



# ***CREATING EXPERIENTIAL MOMENTUM***

HOW SUSTAINABLY LED EXPERIENCES BUILD  
POWERFUL COMMUNITIES. >>

As a non-traditional marketing play, experiential has seen a meteoric rise. What was once used by innovators to stand out is now a mainstay in brand marketing budgets. But with a shift to mainstream, in a rapidly evolving consumer climate, can experiential programs hold on to their authentic approach that so powerfully promotes brand loyalty?

Yes, they can. Brands that show real resilience create purposeful experiences anchored in sustainable values. They cut through the mounding fluff of experiential marketing to create loyal communities that evolve with the inevitable changes brought by life and market forces.

In the rush to deliver unique and exclusive experiences, there's a danger brands don't hear what consumers want. It's no secret consumers are looking beyond products and services – craving community and shared values. We're at the crossroads of a unique opportunity to replace eroding trust in conventional institutions by doubling down on brand values and using experiential touchpoints to share these directly with consumers.

Moving through a pandemic, we've been gifted the chance to pause for thought. Many brands are revisiting their values and redefining them in the context of the current socio-economic climate. Sustainable values are increasingly linked with consumer spending habits and should not be ignored. NYU's Stern Center for Sustainable Business reviewed consumer purchasing from 2013 to 2018 and found that 50 per cent of the market growth within consumer packaged goods came from sustainably-marketed products. These goods grew 5.6 times faster than conventionally marketed products. There are no signs of a slowdown. If your brand values don't directly address sustainability, you're risking your market share.

Oversimplifying sustainability – confining it to reduce, reuse and recycle – will no longer land with increasingly savvy consumers. Successful brands must go further and address a balance of social and environmental issues, exhibiting values that are about the planet and the people that inhabit it. The greatest opportunity to demonstrate sustainable values is through a robust experiential program.

It can be as simple as assessing engagement, inclusivity and impact. Using these socially responsible values to guide your next experiential endeavour will help strengthen your community. A consumer's desire to stay loyal to brands using their force for good will be your greatest asset. While simple, this equation takes holistic commitment to yield results.

Start by thinking of your consumers as citizens. Crowdfund their greatest concerns, then translate them into program pillars that address true purpose and add real value to people's lives. Focus on positive messaging. People tend to avoid things that make them feel uncomfortable [climate anxiety is real, folks]. Provide solutions, not stress, and engage your audience in the outcome – making them accountable for your shared success. They will build

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community in the process. Pokémon GO developer Niantic worked with players and NGOs to help remove 145 tons of trash in time for Earth Day. Niantic offered players the chance to nominate an organization to help battle various eco-crises and thanked them with in-game rewards.

Consider replacing the allure of exclusivity with wider-reaching inclusivity. Micro-experiences, rather than large, centrally located events, are a great alternative. Sure, flying influencers to a remote location to launch your product could attract attention but it might not strike the right chord with consumers. Accessible micro-experiences are more targeted, establishing intimate connection points and providing a platform for more seamless inclusion. In partnership with *Elle*, *Cosmopolitan* and Oxfam, detergent

brand Comfort hosted a swap shop to raise awareness about the importance of upcycling clothes and buying second-hand. The simple concept was impactful and easily accessible, allowing visitors to engage in the experience by taking in an item of their clothing to swap for a piece donated by campaign partners.

Assessing the impact of current and future programming is equally important. Review the layers of details that go into building out your experiential touchpoints and ensure they align with, and are measured against, your core brand values. Avoid trying to tackle everything at once. It will only result in overwhelm and a diluted message. Consider addressing issues like transport emissions by taking a hybrid virtual/in-person approach or producing locally rather than touring across the country. Partner with stakeholders who are tackling waste reduction in interesting new ways. Don't settle for anything less than true diversity amongst your thought leaders and spokespeople. Consider ditching traditional giveaways and replacing them with charitable donations [to an organization chosen by your community, of course]. Most importantly, be transparent. Explain what you're doing and why. Trust is almost always guaranteed to increase buy-in.

In 2020, resilience was at the centre of every brand survival story. But it's not just about weathering the storm. Resilience involves foresight, preparedness and the willingness to take important steps before they are thrust upon us. Review your brand values in the present context. Are you using experiential touchpoints to tell your audience you care about the same things? Show them you're here to build a community that will help bring real value to their lives.



After almost a decade working with global event producers, **Hannah O'Donovan** founded Lovedey – a

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