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Citation:

CROWTHER, Philip (2010). Marketing space : a conceptual framework for marketing events. The Marketing Review, 10 (4), 369-383. [Article]

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Marketing Space: A Conceptual Framework for Marketing Events

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Abstract

Despite the growing resonance of events within the marketing domain, they continue to receive scant coverage in academic literature, and remain a poor relation to other forms of marketing communication. This detracts from them realising their potential as a relevant and pervasive marketing delivery method.

Couched between the authors previous and future (ongoing) empirical work in this area, this article provides much needed conceptual development. The paper introduces the core construct of 'marketing space' and associated framework. Marketing space represents the distinctive environment a marketing event creates, which is unlike that cultivated by other communication methods. Marketing space is a transient reality where representatives of an organisation come together physically, and in a planned manner, with a gathering of existing and future customer's, clients, and wider stakeholders.

Marketing events are a grouping that comprises a wide and rich variety of event types, which can be termed 'marketing event platforms'. These range from the largest of congresses or trade shows, to the smallest and most intimate of seminars or hospitality events. The conceptual framework of marketing space, with associated concepts provides the basis of a new lexicon for practitioners and academics interested in, and utilising, events for marketing purpose.

The paper also explores the rationale for the growing resonence of marketing events; examining the characteristics of events, including experiential, interactive, targetted, and relational. The paper ends with the introdiction of two dichotomies to the lexicon of marketing events' direct and indirect events, and exclusive and non exclusive events.

Biog

Phil spent 11 years general management, business development, and senior sales management roles within leisure venues and tourist attractions. Within these roles, Phil planned and managed a wide range of events. It was this experience coupled with a focus and interest in marketing that led Phil to pursue an academic career in these areas. Phil's industry career also included operating as a sole trader delivering consultancy to a number of SMEs in the areas of marketing and business strategy.

Since joining Sheffield Hallam University in addition to his teaching, and industry projects, Phil has developed a research interest in the utility of event for marketing purpose. He has published in this area and presented at a variety of industry and academic conferences. At the heart of his work is the strategic potential of events, their role within integrated marketing communications, and how this can be realised through effective event management.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Events provide marketers with a tool that is rich in potential, comprising a range of qualities that differentiate events from other methods of communication. The presence of events is increasingly noteworthy in both attraction and retention marketing (Gummerson 1999). In spite of this, marketing orientated events (marketing events) have received scant coverage in both event studies and marketing literature. Consequently conceptual development in this area is lacking. This paper is therefore a conceptual piece that builds upon previous empirical work and fills a gap in existing literature. The author completed empirical research in 2008 and is currently undertaking further research in this area, in the short term, however, there exists a necessity to engage in conceptual development as a foundation for future empirical work.

Established connections locate events within the realms of marketing communications. This popular sentiment is endorsed by Kotler (2002), summarising that 'marketing events' are *"occurrences designed to communicate particular messages to target audiences"* (p576). Masterman and Wood (2007) judge this definition to be overly broad; which is accurate given that overly simplistic definitions fails to reveal the full capability of marketing events. Indeed it is a prevailing theme that writers have failed to fully capture the essence of events as a marketing force. When effectively deployed marketing events play a multifaceted role for the marketing (and sales) practitioner fulfilling diverse tactical and strategic outcomes;

comprising areas such as (but not limited to) brand communications, profile raising, relationship development, and customer consultation.

The notion of event management as a fledgling profession is particularly pronounced in its status and application within marketing. An inferior standing is evidenced with events being employed in an overly informal and ad hoc manner, consistent with the findings of previous empirical research (Pugh and Wood 2004). This theme is symptomatic of a wider trend revealed in this author's own empirical research which identified the overly tactical approach to planning and delivery of marketing events, applying the metaphor of a 'cottage industry' (Crowther 2009). This is indicative of the notion of events continuing to be perceived, and treated, as a poor relation, particularly relative to other more conventional methods within the integrated communications mix. Crucially this hampers marketing events in realising their potential as an integrated communication tool.

The primary objective of this paper is to introduce a framework to underpin thinking and practice surrounding events within the sphere of marketing. This framework is evolutionary and intended to stimulate discussion and development. The pivotal notion is the conception of 'marketing space'. Marketing space represents the distinctive environment a marketing event creates, which is unlike that cultivated by other communication methods. Marketing space is a transient reality where representatives of an organisation come together physically, and in a planned manner, with a gathering of existing and future customer's, clients, and wider stakeholders. Marketing space is not a homogeneous construct; it is changeable and indeed

adaptable, determined by a number of dynamics, not least the particular marketing event platform that is selected.

Marketing events are a grouping that comprises a wide and rich variety of event types, termed 'marketing event platforms'. These range from the largest of congresses or trade shows, to the smallest and most intimate of seminars or hospitality events. Each individual occasion is expressed as an 'episode', with organisations likely to engage in a number of 'marketing event episodes' over a given time period to achieve different objectives. The conceptual framework of marketing space, with associated concepts of event platforms and episodes provides the basis of a new lexicon for practitioners and academics interested in, and utilising, events for marketing purpose. This framework is fully developed and discussed in section three of this paper.

This paper is structured in four further sections. Initially it provides a coherent basis for the prevalence of marketing events, through the reframing of disparate literature. It goes on to examine the conception of marketing space, and underpinning thinking. In section five the paper concludes and introduces some useful dichotomies, through which to interpret marketing events. A cross cutting theme repeatedly evident in this paper is the reality that marketing events are high in both opportunity and risk. Therefore, accessing the potential of marketing events impinges upon professional and creative planning and delivery.

2.0 RATIONALE FOR MARKETING EVENTS

Everyday organisations, in all three sectors of the economy, are delivering events that have marketing related outcomes. Some are events with established marketing intent, such as exhibitions and product launches. Others have less formalised marketing purpose, such as conferences or charity events, but nevertheless contain latent marketing potential. This prevalence of marketing events is a widely accepted notion in both the practitioner and academic worlds. This is typified by Gupta (2003) who reflects that *"event marketing is gaining popularity"* (p87). The embryonic nature of research in this area, combined with the diversity of event platforms (see figure 2), means that coherent data does not currently exist to provide robust confirmation of the extent of marketing events in the integrated communications mix. There are however a variety of widely reported arguments and trends in contemporary marketing thinking that provide sound justification for the growing resonance of marketing events.

The sections below outline the virtuous character of marketing events, evaluating their legitimate presence in the modern marketing world. Importantly the discussion highlights the apposite features of marketing events, which comprise; experiential, interactive, targeted, and relational. The discussion is not intended to advocate the primacy of marketing events compared to other communication forms, moreover to substantiate its presence in a multifaceted and vibrant marketing world.

The below has been divided into subsections to facilitate clarity for the reader, in reality the sections are overlapping.

2.1 Evading the Clutter

Marketers are persistently crafting communication methods to evade the frustrating and inconvenient reality of 'marketing clutter' (Roy and Cornwall 2004). Given the crowded markets, 'noise', and busy consumers that characterise the present day, marketers are challenged more than ever to achieve coherent communication with their markets. Therefore practitioners have a fondness for communication methods that can evade the clutter and present opportunity to create and build meaningful emotional connections. Events fulfil this need, providing a vehicle to communicate the brand and its messages in an invasive manner. Furthermore they represent an adaptable and comprehensive tool that when strategically deployed can facilitate the cultivation of awareness, interest, desire, and action (Strong 1925). This is because it represents a reciprocal communication containing structured and unstructured elements, permitting a personalised experience for the attendee.

2.2 Unique Configuration

Marketing events are a subgroup of the broader field of experiential marketing (Schmitt 1999), which also comprises other areas such as field marketing, social

media and so forth. Experiential marketing is clearly differentiated from other communication methods. Notably, and significantly for marketing purposes, events contain a unique blend of additional qualities that make it dissimilar to other forms of experiential marketing and augment its value to the marketer. In this respect they hold a distinct presence on what can be depicted as the experiential marketing continuum.

The three differentiating characteristics are as follows. Firstly the pre planned nature of an event means the marketer has an increased modicum of control compared to more immediate experiential marketing forms. Secondly the event occurs at an agreed location and will usually last for a predetermined period of time. This presents the marketer with a structured opportunity within which to facilitate a favourable event experience that is strategically designed. Finally, and perhaps most significantly, the attendee is a willing and voluntary participant in the marketing communications process. These features present a unique configuration in marketing communications, distinct from other forms of marketing communication.

2.3 Targeted and Customised

A recognised marketing trend is the erosion of mass markets and the emergence of smaller market segments, which Parsons and Maclaren (2009) depict as fragmentation. While the eagerness for mass communication methods remains, there is a corresponding need for methods that facilitate more personalised

communications. From the invitees, to the design of the event, marketing events represent a highly targeted communication form. Professional and creative event management provides an opportunity for a highly customised event experience for the attendee. Like other forms of communication the opportunity exists to tweak the design and messages to best suit the specific segment. Furthermore, and depending upon the event platform used, marketing events allow for individualised communications as indicated in 2.1 above, such communication being a holy grail for marketers.

2.4 Interactive Brand Communications

Pine and Gilmore (1999) emphasise peoples growing appetite to consume experiences. Within a marketing context Parsons and Maclaren (2009) introduce the concept of hyperreality, with consumers actively experiencing the brand. Communication methods therefore play an integral role in the customer, client, and stakeholder's perception of the organisation. The premise being that marketing communications can enrich or diminish the perceived value a buyer gets from their engagement with a given brand. The experiential nature of events and the potential to engage with participants is palpable. This is aligned with 'brand hyperreality' as introduced by Whelan and Wholfeil (1993) in their depiction of event marketing. The emphasis is upon the holistic experience of the consumer and the 'live communication of the brand' (Getz 2007).

The role of marketing communications in informing brand perceptions is evident, and particularly palpable for marketing events. Marketing events are a pervasive, and often determining, tool in shaping the opinions and behaviours of attendees. An extension of this logic leads us to consider marketing communications, and specifically marketing events, as a constituent part of the 'service delivery process' as portrayed by Vargo and Lusch (2004). Their experiential nature making them integral to the relationship an organisation has with its customer, clients, and wider stakeholders. The contention that events as an interactive communication of the brand is a central tenet of this paper and one that should resonate for marketers in planning their next event.

2.5 'For and With' Consumers

An outdated tenet of marketing thinking is the notion of doing things 'to' consumers; this has been superseded by the sentiment of doing things 'with' consumers. This is linked closely is the work of Vargo and Lusch (2004), who accentuate the importance of consumers co-creating value rather than being passive and inactive. The principle of the consumer as an active and voluntary participant in the marketing process is a step change, and a revealing notion that is consistent with the inherent character of events. Marketing event platforms provide an interactive environment (marketing space) that is highly participative, promoting a collaborative experience.

The emphasis is shifting from one dimensional to interactive communication forms, which are underpinned by the importance of engaging in conversations with consumers (Kumar 1997). Arguably marketing events are the most interactive of communication forms. It is widely recognised that modern consumers and buyers display scepticism about being 'marketed to', therefore the advancement of communication methods that facilitate participation is timely and appealing.

2.6 Primacy of Relational

The above sections are revealing in capturing the significance of marketing events. Implicit in much of the above discussion is the evolution of marketing thinking from a product orientated psyche to a more relational approach. This shift is illustrated by the advancement of relationship marketing thinking (Gronoos 1990), and in more recent times service dominant logic (Vargo and Lusch 2004). The primacy of the holistic relationship with all of it's 'touch points' creates a new reality for the marketer. It determines that all communication with the consumer must be suitably consistent and integrated, so as to constantly sustain and enhance relationships. As a communication form that is highly experiential, marketing events are prolific in this respect, presenting a ripe opportunity to enhance and even transform a relationship.

The shift away from the customary buyer seller paradigm is pivotal to the ideas of Sheth and Parvatiyars (2000), who call for a new way of thinking that accounts for the continuous nature of relationships among marketing actors. The experiential,

interactive, targeted, and relational qualities of marketing events sit well in such a reality. This revealing concept is a suitable place to end this exploration of the role of marketing events in the contemporary marketing context. The paper progresses to examine and explain the core construct of 'marketing space' and the associated conceptual model.

3.0 'MARKETING SPACE' CONCEPT

The unique characteristics of events create a precious, yet finite, marketing opportunity. An opportunity that can be realised or abused, dependant upon the strategic intent infused, and the quality of the operational planning and delivery. Marketing events cultivate an environment unlike that created by any other form of marketing communication. A transient reality that provides marketers with a versatile opportunity that is appealing for the reasons presented in the previous section. Marketing space is the term used to characterise this finite opportunity.

From the attendees perspective we can portray marketing space as time out of time. It is an occasion where the customer, client, or stakeholder inevitably becomes more closely acquainted with an organisation. Optimistically it will create feelings of acquiescence, reaffirming, enhancing, or even redefining, existing brand perceptions. Conversely, the consequence could be detrimental to brand perceptions. Marketing space is an environment where an organisation is laid bare, more fully and revealingly exposed than through any other forms of marketing communication.

As the above indicates, optimisation of marketing space is far from guaranteed, and is dependant upon a variety of interrelated factors and processes. These are discussed in section 3.1 below.

3.1 Model

Figure 1: Marketing Space Framework
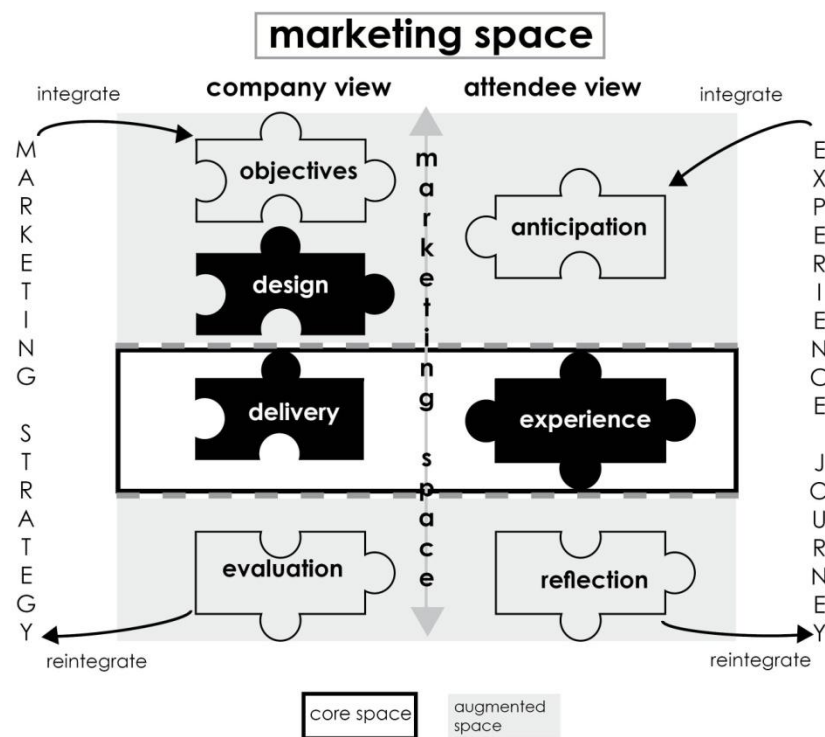
Marketing space is designed and facilitated by the organisation, and experienced by the attendee. Figure 1 depicts marketing space from both the attendee and also organisational perspectives, suggesting that there are some parallel processes. These will be referred to interchangeably in the following introduction to the framework.

For both the attendee and the organisation there are interrelated processes in play. For the attendee it encompasses anticipation, experiencing, and reflection (Le Bel and Laurette 1998). For the organisation, it incorporates setting event objectives, the design, delivery, and evaluation of the marketing event episode. The organisational factors combine to create a unique marketing space that impacts the experience, reflection and future behaviour of the attendee. Although experience cannot be guaranteed, it can be facilitated (Getz 2007) through the design and delivery of the marketing space. This places an emphasis and expectation upon the organisation and their marketing and event managers.

Crucially marketing space, and therefore the attendee experience, extends beyond the physical and time parameters of the event. The diagram denotes the anticipation and reflection stages as being augmented marketing space. These time periods represent the prelude to the 'core marketing space', and also the sequel. They are interwoven and integral extensions of the event and present many opportunities to heighten (or diminish) the attendee perceptions. Marketers should see these as fundamental components of the event planning and delivery.

3.1.1 Integration

Underpinning the framework is the principle that marketing events are a delivery mechanism for the marketer, and that each episode should be integrated within wider marketing and communications strategy. Marketing events are one tool available to

the marketer; they may often not be the most appropriate tool. When they are utilised they will typically be one part of a more integrated strategy involving other tools, such as PR and advertising.

For the attendee, their marketing event experience must be carefully coordinated within their wider experience journey with the organisation. Previous research has shown fracturing of this link, resulting in marketing events that are an adjunct, devoid of strategic intent (Pugh and Wood 2004, Crowther 2009). This results in event objectives, design, delivery, and evaluation that is preoccupied with short term tactical outcomes. These would typically focus on sales or satisfaction objectives, limiting the marketing event opportunity. The net impact being a failure to adequately integrate the attendee experience into that individual's wider 'conversation' with the organisation.
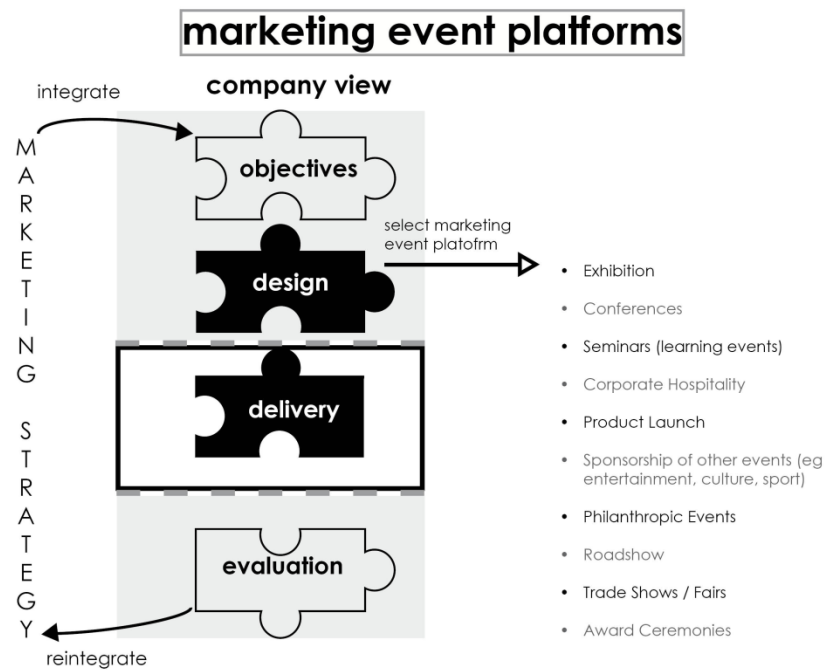
Marketing space provides attendees with a pervasive and interactive experience of the brand; this is an inescapable reality of utilising marketing events. Whether you plan to communicate the brand or not, it is there for all attendees to see. Therefore effective brand communication is best achieved through careful design of how the experience will embody brand personality and values. Such planned consideration, in the form of objectives and design, should also be afforded to other potential marketing outcomes. These may include; relationship development, market sensing, customer sensing, sales, new product exploration, and so forth. Therefore marketers must identify relevant and appropriate goals, or combination of goals, and translate these into specific event objectives. These objectives should be measurable to facilitate

evaluation. Therefore providing the marketing event with a quantifiable opportunity to demonstrate its contribution linked to marketing strategy, and where possible return on investment.

The above provides a framework within which to achieve continuous improvement in the application of marketing events. As event outcomes are inexplicably linked to inputs, successes can be identified and build upon, and failures analysed, mitigated, and remedied. The bedrock is the alignment of the event objectives with marketing strategy. This creates the conditions through which marketing space can be infused with pre determined messages to lucidly communicate the brand messages and position, and also to embed other diverse objectives. When the linkage between the event objectives and strategy is fractured such outcomes are unlikely. Therefore strong integration with marketing strategy, and the integrated communications mix, is a prerequisite to event episodes realising their strategic potential.

3.1.2 Design

Figure 2: Marketing Event Platforms

marketing event platforms

company view

integrate

MARKETING STRATEGY

objectives

design — select marketing event platofrm →

delivery

evaluation

reintegrate

- Exhibition
- Conferences
- Seminars (learning events)
- Corporate Hospitality
- Product Launch
- Sponsorship of other events (eg entertainment, culture, sport)
- Philanthropic Events
- Roadshow
- Trade Shows / Fairs
- Award Ceremonies

As indicated in figure 2 the first stages of the event design process is to determine the event platform to be adopted. Events are not an amorphous group, each platform has its own charm, characteristics, and indeed challenge. Therefore once objectives are established a selection process of the most opportune event platform(s) should follow. Each event platform lends itself to the achievement of specific combinations of event objectives. For example a product launch could be a powerful mechanism through which to leverage objectives associated with sales and brand communications. Where as objectives around augmenting relationships with clients would perhaps be better served through a smaller workshop or hospitality event.

Once selected, the event platform should not be seen as a standardized configuration. Each platform is pliable and can be creatively and deliberately crafted to achieve desired outcomes. So for example sponsorship of an event is in the first instance

entirely about brand communications; however this platform can be activated through more creative design. This could provide the opportunity to successfully incorporate other elements that will more favourably lend themselves to sales and relational outcomes. The above sentiment is symptomatic of a pivotal point in discussion of marketing events. Event platforms are optimised when tailored and fully integrated with other methods and media within the communications mix.

A fundamental, and initial, stage of the event design process is to determine invitees. An event is fundamentally a pervasive communication of the brand, therefore careful consideration therefore should be given to who is consuming each marketing event episode. It could conceivably be the case that you would not want all aspects of your market, and wider stakeholders consuming all the marketing events the organisation delivers. Like any form of communication marketing event episodes should be tailored by design to specific markets and stakeholder groups.

While event objectives are the precursor to the design process, another determinant is a prevailing focus upon the influences, motivations, and expectations of the attendees, which Getz categorises as antecedents (2007). This customer orientated mindset is borne out of recognition that the optimisation of marketing space is not exclusively the outcome of organisational factors. Beauty is indeed, in the eye of the beholder, and the attendee carries with them expectations of the event driven by a variety of intrinsic and extrinsic influences. It is therefore incumbent upon the marketer to design the marketing space guided by the peculiarities of their target attendees.

As discussed, pre and post event communication are augmented components of marketing space that can either enhance the experience or dilute it. These elements should be carefully integrated to be value adding extensions of the event. These stages will inevitably utilise other marketing communication methods, emphasising the requirement to leverage the experience beyond the interactive medium of the core event. Pre event communication should be designed to deepen the anticipation of the attendee. It should, however, not over hype the event as this can have the impact of falsely inflating expectations which could prove self defeating. Logically, and ideally, event expectations should be less than, or equal to, event reality. Similarly post event communication provides an opportunity to provide longevity to the experience.

3.1.3 Delivery

During the event time and space parameters of the event, depicted as 'core marketing space', the opportunity exists to deliver a balanced event design that will facilitate the most favourable experience for the attendee. This impinges upon the specifics of the desired objectives, attendee antecedents, and event platform. The balance would typically be optimised through manipulation of the following design elements, education (learning), social, and entertainment. In consideration of the event experience, deliberation should be given to the content, but also the flow of activities.

The challenge of coherently communicating your brand values and message within the 'core marketing space' is composite. There are many features of the event that the marketer must coordinate to accomplish the desired outcomes. Berridge (2007) emphasises service received, location, goods used and consumed, theme, and also programme design as integral considerations. These represent a wide range of tangible and intangible cues that expose the brand to the attendee. The core components of the event are persuasive, but peripheral aspects are also telling. These are wide ranging and consist of (among other things), the welcome the attendee receives, the soap to wash their hands, parking available, and how questions and concerns are handled.

Pine and Gilmore (1999) emphasise dramaturgy as an added consideration, and dimension, to the optimisation of marketing space. This implies the similarities between events and the theatre. The parallels are palpable, with organisation putting on a performance. The opportunity is for the marketer to adopt a design mentality and see the event as a blank canvass that can be shaped in such a way to best maximise the event objectives and the attendee experience. Design and delivery influence how the marketing space performs in sustaining, enhancing, or indeed diluting the attendee's acquiescence with the organisation. A difficulty of marketing events is that a much wider range of people inform the communication than in other communication methods. Brand ambassadors come in the form of receptionists, cleaners, catering, and security guards, in addition to the marketers, event managers, and senior executives. Choreographing these touch points to provide a coherent message is a distinct challenge.

This difficulty of creating an experience that enhances the relationship of an individual with an organisation is further elevated when considering the concept of 'perceived sacrifice' (Monroe 1991). Applying this thinking to marketing events suggests that participants perceived costs in actively attending an event are higher than when passively consuming other forms of marketing communications. Event attendees have typically incurred real costs in their presence at an event, in the form of time, money, and effort. Appreciably, particularly in the case of business to business events, there are also incalculable opportunity costs of attendance. Consistent with Monroe's work, the indication would be that the higher the sacrifice, the higher the attendee's expectations from the event.

A further consideration, and caveat, is that event attendees are rarely from a generic group. Often attendees comprise varied stakeholders, from prospective customers, existing customers, media, suppliers, and beyond, each with different value to an organisation. The design and delivery of any given episode must be sophisticated enough to provide differential experiences dependant upon the event objectives and antecedents of the attendee grouping. The opportunity to customise the event design and delivery is a prevailing quality of marketing events, and realising this is fundamental to optimising the marketing space for all attendees.

3.1.4 Reintegration

Aligned to the logic of integration discussed in section 3.1.1 an event episode must be reintegrated into the wider experience management, marketing and communications strategy of the organisation. Each event episode has value in itself, but utmost value is achieved when they are seamlessly integrated into wider communication activity. The relationship with any given customer or wider stakeholder is sustained and enhanced by the 'touch points' between events. Therefore issues such as the personnel delivering events and post event analysis, and feedback (forward) become paramount.

The opportunity is for organisations to strategically plan a calendar of event episodes logically fitting into the activities and campaigns within the wider communications mix. These event episodes are knitted together so as to provide customers, and wider stakeholders, with a consistent narrative of 'living the brand' (Russel 2007). Such events providing strategically planned marketing space between the organisation and its key markets and stakeholders. This could support manifold objective, not least that of achieving an intensity of relationship with consumers and stakeholders who otherwise would engage with organisation in a much more informal and impromptu manner.

4.0 'MARKETING SPACE' DISCUSSION

4.1 Potential

Marketing communications comprises a large number of methods where the recipient is largely passive and inactive in the process (Duncan and Moriarty 1998), such as direct mail, advertising and more contemporary phenomenon such as e-marketing. Marketing events are fundamentally different, with attendees voluntary and active in their involvement, cultivating a unique dynamic, as discussed.

Figure 1 depicts attendee experience as 'core marketing space', being the time from which participants physically arrive at the event to their departure. During this period, as outlined by Getz (2007), participants are typically more relaxed, uninhibited, and open to new ideas. The marketing event therefore takes on heightened significance providing a fertile opportunity to communicate with attendees, and importantly establish, maintain, and enhance relationships (Gronoos 1994, in Ravald and Gronoos 1996). Using the phraseology of Belk (1989) marketing space is characterised by a blurring of the boundaries between the sacred and profane. For business people attending events this can be seen as a blurring of the commercial and the social, for consumer a blurring between everyday lived experience and the stimulation and escapism of the event.

Whether business to business or business to consumer a transitory reality is forged that is opportune for the marketer. A reality that enables a freer transference of messages and as such enables a greater level of empathy and communication of marketing messages. This is consistent with the aspiration of marketers to develop

emotional connections with customers, and other stakeholders. As indicated in the introduction the caveat to the virtuous nature of marketing space is the management challenge it brings, the following section illustrates this further.

4.2 Challenge

Marketing space is intangible, heterogeneous, inseparable, and perishable (Brown et al 1994). These factors make marketing events a complex and demanding device to successfully employ. This is particularly the case when aspiring to achieve strategic objectives, in addition to more tactical and short term outcomes linked to sales and satisfaction. It provides marketers with management challenges that are dissimilar to those presented by more established marketing platforms, such as advertising, sales promotion, and public relations. This triggers discussion about the appropriate human resourcing of marketing events, a salient point given the findings of previous research (Crowther 2009).

The communication process, as exemplified by Jobber (2007, p504), is starkly different in marketing events to other communication methods. Within marketing space the modicum of control in respect of the transmission of messages is reduced in comparison to other methods. The transmission can be seen as fluid and reciprocal providing rapidity that is challenging when striving to achieve coherent communication. Managing diverse brand cues in an interactive setting is a complex process. This challenge is compounded when one considers that organisations often

engage with a range of event platforms and episodes each year. Effectively managing interactive brand communications suddenly takes on a new impetus.

Should an event not meet (or exceed) the expectations of the attendee then the brand, but also the achievement of other marketing objectives, would logically be compromised. This discussion exemplifies why events are high in risk as well as opportunity. Realising the potential presented by marketing space is a complex process, which impinges upon the adoption of creative and professional event management on behalf of the organisation. As indicated in the introduction previous research has indicated that organisations adopt an overly informal and ad hoc approach to planning and managing marketing events. This is clearly inconsistent with the enormity of the challenge illustrated above.

5.0 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Marketing events are a sub category of experiential marketing which is one component of an organisations communication tools. Notably marketing events comprises a variety of event platforms that can be activated by the marketer to achieve their objectives. Marketing events are therefore by definition heterogeneous, and these differences become even more pronounced when considering the context of the marketing event, such as whether they are employed in business to business or business to consumer marketing. Such realities provide considerable food for thought. It is of course problematic, and from some early feedback controversial, to develop inclusive frameworks and concepts surrounding events and marketing.

Some final thoughts may bring some further clarity to the debate. The closing discussion introduces two dichotomies that provide some further classification of marketing events.

5.1 Direct and Indirect Events

Any event engaging with external stakeholders is a communication of that organisations brand and is therefore of marketing significance, and should logically be informed by marketing strategy. Ostensibly this is the case however research findings indicate a more fragmented approach in the field. Different event platforms received varying degrees of marketing intensity and resource (Crowther 2009). This is caused by the parameters of what is, and is not, a marketing event being blurred. There is a disparity between what an organisation would internally consider to be a 'marketing event' and 'events that have a marketing impact'. The net impact being a dilution of the marketing benefit leveraged from the full range of organisational events.

There exists a continuum of marketing platforms, at one end are events receiving complete marketing focus; at the other extreme are those that have negligible marketing involvement. This can be expressed using the dichotomy between direct and indirect events. Direct events being those devised and planned primarily to achieve marketing objectives. Indirect events comprise those most likely devised by

different functions of the organisation, and not adequately informed by, and therefore integrated into, marketing strategy. This could include, for example, a charity event.

The implication being that certain external facing events will result in missed opportunities to realise marketing benefit as the organisers lack both awareness of, and focus upon marketing and brand strategy. More concerning is the propensity for these events to communicate the brand in an eclectic and incongruous manner. It is therefore important that whether an event is direct or indirect it receives a benchmark approach to design, delivery, and evaluation that is consistent with the communication of brand and the realisation of other marketing outcomes.

5.2 Exclusive and Non Exclusive Events

Some events are completely controlled by a given organisation, from invitees, to design and delivery; these are categorized as exclusive events. These would typically include, product launches, conferences, or seminars. The opposite being events that are collaborations, perhaps involving sponsorship, or the organisation is one of many exhibitors, such as a trade show or exhibition. These would logically be labelled non exclusive events. This dichotomy is important as it represents a variation in the modicum of control. In the case of non exclusive events the control is palpably less.

Figure 1 depicts marketing space from the point of view of exclusive events. The framework is useful in identifying the inevitable tensions and challenges when the organisation has a lesser or more restricted involvement. Marketers therefore need to

be cautious in selecting non exclusive events that are consistent with their brand and will enable them to suitably communicate their brand and achieve broader objectives.

5.3 Concluding Remarks

This paper has introduced a conceptual framework through which to interpret events within the marketing domain. The impetus for this is the reality that events are rich in marketing potential to position an organisation, achieve manifold outcomes, and embody your brand in a 4D experience. This is an embryonic framework that will evolve and presents many separate and interrelated areas, for future conceptual and empirical development.

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