

Marketing event outcomes : from tactical to strategic

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Marketing Event Outcomes: From tactical to strategic

1.0 Introduction

Events provide organisations with a strategic and versatile tool through which to realise diverse marketing related objectives. This potential often fails to be fully realised, impeded by a myopic and overly tactical approach to planning and delivery (Pugh and Wood 2004, Crowther, 2010a). Events are too often an informal adjunct to marketing activity lacking strategic integration and intent. Practitioners looking to the academic world for guidance and inspiration will be frustrated as there is currently a lack of research and conceptual development connecting marketing and events.

In response to the above, this paper draws upon related, yet fragmented, literature within marketing and event studies (Getz, 2007, Berridge, 2007), to create a framework to examine and illustrate the strategic potential of marketing events. The framework provides a structured approach through which practitioners and academics can interpret the role and dynamics of marketing events. Marketing events is used as an inclusive term that comprises a diverse range of organisational events that have marketing utility, ranging from the largest of congresses or trade shows, to the smallest and most intimate of seminars or hospitality events. These different event forms are labelled marketing event platforms (Crowther, 2010b), each with their own charm and challenge. Underpinning the framework, and associated discussion, is how marketing events integrate with marketing strategy. The connection between event objectives and marketing strategy is therefore pivotal, and is a prevailing theme of this paper.

Established definitions of 'marketing events' are somewhat crude and often belie their more sophisticated capability, for example 'events are occurrences designed to communicate particular messages to target audiences' (Kotler, 2002, p576). This theme is echoed in practice with events continuing to be perceived, and often treated, as a poor relation to more dominant media within the integrated communications mix. The notion of event management as a fledgling profession is conspicuous when examining its status and application within marketing. This subordination hampers events in realising their potential as an integrated communication tool. This backdrop seems incongruous and needing re-evaluation, given that when effectively deployed, marketing events play a pervasive and multifaceted role in achieving diverse marketing and sales objectives. Positively, the increased prominence of integrated marketing communications (Finne and Gronoos, 2009) creates an environment more favourable to the integration and expansion of less renowned methods, such as events, as it is an approach that seeks to align and optimise the communication impact of various methods (Kitchen et al, 2008). The evolution of strategies such as 'media-neutral planning' (Jobber, 2007) are further evidence of a recognition of the need to create a communications landscape that is more inclusive.

The proposed framework is introduced and examined in section 4. The pivotal notion underpinning this framework is expressed as 'marketing space'. Marketing events provide practitioners with a distinct 'space' within which to connect with their market and stakeholders, a space that is dissimilar to that offered by the other communications methods. Marketing space is depicted as 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. Central to the framework is the connection between the event and wider marketing objectives and activity, advocating a transition from

silo and operational to integrated and strategic. Events have resonance within a variety of conceptual areas within the field of marketing. The framework is therefore particularly influenced by a range of distinct yet overlapping marketing paradigms. These include relationship marketing (Gronroos 2000; Sheth and Parvatiyar 2000; Gummesson 2002), integrated marketing communications (Schultz and Barnes 1999, Kitchen et al, 2009), relationship communication (Duncan and Moriarty 1997, Finne and Gronroos, 2009), and service dominant logic (Vargo and Lusch, 2004).

In the following section the discussion progresses to introduce and appraise the marketing event landscape. Section 3 examines and reveals the distinct character of marketing events, presenting an underlying rationale for their efficacy in the contemporary marketing environment. Discussion in section 4 introduces the marketing event framework and associated notion of marketing space. Section 5 advocates and explores a range of strategic event objectives as the foundation for event design, delivery, and evaluation.

2.0 Marketing Event Landscape

In addition to the more traditional and rudimentary definitions of marketing events, other characterisations consist of 'brand hyperreality' (Whelan and Wholfeil 2006), 'live communications' (Getz 2007), and 'live the brand' (Russel 2007). These terms begin to capture the more pervasive value of planned events and the multifaceted possibilities they offer marketers. Such thinking illuminates why organisations, in all three sectors of the economy (public, private, and third sector), invest considerable percentages of their marketing budget in delivering events. The academic reporting of the growing popularity and resonance of marketing events (Gupta 2003) is supported by recent empirical research. A case study of Microsoft's event operations revealed that 10% of its marketing communication budget is spent on event marketing (Heasley, 2010), and a wider survey suggested an industry average figure of nearer 25% (Fahmy, 2010).

As indicated, 'marketing events' is an overarching term that incorporates a wide range of organisational event platforms (see figure 3). The common denominator being that they are all platforms that embody the basic characteristics of an event (Getz, 2007) engaging with an audience of customers and/or wider stakeholders. In so doing, they inescapably represent a 4D communiqué of that organisation's brand. They are therefore of marketing consequence and should be informed, at least partially, by marketing strategy. The essence of an event is an experience; the rationale presented in this paper is that the experience should be informed and infused by a consistent narrative that is aligned to the marketing strategy of the organisation. Hence any fracturing of the relationship between strategy and the event is problematic. This contention is pivotal, and a central tenet of this paper.

In practice the marketing focus afforded to event platforms is inconsistent (Crowther, 2010a) often with a disjointed and silo approach evident. This fragmented approach is perhaps explained by the fact that the marketing event landscape is diverse and differential. There exists a continuum of marketing event platforms; at one extreme there are 'direct events' that would typically be driven by the market function of an organisation, such as product launches or sponsorship of events. The management of these would logically receive considerable marketing focus. 'Indirect events' are at the other extreme comprising those most likely initiated and managed by different functions of the organisation. This could include, for example, a charity event, or a conference.

A distinct characteristic of events is therefore cross departmental involvement, planning and management. Events are delivered by a proliferation of individuals and teams throughout the organisation, and of course external agencies, each with their own structures, processes, priorities, and (perhaps) interpretation of the brand. This point is debated by Kitchen et al (2009) who reflects on the conflict that occurs within this environment and the damaging impact this can have on achieving a broad range of strategic outcomes from the activity. This can have the impact of diluting the marketing benefit that can be leveraged from these events. At best, this can result in missed opportunities. At worst, it provides an incongruous and eclectic communication of the brand and the risk of uncoordinated, inconsistent and perhaps excessive contact with the market and wider stakeholders.

3.0 Utility of Marketing Events

Exposing the distinct character and utility of marketing events is pertinent given the prevalence of integrated marketing communication, and the necessity for organisations to activate a proliferation of mediums to 'reign supreme' (Fehrstrom and Rich 2009). The integrated and pervasive character of marketing events is pronounced when reflecting that communication does not take place in a vacuum, but in a wider context incorporating not only traditional media but also other communication efforts, as well as product and service encounters (Duncan and Moriarty, 1997). The ensuing discussion is not intended to advocate the primacy of marketing events, as they have noteworthy limitations, such as their limited reach, difficulties of evaluation, and resource consumption. Moreover it unpicks the characteristics of marketing events and evaluates their relevance to the modern marketing environment.

Events are in essence experiential, interactive, targeted, and relational; these features are highly relevant and desirable given the modern marketing environment. Such characteristics are of course consistent with other communication forms, notably within the wider, and expanding field of experiential marketing (Schmitt, 1999). However, in addition to these shared characteristics, marketing events comprise unique features which differentiate and augment their value and status.

Firstly, the pre planned nature of an event means the marketer has an increased modicum of control, as they have the opportunity to plan and facilitate an experience at an agreed location that will usually last for a predetermined period of time. This constitutes a structured opportunity within which to facilitate a favourable event experience that is strategically designed. This is distinct from more immediate forms of experiential marketing. Secondly, and significantly, that the attendee is a voluntary and active participant in the communications process. Marketing communications comprises a large number of methods where the recipient is typically passive and inactive (Duncan and Moriarty 1998), such as direct mail, advertising and contemporary phenomenon such as e-marketing. Indeed, many of the traditional approaches have been preoccupied with the active sender and the passive receiver in the communication process (Percy and Elliott 2005, in Finne and Gronoos, 2009). Marketing events are fundamentally different cultivating a unique dynamic.

The inherent characteristics evaluated above provide marketing events with a distinct DNA. The discussion in the remainder of this section evaluates this DNA within the context of the contemporary marketing environment, and in so doing reveals the particular utility of marketing events.

3.1 Pervasive and Targeted Communication

A frustrating, yet prevailing, reality of marketing in the modern era is the existence of 'marketing clutter' (Roy and Cornwall, 2004). Given the crowded markets, 'noise', and busy consumers, practitioners have affection for communication methods that can evade the clutter and present opportunity to create and build meaningful emotional connections. The experiential nature of events lends themselves to this objective, facilitating pervasive and interactive communication. Gupta (2003, p87) refers to event marketing 'gaining popularity in long term brand building and humanising of corporates'. These objectives are of course significant given the prevailing need to differentiate based upon emotional rather than utilitarian features.

The erosion of mass markets and the emergence of smaller market segments is termed fragmentation by Parsons and Maclaren (2009). There is a growing imperative for organisations to construct communication strategies that are more targeted and personalised. From the invitees, to the design of the event, marketing events represent a highly targeted communication form. Through understanding of the antecedents of attendees (Getz, 2007), event managers are able to facilitate appealing and opportune experiences. Furthermore event management can provide the possibility for a high degree of personalisation of the event experience for the attendee. Depending upon the event platform used marketing events can create individualised communication, such communication being a holy grail for marketers. The event environment contains structured and unstructured elements, permitting a personalised experience for the attendee, and the opportunity to actively experience the value propositions, and connect with the organisation. The latter point has particular resonance when seeking to achieve sales oriented objectives.

3.2 Meaningful Experiences

Parsons and Maclaren (2009) adopt the term hyperreality to symbolize the growing phenomenon of modern consumers actively experiencing brands. Marketing communications can therefore 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 therefore palpable. Marketing events stage a multi sensory experience with attendees 'enjoying' a 'live communication of the brand' (Getz, 2007).

An extension of this logic leads us to consider marketing communications, and particularly marketing events, as a constituent part of the 'service delivery process' as suggested by Vargo and Lusch (2004). Their experiential nature makes them integral to the relationship an organisation has with its customers, clients, and wider stakeholders. Events provide organisations with opportunities to interactively engage with customers and wider stakeholders in order to enhance emotional connections, moving them up (or down) the loyalty ladder (Christopher et al, 1991).

3.3 Participative Environment

An outdated tenet in marketing is the notion of doing things 'to' consumers; this has been superseded by the view of doing things 'with' and 'for' consumers, hence the term co creation (Vargo and Lusch, 2004). 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 marketing events. Event platforms provide an interactive

environment (marketing space) that is highly participative, promoting a collaborative experience through which to engage in ongoing conversations with customers (Kumar 1997). Informed modern consumers and buyers are sceptical about being 'marketed to' therefore the advancement of communication methods that facilitate participation is timely and appealing.

Haeckel (1999) extends this logic by introducing the aspiration of forging a 'sense and respond' strategy with customers to proactively anticipate product and service issues, characterising marketing as a customer consultation function. Events are an interactive and personalised tool providing an opportune environment to facilitate this outcome and indeed wider outcomes associated with gathering customer and market intelligence, both from customers, but also wider stakeholders in the supply and distribution chains.

Crucially, as the marketing space framework illustrates, event design is key in cultivating a participative environment along the lines of the 'outside in' approach advocated by Finne and Gronoos (2009), who emphasise the opportunity for the consumer to create the integration as opposed to the more prevalent 'inside out' approach. The emphasis is therefore on the event management to facilitate a customer centric event environment. Achieving this will enable the organisation to realise the manifold rewards of 'face to face' marketing. There is a broad base of research that demonstrates the power of 'face to face marketing' in achieving a range of sales and marketing objectives, some of which are cited by Fahmy (2010).

3.4 Strengthening Relationships

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 its 'touch points' creates a new reality for the marketer. It demands that all communication must be consistent and integrated, so as to constantly sustain and enhance relationships. 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. Marketing events qualities are aligned with the focus upon strengthening and deepening relationships. The emergent area of relationship communication is a useful paradigm through which to interpret events. Lindberg-Repo, (2001, p183, in Finne and Gronoos, 2009) refer to relationship communication as '...the sum of all actions that convert the message and meaning in a mutually beneficial way and affects the knowledge base between parties'. Such a definition is very much in tune with the time and situation context of an event environment (space).

4.0 Marketing Space Framework

The framework introduced in this section is required and fitting given the contemporary marketing context evaluated in the opening sections of this paper. This preceding discussion has demonstrated the legitimate role of events in twenty first century marketing. Marketing events are relationship communications (Duncan and Moriarty 1997, Finne and Gronoos, 2009) that have far reaching strategic possibilities and implications; these are examined in section 5 below. In spite of this there is an absence of conceptual development, frameworks, and tools that academics and practitioners can use and critique. The framework and associated concepts introduced below have emerged from a review of related marketing and event studies literature. It is this fusion of the two fields that will successfully advance thinking in the area of marketing events.

The realisation of the strategic possibilities and implications impinges upon the activation and implementation of a process that firmly anchors the event within the organisations strategic marketing plans. This results in the development of 'strategic event objectives' which become the heart beat of the process. Preoccupation with these objectives and the event experience of all stakeholders (Getz, 2007) infuses every decision throughout the design, delivery, and evaluation cycle.

Marketing space is a concept adopted to depict the unique environment marketing events cultivate, which is unlike that created by other communication forms. This space is a valuable, yet transitory, opportunity for the marketer, which is both high in potential and risk. Figure 1 (displayed in 4.1 below) depicts the marketing space framework. At the heart of this model is core marketing space which is attendees experience within the time and space parameters of the event. Notably the event experience extends beyond the actual event and this is denoted as augmented marketing space. This is the prequel and sequel to the event, manifesting themselves as attendee anticipation and reflection. These are interwoven and integral extensions of the event that increase the longevity and present many opportunities to heighten (or diminish) the planned event outcomes.

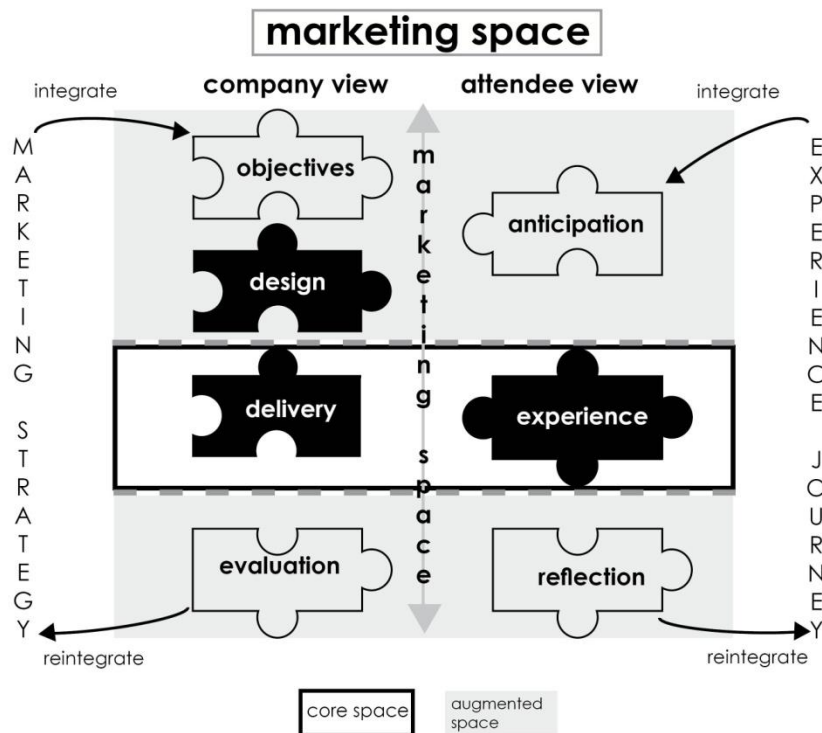
From the attendees perspective, marketing space can be portrayed as time out of time. It is an occasion where the customer, client, or stakeholder inevitably becomes more closely acquainted with an organisation. Optimistically, it will create feelings of acquiescence, reaffirming, enhancing, or even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

The optimisation of the opportunity impinges upon strategic event management that is professional and creative. While many organisations are exemplar in this respect, many more are not and therefore events remain as much a risk as an opportunity. The following discussion further illustrates the model and the challenge and opportunity it presents. As indicated above, the discussion then moves in section 5, to the pivotal component of strategic event objectives.

4.1 Framework

The marketing space framework is displayed below:

Figure 1: Marketing Space Framework



The framework is designed to demonstrate the parallel and interrelated processes in play during the lifecycle of a marketing event. Central to the model is the depiction that marketing events must be fully integrated to wider strategy and customer experience (relationship) management. Marketing space is designed and facilitated by the organisation and is experienced by the attendee. 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 infuse a marketing space that impacts the perception and future relationship with the attendee. Of course experience cannot be guaranteed, however it can be facilitated (Getz, 2007) through the design and delivery of the marketing event. This places an emphasis and expectation upon the organisation and their marketing and event managers.

4.2 Opportunity

When immersed within the core marketing space attendees are typically more relaxed, uninhibited, and open to new ideas (Getz, 2007). The marketing event therefore takes on heightened significance providing a fertile opportunity to establish, maintain, and enhance relationships (Gronoos, 1994, in Raval and Gronoos 1996). Applying the phraseology of Belk (1989), marketing space can be seen as a blurring of the boundaries between the sacred and profane, with social and entertainment ingredients being incorporated into the marketing exchange. For business people attending events this can be seen as a distorting of the

commercial and the social. For consumer this is a blurring between everyday lived experience and the stimulation and escapism of the event. This transitory reality enables a freer transference of messages and as such enables a greater level of empathy and communication of marketing messages.

4.3 Challenge

Consistent with other service environments, marketing space is intangible, heterogeneous, inseparable, and perishable (Brown et al, 1994). These factors make marketing events a composite device to successfully employ. This is evident when trying to achieve tactical outcomes relating to sales or attendee satisfaction. The challenge is amplified when aspiring to achieve more strategic and subtle objectives, perhaps relating to brand communications or relationship development. Typically, the modicum of control in the communication of messages is reduced in comparison to more traditional and less experiential forms of communication.

The transmission of messages in the event environment (marketing space) can be seen as fluid and reciprocal providing a rapidity that is challenging when striving to achieve coherence. This presents a distinct challenge and risk for marketing events given the necessity for marketers to focus upon the receivers, and meaning created by the receivers in the communication process (Vakratsas and Ambler, 1999). Both tangible and intangible brand cues are therefore manifest, and managing these within an interactive setting is a complex process. This challenge is compounded when one considers that organisations will likely engage with a range of event platforms and event episodes (Crowther 2010b) each year. The effective management of interactive brand communications takes on a new impetus.

Should an attendee's experience within the 'marketing space' fall below his/her expectations then the (manifold) organisational objectives would logically be compromised. Given the multifaceted nature of experience, this discussion exemplifies why marketing events are equally high in risk as opportunity. Therefore, realising the potential presented by marketing space is a complex process impinging upon the adoption of creative and professional event management on behalf of the organisation. This provides marketers with a management challenge that is dissimilar to those presented by more established marketing platforms, which prompts discussion about the appropriate human resource of marketing events, whilst this is not the focus of this paper it is relevant given the findings of previous research (Crowther, 2010a).

5.0 Marketing Event Outcomes

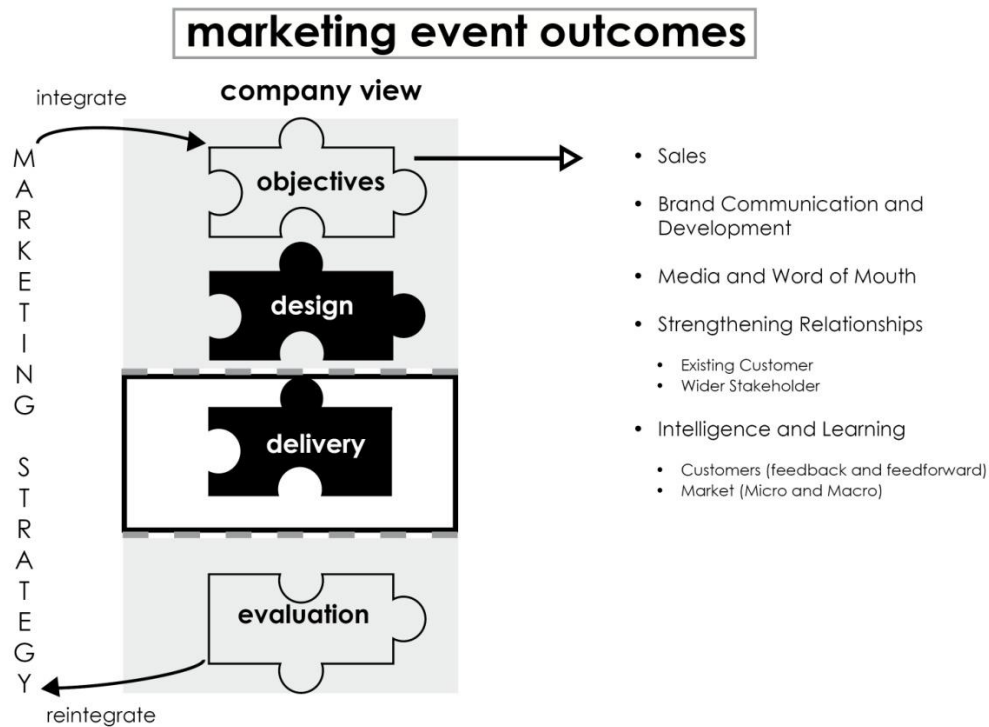
Integral to the conceptual framework and discussion in this paper is the principle that the design and delivery of the marketing event(s) should feed into and be informed by marketing strategy. Marketing events are inevitably one constituent of more holistic integrated communication strategy. This is underpinned by the existence of strategic event objectives, which is the first stage as shown on the framework. Strategic integration is the heart beat of the framework and without it the marketing event becomes overly informal, within such a context marketing events cannot realise their strategic potential.

5.1 Strategic Objectives

The opportunity is to leverage greater outcomes and impact from the event by activating a range of event objectives making the event more of a strategic force. Figure 2 below

illustrates the range of objective areas that marketing events can realise. The objective areas are diverse, spanning tactical to strategic. Beneath each overarching heading there exists a variety of focussed objectives which will vary depending upon sector and organisational context. It should be noted that the usefulness of events stretches beyond what purists would categorise as marketing and overlaps with sales, the author recognises the obvious distinction.

Figure 2: Marketing Event Objectives



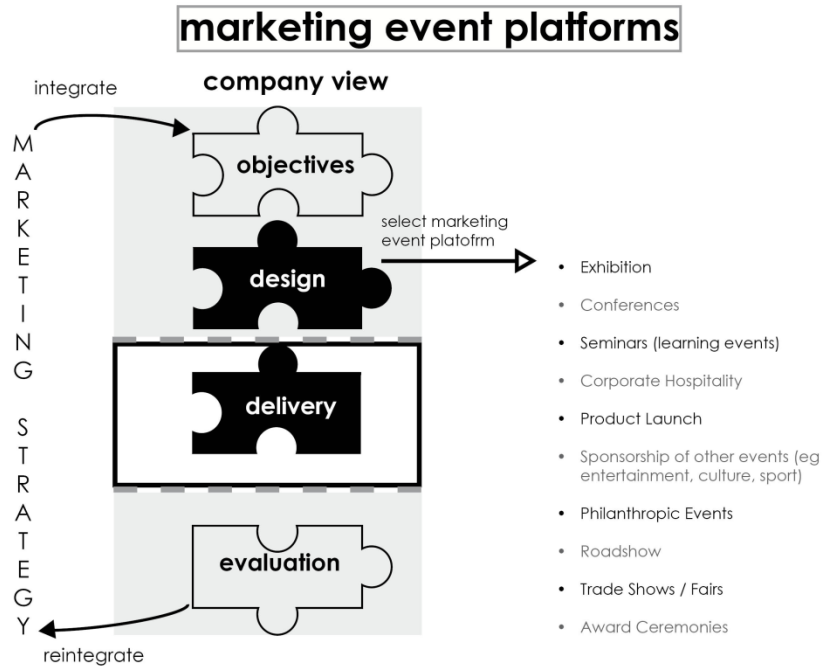
Marketers have the opportunity to identify primary and secondary objective areas that they seek to realise through the event episode. For example, there may be some primary objectives around profile raising, lead generation, and brand development. The event opportunity may also provide opportunity for customer relationship management, and customer and stakeholder feed forward about new product development. Management decisions relating to event design, delivery, and evaluation must flow directly from these objectives, as expressed by Nancy Neipp from Cisco, "If the purpose of the event is to generate sales, then you'd better set up an event that's a conduit for sales." (Fahmy, 2010). The message is to ensure that every facet of the event(s) is infused by strategic intent, and not preoccupied with operational convenience.

5.2 Event Platforms

The first stage of the event design process is the identification of opportune event platforms to best deliver the required event objectives; these are indicated in figure 3 below. Marketing event platforms are not an amorphous group, each platform has its own charm, characteristics, and indeed challenges, therefore lending itself to the achievement of specific combinations of event objectives. This marks a step change as a more typical approach is the reverse where objectives follow the selection of platform. Clearly, apposite platforms can only be selected

once the required objectives are specified. 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. This pattern is replicated across all event platforms and combinations of objectives. Specific platforms (or combination of platforms), lend themselves to the achievement of specific objectives.

Figure 3: Marketing Event Platforms



5.3 Marketing Event Objectives

The following sections evaluate each of the event objective areas identified in figure 2.

5.3.1 Sales

Marketing event can offer an intimate, and potentially seductive, environment through which to activate a range of sales related objectives. As indicated in section 3.3, face to face is a powerful medium and events present a conduit through which to cultivate these interactions, with existing, or new customers. Indeed, the evolution of marketing events, in the form of such platforms as trade and consumer shows is rooted in sales oriented psyche.

A fundamental, and initial, stage of the event design process is to determine invitees. Event marketing provides organisations with opportunities to interactively engage prospective customers and move them up the loyalty ladder (Christopher et al, 1991). The experiential and interactive character of events allows prospects to potentially see, feel, and sample aspects of the value proposition. Additionally, planned events can be a useful and convenient mechanism through which organisations can identify and screen new prospects.

5.3.2 Brand

An inescapable reality of marketing events is that they provide attendees with a pervasive and interactive experience of the brand. Whether you plan to communicate the brand or not, it is there for all attendees to see. Effective brand communication is best achieved through careful design of how the experience will embody brand personality and values. 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 an effective and coherent communication of the brand message and differentiation. Everything about the event communicates including service received, location, goods used and consumed, theme, and also programme design (Berridge, 2007). 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.

A difficult reality 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. Gummesson (1999) refers to part time marketers in this respect, indicating that non marketing staff irrespective of role and expertise impact customer experience. Choreographing these touch points to provide a coherent message is a distinct challenge.

5.3.3 Profile

A peculiarity of events is that often the physical attendee is not the only, or even primary, audience. Marketing events have longevity beyond the actual event, seeking to propel the message to wider audiences and stakeholders through media and word of mouth. The explosion of the virtual world has aided organisations in 'extending' their events, providing opportunities to develop very sophisticated event strategies that combine physical and virtual elements. It is particularly within this context that the pivotal nature of other communication methods is palpable, for example social media and PR. This area is ripe for further exploration.

A fundamental issue is the delivery of a positive event experience for attendees. Without this core component, positive profile outcomes will be negated. In addition to strategic event objectives, another precursor to the design process 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, and therefore attendee experience, 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 and facilitate the attendee experience guided by the peculiarities of their target attendees.

5.3.4 Relationships

Compared to many other forms of marketing communications, marketing events, rich in relational qualities, present an apposite vehicle to facilitate meaningful relationships with prospective clients, facilitating their likelihood to display loyalty. However, physical attendance at events inevitably brings costs, both direct and opportunity. Therefore, the event design needs to be focussed upon providing value to attendees, value that outweighs that which they have forgone to attend. This value is optimised through the sophisticated management of the following design elements, education (learning), social, and entertainment, or hybrid variations such as 'edutainment' and 'infotainment'.

It is noteworthy that many organisations and their clients experience ad hoc transaction patterns. Therefore, there is an issue around maintaining frequency and intensity in the relationship (Gummesson, 1999), more so in business to business marketing. Events present a conduit to achieve more frequent and consistent 'conversations' with customers. Linked to this logic, Varey and Ballantyne (2005) discuss the importance of organisations engaging 'network participants' from both the organisations and customers supply chain. Christopher et al (1991) emphasises wider markets, including, among others, future employees, suppliers, and influencers. Planned events provide a platform through which organisations can consult, engage, and build fruitful relationships with these important stakeholders.

5.3.5 Market and Customer Intelligence

An organisation's customers, clients, and wider stakeholders present a considerable resource for learning and intelligence, to then positively influence decisions across the organisations departments. This intelligence could be something as obvious and immediate as customer feedback and feed forward, or the much more strategic endeavour focussed upon the consultation of wider stakeholders to inform future marketing strategy. Creatively designed events present an opportunity to facilitate these objectives. Intimate learning workshops and seminars can be a favourable conduit, which could either be stand alone events, or adjuncts to other event platforms such as large conferences or even non exclusive events such as trade shows.

Given the prominence of ethics and also the required efficiencies consistent with the business to business environment, the days of the 'jolly' or 'junket' are numbered. Organisations have to find more creative ways to ensure attendance from stakeholders and customers at their events. Against this backdrop, intelligence and learning objectives are increasingly informing marketing events, particularly in a businesses to business, but also business to consumer, sectors. Facilitating learning is therefore a legitimate and constructive strategic event objective. The aspiration being that this learning has utility for the organiser and attendee, an interactive and reciprocal process whereby each party are value creators and value beneficiaries (Vargo and Lusch, 2006).

6.0 Concluding Remarks

The pliable nature of marketing events is one reason they are an apposite tool for the twenty first century marketing manager. Other reasons are also evaluated in section 3 of this paper. Successful leveraging of the strategic potential of any given event activity impinges upon a range of factors, primarily; the strategic intent, integration with other methods and innovative event design to facilitate an event experience that enhances brand perceptions and relationships. This paper has sought to evaluate the rationale for the growth of marketing events, illuminate their strategic potential, and suggest an exemplar process to maximise impact. In so doing, it has provided a vantage point from which academics and practitioners can conceive marketing events. The core concept of marketing space is a seductive notion for the marketer, a virtuous environment with customers and clients who want to be there and are participative in the marketing exchange.

Throughout the above discourse there has been the ever present suggestion that as an experiential communication, marketing events are as high in risk as potential. Given the composite nature of events and event management, unsophisticated application might not only be inefficient, but could actually be damaging to such fundamental and prized assets as an organisation's brand and relationships. Successfully facilitating and optimising marketing space, with all of the contingent factors and considerations, takes the marketer outside of their core competence and into the realms of event designer, event manager, and even service recovery manager. The manifest challenge is augmented by, among other things, the diverse antecedents of the attendee (Getz, 2007), necessity to experientially communicate the brand, manage all touch points on the attendees journey. All of a sudden the seductive notion of 'marketing space' takes on a more menacing persona.

If we are to fully realise and embrace the strategic potential of marketing events, we must equally accept the reality that overly operational and tactical management is inapt. The marketing space framework introduced in figure 1 signposts a future where marketing events are an integral component rather than an informal adjunct of an organisation's marketing activities. Within this scenario, marketing events can realise their potential as a fluid component of the integrated marketing communications mix. The development of the marketing space framework is the beginning of the journey. The author's attention has now shifted to empirical work with event managers, marketing practitioners, and their organisations to illustrate, and of course refine, the model.

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