Getting the message across - without the jargon

By Abey Mokgwatsane

12 Oct 2005

Much has been written about experiential marketing and anyone and everyone has taken a shot at defining the territory, its role and the discipline's effectiveness.

It seems strange to me that in this day and age we are still trying to define themes such as ATL, BTL and experiential, when consumers don't actually care. And frankly, neither should the industry. Our key objective, as marketing practitioners, should be to understand brand objectives and decipher the most effective ways of achieving them - regardless of the particular vehicles used.

Far too much time is wasted debating the tools, when in fact we should be arguing the most effective ways to drive impact.

Colgate and Miller Genuine Draft case studies well illustrate the point that it doesn't matter what tools you use: impact can be driven by multitudes of tools.

Brushing Up on Colgate

How to get six-year olds to brush their teeth - a challenge most plaque fearing parents face year after year. As a toothpaste manufacturer, how would you help this desperate sector of parents achieve this particular parental objective?

Perhaps the way that I got hooked will give you a clue.

One day my grade one teacher brought some guys in from Colgate to educate us on the small matter of teeth brushing. Only these guys didn't present the usual posters and tooth models reminiscent of the dentist. They had an entirely different approach. They gave each pupil present a special sweet. Well, for all accounts and purposes it looked like a sweet, but it was in fact a colourant packed in tablet form. Once you took it, your mouth turned bright pink, yellow or red.

They went on to explain to us that each of the colours in our mouths represented the different kinds of germs that we pick up from eating the things we do everyday. We were told to go around the class and find friends with different germs to our own. You can imagine the scene - 30 six-year olds boasting to each other about their respective germs.

The real killer approach however, was yet to come. When we were asked to rinse the colour out of our mouths, it didn't work. No matter how much we tried the colour stains wouldn't budge.

Enter Colgate and a range of cute toothbrushes! The colour stains (germs) were instantly removed and our mouths were transformed into clean germ free zones. That's how I came to brush my teeth.

This whole experience captured our imagination, taught us about germs - even if it was at a very basic level, and made 'real' the reason why we had to brush our teeth everyday - twice a day. Was this an experiential campaign? In today's terminology it probably is. But back then - I doubt it. It was simply the best way to get a message across.

Miller Miles
The second initiative presented on a much larger scale. It was the Miller Music Tour, the annual Miller Genuine Draft (MGD) promotional initiative. The campaign objective was to drive trial and awareness of MGD.

The blue sky idea was that one South African could fly in a private jet to join 220 people from all over the world for the party of a lifetime in America. It was clear that in order to drive the message, the campaign would have to effectively manifest across all the key touch points in the legal drinking age young-adult market.

The 360 degree execution included, ATL, in trade presence, events, Internet and an SMS component.

Consumers could earn 50 Miller Miles every time they SMS'd the unique code found under every MGD bottle cap during the promotion. The more unique codes you SMSd the more Miller Miles you earned.

The marketing programme led with a TV and radio campaign that sold the "sizzle" of the trip and the core promotional mechanic. The in-trade presence reinforced the ATL message on the ground. Activation teams developed on the ground experiences in clubs and lounges across the country. The key call to action at each experience was to generate Miller Miles. It became the MGD promotional currency. Finally consumers could log onto the MGD Web site to check their Miller Miles balance 24-hours a day.

The campaign results speak volumes to the success of the integration of the various mechanics employed:
Record sales were generated during the promotional period
The brand has managed to sustain its growth cycle since the promotion
The campaign generated 202264 SMS's which represented a redemption rate of just over 6%
A total of 20 218 consumers registered for the promotion
Traffic to the Web site www.millertime.co.za increased 4000%

Was this an experiential campaign? Once again that depends on your perspective. This campaign utilised many different tools to manifest its big idea - it didn't matter which boxes you ticked.

One could argue that experiential marketing is limited to initiatives where consumers are immersed in specially designed experiences that are meant to make them see, feel and believe a particular message. However I propose that everything we do as marketers is about creating experiences that leave target consumers with a positive message about our brands. A message that will affect attitudes and drive the right behaviour.

Viewing Colgate TV commercials as a child supported my physical experience and reinforced the brand name. Just as the MMT TV commercial supported the campaign by selling the sizzle to the target audience.

Each vehicle has its purpose; none in isolation can overcome the marketing challenges we face. Lets stop wasting time debating the merits of each one and work towards applying our skills across that spectrum of tools available to drive impact.

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