Live Events Are the Next Big Thing in Branding

Face-to-face was the first, and is the ultimate, medium for communication.

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A Note From The Editor

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Brand is probably the most misused word in the English language. Branding started as a way to identify livestock roaming the range. It grew from there to mean creating a logo for a company. As the word gathered steam, it came to mean the look and feel of a company, then the customer experience and finally the company itself. But at its core, brand building is about storytelling – about connecting with people rationally and emotionally. And it's for everyone – people, small businesses, large enterprises and associations.

For as long as our species has been on Earth, we have been feeding our insatiable hunger for stories. At first, we just told each other stories that were shared inside our tribes. Sometimes we illustrated them on the walls of caves, and they were shared with other tribes. Eventually, we got smarter and came up with more ingenious ways to experience our stories. We

invented language and tablets to help us tell them. Then, when we realized we could transform bark into paper, we invented scrolls and books for our stories. The smarter we got, the more technology we applied to help share and create experiences around the stories of our time.

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We created big thing after next big thing, including the printing press, radio, television and, finally, the internet. All of these technologies helped to satisfy our hunger to share the human experience. These days, the internet itself has spawned a plethora of next big things enabling us to better share our stories. We have email, social media, blogs, podcasts, streaming video, virtual reality, augmented reality and much more to come. It's this media through which we feed our souls – and through which we build our brands.

These next big things continue to change the course of human behavior. I've seen it before, having had the privilege to work with companies that have done just that – including Apple, Adobe, BlackBerry, Cisco and Google. These companies changed the way we communicate with each other, gather information, develop and share content, go to work and entertain ourselves. They brought about new trends in behavior, including our dependence on smart phones, our storing and sharing of photos, finding our way, listening to music and educating ourselves.

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Interestingly, the technologies behind these trends enable us to be more productive, increase our networks and keep meticulous track of our lives, but they also conspire to separate us from each other. This phenomenon has brought about a new trend to spend more and more time exploring the things we enjoy live. Live is experiencing our humanity together, in

the same space. It invites the opportunity to look up and at each other and to feel the human connection. The live experience has officially become a medium of choice for people around the world, especially millennials.

In 1964, Marshall McLuhan told us in his book *"Understanding Media"* that the medium is the message. In other words, when you choose a medium in which to tell a story, the story is inevitably connected to, and actually embedded in, that medium, complete with the medium's capabilities, limitations and idiosyncrasies. The medium, in fact, becomes part of the story.

I think Marshall McLuhan would agree that in the 21st century – an era ripe with technology in which we can communicate with each other in myriad ways, but one in which everyone is glued, heads down to their device – the richest medium of all is "live" because it affords us the opportunity to experience the human condition together and to share it. It's no wonder companies are hungry to get face-to-face time with employees, customers, partners and influencers, and to create experiences that develop into long-term meaningful relationships with their brands.

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The live medium is ripe for commercialization in the same way publishing, radio, television and the internet were commercialized in the past. The giants of these industries – Hearst, Tribune and Gannett; ABC, CBS and NBC; Google, Amazon and Netflix, among others – built empires on the crests of new media waves. Their efforts moved industries; their companies changed the world. The music industry is already commercializing the live medium focusing on concerts as primary revenue generators and artist brand builders. If the music industry can do it, why can't others?

Imagine a world where live experiences become brand builders for companies and organizations. Is it possible to transform old industrial spaces into new brand building experiences? Could that be a commercial service? Yes, and the time is now to capitalize on the live medium for the purpose of brand building. After all, the better a brand is, the more people will flock to it. And effective live experiences can solidify a brand’s presence, and even drive brand migration, among consumers. Don’t miss out, it’s time to start implementing this next big thing into your brand building and marketing strategies

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