

Experiential Marketing in the Age of COVID-19

Q&A with Lenetta Pesotini of MAG Experience

ARTICLE | **APRIL 06, 2020**

eMarketer Editors

As the spread of coronavirus forced event cancellations worldwide, the experiential marketing industry has had to adapt to a new culture of remote work and social distancing. Companies like MAG Experience, a New York-based experiential marketing agency, acknowledge the tough road ahead but see an opportunity to bolster their virtual events and innovate new offerings for clients.

We spoke with Lenetta Pesotini, vice president of the MAG Experience, about the shift to virtual experiential marketing, keeping customers engaged during online events and the pandemic's long-term impact on experiential marketing.

Can you share any best practices for switching to virtual events?

Think about your attendee first and foremost. How can you make them feel like you're investing in them, even though you're not under the same roof? How are you making your content interesting and tangible? Are you gamifying it? Also, think about your audience overall. Is everyone in the same time zone? Will you need to do video-on-demand so people can tune in on their own time? Or do you need to lean on people within each region to deliver a keynote, even if they would not necessarily be doing so if the event was in-person?

What's the advantage of gamification?

You want to give attendees a way to interact with your brand or one another, as well as delivering content in a fun way. For example, a sales kickoff event: You can create situations they would encounter in everyday life, but put it in game form. At an in-person event, it's very easy to tell if somebody isn't in their seat, but at home, they might have you on mute, or they might be checking email or reading an article. If we enforce interaction and have games for them to play, we'll keep them engaged.

How does this advice translate internally? As your organization shifts to working from home, have you taken similar steps for internal conferences and meetings?

Absolutely. We have mandated daily team meetups for our organization; and video-on is a requirement. We try to shift them throughout the day so they don't become too routine. Sometimes, we'll have breakfast or coffee. Other meetings will be in the afternoon or evening. When we completed our first work from home, we hosted a virtual happy hour—something we do often in the office, but sitting at home with all your team members on your screen was rather fun. We also play games that we are looking to pitch to our clients for gamification. We find ourselves to be the best case studies for it.

What are the longer-term impacts of switching to virtual events?

We are in a situation where everyone has to be working remotely. We don't have a choice. Because of that, people in financial departments are seeing that virtual spend is a lot less than in-person spend. But we are going to miss the human interaction. Brands will start to see that. While this might dictate the next year or two, the fears of being around a big group of people will rinse off, and we'll be back to normal one day. Now, I can guarantee you that when it does get to that point, hand sanitizer and Lysol wipes will be the first items on our load list going forward. But I think we will get back to normal.