

Brand vs. product: Where to shine the experiential marketing spotlight

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Conventional wisdom says that when it comes to capturing consumer interest, your product should be positioned front and center. Experiential marketing is a great way to shine a massive spotlight on a product but be careful – putting your product on a pedestal is only effective if it is truly compelling in its own right. Take for example, a luxury handbag, a new soda flavor or a smart phone – consumers naturally care about these products. They want to know how it works, feels, tastes and smells. They're interested in actual features that make a real difference.

On the other hand, many products are purchased out of mundane necessity. These purchases are often driven by brand familiarity rather than prolonged consideration. Even when consumers do take time to consider features and benefits, making a choice can feel like a chore. In the context of experiential marketing, putting a strong focus on necessity products like paper towels, furnace vents, new tires or sunscreen can be an uphill (and losing) battle. If this sounds like your product, don't panic. There are still plenty of routes to a successful experiential marketing campaign.

So how do you encourage organic movement through the customer lifecycle? Instead of begging consumers to care about the nitty gritty details of your product, think more broadly about associated experiences. Then infuse an emotional sensibility that fits your target audience and create a clear tie that runs through your product. Think about:

WHAT happens around the product?

- If you're trying to promote paper towels, you can drive yourself (and your target audience) crazy with talk about "absorbent pockets." You'd be much better served thinking about the purpose a paper towel has – like clean up! Consider hosting a kids art booth at local art fairs and use your paper towels to clean up all day long. You will be offering something fun and interesting while promoting your brand in an authentic way.

WHO benefits from the product?

- If your goal is to promote a healthy dog food, a list of wholesome ingredients is important but don't miss the opportunity to capitalize on the joy of man's (and woman's) best friend. Surprise dog owners by setting up a doggie photo booth near busy dog parks. It's social media friendly and reminds owners why it's so important to keep their pooch healthy and happy. Can you say #ilovethisdogfood?

WHY is the product important?

- Suppose you're looking to promote an all-weather tire. Don't focus too much on tread talk. Make a clear connection to your product's differentiator – let's say it is safety and maneuverability. Invite your target audience to a closed test track with gravel, mud, hills, rain,



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ice and snow so they can put their driving skills to the test. Giving them the chance to experience the tires in a controlled all-terrain, all-weather environment is much more memorable. You'll earn credibility and drive home the message in a more relatable way.

WHERE is the product used?

- Let's say you're promoting furnace filters. It may not be the most heart-warming topic but there's a way to make it more personal. Partner with a large hardware retailer to offer free home maintenance workshops. You'll be offering real value to your consumers while promoting your brand. This approach demonstrates an investment in helping your consumers create a healthy, happy home. Suddenly furnace filters feel a little more personal.

WHEN is the product used?

- If you are trying to promote sunscreen, you're probably neck and neck with your competition. SPF 50 is a dime a dozen and there's already a formula for nearly every preference. The best way to stand out is to align your product with an event that is positive and fun. Sponsor a series of 5K events for an organization like the American Melanoma Association. Have a street team distribute samples to stay top of mind whenever your target audience goes outdoors.

Experiential marketing can be an important tool to build brand loyalty. The most successful campaigns take time to lay out a strategy that aligns with the unique properties of the brand and product. The possibilities are endless – even for necessity products.

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