Experiential Is Central to Cannes Lions' Evolution

During the week I spent at the Cannes Lions International Festival of Creativity, one thing stood out: creativity goes way beyond the Palais—from the beach and the villas to every block of the waterfront.

This year, it was impossible to walk past Salesforce Beach, the Journal House, or the DoorDash activation without stopping. It proves how the festival has become something bigger than anyone originally imagined.

It's time we talked about what that means.

Cannes Lions started as an awards festival for the advertising industry to celebrate craft and creative excellence. That's still true and valuable, but something shifted.

When the festival introduced The Brand Experience and Activation Lions, it showed that experiential is a legitimate creative discipline and not just a budget line item. Then brands started showing up differently: they built temporary campuses, hosted executive summits, launched products, created content, and most of all, deepened relationships.

Cannes has transformed into one of the world's most powerful B2B experiential marketing platforms. More than 12,000 delegates, the most important marketing conversations, and decision-makers who are accessible in ways they aren't the other 51 weeks of the year. That transformation tells us brands already know the ROI of live experience.

Event industry leader David Adler previously posted on LinkedIn that "the events world built Cannes Lions." He's

right.

The experiences drawing the crowds, generating the content, and sparking the conversations that end up in everyone's LinkedIn feeds are the creative work of this moment. They are the result of strategic thinking, creativity, and world-class execution which the experiential agencies designing and producing are making possible.

Brands should think past award recognition and focus on presence and ownership

If experiential has become the dominant creative expression at one of the world's most important marketing platforms, then the brands and agencies driving that work need to recognize what they've built and show up accordingly.

Brands come to Cannes with vision and investment to make something memorable. The experiential agencies turning that vision into reality are strategic partners in that work, not vendors executing a brief.

The brand brings the story and the agency brings it to life in three dimensions and in real time. That partnership is what produces the moments Cannes is known for.

The events industry has experienced Cannes as something that happens around us, rather than something we helped create. The festival's evolution from awards show to global experiential platform was driven by brands and their agency partners who understood that the most powerful marketing doesn't live on a screen—it lives in a room, on a beach, in a moment that people carry with them long after they leave.

Cannes Lions needs to continue to expand its definition of creativity to reflect where the creative energy is flowing and the events industry should be showing up not as guests, but as architects.

Recommended videos
https://www.adweek.com/brand-marketing/experiential-is-central-to-cannes-lions-evolution/