit experience for the small group interaction with the booth staff and the opportunity to see products in action. Ensure that your booth staff has extensive knowledge of the products in the exhibit. Prior to the show, make sure that all staffers know one another and are familiar with each other's expertise. This is especially important if diverse product offerings are present in the exhibit. The members of your company staffing the booth are more than sales people. They are the face of your company and they may represent the only personal contact that a potential customer may ever have with your company. Their attitudes, attire, professionalism and knowledge are a direct reflection of your company.

When demonstrating products for attendees, the staff should focus on product benefits such as cost savings, improved efficiencies, ease of use, durability and low upkeep. Showing attendees how the product will benefit their jobs, budgets and staff is generally far more important than an extensive discussion of product features. Save the features for the literature.

Whenever possible engage the attendees. Education is most successful as an active participation experience. Let the attendees try the product – preferably in a problem/solution scenario that they can easily identify with. The proof is in the pudding and there's no substitute for hands-on experience.

Within the exhibit environment, education shouldn't be one sided, however. Have the booth staff ask open-ended questions in order to learn more about the attendee and his or her needs.

Exhibit graphics should be used to support the product demo experience. Use photos to indicate context and usage. Keep text to a minimum. A good rule of thumb is five bullet points or less. This is another sound-bite situation and attendees are unlikely to invest more than a few seconds reading copy.

Educational product demonstrations should be appropriately focused on the product and the customer. Interactive hands-on workstations with computerized demos will be far more appealing to members of Generation X or the Echo Boomers. Wi-Fi and infra-red download stations capable of sending product literature directly to a palm computer; e-mail account or cell phone will also appeal more heavily to this crowd.

The booth design should easily accommodate the type of product demonstrations that are appropriate for your products and marketing goals. Considerations for demo areas include the ratio of attendees to booth staff. Do you want to demo to the aisle to attract passersby or into the booth? Is it appropriate for your staff to be on the same side of the demo station or counter as the attendee or should the demo station separate them? Are your demonstrations more appropriate for smaller groups of one to three people or are they more of a one on one experience? What will provide the most impact for the attendee as he or she experiences

your product? There are a lot of considerations. It's important to choose a direction that most easily facilitates active participation and interactive education.

Entertain attendees through demonstrations of products and services.

By its very nature, entertainment is a more passive pursuit than education. Larger theater demonstrations or product demos aimed at audiences of 10 or more people are ideal candidates to blur the boundary between education and entertainment. Make the experience enjoyable for the booth staff as well as the attendees. Allow attendees to relax and enjoy the show while simultaneously receiving a focused marketing message about your brand and your product offerings. Entertainment affords a method of keeping attendees engaged by your marketing message and it allows them to linger in your exhibit for longer periods of time.

Tie the fun back into the product or brand frequently. Connect premium give-aways to the entertainment component of your marketing message. This provides another method of holding your audience's attention and keeping them engaged. Make sure the entertainment is appropriate and the connection between the entertainment and the brand is a good fit.

Use celebrities if they provide credibility in addition to "star appeal." Professional golfer, David Duval wears Oakley sunglasses and he credits their use to alleviating dryness and irritation with his contact lenses. He also credits their use with helping him become a winner on the PGA tour. He's a great fit for an appearance in an Oakley exhibit. Likewise, Chrysler has a multi-year, multimillion dollar endorsement contract with Celine Deion. She's a natural to appear in a Chrysler exhibit to perform a song and extol the virtues of Chrysler's vehicles. The purpose of entertainment in the exhibit is to facilitate brand awareness for you – not to fill your exhibit with celebrity groupies who have no interest in your product or service.

Keep the entertainment fresh. Change the presentation periodically. Perform frequently so that it is convenient for attendees to be entertained. Another rule of thumb is to hold entertainment based presentations to 10 minutes or less in duration. Any longer and people will lose interest. There's just too much to see at a tradeshow.

Entertainment is another area where it really pays to know the demographics of your customer base. Having an extreme sport athlete like Tony Hawk in your exhibit will not attract the same audience that Oliver North will attract. Similarly, scantily clad "booth babes" may be a bad choice at the National Religious Broadcasters Show but the ideal choice at the Consumer Electronics Show.

Immerse attendees in your exhibit, your corporate culture and your brand.

When an attendee enters your exhibit, it should be like entering another world. They should immediately be struck by the fact that your exhibit represents new realms of experience and possibilities. Appeal to their senses. Control what they see, what they hear, what they smell – even what they taste. At a bare minimum, double-pad your booth carpeting. This will provide an immediate physical response for the attendee. Tired and aching feet, legs and backs get a nice reprieve – and this will certainly provide impetus for them to browse your product offerings and stay a while.

Serve coffee – it provides a sumptuous smell as well as a rich taste. The same is true of freshly baked cookies or cinnamon rolls.

Immerse the attendee in your corporate culture and brand experience. When someone is in your exhibit they should sense your passion for your products. They should feel the excitement generated by competing head to head in the marketplace and at the show against your biggest competitors. It should feel like the start of a sporting event or concert. Electricity and energy should be in the air.

As Pine and Gilmore state in *The Experience Economy*, "The sweet spot for any compelling experience – incorporating entertainment, educational, escapist and esthetic elements into otherwise generic space – is similarly a mnemonic place, a tool aiding in the creation of memories, distinct from the normally uneventful world of goods and services . . . everything revolves around [the experience] . . . anything detracting from [the experience] is excluded."

Now that we've defined and explored the four dimensions of interactive marketing that should be embodied in all exhibits, we are going to examine two corporate case studies in a bit more depth. I'll illustrate in both cases

how the four dimensions of interactive marketing are consistently applied to promote the brand and the user experience. First we'll look at Nike and how they manage their image and branding in tradeshow exhibits, Niketown retail locations and at their corporate campus in Beaverton, Oregon. Then, we'll look at Visa – a company that doesn't have a physical product at all. We'll look at how they promote themselves and protect the value of their brand in tradeshow exhibits and through corporate partnerships and alliances that provide exposure at special events.

Case Study #1: Nike

Nike's website proclaims, "Ours is a language of sports, a universally understood lexicon of passion and competition. A lot has happened at Nike in the 30 years since we entered the industry, most of it good, some of it downright embarrassing. But through it all, we remain totally focused on creating performance opportunities for everyone who would benefit, and offering empowering messages for everyone who would listen."

Over the years, their messages have included the following:

- Irreverence Justified
- I can
- What if?
- What moves you?
- Why Sport?
- No Rules, No Refs, No Plan, Just Play.
- Just Do It.

Even as the messages changed, the intent behind the messages stayed consistent.

Today, the mission of Nike is "To bring inspiration and innovation to every athlete* in the world." *If you have a body, you are an athlete.

In 1997, I was one of the designers and the lead project manager for Nike's exhibit for Super Show 1998. For nearly 4 ½ months, I worked on this exhibit. I split my time between my office in Atlanta at Design South and Nike's campus in Beaverton – sometimes making two round trips in a business week.

From the moment you arrive at their campus, you are fully immersed in their corporate culture and their brand. It's subtle and elegant at times – like this statue of a runner along a jogging trail. Other times it's bold and in your face.

[series of photos of Nike campus – with on the fly commentary running something like below . . .]

There is no question that wherever you may be on the Nike campus, you can identify, you know you are on the Nike campus. It takes less than 3 seconds to identify your location – guaranteed. Education is prevalent throughout the campus as well. There are plaques, awards and memorabilia commemorating great athletic accomplishment throughout the campus. Nike is proud of their sponsored athletes and they celebrate them and their accomplishments very publicly.

Entertainment is another strong element of the Nike campus. There's a regular parade of athletic performances happening frequently on the many playing fields and performance labs around campus. Teams regularly come to Nike to practice, play and test equipment. Often, the employees need only look out their office windows to see world-class athletes practicing or coaching youth clinics.

And, again, immersion is the essence of the experience.

[series of photos of NikeTowns – with commentary]

All of these same factors are evident at every NikeTown anywhere in the world. These aren't merely retail stores. These are carefully crafted sports experiences that take visitors into the world of Nike and performance athletes. The stores are filled with memorabilia, large scale photography and exhibits designed to teach the shopper about a variety of sports and the athletes Nike sponsors. They are part theme park, part upscale boutique and part destination. Shoppers visit NikeTowns the same way they visit museums and other points of local interest when traveling. Every NikeTown is completely unique. None of them feature the

same exhibits or displays. They all feature hands-on demos as well as multimedia eye-candy extravaganzas. They captivate shoppers and engage them in the cult of sport – Nike style.

[series of photos of Super Show '98 – with commentary]

For the last few years that the Super Show was in Atlanta, Nike removed themselves from the exhibit floor – preferring instead to take over a second floor ballroom with controlled access. Visitors to their booth came by invitation. After ascending an escalator and entering a lobby space, visitors were given a printed map of the exhibit space to guide them through their experience. Upon entering the formal exhibit through a series of darkened, black hallways, visitors were treated to a smorgasbord of sights and soothing music.

[on the fly commentary and images]

Interestingly, Nike does not bring athletes to their tradeshow. They prefer instead to celebrate sport itself and a few particular athletes through imagery. They want the brand to be the main focal point – not the presence of Tiger Woods, Mia Hamm, Lance Armstrong or Michael Jordan.

Case Study #2: Visa

Our second and final case study is Visa. According to Visa's website, Visa operates the world's largest and most sophisticated consumer payments processing system, with enough communications lines to encircle the globe nearly 400 times. They process over 3,700 transactions every second at peak times, and they are capable of handling transactions denominated in 160 different currencies. Visa is actually a membership association jointly owned by more than 21,000 financial institutions around the world. Visa is wholly different from Nike or any of the exhibitors here at the Housewares Show because Visa's "product" is actually a service. It can't really be demonstrated at the show – only described. It can't be put on shelves for display. It can't be picked up and examined by attendees. It has no physical embodiment.

What Visa does have is a strong brand and a recognizable logo. Their slogan, "Visa. It's everywhere you want to be." Has been in place for more than 17 years. During that time, their payment card share has increased by 7%. In the U.S. alone, consumer preference as the "best overall payment card" has risen from 34% to 60%.

When Visa exhibits, they do not use a lot of imagery in the booth. And they don't want a flashy booth either. They prefer the exhibit to blend into the background so that their logos and messaging can take center stage. Ensuring that attendees can easily identify their presence on the show floor is of paramount importance. Booth staff focus on one-on-one or small group demos designed to educate attendees about the Visa network and new service offerings. Entertainment regularly features professional athletes or actors from one of Visa's high-profile sponsorships such as NASCAR or the Olympics. Brand immersion, while dramatically different from the Nike experience, nevertheless occurs within the construct of the Visa exhibit.

Visa has gained power, recognition and market share through strategic partnerships with events and promotions that attract large audiences. They have chosen to marry their services to activities and organizations that do high-volume transactions and have extremely loyal fan bases. They currently have relationships with the NFL, NASCAR, the Olympics, Broadway events and the Visa Triple Crown Challenge. As such, they maintain an active web presence (virtual interactive marketing) and they exhibit in less traditional ways at their partner events.

[series of images – on the fly commentary]

Conclusion

The four dimensions of interactive marketing are the cornerstones of successful exhibiting. Regardless of where your brand and product offerings fall on the spectrum between Nike and Visa, a consistent application of the four dimensions of interactive marketing will lead to greater brand recognition, collection of more qualified leads, higher sales and overall exhibit success.

It's as simple as 1-2-3-4.

1. **Identify** who you are and what you sell.
2. **Educate** attendees about your products or services.

3. **Entertain** attendees through demonstrations of products and services.
4. **Immerse** attendees in your exhibit, your corporate culture and your brand.

Thank you.

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CEIR – Center for Exhibit Industry Research

Exhibitor Magazine

IAEM – International Association of Exhibition Management

TSEA – Trade Show Exhibitors Association

The Experience Economy by B. Joseph Pine II and James H. Gilmore

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