

Jens Ornbo
Claus Sneppen
Peter Franklin Würtz

Experience-Based Communication

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Jens Ornbo • Claus Sneppen • Peter F. Würtz

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 Springer

Jens Ornbo
3rd Dimension
ApS
Hellerupgaardvej 18
DK-2900 Hellerup
Denmark
jo@3rddimension.com

Claus Sneppen
3rd Dimension
ApS
Hellerupgaardvej 18
DK-2900 Hellerup
Denmark
cs@3rddimension.com

Peter Franklin Würtz
3rd Dimension
ApS
Hellerupgaardvej 18
DK-2900 Hellerup
Denmark
pfw@3rddimension.com

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Preface

Do what you say you'll do. Be who you say you are. And live up to this in every physical meeting with the world outside. Don't stop at words; give your messages substance, bring them to life, and create an experience that people will remember. Involvement creates empathy.

The past has finally caught up with us. No matter how many groundbreaking new technologies we invent to simplify communication, we cannot ignore the power of human contact. This is such a WONDERFUL statement to convey because it confirms the incredible power of the *experience* as a communication media. Experiences favor the authentic over the fabricated, and they enable companies and individuals to approach each other and create a framework of joint reference and mutual understanding.

We have written this book, well aware that companies have improved the efficiency of the way they communicate with employees and the world at large. Paradoxically, this “improvement” has driven sender and recipient even further apart. Such improvements often focus on printed and electronic media rather than experiences designed to make the recipient identify and empathize with the sender. Such improvements also drain a company’s resources and fail to provide an adequate impression of the actual organization and/or product/services. Consequently, they fail to provide results.

So how do you ensure that messages are motivating and easy to understand? The answer is already well known. Confucius and Grundtvig, two of the world’s greatest philosophers, both said that the best way to learn is through first-hand experience. Educationalists have long been aware that when we experience things personally and are allowed to draw our own conclusions, our comprehension – and motivation – increases.

So what can we tell you that you do not already know? *It is how you apply these principles in the way you communicate with your staff and the world in general.*

As consultants, we are yet to meet a company that has been able to summon enough courage or gain sufficient support to implement all of the principles described in this book at every professional level – both internally and externally. We believe that it is just a question of time, and that the successful companies of the future will define themselves as living organisms with a body and a soul. Their behavior will be carefully tailored and they will use sensory elements wherever they come into contact with the outside world. Such companies will not define themselves through audio-visual means only; they will involve other senses such as touch, smell, taste, etc, to create a powerful impression.

You may be wondering what qualifies us to draw these conclusions. Well, we have observed and worked with organizations in many continents, and it is the knowledge and experience we have acquired that has inspired us to create the universe you will explore within these covers.

The authors of this book have worked together for a number years in 3rdDimension – a consulting company which daily provides advice to Danish and international companies on the art of Experience-based communication and the value of an optimized Experience Architecture. We would, therefore, like to take this opportunity to thank our customers, business partners and our colleagues in 3rdDimension for the knowledge this collaboration has generated. We would also like to thank Associate Professor and specialist in Business Research at Copenhagen Business School, Mogens Bjerre, for his invaluable input and assistance in structuring this book – not to mention his convivial company.

Some readers might call this book calculating or provocative, but at the risk of further downfall we would like to quote German Professor of Philosophy, Arthur Schopenhauer:

Every truth passes through three stages before being acknowledged:
First it is ridiculed, then it is opposed, and in the end it is recognized
as being self-evident.

We hope, of course, that after reading this book, you will find its contents self-evident! If you embrace these ideas and apply them throughout your

entire organization – from management to employee and from production to the consumer – you will be able to:

- Present yourself as a trustworthy player.
- Your employees/colleagues will understand who you are, what you are striving for and why – making them far more motivated.
- The press will adore you.
- Customers will continue to purchase and become willing ambassadors for your company.
- Prospective customers will be curious.
- Your company will prosper.
- Your conscience will be clear because you will be communicating in an honest and sincere manner.

We hope you enjoy the read!

*Jens Ornbø
Claus Sneppen
Peter F. Würtz*

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Introduction

Norse mythology would have us believe that the gods Odin, Vilje and Ve created the world; that while the three of them were walking along a beach they agreed to create man. They found two pieces of driftwood – one of ash and one of elm, and decided to make these the building blocks for the first humans.

Odin gave these creations spirit and life – and they began to breathe. Vilje gave them mobility – and they begin to move. They were man and woman, and the gods named them Ask and Embla. They began to walk, and the gods shouted, “Be careful – you’ll cut yourself on the rocks.” But lacking the fundamental senses, the humans could not see, hear or feel. So Ve said, “They need the five senses, and I will make these my gift because it is through the senses that world comes to life.”

Reality is three-dimensional and is perceived through our five senses. The experiences and the physical encounters are out there somewhere, on the other side of the hole in this book!

How can a book ever provide an authentic experience? Reality, experiences and the power of what is alive perishes as soon as it hits the mock reality of paper. The experience is always so close – yet so far away. In frustration we found a way to break through to reality and we allowed it to permeate this book from the first to the very last page. The holes are your connection to the world outside and they remind you never to lose yourself in the one-dimensional surface of these pages.

Chapter 2

Experience-Based Communication

Experience-Based Communication

The Consultancy Firm: Inhuman?

Some time ago a renowned consultancy firm invited one of the authors of this book to a non-obligatory meeting about possible future cooperation. Initially the CEO and Communications Director informed us that the company had undergone a lengthy process in order to define a series of values that effectively described the firm. When asked what these were, the managers were able to remember only a few of them; they did, however, stress that humanity was one of the crucial values in relation to employees and customers.

It is a thought-provoking and symptomatic situation when members of a management team – who should be setting an example – can neither remember nor understand the values they themselves defined. The problem here is obvious: it is well known that messages become increasingly blurred as they filter through the layers of an organization, so if the management is unable understand them, how are their employees likely to fair? The experience of simply entering the building would confirm whether the humanity value was being put into practice in real life...

An oblong hall fitted with classic, cool marble tiles is the first thing that meets the eye as you walk through the company's glass door. A waft of universal cleaning materials mixed with the slightly stuffy smell so common to office buildings assails your nose. At the end of the hall lies the reception area, which is slightly elevated. It is in front of a large window, which from a distance turns the receptionist into a solemn, dark silhouette. You get the feeling that you are about to receive Holy Communion! As you amble towards her along the marble mile, you cannot avoid feeling slightly uneasy, humble and small. The receptionist looks down and greets you politely. You tell her about the meeting and she tells you to take the lift to the fifth floor.

Inside the lift a notice states very clearly which floors are reserved for EMPLOYEES ONLY – making you feel as though you are already trespassing. At the fifth floor you are met by yet another receptionist who states coolly: "The cloakroom is behind you. Please take a seat in the meeting room while I find the person you're looking for." The meeting room is nice and clean, with a bountiful supply of fruit, cake, water and coffee, but there are no people in sight. After 10 min the consultants emerge, and everyone presents themselves.

This account may sound rather embellished, but this is not the case. The question is: Where was the humanity in the way this company presented itself? From the time of arrival to the time of the meeting, 15 min had passed. During this period the experience was anything but friendly; on the contrary, it was cold and solemn.

Did that first impression actually influence the visitor’s perception of the consultant? The answer is *yes*. In an age where everyone feels pressed for time, people want to spend it wisely. In an age where products and services are basically identical, where we try to differentiate what is on offer by ascribing emotional qualities to them – and in an age where we try to establish personal relationships with customers – we cannot help but wonder why this particular consultancy firm did not make more effort to ensure that the experience and the meeting successfully expressed their core values. Surely there must be another firm out there with a more human feel to it?

Before, during and after the moment of truth, i.e., the physical meeting itself, factors such as time, the environment and the overall experience help to determine people’s expectations and lend the message credibility. Prior to the meeting, many of the elements of the experience were in place: the phone conversation during which the meeting was decided, the e-mail that confirmed it, the visitor’s arrival at the office, the way in which he

The most important test a message can be subjected to is a face-to-face meeting with the outside world.

was welcomed, the waiting time at reception, the things he noticed in the lift, the waiting time in the conference room, the meeting itself, etc. Each one of these contact points was critical to honoring the company’s humanity value. The physical meeting and the sensory impressions and signals that

were sent all helped to determine the nature of his experience. Unfortunately the overall experience was more or less ruined because – due to inadvertent behavior – the company’s image lacked credibility.

Most people and companies today are extremely conscious of the significance of their ability to control their image. They are also aware that the manner in which they do so must in no way alter their own personality or the core identity of the company. They know what needs to be done when they are *IN* the spotlight; however, if their behavior changes when they are *OUTSIDE* the spotlight, the message they are striving to communicate will suffer. When this occurs, people are rarely conscious of

it. They forget that in this day and age, all of us are in the spotlight all of the time – even when we think we are not! The most important test a message can be subjected to is a face-to-face meeting with the outside world.

Would your messages pass the test?


Messages Tested Through Physical Meetings

In the real world we are always in the spotlight. Companies are generally not very good at controlling their images, nor do they fully understand how crucial physical contact points can be. They forget to express their values through their behavior. Consider your personality for a moment: any experience you wish to create must come from the heart in order to be trustworthy and genuine. Experiences and messages cannot be donned like clothing; they are the essence of who you are! *You* must be the experience and the message and you must be *true to both*.

If the atmosphere in the consultancy company had been warm and friendly the entire experience would have been different. Had there been a scent of fresh coffee, and had the reception area looked more like a lounge area, then our colleague’s associations would have been more positive. And had the consultant arrived immediately and welcomed him with a firm handshake and a smile before escorting him to the meeting, a different impression would have been created. Why? Because all those fine words about humanity would have been backed up by concrete actions, and the visitor would have perceived a genuine interest in people through his sensory impressions. His senses should have been assailed the moment he set foot in the place. If you think this kind of behavior seems insincere, then your inability to empathize with clients and understand the world in which they operate will be reflected in the way you communicate.

Messages must be incorporated into your company and be experienced by both employees and customers in order to create a common understanding and strong working relationships. The primary message of this book is:

Add substance to your values and messages, and communicate in a way that can be both sensed and felt.



Communicate in a way that can be both sensed and felt

Set the scene for your company and make sure that your values pervade

your every move – from the way you conduct yourselves at meetings, seminars, employee events and exhibitions to the way your buildings are designed, organized and furnished. Deliver messages from the heart, so they appear trustworthy and valuable. People must experience, identify and empathize with those messages whenever and wherever they encounter them.

The former CEO of Copenhagen Airports, Niels Boserup, was the dynamo behind the restoration of the old airport terminal, which was designed by famous Danish architect, Vilhelm Lauritzen. Today the terminal houses the airport’s administrative offices, among other things. The restoration was a conscious initiative on the part of Niels Boserup and it was designed to make the company aware of its identity and history – and proud of it¹.

Walking the talk

The management wanted the quality expressed by the physical framework to be reflected in all forms of communication and in the behavior of all its employees.



The recently restored airport terminal in Copenhagen houses the administrative offices for all of the airport’s employees. Quality is expressed in many ways – one of which is the reestablishment of the original entrance with columns and a canopy. The airport terminal was carefully moved to a new location (Photograph: Copenhagen Airport Press Photography)

Copenhagen Airports has fully understood the influence physical meetings can have on people’s behavior. A message is a promise, and it is only worth as much as it is reputed to be. If you have ever heard the expression “Walk the talk” you will know that it really is that simple.

About This Book

The consultancy firm did not succeed in making visitors identify and empathize with their message, and this book tells you how they might have achieved this. A series of key considerations concerning experience-based communication will be introduced with the purpose of increasing not only your comprehension of its strategic and emotional importance, but also the role it could play in your company’s internal and external communication.

Experience-based communication happens when companies consciously use physical meetings and locations to create an affinity with a given market segment.

Experience-based communication occurs when a company consciously uses physical meetings and locations as communication tools to connect with a given market segment. When it comes to influencing people’s behavior, no other tools are as powerful as physical meetings.

This book is not an A–Z on how to work tactically and operationally with experiences; in other words, the

project-management oriented approach has not been prioritized. Instead we aim to shed light on – and accentuate the importance of – the influence experiences can exert on individuals, companies and networks.

The theories and considerations presented in this book will be integrated in the final chapter, which presents a holistic view of the strategic importance of optimizing your company’s experience architecture. Such architecture can be considered optimized when your mission, vision and values can be experienced at every real-life touch-point. The objective is to engage your target audience mentally, physically and socially, thereby transforming them into loyal customers and willing ambassadors for your company.

You can read this book from cover to cover or use it as a source of reference. Chapter 2 is basically a snap shot of the whole book. If you do

read the entire work, be prepared for some repetition, because the concept of experience-based communication will be explored from many angles.

Whenever the word *experience* is used in this book it should be interpreted as *the experience medium itself*. This covers physical, multi-sensory contact between people and organizations.

To show you how our theories work in practice we provide examples where experiences have been used as a communication medium (Fig. 1).

The idea is not to reject other types of communication or media, but to make people aware of how physical meetings and locations can affect a



Fig. 1 *The body and soul of experiences (3rdDimension©)*

company or a person’s credibility and ability to make their presence felt, as well as their ability to incorporate learning-via-the-senses into the message needing to be communicated.

The most important goal of communication – both internally and externally – is to create good relationships with the recipient. You have to meet people face to face, build up a rapport and establish emotional ties through experiences. Then you can turn your attention to other channels of communication, where the dialogue can continue in a more cost-effective fashion (or vice versa).

Support your message with the appropriate behavior and make that behavior your guiding light wherever you make contact with people externally. You can provide a coherent experience by integrating various disciplines in your organization and by taking a cross-disciplinary approach. The above model illustrates how experience-based communication works: it plays a pivotal role in defining behavior when communicating with selected target groups.



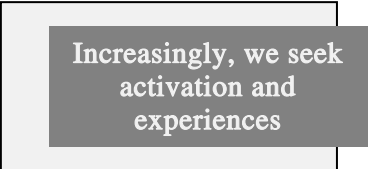
An oxygen bar, placed in an airport setting, where “air cocktails” containing various soothing and stimulating aromas can be inhaled through nasal tubes (Photograph: Arne V. Petersen)

This book will help you ensure that the way you communicate is considered to be cohesive by people in the outside world. The experience angle guarantees that messages are perceived through all of the five senses in order to move the recipient physically, mentally and socially. Our ambition is to provide a relevant, theoretical contribution to all individuals who formulate and convey messages; a source of inspiration to be used by dynamic companies and leaders who are ready for change – and by those who want to communicate and who are brave enough to set an example and bring their company’s values to life. Whether you work in a company, institution, political party, association or church, etc. the only way to achieve this is to add substance to your values and support them with the appropriate behavior.

By integrating our theories on experience architecture into your strategic planning, you will be able to develop your business and achieve your goals. If you can create a corporate DNA that is authentic, credible and easily recognizable, you will be able to strengthen your image, build a larger and more loyal customer base, and create shortcuts to your most important target groups. You will also be able to motivate and retain employees, and ensure that they behave in a fitting manner in all dealings with the outside world.

Experiences: Nothing But Hot Air?

People are becoming more and more interested in their emotional needs, so the challenge for the communicator is to address both the intellect and the heart. Most products and services differentiate themselves through the emotional values attached to them through marketing. This trend has been initiated by an increasing demand for superfluous, more luxury-oriented goods and services. One such commodity is the “air cocktail” that is served at the oxygen bar at Copenhagen Airport, which consists of fresh air containing various aromas



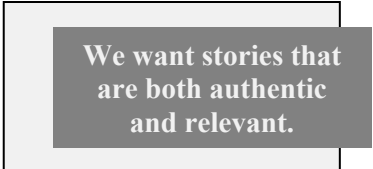
Increasingly, we seek
activation and
experiences

that can be inhaled through nasal tubes. Apparently, things that used to be ridiculed and described as nonsense and “hot air” can now be sold and make perfect sense!

It seems that hot air (i.e., the experience) has become a valuable commodity. People sell us *Silence from the Himalayas*, which comes in tins, and *Water from Greenland’s ice cap*, and so forth, but they would have to be extremely skilled to sell sand in the Sahara. Or would they?

Society might be losing its heart and soul but people have not yet lost the privilege or will to mold and remold their everyday lives. It is not products or services that we value the most; increasingly we focus on the ritual accompanying their purchase or consumption. Just think about the “Build a Bear” concept, where an ordinary teddy bear becomes unique due to the rituals of giving it a heart, clothing it and christening it, etc. Not only do these rituals allow the company to charge a premium price; they have enabled them to expand their target groups from small children to teenagers and adults also. The queue of people waiting outside any “Build a Bear” shop speaks for itself.

Today people are not interested in passively consuming pre-fabricated dreams and stories; we want to be activated and have an influence – and we want true stories with personal significance. A story about a cheese that has matured in an ancient chalk pit is a good story, but is it trustworthy? The answer is yes, if it is founded on tradition. Otherwise it would seem insincere and profit-seeking. Companies and brands that recognize our worth as individuals, and who involve and interact with us seem credible and authentic, and we remain loyal to them. We are not looking for fabricated values and stories; we want the genuine article. And that is why messages must be brought to life. The dream society of yesterday lacked depth and credibility; today we want stories that are both authentic and relevant.



**We want stories that
are both authentic
and relevant.**



*The successful “Build a Bear” concept is an excellent example of brand activation
(Photograph: Scanpix)*

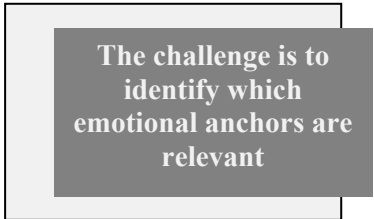
Today We Want Stories That Are Authentic and Relevant

This is where experiences become relevant because they *can* make things credible. For the world outside to associate a company with a certain set of values it is not enough simply to define them and print them. Values must be consistent and beyond reproach, and they must be reflected in a company’s actions. Products or services are no longer the primary focal point; today it is the company that commands people’s attention. Factors such as attitude towards the environment, sense of social responsibility, and involvement in issues affecting local communities can affect a company’s ability to sell its products or services as well as its ability to attract desirable employees. Networks and strong customer relationships have therefore become far more important than before. As individuals we have become wealthier, which makes it easier to satisfy our material needs. But we have also become poorer – both emotionally and spiritually.

As individuals seeking fulfillment we demand meaningful experiences that teach us something about ourselves. An example that perfectly illustrates this trend is the Christmas present, which today often takes the form of an experience – from spa vouchers to theater tickets or weekend getaways.

We are moving from shallow Christmas presents to personal ones. This is a definite indication that personal, emotional and meaningful *substance* is becoming more important than material goods. The yardstick of quality is no longer *more, bigger or better*; it has become *meaning*. Our needs have obviously changed.

Futurologists anticipate that in 50 years from now the average person living in Western world will have as much money to spend as a prosperous person living in Beverly Hills today. If this proves to be true, the financial opportunities to fulfill our hopes and dreams will be greater than ever. This may sound unrealistic, but today the unreal is often more credible than reality. We live in a huge, abstract hyper reality, where missing a favorite TV show can make people feel that they've lost touch with the real world.



The challenge is to identify which emotional anchors are relevant

Directors and marketing specialists need to understand that emotional values are some of the best assets you can attach to a product. The challenge is to identify which emotional anchors are relevant.

These anchors might be birthdays, jubilees, holidays, final exams, trade fairs, etc. or they might be situations that educate, entertain, enrich or in some other way manage to move people emotionally. Such messages are thought to be intangible and abstract – but are they? They appeal to people's psychological and social needs. They are also difficult to grasp, and if they are irrelevant and consequently fail to appeal to the heart, they are perceived as being nothing more than hot air.

If values are to become tangible and believable they need to be expressed through meaningful behavior designed to motivate and inspire the recipient. Having said that, why do so many companies fail to achieve this? Where do they go wrong, and which stories do they fail to tell? Take food products, for instance. During product development, great weight is attached to sensory factors such as smell, taste, consistency, packaging and design. This is because the sensory aspects significantly affect people's perception of a product. What we are really discussing is the customer experience and emotional reaction. When addressing the customer experience, companies need to know which emotional drivers to employ in order to generate the desired reaction.

As the service society and the experience society have evolved, a struggle between identical products and services has developed. This has made branding very popular and intensified competition between products and brands. A superabundance of products has forced companies to find new ways of differentiating themselves from the competition. One of these involves attaching emotional values to products through marketing.

However, many companies are realizing that emotional values do not

When emotional messages lack credibility, people don't pay attention

necessarily promise more visibility or a greater share of the market. Some might theorize that these values have lost their potency – but how true is that? The Copenhagen Institute for Future Studies once wrote a report on the branding techniques of the future,

and one of their scenarios (all of which are anchored in the concept of individualization) suggested that people's emotions have become saturated and that they now search for profound knowledge, clarity and fixed points in their lives². But the authors of this book beg to disagree. We believe that the problem is more likely to be the manner in which emotional values are communicated – because if they lack credibility, all they do is go straight in one ear and out the other.

Why is it that so few companies manage to address the sensory aspect of emotional messages when communicating? Can emotional values be brought to life or not? We might be able to see and hear that a brand is exclusive, provocative, romantic or inspiring – but why do we never get to taste, smell and feel these qualities? Are they nothing but empty promises?

At the end of the day your company has a choice: you can either communicate nonsense or you can add sensory elements and substance to your messages so that the recipients can identify with them. The three challenges that must be overcome in a company's management style and communication methods are a lack of sensitivity, anonymity, and behavior that fails to express the company's fundamental values.

The sixth sense in the model entitled *The Sensitive Organization* – Intuition – should be interpreted as the synergy between the five senses. All companies, political parties, NGOs, trade unions, etc. risk communicating nonsense unless they develop an awareness of how their messages are being experienced. You need to ask whether your company is actually

doing what it says it will do. Can you smell it, hear it, taste it, feel it and sense it?

People are rarely given the opportunity to experience messages through their senses, so they perceive many companies and products as being untrustworthy. But it is possible to inject credibility and authenticity into your messages by thinking of your company as an entity equipped with senses (Fig. 2).

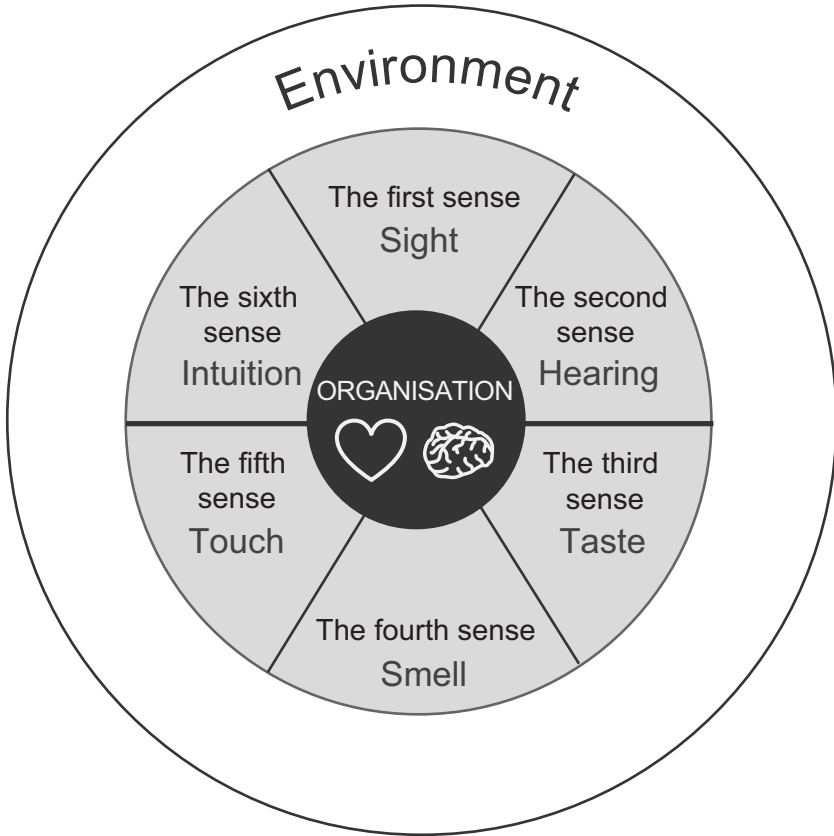


Fig. 2 The sensitive organization

A Society Without Physical Contact

Technological developments have made it easier than ever to contact people, but technology has also removed the human element from

communication. The sender has distanced himself from the recipient – whether the communication is internal or external.

Technology is teaching people new skills in the areas of research, communication, knowledge sharing, publishing and even activism. Internet surfers have learnt to share knowledge through Wikis; ideas through Social Book-marking; entertainment through You Tube; socialize via Facebook, etc. And people’s awareness of media and communication channels has grown exponentially.

Electronic media has its uses but impact-wise it can never replace personal meetings. The optimum way to engage today’s audiences is to employ various forms of communication to deliver “cocktails” of storytelling and sensory experiences. This is already happening: activists are using Speakers’ Corners *and* internet blogs to get their messages across. Off-line brands are making themselves available on-line too. And on-line brands are developing a physical presence either at a permanent location or at temporary touchpoints, as the need arises.

The sender has distanced himself from the recipient

Many people feel that they are being pacified and that they are missing out on the total experience and this is because their senses are not involved. This deficiency is reflected in the demand for experiences in all facets of

life. The question is: Do we experience anything at all? We do everything we can to change our habits and escape the hustle and bustle of everyday life. Take the travel market, for instance: more and more of us go off trekking in exotic, far-off places in search of active, memorable holidays.

On the subject of travel, where does the journey actually begin? Think about the last time you went to the airport, for instance. Airlines have begun to outsource their fare systems, so you might have ordered your flight tickets via the internet, where they were automatically registered on your bonus card. When you arrive at the airport you leave your car in a car park that is monitored by electronic sensors and cameras. Sensors also open the doors to the departure lounge, where your luggage is scanned by a machine. Your body is then scanned by a detector, and you check in by running your credit card through a machine. Fifty years ago this process would have brought you into contact with twenty people; today you meet only two.



Self-service airport check-ins (Photograph: 3rdDimension©)

Just imagine, instead of sensors, detectors and machines that read your card, you could meet real people! Would that not influence your impression of, and relationship with, the airport and the airline? Ignoring the rational and economic arguments, ask yourself this: Have the automatic check-in counters and monitoring systems been introduced to help the airline and its staff, or to please its customers? Self service may look like an ideal opportunity to reduce costs, but is it customer liberation or corporate imposition? Even the faintest whiff of an agenda for transferring cost from company to consumer will cause it to be rejected by customers. Conversely, the more trust people have in a company, the more self-service as a concept will be considered.

Where airlines are concerned such rationalization and automation of services has made them appear superficial and anonymous. Being unable to see their faces or sense their values, we feel nothing when interacting with them. Without emotions there is no experience. Our muscles have been pacified by machines, our minds invaded by computers and our senses replaced by sensors. We are becoming increasingly passive, and the gap between ourselves, other people and other entities is widening.

Our emotions are the only part of us that have not been automated – yet! But how long is this state of affairs likely to last? The pharmaceutical

We want to be activated, and we want to think for ourselves. We want to get in touch with our senses and emotions.

industry already sells happiness in the form of pills. Cosmetic surgery clinics sell beauty, self-confidence and success. Will we one day be able to buy love, happiness, grief and anger? Feelings are generated by complex nerve impulses and processes in the body. Science tells us that they can be provoked hormonally with the aid of

adrenalin and other substances. But where will that lead us – and do we really want to go there?

Society could potentially become so comfortable and superficial that we become emotionally demotivated as employees, consumers and individuals. Emotions should move us, but when we are in this frame of mind, they fail to do so. And this lack of ability to respond produces a counter reaction. We *want* to be activated, and we *want* to think for ourselves. We *want* to get in touch with our senses and emotions. We live in insulated spaces – offspring of the age of technology – and the worst-case scenario is that we will lose touch with the real world and find ourselves adrift in cyberspace or some kind of hyper-reality that might turn us into zombies. Such a fate can also befall a company, product or a brand, because when people’s sense of reality disappears, the physical experience falls by the wayside.

The noise, anonymity and inefficiency of mass communication have made direct marketing a more profitable solution; after all, why use a scattergun when a more effective weapon is at hand? But despite this more targeted approach, companies still fear face-to-face contact due to a higher contact price. Much can be gained from involving people physically because it puts a halt to passive observation.

Some of the most recent research into the brain and teaching principles indicates that people learn and understand more when they are allowed to get actively involved.

Experiences affect people’s feelings through active involvement

People react emotionally to experiences because they feel actively involved, so if you want to move people, be sure to incorporate behavior and movement in your messages.

External motivation (the way you stage the situation in which the message is to be communicated) and *internal* motivation (the way you adapt the message to fit the target audience), are Alpha and Omega when it comes to communication. This combination helps the recipient tune in, so they can absorb and comprehend the message you are trying to convey. In this context, companies must acknowledge the significance of learning and the value of staging. One of the strengths of the experience medium is that it combines multi-sensory learning with physical staging. When messages involve both body and soul, recipients are affected physically, mentally and socially.

When messages involve both body and soul, recipients are affected physically, mentally and socially.

Positive experiences alter not only people’s reactions but also the roles they play. Passive spectators suddenly become willing ambassadors. Involvement engenders empathy, which makes the message feel important to the individual. And this reaction influences others in the group. We become involved completely voluntarily when presented with an experience that affects us emotionally.

One of the conclusions of this book is that learning is optimized when the experience involves physical, mental and social dimensions.

Learning is optimized when experiences include physical, mental and social dimensions

Physical experiences are what we see, hear, feel, smell, taste and sense.
Mental experiences are when we begin to feel involved.
Social experiences are when the experience and involvement lead to empathy, interaction and communities.

The EET model (Experience, Engage, Transform) is the result of years of working with experiences in communication, where we have learned that these three dimensions make messages easier to comprehend. This model is not a definitive learning model; it neither includes the complexity and diversity that characterize our way of acquiring knowledge, nor is it described in learning theory. Take the time factor, for instance, which should be a parameter since learning takes place over time. However, we

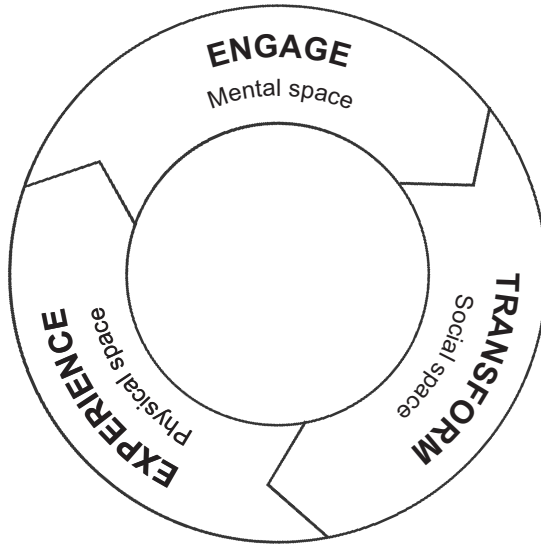


Fig. 3 The EET model (3rdDimension©)

believe that the model summarizes most of what learning theory encompasses (Fig. 3).

We believe that communication will increasingly involve bringing messages to life through telling authentic stories and involving the five senses in the process. This combination makes messages more pertinent and more credible.

Messages that have been brought to life are more pertinent and more credible

The visual “business card”, which encompasses everything from architecture, shop facades and interior design to merchandise, logos and website design, etc. gives people an impression of a company’s culture. But the visual aspect is only a part of the

total experience. Companies often focus only on the surface, i.e., the visual identity, but if messages are to appear trustworthy they must permeate the whole organization, from the exterior design to the internal working methods and the way people interact.

Consider your own three-dimensional business card. The behavior of your employees *must* correspond to your company values. And mental and sensory dimensions must be attributed to these values in order to

differentiate them from traditional, image-based communication. Image-based communication usually provides a static and arbitrary picture that may well make messages visible, but this does not make them easy to understand or relate to. Paper-based messages or PowerPoint presentations may be visual but they lack true vitality, so people may not recognize them

The process you follow when bringing messages to life should be perceived as a test that will reveal whether they are genuine and trustworthy.

when entering a reception area, meeting employees, visiting a shop or calling on the phone.

All too often, very little attention is given to other sensory aspects – such as the way a building smells and sounds and, not least, the way employees treat visitors. When messages lack a solid foundation and support (both internally and externally), people are unable to

equate them with their perceptions of the company in real life. They do not want to be force-fed with messages that try to tell them what to think.

The process your company follows when bringing messages to life should be perceived as a test designed to reveal whether those messages are genuine and trustworthy. Untrustworthy messages are impossible to transform and only serve to help your competitors. They must therefore be eliminated to pave the way for more genuine and trustworthy messages. Experiences can help you to establish your identity both internally and externally, but to make these experiences unique you must ask these questions: How do people experience your values? What kind of experiences and emotions do they invoke? What kind of behavior will reflect your values in a face-to-face meeting? Such questions will help you ascertain exactly how your messages should be conveyed in terms of sound, smell, touch and taste.

To communicate effectively, companies need to perform certain symbolic acts

Written communication always falls short because the printed word commands only a fleeting interest. To communicate effectively, companies can dramatize certain symbolic acts. These may help you to communicate your values to the entire organization, but they play only a small role in the total experience. Basically, *drama*

means expressing oneself vocally and physically, and you can use these tactics to demonstrate how well your employees cooperate.

Dramatization can reveal whether everyone perceives a company’s values in the same way, or whether they differ. The employees of the consultancy firm mentioned earlier could have benefited from asking themselves what kind of behavior or act symbolizes the Humanity value. By translating this value into actions the company could have helped everyone understand what it really meant. A friendly gesture – such as being polite and forthcoming – is the kind of behavior that symbolizes humanity and openness (Fig. 4).

American politicians have been using symbolic acts in election campaigns for years. At a carefully planned press conference in the 2004 election for Governor of California, Arnold Schwarzenegger said to the sitting Governor of California and his staff: “I’ll clean office.” And he used a broom to emphasize his point. That same year, while visiting

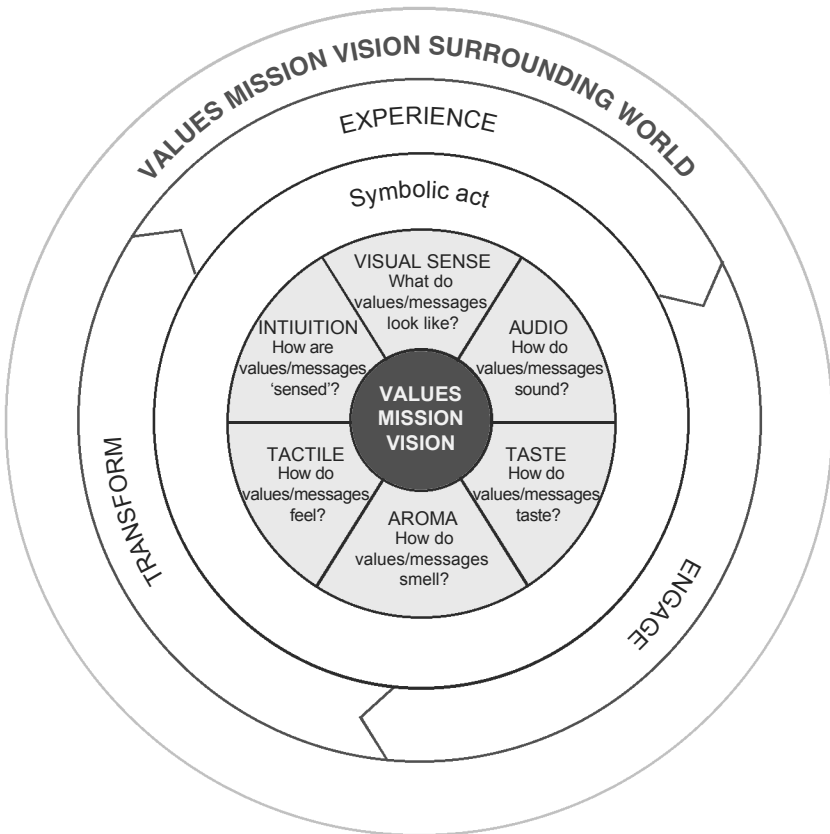


Fig. 4 Experience-based communication (3rdDimension©)

American soldiers during the war in Iraq, Schwarzenegger said with his characteristic accent to a cheering crowd: “I once played Terminator in the movie, but you are the true terminators.” Although it may sound rather comical, this way of dramatizing things actually helped him become governor. Companies and people can make a powerful impact using very limited means by incorporating strong, symbolic acts in their behavior. The saying, “Actions speak louder than words” is all too true, and politicians are very well aware of this.

Yet sometimes politicians fail to follow the path of truth. Nobel Peace Prize winner Al Gore’s documentary on climate change, *An Inconvenient Truth*, won an Oscar for best documentary feature. Unfortunately, The Tennessee Center for Policy Research has found that Gore deserves a gold statue for hypocrisy³. His mansion, located in the upper-class Belle Meade area of Nashville, consumes more electricity every month than the average American household uses in an entire year, according to the Nashville Electric Service.

In his documentary, the former Vice President calls on Americans to conserve energy by reducing electricity consumption at home. According to the Department of Energy, the average household in America consumes 10,656 kilowatt-hours (kWh) per year. In 2006, Gore devoured nearly 221,000 kWh – more than 20 times the national average. In August alone he used 22,619 kWh, which is more than twice the electricity than the average American family uses in an entire year.

As a result of his energy consumption, Gore’s average monthly electric bill topped \$1,359. Since the release of *An Inconvenient Truth*, Gore’s energy consumption has increased from an average of 16,200 kWh per month in 2005, to 18,400 kWh per month in 2006. And the extravagance doesn’t stop there. Natural gas bills for Gore’s mansion and guesthouse averaged \$1,080 per month last year.

“As the spokesman of choice for the global warming movement, Al Gore has to be willing to walk the walk, not just talk the talk, when it comes to home energy use,” said Tennessee Center for Policy Research President, Drew Johnson.

Gore paid almost \$30,000 in combined electricity and natural gas bills for his Nashville estate in 2006. Unfortunately he failed to think his actions through; they provoked an extremely negative reaction because they revealed more about his own values and inconvenient truths than his



Al Gore with his Nobel Peace Prize (Photograph: Scanpix)

opponent’s. Gore’s use of a private jet to promote his documentary worldwide has also come under fire: Why does he not travel by ordinary airplane or reduce his own CO² footprint? It is hard to make a genuine call for action if the messenger doesn’t “walk the talk”.

When Jose Bove, a French shepherd, attacked a McDonalds Restaurant in the village of Millau it was a strong symbol of the anti-globalization movement. Jose Bove became famous worldwide as the “David” who stood up to a commercial Goliath. The photograph of the attack made headlines all over the world and created more media attention than if Jose Bove and an army of activists had been standing in front of the European parliament or the World Trade Organization waving banners.

To some the attack reinforced the view that Frenchmen all too often take the law into their own hands. Images of farmers smashing trucks carrying imported vegetables; recurring riots in Paris suburbs, and the recent protest against new labor market laws all spring to mind. However, not all symbolic actions need to be provocative, controversial, illegal or detrimental to others.

Our lives are full of rituals and symbolic actions – from baptisms, weddings and jubilees to the christening of ships and inauguration of bridges. Companies can benefit greatly from using such actions as a means of communication.

One symbolic action that gained the attention of the media took place at global hearing aid manufacturer Oticon, which installed a huge paper shredder above a transparent tube in a central location at their head office to symbolize that the days of traditional paper-shuffling and bureaucracy were over. This had a major effect both internally and externally. Naturally, the more people you can involve in a symbolic act, the more memorable and personal it becomes.



Shepherd Jose Bove attacks a McDonalds Restaurant under construction – a symbolic act demonstrating his disapproval of US trade sanctions against the EU. The photograph traveled the entire globe (Photograph: Polfoto)

Experiences Target Our Hearts and Minds

Try to turn things around and get closer to people with your messages. Inject more emotion into them. Consider the cornerstones of all human

communication – perception and learning – and remember that we make ourselves understood through our senses, and that we use them to interpret the world around us. We learn more when we go “hands-on” – so why it is that so few companies include the body and the senses when communicating? All communication should be based on how it is likely to be experienced.

In a world where trustworthiness, meaning and authenticity are paramount, it is essential to create a strong emotional bond between leader and employee, employee and customer, seller and buyer, sender and recipient,

We communicate and make ourselves understood through our senses, and we use them to interpret the world around us.

etc. This book is designed to help those professionals whose responsibility it is to communicate values to increase the precision, comprehension and flexibility of their internal and external communication by eliminating unnecessary interference. This helps to shorten the distance between sender and recipient.

The authors of this book have brushed up on their basic knowledge of human perception and the way in which people learn in order to provide a clear idea of how best to engage and involve the target group – and teach them something in the process. This book’s contribution to the often heated debate on the values of marketing and branding is to bring things down to a more sensible level. The Chinese philosopher Confucius once said:

“I hear and I forget. I see and I remember. I do and I understand.”

Confucius (551 BC)

Confucius understood what many people have difficulty understanding in this day and age; that when we are allowed to experiment and make our own conclusions, we understand more. The solution is to give people a face-to-face experience. It is not about making more noise than everyone else, or making it more often. Nor is it about making yourself more visible,

Give people a face-to-face experience!

or about being seen in all the right places. It is about creating an experience that has maximum impact on the recipient’s senses, to help them remember and understand.

Being convincing requires credibility and innovative thinking. If you have ever waited in a transit lounge, surrounded by rolling ads and noisy billboards all competing with messages being piped through the loudspeaker system, you have probably felt a strong urge to run. Bad timing – certainly! But airports are generally so noisy that when you hear futurologists predict that peace and quiet will one day become more valuable than time, you cannot help but applaud the idea.

Years ago most airlines, including Scandinavian Airlines (SAS), created a lounge area where bonus and business customers could temporarily escape all the noise and stress, and enjoy comfort and good service. This was the idea of course, but when actually visiting the SAS lounge you will find yourself surrounded by magazines and display cases full of items such as Örefors porcelain, etc. These products were carefully placed for maximum promotional impact, and they did match the “It’s Scandinavian” concept. But to be quite frank, the experience had nothing to do with SAS. How credible is that?

In our opinion, SAS appear to be compromising their core values and services in full view of their best customers, just to make an income from alternative sources. They are also missing out on the opportunity to use their lounge to differentiate their services from their competitors’ and to communicate important messages to travelers. Instead of bringing their values to life with no interference from other sources, they are actually “polluting” their own lounge and the desired SAS sensation. And their customers spend their time wondering why they have done this.

So what is the problem exactly? So many players are battling for our favor – from political parties, NGOs and non-profit organizations to companies and brands. They all attempt to outshine each other, sometimes in the most unexpected places. The average Westerner is exposed to up to 3,000 messages each day. We surround ourselves with cell phones, the internet, PDAs, Bluetooth technology and so on, and make ourselves available 24 h a day. Very soon, not a single place in the public domain will exist in which we are NOT bombarded with information. So we avert our eyes and ears in an attempt to register only those messages that seem relevant.

If the SAS lounge had motivated people to relax and *sense* the comfort and service level, they would have taken things to an entirely different plane. They would have come a lot closer to involving their customers in an experience that encouraged them to interact while visiting what should have been a noise and “pollution-free” zone.

In future the challenge will be not merely to create a cohesive experience of a company’s identity but to take things a step further and allow people to experience its values via communication. People need to get involved and interact, so it is important to establish various oases or spaces in which to create these experiences, where noise and “pollution” are banned. Only when people feel they are part of something do company values become more personal.

An old Chinese proverb says: “If you think for too long about your next step, you will spend your entire life on one leg.” Companies, organizations, and associations must understand that, when making choices, people are increasingly following their hearts, and they demand greater openness, authenticity and credibility. Superficial messages and empty promises fail to satisfy us; instead we value companies and brands that can be sensed. They should feel familiar; be pertinent; have faces and present authentic and trustworthy stories rather than dreams. Values need

We value companies and brands that can be sensed

to be sensed physically in order to become meaningful. Messages that put distance between sender and recipient are perceived as being empty and irrelevant.

Values need to be sensed physically in order to become meaningful

Experiencing a company’s values can be quite disappointing because until that point they have only been seen in their best light. When we come in direct contact with a product or service, and venture behind the façade or packaging, the message suddenly

lacks depth and substance. It can seem intangible and non-existent – thin air compared to what we had expected.

Conversely an experience we expected to be disappointing can actually turn out to be quite positive. If the real-life experience manages to surpass the expectations that have been created through a non-physical contact point, it can be highly advantageous. However, the opposite is often true: values become watered down. People need to feel that companies, brands and products are less formal and more intimate. Therefore the challenge is to do what Jesus Christ is said to have done: turn water into wine!

Experiences can be evaluated in much the same way as a good wine, where we use our senses to assess its color, body, taste and bouquet. A

good wine opens the mind and provides a positive, multi-sensory experience. A fine wine also has a story to tell; a unique history that carries us through age-old traditions, unique cultures and remarkable regions. Such wine should be enjoyed in good company, where friends raise their glasses and share the experience.

See, hear, smell, taste, feel and sense. We may as well face the facts: experience-based communication will be viewed by some as old wine in new bottles – but what a wine it promises to be!

Chapter 3

Time and Experiences

Time and Experiences

The experience economy is a fact of life

The experience economy is a fact of life, but how and why does this manifest itself in today’s society? Experiences have become increasingly influential when it comes to creating values in society. Companies have

realized that they can no longer differentiate themselves through products and services alone. The market is full of identical products and services. To create value and secure their survival, companies must be more innovative. So we ask: What role does the experience play as a differentiator?

Sociologists point out that people are becoming more individualistic, making them more critical, more independent and more determined to achieve their full potential. Where is the individual today? And can individualism account for the growing need for experiences and the stimuli that generate them?

Experiences dictate how people behave

The scene is definitely set for experiences; they can dictate how people behave, which means they have become a driving force of the economy.

This puts not only consultants under pressure but also the marketers themselves. Both parties must understand that experiences are the best solution – and one of the most critical survival factors in a competitive market.

Experiences Can Differentiate A Company’s Products and Services

B. Joseph Pine II and James H. Gilmore, inventors of the term “The Experience Economy” and authors of a book by the same name, are quoted as saying, “Work is theater and every business a stage!”⁴ In their view the Experience Economy has emerged as the result of goods and services been standardized, so companies must seek new ways of differentiating themselves in order to be able to increase their prices. It is estimated that the number of brands has doubled worldwide in the period 1990 to 2000, making competition even fiercer. And this puts pressure on companies to differentiate their values to an even greater degree.

Pine and Gilmore’s research indicates that this cannot be achieved through products, services or other peripheral offerings, but rather through experiences that engage and involve the consumer. This applies both to the manufacturer’s market and the consumer market. Companies that stage experiences can increase their prices faster than increases in the inflation rate, because consumers consider them valuable⁵.

In the new experience economy the value of the physical product constitutes only a small part of the price; the real value lies not in the features, benefits or service, but in the experience. Phrases such as “the experience medium” and “experience-based communication”, which are introduced in this book, are therefore not merely buzzwords but a phenomenon caused by changes in society.

LEGOLAND theme parks have been an important part of LEGO’s branding strategy for some time. Inaugurations of new parks in California, Windsor, and Günzburg are evidence of this. These parks offer LEGO a unique opportunity to meet customers and give them a memorable experience of the entire toy universe. This is an excellent example of how experiences can add value to brands; LEGO benefits from the LEGOLAND experience because it helps them increase sales and profits.

LEGO has another foothold in another part of the experience economy, namely the PC game industry. With the introduction of their Mindstorm robots, LEGO became the world’s largest manufacturer of robots. Roomba, a US vacuum cleaner manufacturer, is number two on the list.

People want stories that match their own hopes and dreams

Pine and Gilmore cannot take all the credit, however. Bernd Schmitt and Alex Simonson (also Americans), emphasized at a much earlier point that marketing is about selling multi-sensory and memorable experiences. In their book, *Marketing Aesthetics*, they accentuate the importance of a company’s total aesthetic output and stress that the most important aspect is the “look and feel”⁶. Contrary to Pine and Gilmore, they use *aesthetics* as a metaphor rather than the world of theater.

We have heard of this before; one example being the “Disneyfication” of society. Danish futurist Rolf Jensen calls it “The dream society”. No matter which term is used, the common denominator is that people want experiences and stories that correspond to their own hopes and dreams.



The LEGOLAND theme park, where LEGO's toy universe is brought to life through entertainment, amusements and restaurants (Photograph: LEGOLAND Press Photography)

Pine and Gilmore illustrate the development of economic value in the following manner (Fig. 5):

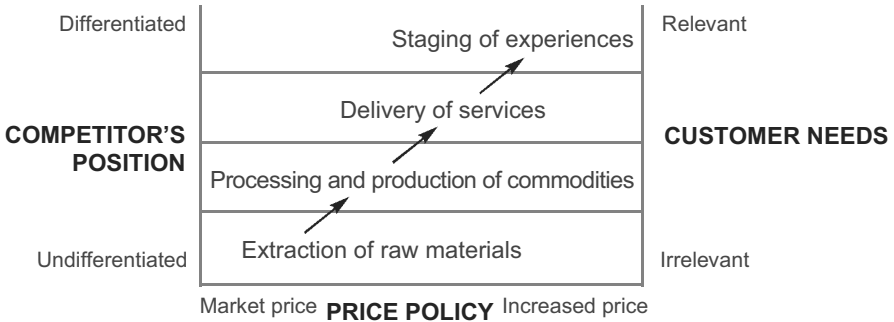


Fig. 5 Development of economic value (Pine and Gilmore 1999)

Pine and Gilmore describe the development of economic value from *raw materials* (iron ore and tomatoes) to *goods* (cars and tinned tomatoes) to *services* (hiring cars, visiting restaurants) to *experiences* (limousine services and theater cafés)⁷. Every step enhances the customer's perceived value.

From Raw Material to Experiences

On the top of Lampivaara Fell in beautiful Finnish Lapland is the only working amethyst mine in Europe. Faced with competition from low-cost countries, the owners had to choose between closing the mine altogether or reinventing their business. They made the leap into the experience economy by allowing people to visit the mine and even dig for their own “lucky amethyst”.

Thus the mine has shifted from being a simple operation focusing on the extraction of amethysts to being one of the only gem mines in the world to admit visitors. In cozy huts, guests can hear fascinating tales of how amethysts were formed and why they have been attributed mystical powers.

Another company that understands the importance of integrating experiences into its products or services is the Hard Rock Café, where the music and exhibits are just as important as the items on the menu. Other companies choose to market products or services in connection with experiences. For instance, Red Bull invests considerable sums in creating experiences such as model airplane events and go-cart races, which hoards of young people attend. Their incentive is the huge media attention – not to mention the word-of-mouth effect. We are not advocating one method over another; merely pointing out that the experience can make all the difference. To quote Pine and Gilmore once more: ‘While commodities are fungible, goods tangible and services intangible, experiences are memorable.’⁸

Scott M. Davis’s book entitled *Brand Asset Management* introduced a concept called the “Brand Value Pyramid”. Just like Maslow’s “Hierarchy of Needs” (so often utilized by advertising researchers), this pyramid illustrates that brands have the potential to satisfy not only basic physical and social needs but also emotional needs such as job satisfaction. The higher up the pyramid the brand is, the more meaningful and relevant it is perceived to be and the harder it is for competitors to copy. Experiences depend on time and place, which is why they are never identical. A unique, tailor-made branding parameter as effective as this one is at differentiating products and services simply cannot be found anywhere else (Fig. 6).

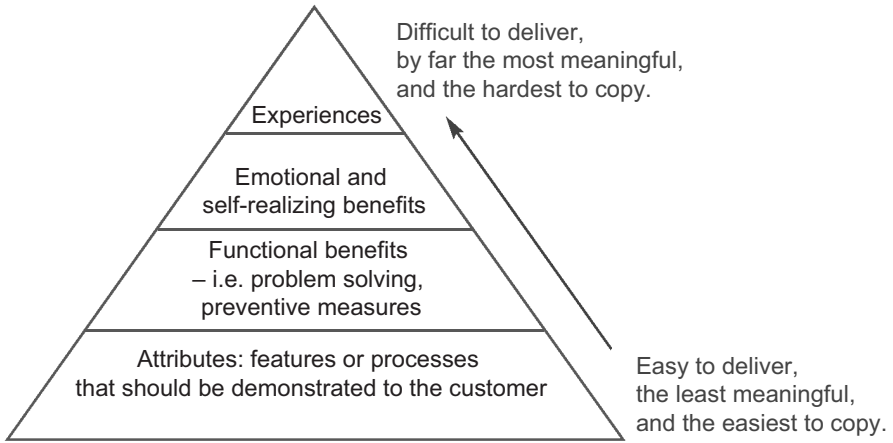


Fig. 6 *The brand value pyramid (brand asset management)*

Historically the focus of marketing has been on the functional qualities and advantages of products and services. In the industrial society, where products created the greatest value, the four P’s (Product, Price, Placement and Promotion) were considered the most important aspects of marketing⁹. The term “Unique Selling Proposition” (USP) became a popular expression for these until the angle became more emotional and companies began talking about the importance of the “Emotional Selling Proposition” (ESP) as a value-adding, differentiating factor.

“Brand Building” became the new trend, and of the four P’s, the Promotion parameter was the only element capable of creating value. In advertising and communication, companies attached emotional values to their brands by making them lifestyle-oriented and by using symbols and metaphors. They targeted people’s emotions rather than just their common sense. Companies that were socially conscious and environmentally aware had discovered a new way to generate goodwill and add value to their products – and the whole “Stakeholder Theory” was born.

When people perceive value, sales follow quite naturally

Most companies still use USP and ESP; however, it is important to be perceived as being empathic rather than profiting seeking and hard selling. Sales are vital of course, but the primary goal is to encourage people to

value and relate to your company. When they do this, sales will follow quite naturally.

The author Martin Lindstrom suggests that the next-generation term might be “Me Selling Proposition” (MSP). The idea is that, having become more independent and critical, consumers now want to customize and create products themselves.

Actually, it doesn’t get any more personal and individual than the “My DNA Fragrance” concept. In the US this company specializes in blending unique fragrances based on the DNA of their customers. All they need to do is to send in a saliva sample and a week or so later they will receive a fragrance that has been tested and created based on their unique DNA. The price is \$89.99, and the customer’s DNA can be stored at an additional cost of \$99.99. Each fragrance is then bottled and stamped with the customer’s own label. You can read more about this concept on <http://www.mydnafragrance.com>.

The figure below illustrates the shift from yesterday’s traditional way of communicating to the experience-based method of tomorrow. The difference lies in the order of events: first you bring the message to life; then you select the most suitable media and communication channels. This approach favors authenticity and credibility because the media is not allowed to dictate and limit your behavior and presence in the market place.

With a *substance before form* approach, the focus is on winning your share of body and mind rather than just a share of voice or a share of eyes. By helping you to actively involve your target audiences in your messages, Experienced-based communication wins a higher share of body and mind at all physical touchpoints. Far too many consultants and agencies operate with

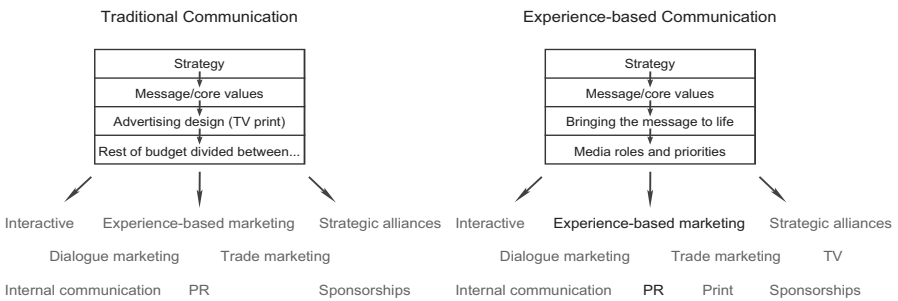


Fig. 7 Traditional vs. experience-based communication (3rdDimension©)

predefined media choices, so their clients end up with standardized packages rather than solutions that are tailored to their needs. Bring your messages to life and you will be able to create a unique platform for storytelling that will energize all of your touchpoints in an authentic manner (Fig. 7).

Communication must be authentic, trustworthy and experience-based

In addition to providing functional advantages, products must be relevant and provide a unique personal experience. Experiences are the way of the future, so companies should try to determine what their fundamental values are, and make their comm-

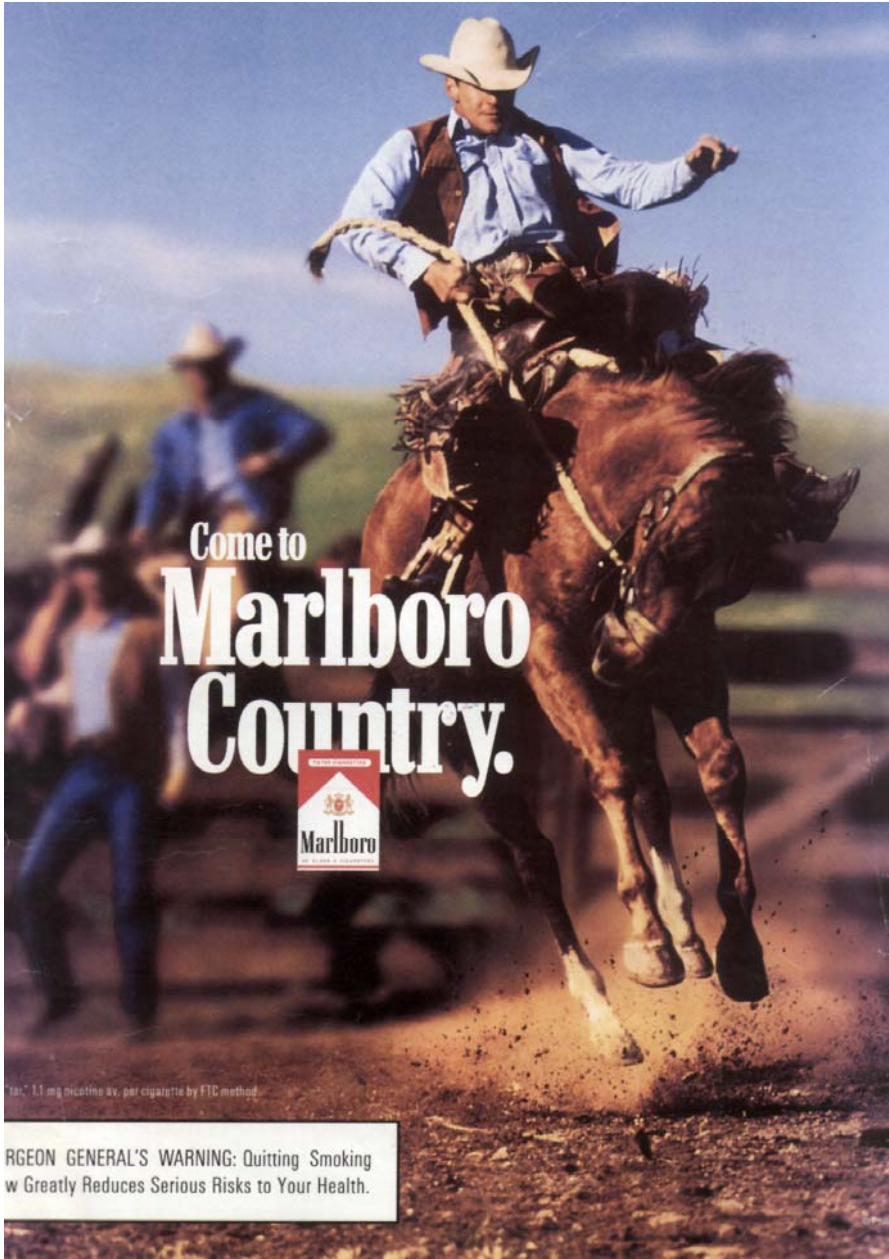
munication authentic, trustworthy and experience-based. The shoe manufacturer Ecco has understood the value of this type of thinking; at their annual Ecco Walkathon hikers collect spectacular impressions with their eyes and lots of money with their feet. And they have done so since 1999. This event has helped to bring ECCO's values to life for customers, partners and employees alike.

For every kilometer covered, ECCO donates five Danish kroner to one of three relief organizations chosen by the participants: The Danish Heart Foundation, UNICEF and WWF. The ECCO Walkathon is not a competition; the only winners are the organizations receiving the funds, plus the companies supporting the event. Each year 50,000 happy hikers traverse the streets of Copenhagen, Berlin, Stockholm, Yokohama and Kyoto, generating huge press coverage along the way. All of this helps to increase the foot traffic in ECCO stores. In fact, the response has been so positive that ECCO is planning to add even more major cities in the future.


The challenge is to incorporate sensory experiences into the storytelling

Futurologist Birthe Linddal describes how Marlboro's story of the cowboy on the prairie no longer fits the bill: "Now we want to experience the prairie ourselves and sit beside the fire...We have grown tired of the immaterial and we seek something

more... Stories must hit closer to home; they must be concrete and realistic enough to make people believe that they are happening in their world."

A photograph of a cowboy in a light blue shirt and brown vest riding a brown horse. The horse is galloping, kicking up dust. In the background, other people in cowboy attire are visible, slightly out of focus. The scene is set in a vast, open landscape under a clear blue sky.

Come to
**Marlboro
Country.**



"tar," 1.1 mg nicotine av. per cigarette by FTC method.

**REGON GENERAL'S WARNING: Quitting Smoking
w Greatly Reduces Serious Risks to Your Health.**

The famous Marlboro icon, Marlboro Man (Photograph: Scanpix)

It is not what you *say* but what you *do* that is important. The founder of Brighthouse, Joey Reiman has said of branding (another of today's buzzwords): 'Branding is telling the world: "Get away, these are my cattle, I branded them."' It is a statement of ownership. Bonding is a statement of relationship. Instead of saying: "I've gotta brand this, I've gotta brand that", you'd say you've gotta make a bond, a relationship to the customer. Branding is a sick concept. The biggest idea is the idea of the bond.'

Marketing expert John Grant suggests in his book, *After Image*, that we are moving away from dreams, lifestyle and storytelling, and moving towards a learning society. People are focusing on acquiring knowledge and exploring new ways of life. Marketing should therefore be based not on attractive and emotional stories but on teaching people something new and valuable. Like Grant, we believe that more and more people desire enriching experiences. They are not just seeking dreams and fairytales; they want something valid and educational.

Why Experiences?

Many companies forget that consumers are not simply the last link in the production process or value chain. Rather, they contribute to the social significance of products through the items they purchase. It is through physical meetings that the real transfer of values takes place and true meaning is generated. The ultimate goal is to satisfy customers, and this can be achieved through experiences. Satisfaction cannot be bottled and sold; it is usually a result of the circumstances in which people come into contact with a company's employees or brand, or the circumstances in which they consume a product. In this context people's own contributions play a pivotal role in their overall perception of things.

It is thought-provoking to consider just how little effort companies invest in ensuring that physical meetings (which are moments of truth) actually live up to the recipient's expectations and are staged in surroundings that conform to the company's values. Such values epitomize everything a company does, i.e. the experience it provides. If this fails to live up to the image presented in the media by management, in shops and through people's personal experiences, the company's values will be revealed as a sham. To avoid diluting them so much that they fail to withstand closer inspection, it is important to think holistically and find out how to bring your company's values to life.

When devising strategies, your ideas should focus on bringing your company and values to life. What do your employees, customers and suppliers actually experience? Add their individual experiences up to get a clear picture of the total experience. Something must bind these stakeholders together. From a holistic viewpoint, factors such as product design, merchandise, architecture, shop design and service all play a crucial role in influencing people's perceptions. Being tangible, they can lend credibility to the total experience. Companies that master the art of creating total experiences will be well armed to meet the challenges of the future.

Experiences are about *being there*: seeing, hearing, smelling or feeling something. People can have visual, tactile and culinary experiences, and when all five senses are involved simultaneously, the entire body reacts. In a total experience, people use all of their senses to absorb the information and the atmosphere.

Cast your mind back to your most recent journey. Perhaps you visited a country with a different culture, where the sounds, smells and tastes all felt brand new. Impressions such as these become lodged in our memories because they affect our perception either positively or negatively. Sensory impressions divulge something about a place – its history, culture, characteristics and so forth. People who have visited Greece in the spring cannot fail to notice the strong, characteristic smell of citrus flowers that pervades the air. So the next time they encounter the smell of citrus flowers, it triggers happy memories of experiences on distant shores.

When people's senses are awakened, their mood improves and they become more receptive to their surroundings. When this happens they find it easier to absorb stimuli. The experience medium can put people in a state of mind or "sensory universe" where they involve themselves both physically and spiritually. Using the senses when communicating you will have a bigger chance of avoiding the filters and enter the attractive and hard to access, interpersonal information channels. Become the talk of town.

Imagine yourself in a spa: your body is relaxed and you are reveling in the experience. Your skin is moist and the towels smell of lavender. You are enjoying a glass of cool, freshly-pressed orange juice. A brook is babbling somewhere nearby, and birds are singing just outside the window... This is what relaxation and wellbeing is all about! When companies involve the senses in their communication, they guide recipients to a predetermined universe where they can relax, enjoy the atmosphere and come away feeling invigorated.



Royal Evian Club, beautifully situated at the Geneva Lake (Photograph: Royal Parc Evian press photograph)

Evian, which bottles and sells natural spring water from the French Alps, has seen the logic in this idea; rather than just saying that they promote health and wellbeing, and that “water is the source of life”, they do their utmost to fulfill their promises. They run a successful health resort called the Royal Evian Club on the shores of Lake Geneva – a meditative oasis to which people flock in order to escape the hustle and bustle of everyday life. The resort offers a wide range of services, from aroma spas to massage and reflexology.

The same trend has emerged within the hotel industry, which now offers not only accommodation but also a wealth of experiences. Royal Evian Club and several other hotels around the world have realized the kind of impact they can make on the total travel experience, and that hotels can be a big enough attraction in themselves.

The Library Hotel in New York has understood the concept of the experience economy by taking the international library classification system a step further. In this system, most libraries are divided into ten different subjects, each of which has many sub-categories. The hotel’s ten floors and 60 rooms boast more than 6,000 books. All the floors are divided into sections, just as a library would be. The third floor has books

Companies can add value by increasing people's receptiveness through experiences

on social science; on the fourth the topic is languages, and on the fifth it is natural history, etc. Visitors who are interested in the history of Asia should book a room on the ninth floor – more precisely, room 900.004, which contains more than 100 books on Asian history. Furthermore, both the

furniture and art relate to the topic in focus. Rooms at the Library Hotel are expensive and very popular, so bookings should be made well in advance. Room 800.001 is famous for its collection of erotic literature – a feature that puts it in great demand, particularly with newlyweds.

Companies can add value to their products or services by increasing customer receptiveness through experiences. Why? Because individuals *want* experiences. As American artist Andy Warhol once said. “In the future, everyone will be world-famous for 15 min.” The many reality shows – which far exceed normal limitations – have revealed the accuracy of this prediction. They reflect the desperate desire of ordinary people to seek meaning and recognition. With its user-generated content, the phenomenon *You Tube* is a typical example of this.

The increased demand for user involvement has generated a new era of co-creation. Customers want to co-create with brands. Since they are the ones who use the products and services, their ideas are likely to be beneficial and innovative. They want to be valued as “prosumers”. The Blogging phenomenon on the internet – the so called “Me publishing.inc” trend – has increased immensely over the past decade, showing just how much we want to be heard and make our opinion count. The broadcasting media in general is beginning to make it much easier for readers and viewers to air their own opinions – often unedited. South Korea’s most influential news media, <http://www.ohmynews.com> uses the slogan “Every citizen is a reporter”. 80% of the website’s articles are written by 40,000 ordinary citizens from all over the world.

Elle Magazine has experimented with co-creation by letting a team of subscribers produce Future Elle. Boeing had 120.000 customers signing up to help design a new aircraft. And Apple has its iLounge for customers to make suggestions about product improvements and work on them with

Apple’s product managers. Besides the benefits of free inspiration, it often generates a lot of media coverage. Many companies fear this open-source communication or marketing, because they feel they lack control. But if they don’t involve the users, there’s a chance you will be neglected and lose customers. It is a common misunderstanding that opening up for dialogue gives you less control of your branding. On the contrary it gives you valuable feedback and makes your offerings relevant to your audiences at all time. You will experience communities develop and people sharing a common interest in you, your product or service. They’ll benefit from your openness. If you have a trustworthy brand and you act honest, self-confident and ethical in everything you do, your brand will stand any hate page or negative comment by a disappointed customer on a web log - any time. It’s the way you act that matters rather than what you say. Openness is proactive and not reactive.

The fact is that today, some people will do anything to win that 15 min. of fame that will help them forget the boredom, oblivion and paranoia that makes them feel eternally trapped in the same old treadmill. They are willing to push themselves to the limit just to be able to say, “Been there, seen it, done it – what’s next?”

Several things indicate that, today, people want to feel and experience things as a way of making their mark. In his book, *Notice the World*, Sociologist Tor Noerretranders anticipates that the “era of consciousness”, with its unambiguous emphasis on the mind, is drawing to an end. In the future the emphasis will be on sensing the world. One explanation for this is that, in post-modern Western societies, people live predictable lives. Today the young as well as the elderly seem to have a great urge to “stage” themselves and make their own mark on things. We see graffiti everywhere. We see cars with license plates like “No. 1” or “Coolio”, and people with piercings and tattoos in unusual places! We see countless personal websites on the internet, and elderly people who try to outrun age

We want to influence the things we consume

by investing in the dreams of yester-year. They buy the motorbikes they were unable to afford earlier in life, etc. Actions like these are their way of saying, “I’m still here, so pay me some attention!”



Mobile phone salesman Paul Potts followed his dream and joined the fame game. He became world-famous opera singer after a breathtaking performance in the TV talent show, Britain's Got Talent (Photograph: Scanpix)

This also applies to the consumption of products and brands, where people seek to show who they are through the products they purchase (also known as the “Zorro Effect”). But they also want to influence the things they consume. A prime example of this is Fusion Fashion, where consumers invent their own personal style by combining famous brands with underground and second-hand clothes. This would suggest that the major brands are heading for a future full of opportunities and challenges.

Globalization is erasing cultural and national differences, but this is creating a deeper awareness of local qualities. In the 1980s the Japanese began to talk about the Glocal Society (“Think globally, act locally”). Coca Cola and McDonald’s were losing momentum in Europe, and losing value. Lacking local roots and courage, their brands were becoming less and less interesting. Appeal-wise, red-nosed Ronald McDonald cannot compete with local clowns; this particular American dream has become too mainstream.



This girl, with her passion for body art, is an example of a growing trend: people who want to “stage” themselves (Photograph: Polfoto)

We continue to dream, but we also know that it is up to *us* to make our dreams come true. Mahatma Gandhi once said, “Be the change you seek in the world”. We get no closer to our dreams by sitting in a McDonald’s restaurant drinking Coca Cola. Nor are we interested in being players in a mainstream story. We would rather devise our own stories to share with others.

Another minus for McDonald's is that the architecture and interior design of their restaurants rarely blends in with the surroundings in Europe and Asia – a situation which often provokes discussions in local communities. McDonald's has learned to adapt to local traditions when designing their restaurants and menus, in order to make them more local and appealing. Ultimately it is the companies that manage to adapt to local conditions – or those that come closest to this goal – that win.

Recognizing the efficacy of this approach, many banks have introduced service concepts that bring them closer to their customers. This includes open-plan offices, fewer desks, lounge areas with free coffee and magazines, meeting facilities for business clients, and a more accommodating service approach. Advisers now sit together with their customers to review data and this kind of openness helps to build trust. When talking to advisers we often find ourselves anxiously watching their facial expressions, and we start wondering what they are looking at. A lack of openness can generate feelings of suspicion and distrust – even though the adviser might be perfectly friendly.

This new approach is more in line with the world of the customer and also the bank's pledge to provide trustworthy, individually tailored financial advice. The fact is that today, people want experiences – something that goes beyond the core services of a bank.

The Sensitive Individual

Whilst the emerging middle classes in India and China are looking to consume even more branded goods in the future, consumers in Japan, Europe and America are beginning to deplore the excesses of consumerism.

Consumerism and ever-faster technological developments have robbed us of our initiative and automated our senses. We miss the extremes in experiences – i.e. the extremely tough or very pleasant. The issue is whether we experience anything at all. The human aspects of communication have taken a secondary position because we now deal with machines more often than we deal with other people.

In today's image-based society most messages are communicated via audio-visual media such as TV, print, outdoor advertising and the internet, etc. We can buy groceries, send flowers, visit our bank and complete

People have become inactive and their senses numbed

training courses without ever coming into contact with other people. We never get to meet the companies or the people behind the technology, and we spend less time with our families, friends and neighbors – all of which

results in a feeling of isolation.

All personal relations are founded on the notion that we all share common values, but how can we appreciate, understand or trust an internet bank, a TV screen or a video phone? As consultants we are not trying to start a crusade against technology because it can alienate people; only to rationalize the increasing demand for personal relationships, sensory stimulation and intimacy – particularly when it comes to companies and products.

Digitalization has created new opportunities to simulate reality and replace personal dialogue. Therefore we no longer talk about “high tech”, but “high touch” – touch screens and other kinds of technologically generated, tactile and kinetic surfaces that allow us to create multi-sensory experiences of virtual worlds. One example of this is *Second Life* – a virtual meeting and marketplace. Major players such as Coca Cola, Disney and Sony have entered this 3D, virtual world. The only negative aspect is that if these types of interfaces stand alone, they only serve to put distance between people. Without face-to-face meetings it is difficult to communicate properly and to create lasting relationships.

Without physical meetings there can be no strong bond between sender and recipient. Long-distance relationships are hard to maintain, as companies that never meet their customers or potential customers will no doubt be able to confirm. Consider the State for a moment. As citizens, where do we come into contact with the State? Certainly not through visiting Parliament or Congress, because most of us do that only once in a lifetime. But we come into contact with it quite frequently when visiting public hospitals, municipal offices, kindergartens, libraries, etc. And our experiences are often rather negative. Because they seem to be understaffed and full of over-worked people who are loath to complain about their working conditions for fear of losing their jobs.

Experiences come from within, and this is a far cry from the way in which public authorities communicate, which is through pre-printed envelopes and complex forms full of rules and regulations. Again we ask: Where is

Without physical meetings there can be no strong bonds

the heart? Where are the sympathetic faces – and where on earth is the recipient in all this? This kind of communication is mainly controlled by the sender. The only people who even attempt to bring the state to life are the

politicians. They hold speeches on flag days and meet voters at public meetings, election debates, and make politically correct pledges which they then often fail to fulfill. Thus the public authorities and services they represent are perceived as being colossal and without character.

Not many of us are proud of our hospitals, town councils or kindergartens because they fail to live up to the image presented by the politicians. No clear values are evident in the way the employees behave – indeed, the staff do not even understand their corporate values. This may be due to the eternal debate about societal values (e.g. social security), which change whenever governments do. When politicians cannot agree on fundamental values – signaling conflict and dissatisfaction into the public sphere – how are employees in the public sector supposed to remain motivated? And how are they supposed to interpret mixed signals from a divided administration?

When do people feel proud of their state or country? It is unlikely to be during hospital visits, or when their President or Prime Minister is making speeches for the press. It is more likely to be when members of their royal family make public appearances; when Independence Day parades promote an all-American feeling, or when friends get together to watch national sports events. These events incorporate symbolic acts that unite us and bring our values to life – something the State and county councils unfortunately fail to do. In the days of the Roman Empire people gathered at the Coliseum or Circus Maximus to watch gladiators or spectacular chariot races. Back then, experiences were a vital medium through which the State could communicate and demonstrate its power.

Today the world is evolving in pace with globalization and the increased mobility of capital and labor. Cross-border networks generate new relationships and partnerships, plus more insight into the self. Perhaps due to the fact that external conditions are always changing, another trend has emerged: people have begun to explore their inner selves. Many have begun to search for their roots in an attempt to find the missing pieces to their personal jigsaw. Rather than focusing on superficial and trivial

things, genealogy allows people to focus on deeper and more personal issues.

In their quest to rediscover their spirituality, people are trying to find out who they are, what they stand for and what motivates them to act the way they do. In short, they are searching for a sense of identity. Modern-day identity problems are reflected in a growing need to consult psychologists and an emergent interest in identity-enhancing products and brands. Having become more sensitive and vulnerable, people have begun to ask existential questions such as: “Do I really exist?” Experiences can make people feel more vibrant. Had the French philosopher René Descartes lived in the 21st century he might have said: “I experience – therefore I am.”

We have begun to value what’s on the inside

One of the reasons why sensitive individuals seek experiences is because they make them feel more alive.

devoid of values and meaning yet full of sensations of emptiness and doubt as to what makes life worth living.¹⁰ This particular psychological problem is typical of this day and age. According to Frankl our main undertaking is

Our main undertaking is to make life meaningful

The philosopher Victor Frankl talks about the “Existential Vacuum” – i.e. the feeling of being in a vacuum to things like nature, art and love, as these can help people lead more rewarding lives. A child was asked in a TV programme; what is the meaning of

life? The 4 year old girl first responded, “... *I don’t know! The meaning of life ... Hmmm (Long break)*”. “Of course”, she suddenly responded. “*The meaning of life is to live. Yes to live, live your life.*” If we all could stay childish, life would be so simple.

People Need Fellowship and Intimacy

It is in sharing experiences (having fun, laughing, crying, making love, etc.) that people feel most alive. The need for a solid network, good relationships, and to feel a sense of belonging all have a major impact on our wellbeing. Consequently it is becoming increasingly difficult to forego intimacy and interpersonal relations.

Starbucks’s “Third Place” concept became world renowned for its excellent grasp of the experience economy. Starbucks uses this term in its marketing because it vies to be number three in line, after the home and the office. This concept was developed by Howard Schultz. In an attempt to make Starbucks a “home away from home”, the café section of the store is often equipped with comfortable chairs as well as the usual tables and hard-backed chairs found in most cafés.

Starbucks ran a full page brand ad in the New York Times showing two interlocking coffee rings, with the word “Hi” written where the rings intersected. The heading said “Reconnect”. The ad was thought-provoking and motivating. Rather than just focusing on the atmosphere and the products, it addressed a deeper need, which is the desire to relax and spend time with friends or colleagues.

Technological developments help people to keep in touch with each other even though they live on different continents. However, this kind of communication cannot replace our fundamental need for direct social contact. People from all walks of life are beginning to appreciate authenticity and intimacy. They expect companies to be just as responsible and active in society as they themselves are – and they also expect them to be more sensitive.

Companies must be more sensitive

This is a natural counter-reaction to the shallowness and indifference that many people feel characterizes our materialistic society. We know that our basic functional needs will be taken care of. We also know that happiness and fortune do not come through filling our houses with inanimate objects crafted by famous designers. What is important is the ritual surrounding a purchase; the stories they tell us; the satisfying and enriching experiences that emerge within the framework they provide. Dr. Gerald Zaltman of Harvard Business School’s Laboratory of the Consumer Mind once said: “Consumers are driven far less by tangible attributes of products and services than by subconscious sensory and emotional elements derived from the total experience surrounding a transaction.” Basically it is no longer the acquisition of product or services that are important, but the ritual accompanying the acquisition.

Most studies today are quantitative, focusing on which products and services people feel they need. But as the above quote indicates, such

surveys would be more valuable if they focused on what customers are trying to achieve and how they themselves measure that achievement. The Norwich Union insurance company has understood the benefit of this approach; their surveys attempt to gauge the emotional reaction of customers and they even have employee innovation groups to help them meet customer needs. Another example is the beverage company Jack Daniels, which uses MRI scanners to gauge the emotional effect of different environments on male whisky drinkers.

The Skeptical Individual

The Millennial Generation – the most recent of several generations in the US to have its own label – is only just getting off the ground. The Millennial Generation won its name back in 1990, when the TV station ABC-TV announced in *World News Tonight* that online voters had chosen this over alternatives such as “Generation Next”, “Generation Tech” and “Generation.com”.

The Millennial Generation has become the largest generation ever in the US and it is estimated that, by the year 2010, it will include 50% of all Americans aged 18–49. According to researchers, this generation will shape the media in future. Millennials spend almost 15 h a day using diverse media and communication tools, and half of them spend more than an hour a day on their cell phones. Male Millennials spend most of their time playing computer games, while females favor the TV and mobile phone.

The first major generation in the US was the Silent Generation of the 1920s. Then was followed by the Baby Boomer Generation, which sprang up at the end of the Second World War. In the mid-60s Generation X was born, and in 1976 the transition was made to the Millennial Generation.

Research company Frank N. Magid Associates launched “The Millennial Strategy Program” in order to meet the demand for insight into how to connect with this generation. Their behavioral traits are brought to life in a fictitious character called “Ms Millennial”.

Ms Millennial is the result of two people’s desire to bring a child into the world and raise it with love and compassion in safe surroundings. She has been protected throughout her upbringing, but she has also been involved

in decision making from a very early age. Ms Millennial considers herself to be special and believes wholeheartedly in the strength and potential of her generation. She is used to performing but sometimes feels the pressure of constantly having to excel.

Ms Millennial is a conventional thinker and her family and friends mean more to her than anything else. She gets on well with her parents, who are a positive influence in her life. Ms Millennial feels no particular loyalty towards her employer because her work/life balance priorities tell her that satisfying them is not the key to happiness.

Advertising has been an integral part of Ms Millennial's life for as long as she can remember; to her it seems a natural way of acquiring knowledge. But she is skeptical and searches for honesty in messages. Credibility is Alfa Omega when trying to reach Ms Millennial. She is always multi-tasking and is often online while watching TV. She has a constant urge to multi-task so it is fortunate that she is comfortable using almost all types of media platforms.

Ms Millennial watches ABC Family – at least, this is what the TV station hopes. They have invested heavily in targeting Ms Millennial and the rest of her generation. For instance, they have launched a feature on their website where viewers of their many family series can hold viewing parties. This involves streaming the series online, so they can pause and fast forward programs whilst messaging each other.

Ms Millennial is based on research performed by Frank N. Magid Associates, whose clients include ABC Family. The results of their surveys have been sourced from the magazine Advertising Age.

Ms Millennial has already influenced our transparent world of democracy. <http://www.planetfeedback.com> is a good example. Here visitors can seek



Everything is up for
debate

guidance prior to purchasing products. They can also discuss specific products or services. The debates are multi-faceted and often turn into heated arguments based on negative customer

experiences. Harris Interactive recently published the Customer Experience Report based on consumer interviews conducted in the US. One conclusion was that 80% of consumers will never return to a company

after a negative experience. What’s more, 74% of consumers will register a complaint or pass on a negative experience. Planetfeedback.com is a perfect example of the skeptical individual who is hard to convince in traditional and commercial ways. The value of word of mouth – and word of mouse – can never be overestimated.

In such an environment it is difficult to predict how management and communication will develop in the future. This is because the future is ours to create. Glocal society is so multi-farious that the market cannot be segmented through the lifestyle analyses and target group criteria currently utilized today. Nationality has become multi-faceted, and humans have become chameleons. We put on one face at work, another at home and yet another in the presence of friends. The term “situation-oriented individual” is a perfect definition for people who adopt different behavior for different situations. Our behavior and viewpoints are increasingly dictated by changing values, our state of mind, impulses, and our environment.

However, this does not mean that companies should give up altogether. Simply acknowledging that such surveys make it no easier to categorize the consumer shows that companies have already come a long way. Consumers can be complex creatures who change their lifestyles and habits almost as often as they change outfits!

The last thing we want to be is players in a mainstream story

As individuals the last thing we want to be is players in a mainstream story. We prefer to devise our own stories and develop our own points of view. The reason why many young people purchase clothes in second-hand shops is

not because they want to save money, but because it allows them to create a unique image and tell their own stories. Companies need to be chameleons too; they must communicate in different ways to encourage their target groups to identify with them. Whether internal or external, messages must be customized to address people on their own terms.

In addition to being competent, managers must be able to take fast decisions and lead the way. They need good social skills and a thorough understanding of the company’s internal and external relations. The service sector will soon constitute the majority of the occupational structure in the west, making knowledge the most important commodity.

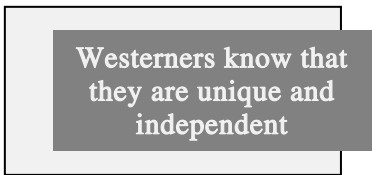
The ability to attract, retain, motivate and develop desirable employees will be essential to a company’s future success. Employees will increasingly want to influence their work and the future of their companies. Very few will tolerate being told how to behave and work unless they are part of the decision-making process. They want to be involved heart and soul in what they do, and they are not afraid to seek other alternatives if their current jobs fail to live up to their expectations. This probably explains why 25-year jubilees are very rarely celebrated any more.

If we make no progress either mentally, physically or socially we feel an urge to move on to greener pastures where new challenges and adventures await. More and more people are beginning to quit their jobs, sell their possessions and travel far and wide in pursuit of their dreams.

The Powerful Individual

Increasing prosperity in the West has allowed us to prioritize ourselves much higher as individuals. But sociologists often point out that individualism kills community spirit. Instead of sharing values and beliefs, people now ask themselves “What’s in it for me?” They are more interested in realizing their own potential, which includes making their own decisions and controlling their own destiny. But has the concept of community spirit really ceased to exist? And in reality, how much fun is it to be all alone on a desert island?

The truth is that homogenous communities have made way for more transient, heterogeneous communities, friendships, memberships and interest groups, etc. People are only part of a community as long as they gain something from it. Fellowship is to be found in fragmented, more fashion- and self-oriented forms than we have been used to. But the feeling of belonging to a group and being socially accepted will always be important – even to people who perceive themselves to be individualists.



Westerners know that they are unique and independent

Those of us who live a western-orientated life are conscious of the fact that we are unique and independent. According to German scientist Thomas Ziehe, we no longer feel obliged to follow in the footsteps of our

predecessors or stick to a particular class, religion, State, gender, age, etc. We are constantly on the move and have gained more power – power that has been transferred from the State to citizens, from management to employees, from marketers to consumers, and from parents to children. Many find this concept difficult to grasp.

The fact that the rules have changed puts companies under great pressure. They must be innovative and see opportunities rather than limitations, particularly where management and marketing are concerned. In today’s marketplace, companies cannot satisfy everyone – only the individual. And people are very different. The things they find valuable are the things that move them on a personal level. The EU, the State, the Church, employer organizations and trade unions are not the only ones battling with values and trying to redefine their roles; companies are doing this too. Trust in authority has faded; rather than just being marionettes, people want to pull their own strings and make a difference.

The increasing criticism of the *system* is perhaps the strongest expression of this trend. For example, if people ask too many questions or make too many demands, the system closes ranks. But more openness is needed. People want to know which surgeons have the highest success rates and where to go for various types of operations, etc. The system should be flexible enough to engage in a dialogue with its clients.

This also applies to companies and other organizations that increasingly are being held responsible for their actions – also at a social level. People want to know what their values and opinions are, and whether they really “walk the talk”. These aspects are often more important than the products or services themselves, although people do appreciate being able to customize things to meet their individual needs. Those that are “talking the talk”

We have not become less loyal - we just demand more

without “walking the walk” are playing a fools game. According to mycustomer.com it is 5–10 times more expensive to win a new client than to retain an existing one; therefore it is financial folly to overlook a parameter

such as customer satisfaction. An increasing number of firms are using “mystery shoppers” and other internal quality-of-service studies (plus customer complaint management programs) to gain more insight into this elusive area.

We have not become less loyal, as some people claim. We merely demand more of the people we spend time with. We want to be appreciated as individuals, and we want the things we need *right now*. We have become more professional and when making purchases we negotiate because we want buying to be a win-win situation. We have become critical “*Wh*” individuals who ask questions like, “*What’s* in it for me?”, “*Why* should I do that?”, etc. We no longer blindly accept a single truth because we know that there are other versions. Companies are losing consumer trust, firstly through highly publicized disasters like Enron in the consulting industry, WorldCom in telecoms, Bearings in finance, Avoparcin in agriculture, Bhopal in chemicals, and Chernobyl and Brent Spar in energy. If we are to accept someone else’s truth it happens through dialogue and deliberation.

People no longer want witty, superficial messages, they want the honesty

Where communication is concerned a complete overload of information and advertising has made people cynical. We are no longer as impressed by amusing, clever and superficial adverts as we used to be. According to global think tank Global Future Forum (GFF),

more weight is now being attached to ethical values. People want to know the truth about companies and products. The marketing of the future will involve far more than aggressive attempts to impress customers and entice them into your shop.

According to futurist Lise-lotte Lyngsoe, who is a member of Global Future Forum, companies should try to attract attention in a positive fashion rather than sending out barrages of Spam-mails and other unwanted advertising. Companies should stick to their values and try to make values so appealing that customers are drawn to them.

Today managers must deal with independent and powerful employees who want to be part of the decision-making process. In the learning and knowledge society employees have become the most important resource, and their skills and knowledge are lost if they leave to find other jobs. Good networks and personal relations have far greater influence on a company’s success than ever before.



Shell's oil rig, Brent Spar, had to be towed in and demolished on land following massive protests from Greenpeace, a consumer boycott and extremely negative media attention. Afterwards, surveys indicated that sinking the rig at sea would have been a more environmentally friendly solution. Shell did try to document this fact (Photograph: Scanpix)

A company's network often means good relations between the management and employees, and also between the sales and purchasing departments. The benefits and longevity of these ties are often related

Good relations are crucial to achieving good results

more to the employees' personalities, motivation and insight than to the products or services themselves. Therefore the challenge is to increase employee motivation, create good internal and external networks, and ensure that people fully comprehend

the company's messages. These factors are crucial to achieving good results.

The Experimental Individual

We are no longer governed by style, but by an urge to experiment. Increasingly, we want our hearts to be in everything we do.

Life can be difficult when we feel pressed for time every day. Our working hours are beginning to consume our leisure time. In the US the Bureau of Labor in Statistics revealed that in 2004, only 17% of managerial workers were working more than 60 h a week. Anecdotal evidence seems to indicate that this is a rising trend. “The 40-h workweek is a bit of a myth now,” says Allan Schweyer, executive director of the Human Capital Institute. “The 50- to 60-h workweek is now the norm.” Recent data from the Families and Work Institute indicates that a woman’s working week has risen from 39 to 44 h, while men report spending 49.9 h on the job (up from 47.1 h). Time has become a scarce resource and deadlines have become ever more demanding, so we end up trying to postpone things until the eleventh hour. The result is stress, and this makes us more selective about how we spend the precious leisure time we have.

Our lives are no longer governed by style, but by an urge to experiment

The term “quality time” has become part of our vocabulary. If you ask people what they mean by this, they often reply that they need more time for themselves and their families, i.e. time to spend on non work-related activities. We want to spend time on things that are personal, out of the

ordinary and meaningful. We want things that stimulate the imagination; a concept that applies equally well to consumers.

People want powerful experiences with a high ROT (return on time) – the kind of action that makes their hair stand on end. The way that Anthony Robbins makes his fast-paced coaching presentations is a perfect example of this. Alternatively, people want to just pull the plug and seize the day with no obligations at all. They want to feel a company’s values and they want instant gratification. They want to hear their own heartbeat for a change. Spiritual teacher Eckhardt Tolle advocates this viewpoint in his book, *The Power of Now*. Experiences have become the driving force for many people because it makes them feel alive.

Never before have so many people jumped from high bridges – not to kill themselves, but for fun! Bungee-jumping is just one way to push one’s limits and make one’s mark. This urge to experiment manifests itself in many contexts, such as the reality shows that appear on almost every TV channel. Jackass, an American program that targets young people, sends a clear message that the more a stunt hurts and the more grotesque it is, the more entertaining it is. Jackass resembles the world of extreme computer



Frank Wells, former President and Chief Operating Officer of The Walt Disney Company, decided to pursue his dream of being an adventurer by climbing the highest mountains on each of the world’s seven continents within a single year – a feat never previously accomplished. He scaled six peaks, but was forced to turn back near the top of Mount Everest. His mountaineering exploits were chronicled in his book, “Seven Summits” (published in 1986). A building was constructed at The Walt Disney Studios in his memory (Photograph: Scanpix)

games, where players survive the most hazardous and dangerous maneuvers – but how realistic is that?

We want to feel values and messages

The boundaries of what is permissible change every day and people are constantly experimenting. The term “Hyper-reality” is used quite often to

describe a situation in which something unreal seems to be more real than the genuine article. People can no longer distinguish between reality and fantasy; indeed, some might say that we have lost our sense of reality. Why make things difficult when you can do things virtually? Today this trend has been reversed: why experience something virtually when you can experience it for real? Climbing Mount Everest inside a PC cannot possibly approach the real thing.

When we experience something physically it becomes meaningful, credible and worthwhile. Seeking deeper meaning and not shying away from confrontation means that we demand a lot from companies and brands. We want to experience things up close and in color – otherwise it makes no sense.

We want to experience things up close – otherwise it makes no sense

The fact that we have become more confrontational and experimental is yet another reason why experiences are gaining ground; they reflect the times we live in. We spend much of life searching for a sense of meaning. A side effect of this is that we find it

difficult to settle down and start families and difficult to make important decisions; we simply do not want to limit the opportunities we cherish. Do we make the right choices? The search seems never ending. Take education, for instance, where students postpone or prolong their studies and become “eternal students”. Another example is first-time mothers, who are considerably older than they used to be.

Experiences are the Answer to Our Dreams!

True stories and experiences are becoming the driving force of human behavior, which makes them the driving force of internal and external communication.

Experiences drive human behavior, so they also drive communication

If companies want to communicate effectively with employees and consumers they must provide authentic experiences designed to engage and involve. We believe that recipient-oriented media are the way of the

future and that the experience medium is one of these.

If companies are to communicate successfully they must be willing to experiment and alter their business approach. The challenge is to reassess the temporary nature of values and products and bring your values to life through messages that are brimming with vitality.

Recipient-oriented media are the way of the future

The need for personal, entertaining, instructive and enriching experiences is growing stronger all the time. We want to experience things during our spare time but we also want experiences at work, at the mall, in the

fitness center, on holiday and so forth. The increasing need for experiences and the stimuli that create them can be summarized in two words:

*hedonistic consumption*¹¹. This term was coined by the Greek philosopher Epikur (270–347 BC). Hedonistic actions are controlled by a desire to experience the greatest possible pleasure. Pleasure does not have to be egotistical; the sight of other people enjoying themselves can be equally satisfying. What characterizes a hedonist is the aesthetic pleasure gained from form rather than substance.

Experiences have become a driving force of the economy and even export items. Disneyland, Tivoli Gardens, and the Hard Rock Café are typical examples. Experiences create value no matter where they take place – whether it is at a national, regional, local or organizational level. Festivals, hotels, restaurants, shops, museums, sports centers, design centers, businesses, schools, hospitals, etc. all attempt to provide positive experiences. In a society where fundamental and physical needs are easily satisfied, people are influenced more by sophisticated and psychological factors when deciding how to spend their money. Experiences rate very high when choosing holiday destinations, houses, banks, clothes, cars, food and entertainment, etc. The desert state of Dubai boasts a huge indoor ski center. Even more impressive is “The World” – an archipelago consisting of 300 man-made islands shaped like the continents of the world and representing over 200 nations. Such attributes prove just how valuable experiences can be when branding a city. A report from “Fast Future” and “Global Future and Foresight” reveals that Dubai is investing USD 381.4 billion in tourism and pleasure activities – a massive amount in a region known for its instability.

Museums are no longer just exhibition galleries in which visitors are told not to touch the objects on display. Today these institutions do everything in their power to bring exhibitions to life and involve visitors in various activities, because it makes the experience more memorable. Zoological gardens are a prime example. All over the globe zoos are allowing visitors to enter certain habitats for a closer look at their occupants. Miniature versions of a tropical forest, where butterflies, reptiles, snakes and crocodiles are kept in open enclosures, provide an exotic and authentic sensory experience of life in a tropical forest – right down to the sounds, smells and vegetation.

Another example is the Royal Danish Arsenal Museum in Copenhagen, which recreates authentic Middle Age environments by holding jousting tournaments. Suddenly inanimate objects such as armor, lances and coats of mail are brought to life, and visitors are transported into another world.



Two knights bring the legendary tournaments of the Middle Ages to life with horses, lances and coats of mail (Photograph: The Royal Danish Arsenal Museum)

Restaurants are no longer simply places to eat. A restaurant could be one of Hollywood Boulevard's most famous venues, or a cellar so dark that you can hardly read the menu. Only the experiences of taste and smell are important. Restaurants no longer just serve food; they work hard to provide memorable experiences. And hotels are doing the same: the Swedish hotel Jukkasjärvi, situated 200 km north of the Polar Circle and built entirely out of blocks of ice (an amazing 4,000 tons of it), attracts 14,000 visitors during the winter season. Sculptors from all over the world flock there each year in November to help decorate the hotel's 60 rooms. One of these – the bridal suite – boasts a fabulous ornamental bed carved from ice. It is adorned with reindeer skins and even has a champagne cooler made of ice! The hotel has given the kiss of life to a town that was dangerously close to being deserted.

Another example is the annual Snow-and-Ice festival in China's Liaoning province, where rough, cold weather is also put to good use. And the hotel Genueser Schiff in Germany, which arranges an exclusive "Crime Weekend" where guests can pretend to be detectives and try to unravel an Agatha Christie-type murder mystery.

The same trends are appearing in the retail industry, where shopping centers are offering experiences as well as shopping opportunities. Consumers can attend concerts, see fashion shows, watch films, entertain their children, visit restaurants, etc. A whole day flies by in these new malls. And the shops themselves no longer just have goods on their shelves; they are becoming mini experience centers where visitors can see the different products in use. This helps companies bring their values to life.

In Tokyo, Japan, a club for trendsetters called Sample Lab opened in the Iceberg Building in Harajuku. Their business concept is very simple: people love to experiment, so that is what they are encouraged to do. In the Sample Lab they can be the first to try out different products, and be inspired through their experiences. The Sample Lab mixes the concept of sampling with the idea of a membership. The 1,000 yen membership fee guarantees exclusive entrance to the lab via a special code on the member's cell phone. Once in, members are free to sample beauty products and test out exercise equipment, for instance. As a service the lab sends the feedback gathered from members back to the manufacturers. Members can only buy up to five items per visit. More information is available on <http://www.samplelab.jp>.



The impressive reception area of Sweden's Jukkasjärvi Hotel, where most of the interior design is crafted out of various types of ice. These beautifully carved and decorated structures provide a unique sensory experience (Photograph: Scanpix)

The “Shop-in-shop” concept is successful because companies have become aware of the danger of allowing externals to decide how customers should experience their products. Shop-in-shops offer two advantages: companies can control the way in which their products are presented to customers, and they can also gather direct feedback.

Bang & Olufsen shops are prime examples of this trend. The company has consciously devised an exclusive distribution strategy in order to control the total design experiences they give their customers. In B&O shops people get a total experience of how the products sound, look, feel, etc. At its head office in Denmark the company also has its own museum. By showing the evolution of its products the museum helps to bring the company’s history to life for employees and consumers alike.



A Bang & Olufsen shop, where the simple and elegant design is applied both inside and outside (Photograph: Scanpix)

In the US (and soon to be in Europe) Nike’s franchise outlets are setting the pace for the shops of the future. Nike’s values and history are brought to life in a place where visitors can play, compete and put their abilities to the test.

In 2002, Nike opened a Nike Sportsman branch in Europe. On the opening day they wanted to attract attention to their Storm collection. The aim was

to get consumers to identify with the brand and to entice them into the shop by offering them a chance to participate in a competition. Outside they took stormy-looking “action” photos of people against a true-to-life backdrop of a mountain landscape. These were then made into fun postcards that could be sent to friends and family. This concept gave the participants an almost authentic experience of Nike’s universe of values, and they could engage in those values in a humorous fashion. The Storm collection itself had been frozen in huge blocks of ice, further emphasizing Nike’s profile as a sports brand.



Nike’s shop-opening promotion, where a young man’s “Nike Storm” experience was captured in a fun photo (Photograph: 3rdDimension©)

Another example is Levi’s flagship store. Visitors to this denim paradise in San Francisco can enjoy a magnificent shop experience: they can have their jeans specially designed and tailor-made! First a computer in a darkroom scans and registers their measurements. Then the customer chooses the style and material. When they come back to collect their jeans another unique experience awaits: they are asked to spend half an hour in a Jacuzzi to shrink the jeans to fit the contours of their legs. They can then go into a special drying room to dry off. All this takes time of course, but

people are happy to do it because they get a unique pair of jeans – plus the opportunity to order more.

The flagship store is very close to the ultimate shopping experience; it brings the brand to life, and the customer becomes the focus of attention whenever he or she encounters it.

Would you mind paying a little extra for such unique treatment? This concept offers more than just service; it offers true value. Jan Croatt, who is responsible for store planning and visual merchandising in Levi’s Brand Marketing Division in San Francisco, has worked with some of the industry’s most prominent brands (Ralph Lauren/Polo, Todd Oldham and Kenneth Cole) and he points out that most shop environments do not focus on how customers are affected by design¹². Appearance is not the only factor; sound and smell are important – as well as it is how it *feels* to be wearing a pair of jeans.

The list of examples of the increasing significance of experiences is endless and covers many sectors. This illustrates beyond doubt that, since experiences are having a greater influence on people’s behavior, they will become a driving force when it comes to communication between employees and consumers.

Be Wary of Superficial Messages and Experiences

It is worth noting that not all experiences are positive. They can be like wine: good, bad, or too much altogether! Just because something works does not mean that people want more of the same. Repetition does not make experiences meaningful; only something out of the ordinary can do that. Experiences are attractive because people are looking for pleasure and satisfaction more than external recognition. So they should not be measured in terms of quantity, but of quality.

Repetition does not make experiences meaningful; only something out of the ordinary can do that.

Negative experiences (i.e. experiences for experiences’ sake) can be defined as having no purpose or connection to the company’s communication objectives, target audiences or products. A typical example of this is the growing and unbridled use of survival

courses and team-building activities. Traditional events such as company picnics and Christmas lunches can be excellent platforms for the communication of values internally, but they have no strategic relevance whatsoever. Resources are all too often used on activities that play no active role in improving communication, and this is because the different departments fail to coordinate their efforts carefully enough.

The reason why the word “event” (as in fund-raising event) rarely appears in this book is that events and happenings are only a few of the amusing gimmicks employed to create experiences. The act of crossing a moat using just a rope can push people’s boundaries. Playing football with a gigantic ball is hilarious. Moving 15 men using three beer cases and a couple of planks is a real achievement. Self confidence and team spirit are all well and good, but do they make employees feel more motivated? And do they provide more insight into company’s values – and consequently a healthier bottom line? With the aid of very few resources companies can create experiences that not only amuse, entertain and give pleasure, but which actively improve internal and consequently *external* communication.

A good example of this is the merger between Microsoft Business Solutions (formerly Navision Denmark) and Microsoft Denmark. Microsoft’s management wanted to celebrate the physical and organizational integration by creating a memorable experience that would make both the new and the old Microsoft employees feel proud. They wanted the experience to illustrate Microsoft’s values and bring their mission statement (“*To enable people and businesses throughout the world to realize their full potential*”) to life. They also wanted the employees to understand that the phrase “We have potential” actually referred to their own potential if they could work together in harmony.

On the opening day a series of social activities were arranged. These included a buddy-scheme where all former employees of Microsoft Business Solutions were given a Microsoft buddy, whose responsibility it was to show them round. All the buddies were photographed together. People were then divided into teams and given the task of assembling, as

quickly as possible, a gigantic puzzle with the words “We have potential”. Some of the team members were given the task of singing along to songs played through headphones, in the hope that their team-mates would recognize the tune. This exercise was also timed.

Last but not least, a well-known composer and singer wrote a song for Microsoft based on the “We have potential” concept and the activities the employees had experienced. This song was to be performed with the employees acting as backing singers! First the unsuspecting employees were taken to The Danish Royal Music Academy and taught how to sing the chorus; then they were taken to the Danish Broadcasting Corporation’s concert hall, where two soloists and the composer were waiting to actually record the song. At the end of the session each employee was given a CD documenting the day’s activities as a lasting memento. We should perhaps mention that the song was of such high quality that it was swiftly intercepted by a well-known singer who succeeded in making it a hit. Today the song is used as ring tones among employees, creating a lot of buzz!

This is a perfect example of how experiences can be used in entertaining ways to help employees understand and support a company’s values. Had

Communication should be experience based and consumer oriented

someone asked the employees whether they believed they could record a CD, the answer would probably have been “No”. The whole experience made them aware that, by helping each other, they could achieve a lot more than if they decided to go it alone.

Commenting on the event, Microsoft’s founder Bill Gates said, “This is a great example of how to do integrate new businesses!”

Today’s communication should be experience based and consumer oriented, and this can be achieved through interaction, dialogue, storytelling and experiences.



The employees of Microsoft in Denmark forming a choir in the Danish Broadcasting Corporation's concert hall. They recorded a song that was composed for this special occasion: "One for All, All for U", 2003 (Photograph: 3rdDimension)

Experiences used in external communication can seem overly forceful. To avoid this it is useful to examine the pitfalls of traditional communication. This has long been aimed at involving consumers through interaction. Almost all messages refer to a website or contact number in an attempt to encourage people to find out more. But providing such information is pointless unless the company first manages to put recipients in a receptive and attentive frame of mind. People may have a well developed perception of visual or aural messages, but the eternal flow of information makes it difficult to interpret and remember messages clearly.

Without a trustworthy frame of reference people are unlikely to believe what you say

Experiences on the internet are advantageous because cyberspace puts us in two places at once. It also provides countless opportunities for accessing information. However, net surfing has become a sport where one website leads to another. Almost all

websites provide links to others and before we know it we are lost in a veritable maze of information. We lose our ability to absorb, reflect and focus on things. The internet and other mass media have become so noisy, fragmented and over-gearred that communicating clearly is difficult, no matter what form the message takes.

The European Union Commission informs us that somewhere between 50 and 66% of all e-mails are now unwanted (Spam). The Commission is working on a directive designed to regulate Spam mail. Most internet users have installed pop-up programs that remove unwanted banners with ads and other noise. For these media to be fully effective they must approach people from a different angle, along paths less trodden. A telephone number and internet address cannot outweigh the disadvantages of these media.

With new media emerging almost every day the overall media picture is becoming more fragmented and confusing than ever. Moreover, public and private spaces are still being invaded by types of advertising that focus on form rather than content – a problem that industry is doing little to address. Messages should not just be glamorous; trustworthiness means everything. Companies with very sender-oriented mentalities believe that manipulating messages is their most important job. And they communicate only in print, through the TV or via similar media designed by engineers. But unless the recipients have verified the framework as being trustworthy they are unlikely to believe the messages being communicated.

Companies must be extremely conscious of the importance of living up to their values, because these are supposed to come from within. Ultimately any problems with efficiency of communication are the responsibility of the sender. Recipients want to be able to see whether companies are living up to the ethics, values and messages they communicate. People are becoming more attracted to companies that take a firm stand on issues such as social responsibility, hot topics, the environment, and quality of life. Experience-based communication creates resonance internally and externally and differs greatly from the kind of communication that only pretends to take values seriously.

Mass media use frequency as a weapon, where advertising and TV spots are shown repeatedly in an attempt to obtain the desired impact. This has made people immune to advertising and weary of commercial messages. Companies that are sender and media-oriented therefore face many challenges that are crying out to be solved.

Traditional media have become too mainstream, and this has a negative impact on the content of the messages being sent. The content always influences the choice of medium because each type has certain advantages and disadvantages.

When communicating, the first step is to decide exactly what needs to be said and in what manner, in order to reach the target audience. Messages can be divided into *content* (what you want to say) and *form* (how to formulate it)¹³. These two elements are interlinked because the content directly influences the form.

All too often companies try to brand their products using traditional media – typically print and TV. This can be compared to asking a carpenter how to build a house, and getting only one small piece of the entire jigsaw puzzle. It would be better to ask an architect because their advice at least would be broader and more impartial, and list options rather than limitations. For these companies the challenge is to break the habit of using traditional media.

The experience medium is a “do-it-yourself” medium where the content and form of messages are identical. Where traditional media are bound by pre-defined audiences (i.e. certain viewers or readers), the experience medium is infinitely more malleable. You can shape it to fit the unique needs of your target audience – and deliver it face to face.

Outdoor media are evidence that companies are trying to integrate new methods (such as movement, smells and sounds) into their marketing, but it is a half-hearted attempt to resurrect a medium that has essentially worn out its welcome. If a company can turn ordinary consumers into “walking commercials” who can move in and out of other people’s lives and social circles, they will try to do so.

Cunning Stunts, a British company specializing in renting advertising space on students’ foreheads, is a prime example. In the sales letter for this concept, Cunning Stunts stated that companies would gain “not only a unique advertising medium but also the opportunity to support debt-plagued students”. This form of advertising not only infringes on people’s private lives; it also makes puppets out of consumers. The Harley Davidson method is preferable, where people actually pay to get a Harley Davidson tattoo because the brand is such an integral part of their identity, image and lifestyle. They own the choppers but they also own the

company’s values. And these go a lot deeper than a temporary tattoo on a student’s forehead.

Concepts such as *New Media*, *Alternative Media* and even *Non Media* are prime examples of media inflation, confirming that traditional media have lost their impact. The term *Non Media* is utterly misleading because it suggests that no media are used in the communication process – not even the People medium or the experience medium. This underlines how out of touch with reality sender-oriented companies have become. They have lost sight of what really matters, which is physical meetings and face-to-face communication. Can they really have forgotten the importance of the human ingredient in communication?

Examples of alternative media are baby carriers, cinema tickets, postcards, petrol-pump grips and toilet seats. The toilet seat concept was exceptionally well received. For an advertising campaign the Danish State Football Pools had stickers produced for toilet seats saying: “There are so many things women don’t understand.” And the concept really hit the mark. The moment that men lifted the toilet seat this perfectly targeted message took them completely by surprise. Anything that can carry a message can be considered a medium, which is exactly as it should be.

The novelty effect of these new media should not be underestimated, but at some point the opportunities offered by paparazzi-type advertising which invades the consumer’s personal space will also have been totally exhausted. Consumers often experience being haunted, instead of being seduced.

While traditional communication puts consumers on the bench, Experienced-based communication gives them an opportunity to court the brand – and perhaps even fall in love with it.

TV commercials are also problematic. The communication industry has decided that these should be amusing, unpretentious or self-ironic. Viewers either ignore these commercials altogether or see them as an entertaining interlude. Thus TV ads are judged on their ability to entertain. Commercials with smart slogans; commercials featuring puppets or the ridiculous antics of country bumpkins can be entertaining, and they can increase brand awareness. But what purpose does it serve to repeat these

ads with such regularity that they become insufferable? People soon grow weary of such characters because they are little more than caricatures.

Advertising that seems totally unrelated to the real world fails to have the desired effect. Where are the puppets and the country bumpkins when the consumer is purchasing a company’s products, visiting its shops or calling its representatives? Perhaps in the shop window or on someone’s couch, if they have been impulsive enough to buy the merchandise, but is this kind of communication really credible?

The unpretentious, self-deprecating, humorous impact that puppets might have on a consumer’s perception of a product suddenly loses credibility when that self-same consumer is forced to wait 30 min to talk to a service representative. Once again, time – or rather *quality time* – is a crucial criterion for success. And we only become aware of it when our experiences fail to meet our expectations.

So when is something worth spending time on? The answer is *when it helps us to forget time altogether*. It is when we have fun or feel fascinated, surprised, enriched, or in some other way experience something interesting and instructive. It is a mistake to portray a company as being open and easily accessible if the real-life experience contradicts this. If consumers feel neglected, and if the communication does not match the real-life experience, customers will feel as though they are wasting their time. The images or ideas communicated through traditional media are simply too superficial.

As experience architects, we believe that companies should acknowledge the shortcomings of traditional, sender-oriented, media-controlled messages – and learn from them. Messages have far more impact when they motivate the recipient to such a degree that they end up becoming a *participant* (Fig. 8).



Fig. 8 From recipient to participant

As recipients we do not want to be passive observers, we want to be active and we want to be able to draw our own conclusions. One-dimensional or two-dimensional, sender-oriented messages make brands and products seem even shallower. Traditional mass media no longer provide the desired effect, but they can still be useful for attracting attention and increasing awareness. The problem is that they do not work particularly well on their own. They must be combined with other, less traditional media to produce the best response and provide the highest value-add.

Numerous marketing methods have emerged during recent years. These include *Lifestyle Marketing*, *Sponsorship Marketing*, *Guerrilla Marketing*, *Buzz Marketing*, *Loyalty Marketing*, *Ambush Marketing*, *Real Marketing*, *Interactive Marketing*, *Cause Marketing*, *Social Marketing*, *Experiential Marketing*, *Event Marketing* and even *Invisible Marketing*. So much jargon takes your breath away!

The Experience Medium has always existed because it is anchored in reality

At the risk of making the reader feel even more disheartened we would like to add our particular brand of communication to the melting pot: the experience medium. While other types of media are relatively inanimate, this one is vibrantly alive because it is

anchored in *the reality of the participants*.

Prior to the 1990s, companies were not particularly aware of the advantages of using staging, storytelling and experiences as communication tools. But since then, things have gathered momentum. Companies are learning that consumers want to be involved in experiences involving authentic and useful messages. However, those experiences must never be allowed to become superficial or manipulative, or be taken to the extremes. Clever concepts such as “outdoor living” and “living advertising” are not enough to bring an experience to life, but engaging a whole army of spin-doctors, designers, stylists and interior designers is not the solution either. This can make the experience seem over-staged and manipulative.

It is crucial to involve the heart as well as the mind when communicating, since this is the only way to ensure that the content of the message always controls its form. If the content lacks authenticity the experience will lack credibility, because without heart, messages cannot be brought to life. Use staging and involve the senses, story telling and symbolic acts in the

experience, and the recipients will welcome it as the genuine article. They will feel involved and motivated, and they will begin to interact.

How Do You Define An Experience?

Is everything an experience? Ellen L. O’Sullivan and Kathy J. Spangler offer a comprehensive answer to this question in their book *Experience Marketing*¹⁴. According to them, many products and most service companies incorporate an element of experience in what they offer – whether it is part of the design or the services themselves. For instance, a PlayStation game typically offers a *design or content* experience, while many banks – with their open office environments – offer a welcoming *service* experience.

Experiences can also add value to a product. Each year the famous Carlsberg–Tuborg brewery (in collaboration with an association for people suffering from muscular dystrophy) arranges a series of open air events in Denmark called “green concerts” (Green being a type of pilsner). And by borrowing the values associated with the experience, they manage to add value to their products. The sports sponsorship approach is very popular in this particular market segment.

Finally, an experience can also be an independent entity; the very core of what a company offers. The Tivoli amusement park in the center of Copenhagen, Denmark is a perfect example of this. Companies that arrange experiences, thereby serving other companies, also belong to this segment. In their book, Ellen L. O’Sullivan and Kathy J. Spangler point out that the experience industry is divided into three segments: experience integrators, experience borrowers, and experience creators (Table 1).

Experience Integrators	Borrow experiences	Experience Creators
Incorporate experiences into their products	Service providers who sponsors experiences to add value to their core competencies, thereby increasing customer satisfaction and differentiating their products from the competition.	Service companies whose core competency is to create experiences

Table 1 *The experience industry (O’Sullivan and Spangler)*

According to O'Sullivan and Spangler, the factors that uniquely differentiate *experiences* from *elements of experiences* of a product or a service are:

- The fact that individuals participate or are involved in consumption.
- Participants are engaged physically, mentally, emotionally, socially or spiritually.
- An exchange of knowledge, skills, memory or emotions obtained through participation.
- The knowledge and perception of having experienced an activity or an event.
- A conscious effort to target people's psychological or inner needs.

Staying at the Hotel Genueser Schiff in Germany would not have been much of an experience without the crime-solving element. And if the guests had not been given the opportunity to engage themselves physically, mentally and socially as a group, there would have been no experience at all. Certainly no other hotel offers people a chance to act out their fantasy of being the world's smartest detective!

Only when an inner need is fulfilled does an event become a true experience. For example, having your car checked by a motor vehicle inspector is not an experience; it is a service, because there is no personal involvement in the inspection. A stay at the Hotel Plaza cannot be classed as an experience either. It is a service, because guests are not involved in anything special and the hotel makes no attempt to fulfill people's psychological needs.

Chapter 4

Individuals and Experiences

Individuals and Experiences

The battle for attention. This statement is often used by companies and advertising agencies. The market has become a veritable sea of information, where companies need to be more visible than everyone else in order to stay afloat at all.

First you must attract attention; then you must keep it

“See me, hear me!” Why all this focus on attention?

Attention could be defined as a readiness to receive and react to sensory impressions. Therefore the challenge is to put people in this state of mind. Unfortunately, attracting their attention is not enough if the objective is to make your values and messages easy to comprehend, and to encourage customers to value your products or services. To achieve this you must attract their attention and *keep* it.

Gaining people’s attention can create awareness, recognition and visibility. But having done this you must find some way to make them remember you whenever the need arises. One of the basic elements in the creation of positive experiences and attitudes is the ability to put people in a receptive state of mind. We use the term “favorably disposed” to describe the relationship between a person and their surroundings, i.e. the world as they perceive it.

Make people favorably disposed towards your company, and they will be more receptive to your messages and more willing to allow you to influence their attitudes and beliefs. If there is no motivation to process your messages, they will be overlooked or ignored entirely. Basically the *extent* of motivation is crucial to understanding.

This chapter sheds light on the role experiences can play in influencing the recipient. We will examine their strongest effects and relate these to the perception process. We will also show how – by making active participants out of passive observers – experiences can improve learning and increase understanding.

The Role of Experiences in the Perception Process

How do experiences influence the perception process, and how do they affect people’s perception compared to other types of media?

Being Favorably Disposed

The perception process is closely related to the traditional S-S-R communication model. Perception is a human process, where several stimuli are chosen, organized and interpreted. We receive some stimuli (S), which our organism senses (S), and these provoke a response (R). The perception process is actually far more complicated than this; more elements are involved before the perception becomes real and the message is recognized (Fig. 9).

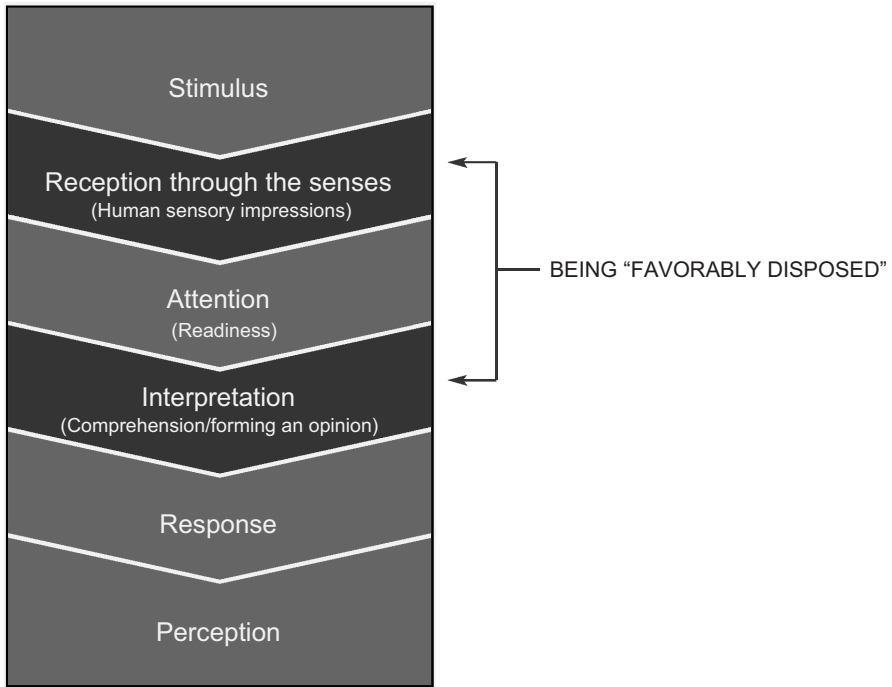



Fig. 9 The perception process (3rdDimension©)

The model illustrates an important point; that before we become aware of stimuli we need to be favorably disposed towards them. And before sensory impressions can begin to make sense we need time to process, interpret and digest the information.



We have become
averse to “noise” and
advertising

Naturally, the value of being favorably disposed depends on the complexity of the message. If the recipient is in a “noisy” environment, or the information is conveyed in such an environment, then even the simplest messages will fall by the wayside. Conversely, if the

physical environment is attractive, appealing and meaningful and the person’s interest is aroused, they will be far more receptive to the information.

Since we live in an audiovisual society rife with communication, in which our sensory thresholds were breached long ago, we have become averse to “noise” and advertising. We do not view commercial messages favorably. And we are so used to advertising that we have begun to ignore it altogether.

Traditional sender-oriented companies and media have attempted to counter this reaction through such tricks as block advertising, storytelling, provocation, contradiction and surprise. But this has exacerbated the problem because now it takes even more to make an impression. TV and radio ads are battling for our attention, but because we are distracted by other things or are involved in other activities, we automatically block them out. This makes them worthless.

Companies find it difficult to make an impression via traditional channels because these only target the eyes and ears. Since our information filters are hard to penetrate, and since and only a few of many stimuli are perceived and actually interpreted, companies must take the consumers’ selectivity into account. Very few stimuli make a mental impact in the noisy, audiovisual context. This is why the experience media is becoming such a sound alternative, since experiences allow companies to engage all five senses in the communication process.

The increasing popularity of experiences reflects a desire to abandon the superficial in favor of something deeper and more sincere. This section of the book shows that experiences are in fact an art form which can motivate

people to get involved and interact. Unfortunately the methods used by advertising agencies create distance rather than intimacy and, whether they will admit it or not, their soulless and often distorted images actually vulgarize communication. In their cultivation of technique and abstract concepts (resulting in pseudo messages) they have unwittingly undermined the fact that reality has a three-dimensional vitality. Things have changed, and movement, sensory perceptions and authenticity are far more indicative of this day and age.

Meet People Physically

The term “communication” originates from the Latin word “communis”, which means “common”. It can be defined as an exchange between people. It can also be described as a circular process where people constantly receive messages and signals from each other, which they then interpret and react to. Marketing communication consciously attempts to manipulate the target group in order to fulfill a certain objective. This kind of communication is asymmetric, because the sender attempts to influence the recipient. Moreover, the two parties meet each other on different levels, which can complicate matters.

Experiences are based on physical meetings, making them far more trustworthy and personal

Being based as it is on the first physical meeting, the experience medium offers several advantages. It gives companies a chance to meet their customers at the same level, and an

opportunity to convey their messages in a way that seems sincere, trustworthy and personal rather than manipulative.

One way to attract people’s attention is to engage not just their sight and hearing but also the rest of their senses at the moment of communication.

Even when we say and do nothing we are still communicating

Avoid bombarding them with commercial media and instead, meet them face to face in a “brand vacuum”. Create a unique space where customers can spend some quality time bonding with your brand or product – and give them something to remember. Choose

the location carefully and stage the experience properly, because the non-verbal aspects of the physical meeting play a critical role too.

Even when we say and do nothing we are still communicating. In real life there are no boundaries. Boundaries between individuals, companies and the surrounding world are easily spotted and just as easily broken down. This is a consequence of the information society. Only advertising, the internet, and items like business cards have a boundary or “surface”.

It is dangerous to hide behind a false image because when people uncover the real one, they will either be extremely disappointed or pleasantly surprised. Ask yourself this: What kind of experience does your company give people? Is it trustworthy and authentic? Do all meetings held with colleagues or external contacts live up to the signals you send? Physical meetings are an important tool and it is wise to be conscious of their value. Just ask a salesperson whether they would prefer to send product or service information to a potential customer rather than presenting it at a physical meeting!

Physical meetings are
a valuable tool

Sir Richard Branson, founder of Virgin, enthusiastically advocates that his company’s management style should be supported by his own behavior. His philosophy is to immerse himself in a new venture until he understands the ins and outs of the business, at which time he hands it over to a capable managing director and financial controller. They are then given a stake in the company and expected to make it fly. Branson knows that expansion through the creation of additional, discrete legal entities not only protects the Virgin group but also gives people a sense of involvement and loyalty – particularly when full authority and minority share holdings are offered to the managers of subsidiaries.

Branson is proud of the fact that Virgin managers have made millions; he does not want his best people to take off and start ventures elsewhere. He is quoted as saying, “...our first priority should be the people who work for the companies, then the customers, then the shareholders. Because if the staff is motivated, then the customers will be happy, and the shareholders will then benefit from the company’s success.”

Simple rituals like going walkabout can make staff feel involved and appreciated and make them more receptive to messages filtering down from the management. Symbolic actions do not have to be staged, nor

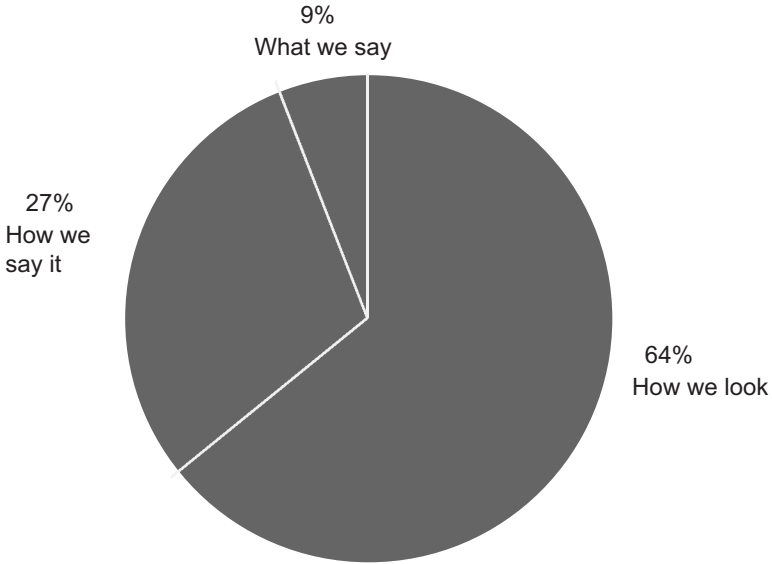


Richard Branson has crossed the Atlantic and the Pacific Ocean in a hot air balloon, breaking all existing speed and distance records. He has also attempted to circumnavigate the globe – a symbolic action closely related to Virgin’s mission (Photograph: Scanpix)

should they be forced on people; they can be an expression of simple, direct and honest communication, where behavior and experiences promote dialogue and understanding throughout the organization.

This may sound simple, but many people still fail to comprehend it. Surveys indicate that our attitudes and perceptions of other people are dictated by *what* they say, *how* they say it and even how they *look*. The model below illustrates how important it is to control the way you communicate and the manner in which you are perceived¹⁵. People are very conscious about verbal communication, but they often underestimate the non-verbal factor, which is crucial to the overall impression.

As the model illustrates, up to 90% of messages are conveyed through non-verbal communication and attitudes, i.e. what people see, hear and feel. As individuals we must be aware of whether we are conveying ambiguous signals and messages when communicating in general. Our words may fool people but our body language rarely does.



SMSs, emails, messaging and phone calls are the most popular forms of communication, both at home and at work. They are fast, easy to use and make no demands whatsoever on our non-verbal communication skills. When everything is in black and white, what is there to misinterpret? The answer is potentially 90%. Professor Albert Mehrabian’s research into the impact of verbal and non-verbal communication on decoding messages indicates that by failing to address these aspects when communicating, companies unconsciously deprive themselves of the opportunity to increase the effect of their messages by 90%. A thought-provoking discovery!

Companies unconsciously deprive themselves of the opportunity to increase the effect of their messages by 90%

An article in Business Week revealed that, rather than enhancing communication, today’s electronic media actually cause misunderstandings.

A survey performed by Justin Kruger, a professor at the Stern School of Business in New York, reveals that over half of all email users fail to

understand the tone and intention of the mails they receive. This problem is exacerbated when the mail comes from a manager. This is the downside of electronic media. But most companies use traditional media without thinking twice.

Why not break this vicious cycle? Try to enhance communication by getting people to meet face-to-face rather than using the phone, and by dramatizing messages. If you want employees to realize that they are communicating too much via paper, and that this is making certain processes unnecessarily heavy, what kind of symbolic action could you use to communicate this message? Imagine collecting all the papers received by your department over the past 2 months, and showing it to your employees. Would that not reinforce your reasoning?

Telephones, TV transmissions, emails and other forms of technically conveyed communication are relevant when trying to maintain and develop good relations, but they are only a vehicle for this. They facilitate a psychological contract with recipients. This contract does not become meaningful until it is physical. Genuine and positive relationships can only be established when two parties meet, bond and understand each other. At the end of the day, being able to remember someone's face or build a relationship that closely resembles friendship is what really matters.

Relations and the Power of Various Media

Different types of promotions and media have been divided into various groups based on Professor Otto Ottesen's model. This shows how the experience is positioned as a form of communication, compared to other media. The model illustrates the value of meeting people in person.

According to Ottesen, communication can be divided into two main criteria:

How Many People Are Being Targeted (One or Many)

Individual communication involves only one person, thus the message can be tailored to the particular recipient.

Mass communication comprises episodes involving multiple recipients.

Whether the Communication is Personal or Impersonal

Personal communication involves generating a dialogue. Symbols of communication are produced by one or more participants during the exchange, and the recipients have the opportunity to provide feedback.

Impersonal communication takes place through channels such as the TV and printed media. Unlike personal communication, the recipient has no opportunity to provide immediate feedback.

We believe that Otto Ottesen has overlooked two important criteria: the physical qualities of the media, and the power of symbolic actions. The more physical they are, and the more methods you employ, the greater their impact is. We would like to expand on Ottesen’s media comparison by adding the verbal and non-verbal parameters mentioned by Albert Mehrabian – and taking these a step further (Fig. 10).

Relations and the power of various media

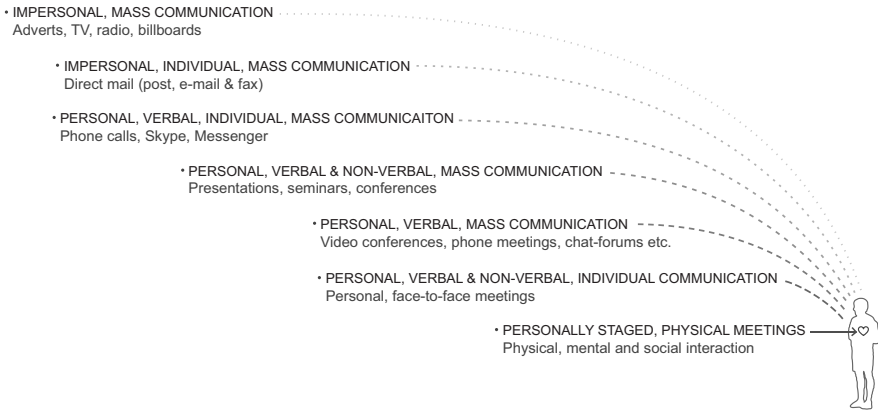


Fig. 10 Relations and the power of various media (3rdDimension©)

In a personal dialogue there can be major differences in perception and interpretation, depending on whether the exchange takes place on the phone or face-to-face. As the model demonstrates, the most effective media

**Genuine relationships
can only be forged
when two parties
meet and bond**

(measured in terms of relations and exposure) is the personally staged, physical meeting. Later in this chapter we will explore the importance of being able to work with the mental, physical and social spaces – as illustrated in the EET model.

Why distance yourself from your target group? Why not meet the people you are trying to target? Technical advancements combined with an explosive development in the IT sector have made it easier than ever to

contact people – at far less cost. Personal sales and relationship marketing have often been the reserve of the manufacturer’s market (B2B), because the volume of sales outweighs the expense of having someone do the job. Personal sales are effective, but only in the consumer market (B2C). So why not try meeting consumers on their own turf? If other companies can do this, so can yours. The growing use of experience marketing shows that more and more companies are venturing out to meet their target audiences and achieving positive results.

It is a paradox that most marketing seeks to facilitate a psychological contract with recipients, yet the media used is one-way and totally impersonal. Companies try to get people to relate to their values through printed advertising, TV and outdoor advertising, but the bonds created via these media are flimsy. Why not go one step further by establishing a physical bond between company and recipient? If nothing else, this will help you build stronger relationships, because when recipients feel involved they will find it much easier to relate your values.

The time you devote to recipients must be spent wisely in order to create good experiences. The longer the exposure and the more quality time you can provide, the greater the quality of the contact will be (i.e. the more influence you are likely to have on them).

Retail is probably one of the sectors in which businesses have long been conscious of the power of physical meetings and of integrating sound, light, smell and interior design into the experience¹⁶. This approach puts shoppers in a positive frame of mind, which makes them stay longer and purchase more. Retailers have also recognized that experiences can be highly motivational. After all, why buy a pair of Adidas shoes in a sports shop when you can buy them via the internet at half the price? The answer is *for the experience*. People *want* to be entertained and they enjoy interacting with others.

Shop decorators are aware that if they can make good use of light and sound and create vibrant, inviting displays, they have a very good chance of attracting attention and generating sales. Take a bakery, for instance. The smell of newly baked bread and cakes – and the way they are displayed – is very attractive. A survey published in the *Journal of Marketing* concluded that smell can improve the customer’s perception of both the environment and the products on sale¹⁷. Smell also encourages them to buy more and return again and again. Indeed, retailers have long been aware that a welcoming environment breeds loyal and satisfied

customers who are inclined to pay more for goods than they otherwise might have done.

Communication as a Motivator

People look for experiences that move them, so communication must be designed to put them in a positive frame of mind. This is an important catalyst in the perception process and it can be used both externally and internally to break down people’s defenses and make them receptive to sensory impressions. There is no better way to ensure that they interpret your messages correctly, and remember them.

When communication strikes a positive chord it will be favorably received

Feelings and attitudes are crucial to the learning process because they influence our ability to process information. If we feel negative or stressed when the information is being delivered, it affects our perception. The body’s stress hormones – adrenalin and

cortisone – have a negative impact on the brain, reducing our ability to learn and remember. But if we are in a positive frame of mind our neurons are stimulated, which makes us more receptive and better able to learn.

Gaining people’s attention is not the ultimate goal; you need to grab their attention and retain it. If you can make them feel positive and expectant, they will connect with you and remember your messages. In an age where companies and brands seem identical, the only way to make your brand stand out is through meeting people and connecting with them. Break your old habits and ask yourself this: When communicating, do we focus enough on getting people to feel favorably disposed towards our products or services?

As we will demonstrate later in this book, the physical environment or “moment of delivery” is crucial when working with experiences. However, the physical environment only makes people feel favorably disposed on the outside. The real trick is to motivate them on the inside. Experiences that lift people out of the humdrum of everyday life will leave them feeling enriched, wiser or happier – all of which produce a positive reaction.

From Observer to Volunteer

Three kinds of recipients are involved in physical meetings: observers, players and volunteers. As the table below indicates, the closer you can get to the recipient, the more important you will become and the greater your influence will be (Fig. 11).



Fig. 11 Types of participation (3rdDimension©)

The Observer: Passive Involvement



Passive observers have no direct influence on the message or the experience. Their presence allows them some indirect influence however, because they may clap or laugh while the message is being communicated.

Passive observers have no direct influence on the message or the experience

Passive observers are involved on a mental level only, engaging their minds rather than their bodies. This form of involvement is reactive and its mechanics can be likened to an exhibition or happening, where

recipients passively observe the activities in much the same way as visitors to an art gallery would study the paintings. At this level of involvement any transfer of meaning will largely be based on the person's perceptions of what is being communicated and their subjective interpretation (based on personal frames of reference). There is a risk that they might misinterpret the information, but this can be dispelled at the active participation level.

The pitfalls in experiences are not dissimilar to those in the art world: art can quickly become elitist, enjoyed by only the very few when presented in art galleries. But such visits are no guarantee that the observer will open their eyes to art. Sometimes the encounter is only superficial because the visitor is perfectly aware that they cannot afford to purchase any of the creations – nor do they appreciate them fully. Art that is difficult to relate to is often perceived as masking the artist's fundamental fear of questions such as 'What?' and 'Why?'

Picasso often warned against over-analyzing art, believing that it was more important to enter into its spirit rather than just its form. Feelings and intuition provide greater experiences and more insight than words and pictures do. So companies should try to avoid staging aesthetic and gallery-like experiences and focus on getting people into the spirit of things instead.

When art installations are incorporated into experiences they provoke only passive participation – one example being Scandic hotels, which chose to advertise at a golf fair. Rather than taking the traditional approach by manning their stand with salespeople armed to the teeth with brochures, Scandic chose to build a "real" hotel room with all the standard facilities. The centerpiece of the installation was a double bed featuring two pajama-clad guests. This unconventional arrangement stopped the visitors in their tracks. And although the installation was passive, it helped Scandic to dispel a number of notions held by Scandinavians regarding the standard of the interiors of their hotel rooms.

The Player: Active Involvement



When people are actively involved they influence the experiences they are given and those they would like to have. This involvement corresponds to an *environmental theater experience*, where the actors and the audience occupy the same space and the audience is involved in the performance. This has a much greater impact than other kinds of theater because the recipients help to create the experience¹⁸. When they participate physically and mentally they remember and value the performance far more than they otherwise would have done.

This level of involvement is preferable because profound and active participation ensures that messages are received as they were meant to be.

Recipients can influence the experiences they are given and those they would like to have

This communication form – which is characterized by dialogue and the opportunity to obtain feedback – is reminiscent of interpersonal communication. The fact that the communication is limited to the here-and-now also puts it in the interpersonal category, but this has

nothing to do with senders and recipients in the traditional sense of the word; rather people communicating on the same level.

It is common knowledge that test-drives help to sell cars, but the question is *how* they do this. A former Chief Executive of General Motors in the US offered the following answer: “Test drives and other face-to-face communication are crucial. To compete today, you have to grab not only the consumer’s eye but also other parts of their bodies – like their butts.”

With active participation, messages are received as they were meant to be received

is *how* they do this. A former Chief Executive of General Motors in the US offered the following answer: “Test drives and other face-to-face communication are crucial. To compete today, you have to grab not only the consumer’s eye but also other parts of their bodies – like their butts.”

The Volkswagen car manufacturer has made experiences part of their marketing strategy by allowing potential buyers to test-drive their cars. Volkswagen arranged a competition known as the VW TDI Cup (Turbo Diesel Injection), with the purpose of getting people to try out the new VW diesel cars. Rather than offering them a traditional test-drive they created a unique experience designed to draw attention to the car's excellent road-holding qualities and low diesel consumption.

The TDI Cup was basically a petrol-saving competition with local and national prizes. One of the key elements of the experience was the computer in the dashboard which, among other things, told participants how much petrol they were consuming on the selected route. The routes they followed were carefully planned to provide the best possible driving experience: on the way to the turnaround point, drivers could simply enjoy the ride and test the car's road-holding qualities. When they arrived at the turnaround point they were welcomed by an experience guide, who reset their computers. And when they returned to their car dealers, their diesel consumption was logged and registered on the dealers' websites.

Naturally the participants became totally immersed in the experience, many of them attempting to improve their results by driving more than one campaign car! Some stayed behind to get more information from the dealer's representatives. Others returned that same weekend to check whether they had been knocked off the board by the other competitors. The experience impressed people so much that they told their friends and acquaintances about it, thereby attracting even more participants. These players became valuable ambassadors. The campaign became a pastime for true VW enthusiasts, who followed the TDI Cup as it toured the country in order to rejoin the fun and further improve their results.

Another element in the TDI Cup was the dealer's alliance with a third party. In cooperation with the periodical, *Money & Private Finances*, a "Financial Doctor" stand was established, where participants could have their own cars economy impartially compared to TDI cars. This documentation provided a number of good arguments that drivers might use when broaching the idea of buying a new car with their partners.

Many retailers and tradesmen organize competitions in order to attract people. However, there is a fine line between positive and negative experiences. Those who use competitions solely to collect information for their databases are skating on very thin ice. This is true, even if the fine print states that they reserve the right to contact customers with a

non-binding offer. Imagine a bank that, in connection with opening a new branch, offers people the chance to win a prize and then proceeds to use the data obtained for a telemarketing campaign: “Hello there! You entered our competition. We haven’t found a winner yet, but would you like to come and have a chat with us?” This approach would be disastrous. But if people had felt that the bank had given them a positive experience (like the TDI Cup), they would have felt that they owed the bank something. The psychological aspect is crucial when attempting to develop a relationship after the initial introduction.

The Volunteer: Social Interaction



Good experiences are those that move you to the extent that you simply must share them with others. Experiences of a social nature create a volunteer effect, where the attraction is so strong that people voluntarily look for messages and spread the word to others.

Social experiences create a volunteer effect

The nature of the experience changes according to whether we are alone, in contact with the sender, or interacting with other participants. In social contexts other people’s reactions, moods and opinions can influence our perception of the information. If our companions are favorably disposed, we are likely to feel the same way. And if other people approve of something, we tend to follow suit. We all seek advice or share our experiences from time to time because we need to have our opinions and perceptions confirmed by others.

Companies can create a social context by creating small islands within the experience zone where people can meet to chat, discuss the messages or talk to representatives. In a theater a large part of the experience is the

Messages that are brought to life create social interaction between the sender and the recipient

ambience itself. During the intermission, audience members discuss the performance. Since everyone notices different things, an exchange of opinions can enhance the overall experience.

When companies create and stage experiences, their actions and behavior help to bring their messages and values to life. And the social interaction between sender and recipient follows quite naturally.

The nature of the experience varies according to whether the participants are alone or with children, in contact with the sender, or just interacting with other participants. No matter what the occasion, the fact is that people are very susceptible to the moods, opinions and reactions of others.

In their book on experience marketing, Behrer and Larsson discuss the various protective mechanisms that we have inherited from Mother Nature, which shield us from the barrage of stimuli that constantly assaults us. Our acceptance of messages depends on whether they correspond to our expectations, evaluations and interests. The experience itself, and the effects of being in an interactive forum, help to break down these protective mechanisms.

Behrer and Larsson describe how the *social suggestion* that emerges in a community of values helps to improve the acceptance and recollection of messages¹⁹. First, people become physically, mentally and socially involved; then they become favorably disposed; then they voluntarily spread the word. This makes the message more powerful and easier to process and disseminate. Even though the experience medium is usually directed towards only a percentage of the target audience (contra traditional media), this is outweighed by the power of its impact. Experiences can spread messages through channels considered impossible to penetrate with conventional commercial messages – namely the channels that exist between people. We all know that the most credible kind of marketing takes place through word of mouth, so why not use this method?

Consider for a moment one of the most efficient venues for experiences in Northern Europe – the Roskilde Festival. The Roskilde Festival Organization is unique in that the majority of its employees are volunteers who are more than happy to work for free in the festival area. In fact the organization often has more volunteers than they actually need. The festival

also benefits from an organized network of 1,000 people who voluntarily advertise the festival all over Europe. They are the festival’s most important marketing asset. Spokesman for the festival, Esben Danielsen, has stated that 44% of the visitors have heard about it from their friends and acquaintances. This proves that experiences can move people so profoundly that they see any chance to contribute to it as greatly rewarding.

The Ambassador Effect

An important advantage of experiences – the TDI Cup being an excellent example – is that they have such a strong impact that people cannot wait to share their impressions with friends and acquaintances. And they remember and talk about them for some time. The model below illustrates the ambassador effect, and is inspired by a similar model dealing with the cinema (Fig. 12).

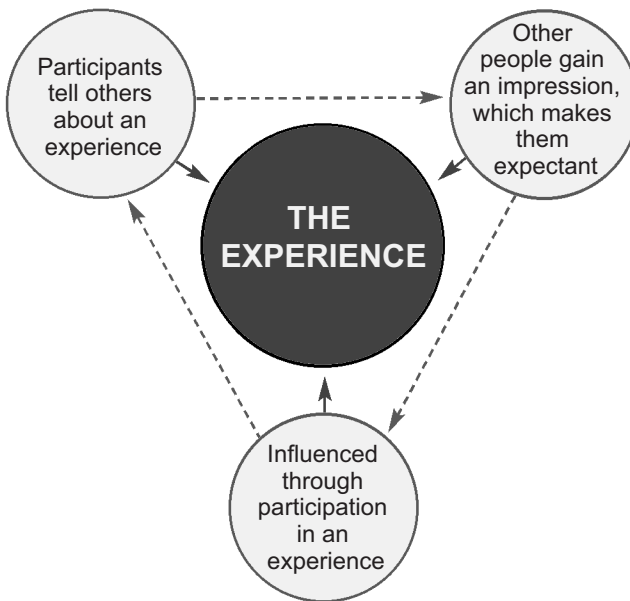


Fig. 12 The ambassador effect (3rdDimension©)

Chapter 7 of this book focuses on the importance of enhancing the value of the ambassador effect by giving participants some kind of symbolic object to take home in order to promote a dialogue and help them spread your messages.

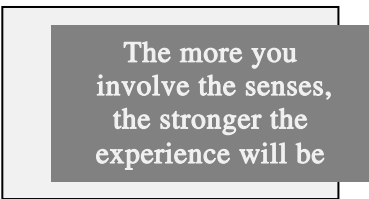
A survey performed by the Keller Fay Group reveals that the most important channel for exchanging information is through word of mouth (WOM). 70% of communication takes place face to face, 19% is via the telephone, and the rest is divided between the TV and the internet. An opt-in online survey of over 1100 event attendees in late 2007 performed by the Event Marketing Institute (EMI) shows that a positive experience makes 80% wanting to recommend the experience and tell it to friends and family. And among the 80% the majority of 63% would tell it in person. Only 13% would tell it by home phone, 13% by mobile phone and 9% would use the internet or text messages. The physical meeting and meeting your audiences face-to-face is the most valuable tool in creating viral impacts.

According to the seventh annual Edelman Trust Barometer 2006, a survey of nearly 2,000 opinion leaders in 11 countries, the most credible source of information about a company is now “a person like me”. In the U.S., trust in “a person like me” increased from 20% in 2003 to 68% today. Opinion leaders also consider rank-and-file employees more credible spokespersons than corporate CEOs (42% vs. 28% in the U.S.).²⁰

“We have reached an important juncture, where the lack of trust in established institutions and figures of authority has motivated people to trust their peers as the best sources of information about a company,” says Richard Edelman, president and CEO, Edelman.

Experience, Engage and Transform

There are three kinds of involvement: physical, mental and social. The level of involvement and quality of the meeting increases when participants are involved on all three levels. Ensure this and you will influence all of their senses and improve their ability to learn (Fig. 13).



The more you involve the senses, the stronger the experience will be

When recipients become physically and socially involved they perceive messages exactly as the sender intended. They also become more motivated, which increases the likelihood of them understanding the information and passing it on.

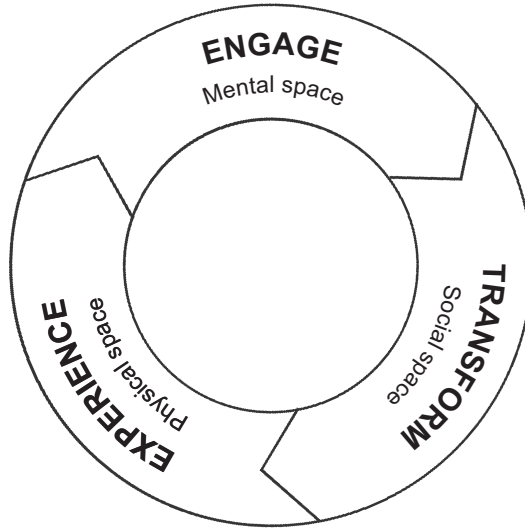


Fig. 13 The EET model (3rdDimension©)

The more you involve the senses, the stronger the experience will be. And the more you involve the recipient, the more important and active their role will be in the communication. From observers they will become players and ultimately, volunteers. But do remember that employees or consumers are not the final link in the value chain; they are an integral part of the communication process with the ability to carry your messages far and wide.

Sensory Perception

We use our senses to take our bearings, interpret information and communicate with our surroundings and each other. The brain’s complex

We use our senses to interpret and communicate with our surroundings

system of neurons and neural pathways enables us to receive signals from our sensory organs, process them and produce reactions. We perceive things through our five senses. Sensory perception is a process which, being part of our consciousness, takes place

in the brain, and it can be triggered by external conditions or internal circumstances. Our senses help us to experience and form opinions about things, and to relate to each other and the world in general (Fig. 14).

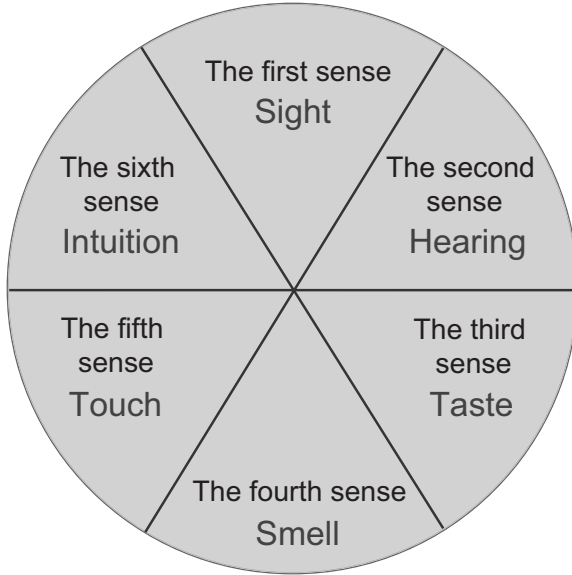


Fig. 14 Senses (3rdDimension©)

We also use our senses to satisfy our needs – whether physiological, psychological or determined by social conditions. Being windows to the interior and exterior world, our senses are the key to our hearts, minds, emotions and intellects. The number of senses stimulated and the intensity of the experience are inextricably linked, so the more senses you can involve, the more intense your messages will be.

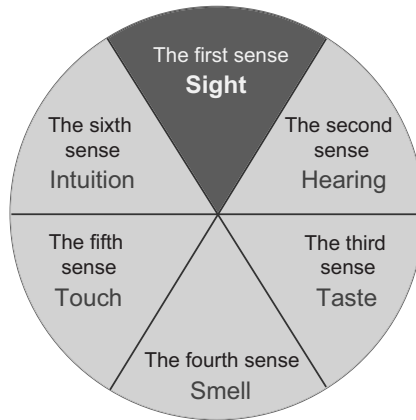
The number of senses stimulated and the intensity of the experience are inextricably linked.

Even though the focus of communication is often directed towards sight and hearing, these senses are the most significant when trying to influence recipients. Smell is one of the most powerful of the five senses, with the ability to trigger memories and evoke feelings faster and more

effectively than the others. The following section examines the strengths of each of the five senses and shows how necessary they are for communication.

Senses open up the world around us – and that makes a world of difference!

Sight



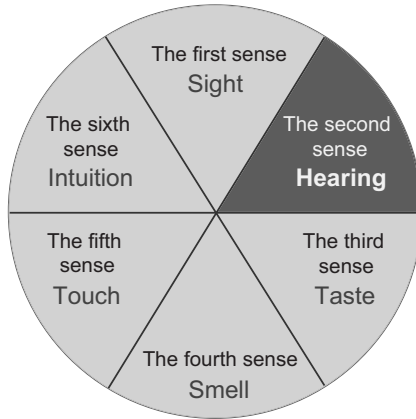
We use our sight to pick up that part of electromagnetic radiation known as light. Humans have three receptors geared to receive three kinds of light: red, green and blue. Due to contrast differences, light intensity and a combination of the two, we can distinguish some 10,000 different nuances.

Much of our perception is determined by the appearance of things, which is why companies are very conscious of the color of their logos, products, company cars, uniforms, etc. The choice of colors is also influenced by the culture. In the West, red is associated with danger, anger and warmth, whereas elsewhere it is associated with trustworthiness and other values.

We rely a great deal on our sight; even as children we are taught to be critical and to analyze and interpret what we see. Without sight it would be difficult for us to function and communicate. Take traffic, for instance, where everything is regulated through the use of signposts and traffic lights.

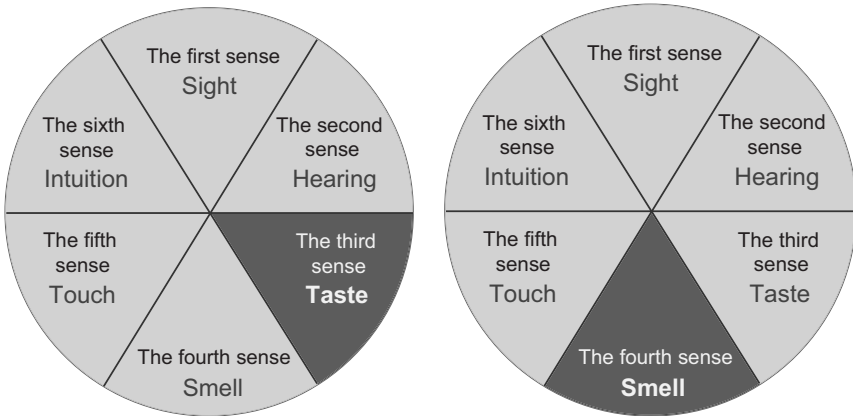
Hearing

Hearing is another crucial sense. We use it to pick up sound waves full of all sorts of information. We also communicate through sound – in the form of language, tone of voice, slang, etc. We describe the world and express moods and feelings through language, and also through music. Celebrated film director George Lucas, father of the Star Wars series, has said that sound makes up 50% of a good film²¹. When Lucas saw *The Empire*



Strikes Back in 1982, he was so disappointed with the sound quality that he asked his own sound studio manager to improve the soundtrack. And this is how THX – the most commonly-used sound system in cinemas today – was developed.

Smell and Taste



In contrast to sight (which involves only three receptors) our noses have 350 receptors that provide access to more than 10,000 different smells. Smell was actually our most important sense back in the days where we still resembled apes, but as our posture became more upright we became increasingly reliant on our sight. Smell remains important though – particularly in connection with food and sex. This sense is directly linked to our cerebrum. Of all the five senses, smell is particularly important

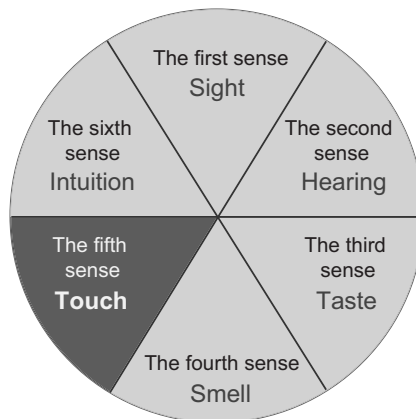
because it is directly linked with the limbic system, which controls our feelings and memories²².

For most animals the sense of smell plays an important role when it comes to reactions, self-preservation and sexual behavior. No other sense is as effective at triggering emotionally oriented associations. If we were to register something significant – such as the smell of burning electrics – we would immediately be on the alert and ready to act. At the other end of the scale, just a whiff of fir or Christmas cake triggers an immediate association with Christmas and cozy winter nights.

When it comes to smell, women can recognize up to 25% more smells than men. Our ability to smell deteriorates with age however; at age 50 we can smell only half as much as a child can, and by the time we reach 70 we have only one eighth of the ability of a 40-year-old. This is probably why elderly people complain that food does not taste as good as it did when they were younger.

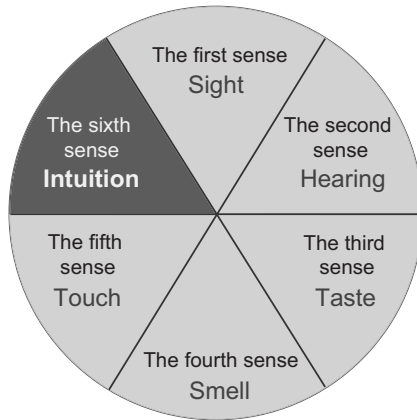
Did you know that 80% of the taste in a meat sauce can be attributed to smell? It is also interesting to consider that freeze-dried Nescafé does not smell of coffee, so the last thing the manufacturers do before sealing the can is to add a coffee aroma! The smell of fresh coffee is there the first time that you break the seal, but that is the only time you will encounter it. Without the sense of smell, the food experience would be very dull indeed. And the world would be a sadder place!

The Sense of Touch



We use our sense of touch to determine such things as proportion and size and to register pressure, texture, temperature and pain. If we ever experience the pain of touching a hotplate on a cooker, we immediately understand why our parents warned us as children never to reach out in that direction. Also, concepts such as comfort, tenderness and sensuality would not be meaningful without the sense of touch.

The Sixth Sense



Many people associate the sixth sense with something supernatural, which makes it difficult to relate to objectively. Some choose to define it as a kind of perception that transcends the normal. Within the field of parapsychology the ability to pick up information about the world beyond the five senses is called extra-sensory perception. This concept includes telepathy, clairvoyance and precognition.

Spiritual occurrences can often be perceived with the sixth sense, for example when sensing the presence of something invisible to the naked eye, or an atmosphere or situation previously encountered. The authors of this book view the sixth sense as being the synergy that arises as a result of all five senses being influenced simultaneously. The idea is that the whole is greater than the sum of the parts: $1+1+1+1+1$ is not five, but six. The mathematician Henri Poincare put it like this: *“It is by logic we prove, but by intuition that we invent.”* Intuition is an integral part of a company’s identity.

The Sense Model

The model below shows that all information passes through our sensory channels. Research into the brain has shown that the filtering and interpretation of sensory impressions take place in the part of the cerebrum called the limbic center (Fig. 15).

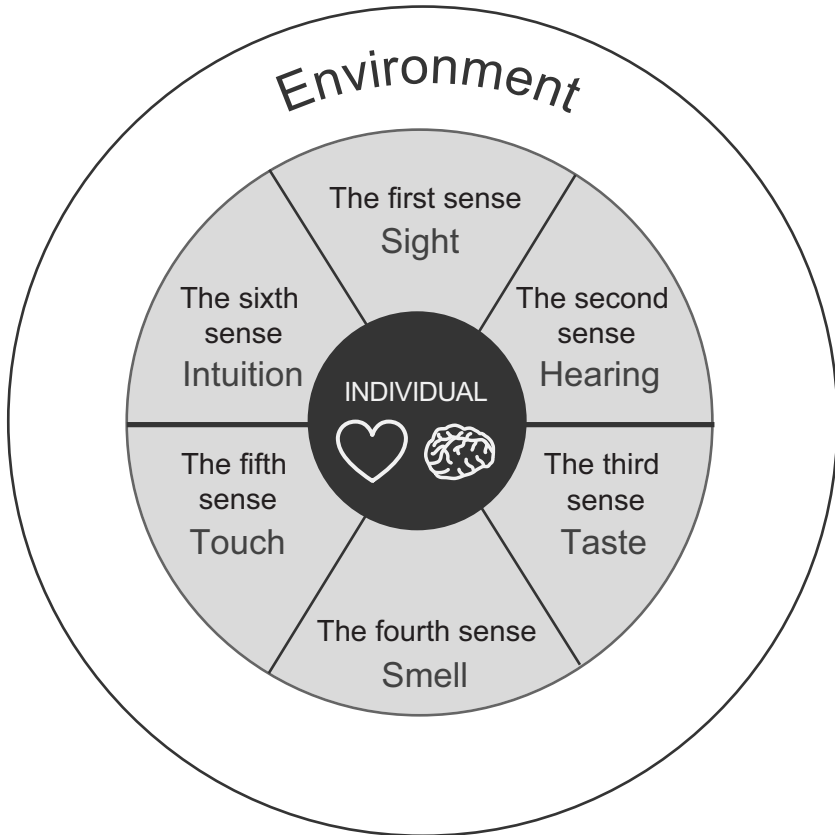


Fig. 15 The sensitive individual

Communication becomes deeper and stronger when all five senses are involved. But it is important to remember not to confuse intensity with quality. The involvement of all five senses is no guarantee of success; the content of the message is still an essential parameter. What purpose does it serve to create a multi-sensory

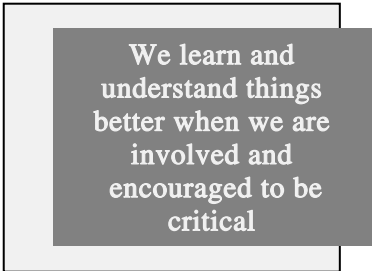
Communication lacks impact because it fails to involve the entire body

experience if the story is weak and the ideas are lacking inspiration and emotion? If your story reveals nothing about the product or service, and if it fails to appeal to the target audience, then you might as well be talking to a brick wall. People certainly will not remember it.

Much communication lacks impact because it fails to involve the entire body. It is here that the sense model – albeit very basic – becomes relevant. The heart symbolizes our body, soul and feelings, while the brain symbolizes our intelligence. Recent research indicates that, rather than being divided into a creative and a logical half, the brain is actually highly integrated and specialized only to a very small extent²³. Thus the limbic center is not only the place where our feelings and geographical memory are stored; it actually contains our memory – including the part that is related to intelligence. The limbic center is linked with the whole brain and all the organs and systems of the body. This is why it makes sense to involve the entire body if you want to influence people emotionally and cognitively.

“We used to think that our senses and feelings were at opposite ends of the scale – or that at least they did not work together... Recent research indicates that our emotional life plays a crucial role when it comes to our thought processes.”²⁴ Eric Jensen.

Communication all too often fails to involve any kind of movement, although we would absorb things better if it did. We know this from meetings, where people sit round a table watching someone making a presentation. And it comes as no surprise, because all through school we were told to sit still and not to move before the bell rang. For years one-way communication has been the dominant form of training and education. The teacher performs a monologue, and pupils or students listen passively.



We learn and understand things better when we are involved and encouraged to be critical

During recent years, student-controlled education, dialogue and physical involvement have gained ground. Rudolf Steiner schools have been practicing this for some time, providing an alternative school system by paying just as much attention to artistic and skills-related subjects as they do to the academic ones. Now outdoor

kindergartens, where children spend their days in woodland or park areas, have become fashionable.

Within pedagogy and various forms of education, customizing the teaching style to fit multiple intelligences has been accentuated during the past few decades. The theory of multiple intelligences was developed in the eighties by Dr. Howard Gardner, Professor of Education at Harvard University, and today it is applied in both primary and lower secondary schools. Why? Because students learn and understand things better when they are involved and encouraged to be critical.

Howard Gardner's book on multiple intelligences has taught us much about learning and the individual²⁵. He provides qualified explanations of how we learn and think, and he also explains how best to approach teaching. His theories are very popular in the US, and several town councils have incorporated his ideas in their teaching plans. Many schools have open-plan classrooms where teachers can move their desks around as necessary. The hearing aid manufacturer Oticon did something similar when they introduced mobile workstations to increase the flexibility of their operations. The transformation – dubbed “the Spaghetti organization” – made the company famous worldwide.

Education theory acknowledges the fact that humans process information differently. Some learn in an auditory fashion, i.e. they need to *hear* a message. Others are visual, needing to *see* things as well as having them explained verbally. And some are tactile and kinetic, needing to *hold things* and try them out in order to understand, etc. The advantage of Gardner's theory is that it makes educationalists and teachers aware that students are different. Teachers are inspired to think about and define these differences in a holistic way – a task that can be very demanding professionally.

Attention has not really been drawn to this problem among professional communicators, and this could be one of the reasons why mass communication continues to be inefficient. The fact that an insufferably high number of repetitions are needed in order to obtain the desired effect clearly indicates that this teaching method is very poor! And so we reiterate: the best way to optimize communication and learning is to fully involve both the senses *and* the body (Fig. 16).

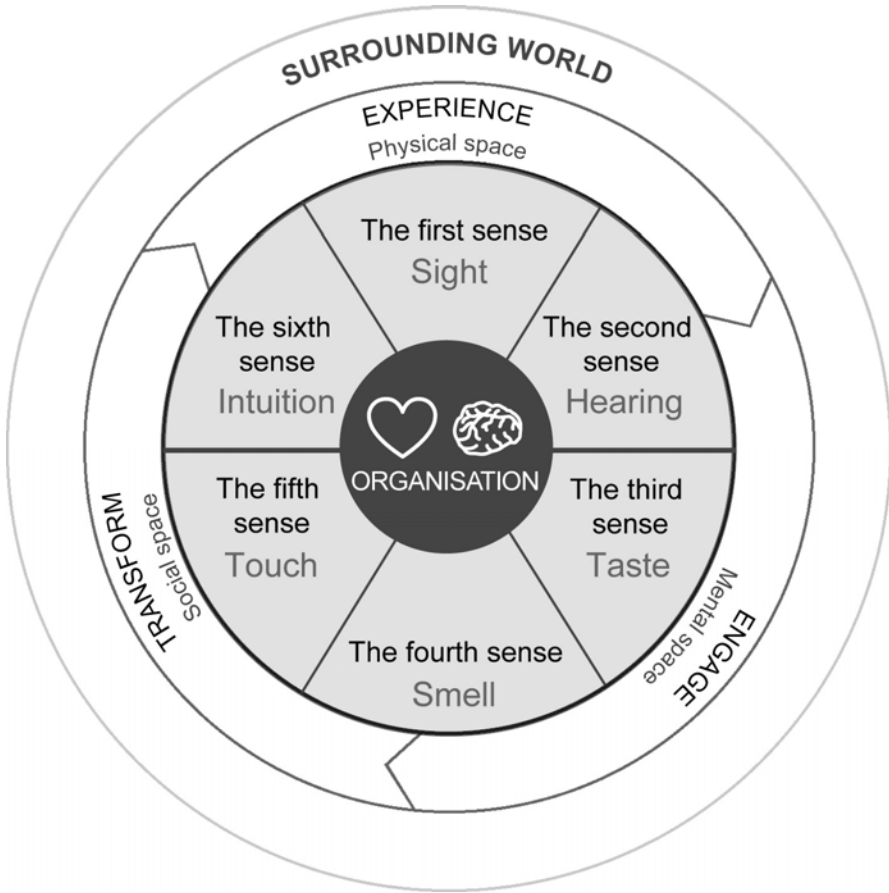


Fig. 16 The sensitive individual and the EET model (3rdDimension©)

Learning and Understanding

The foundation of all learning is our perceptual system. Information must be perceived or sensed in one way or other, i.e. we must see, hear, taste, smell or feel it.

The foundation of all learning is our perceptual system

Learning demands an ability to filter out irrelevant information. Without this ability we would be overwhelmed, because the brain is simply not equipped with unlimited storage space. Selectivity is prerequisite to

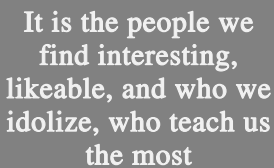
perception and memory, and memory and experience are prerequisite to learning²⁶. Our nervous system is a storage facility from which we can draw information as required. This is why we have a short-term memory and a long-term memory.

All information and sensory impressions are scanned for significance and personal relevance by the structures in the limbic center. They are also filtered in relation to our physical condition. If we are thirsty we focus more on beverages than on the music in the background. If we feel like celebrating we focus more on where to go than on doing the laundry at home. Filtering and interpretation might take place in the limbic center, but the entire brain and body are involved.

Learning has existed since the dawn of the human race and our instincts and behavioral patterns have developed over hundreds of millions of years. Learning is not something new; it is a natural part of human evolution.

Companies should ask themselves these questions: How can we ensure that our messages are committed to memory? Why do some people choose to participate in an experience, and others not? Why do some people choose to learn one thing over another? And how can someone be interested in one thing but not another?

Some of the things we learn are determined by the environment in which we grow up, while others are determined by genes and other hereditary factors. However, the majority of what we learn depends on the socio-cultural world in which we live, in the sense that we learn from other human beings²⁷. And this seems absolutely plausible. Why amass considerable knowledge and information if there's no-one to share it with? The human aspect in communication and learning is therefore important. It is the people we find interesting, likeable, and who



It is the people we
find interesting,
likeable, and who we
idolize, who teach us
the most

we idolize, who teach us the most.

On a more humorous note, the reason why traditional communication and marketing often are inefficient, and why many messages are neither understood nor remembered is that most companies do not “exercise” enough when communicating. In a way messages and values are like muscles. You can choose to focus on static training and beef those muscles

up, or you can focus on cardiovascular training and become more agile. The point is that if you do not include movement and heart, then your message will run out of breath as soon as it is put to the test. An alternative way of looking at communication would be to ask: Is our communication sound, and do we “exercise” enough?

This knowledge is not new, as the following example shows. At the beginning of this century a French doctor by the name of Edouard Claparede was treating a female patient with severe memory loss. So severe, in fact, that every time the doctor left her sight she promptly forgot who he was. So the poor doctor had to reintroduce himself every time he came back into view. Eventually this became too much for him. So the next time he shook hands with her, he put a drawing pin in his hand – which hurt. And the next time he went to shake her hand she shied away. She could not remember who he was, but something made her hold back. Somehow she could remember without being able to remember. How could that happen?

The rationale behind including more movement and physical involvement in communication is that it affects our emotions and our senses. Dr. Carla Hannaford describes the potential of using multiple senses for learning: “The richer our sensory environment is, the greater is our freedom to explore it, and the more complicated our patterns of learning and creativity become.”

Communication remains very traditional because it is based on the idea that the brain has a logical half and a creative half. However, recent research into learning shows that the logical, creative, intellectual and emotional parts of our brain must all be influenced simultaneously in order to optimize learning. All learning involves emotions; even when what we learn is logical. And all memories include an emotional component. The stronger the emotional value of the message is, the higher the chances are of perceiving and remembering it.

Multi-sensory learning can be described as a physically and emotionally enriching experience. We need to connect the visual and aural input with concrete physical action in order to understand and learn better. In other words, we integrate thinking and learning. According to Lena Boström,

Director of the Center for Teaching and Learning Styles in Sweden, the brain uses fatty acids when we move, and this makes the neurons more receptive to the information²⁸. Even quite simple movement such as note-taking or walking about helps us to anchor our thoughts and understand and remember what is being said.

Below are three simple ideas about how to generate efficient, multi-sensory learning (Fig. 17):

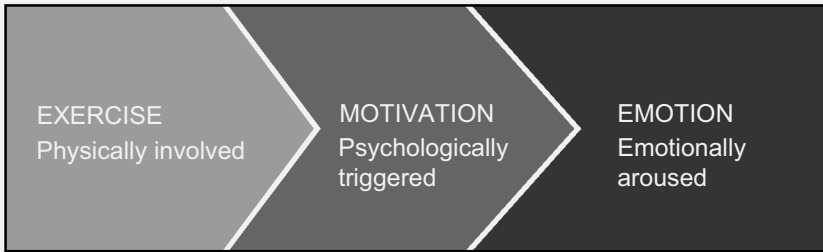
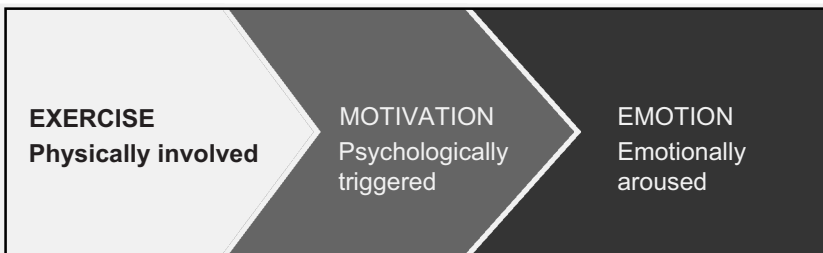


Fig. 17 The exemotion model (3rdDimension©)

If you can meet these three requirements when communicating, your messages will be perceived as being meaningful by your target group. The experience involves and motivates, and this develops into social interaction. “Exemotion” (as we choose to call it) is where a message influences the recipient emotionally through physical involvement and psychological motivation.

Exercise: The Physical Meeting



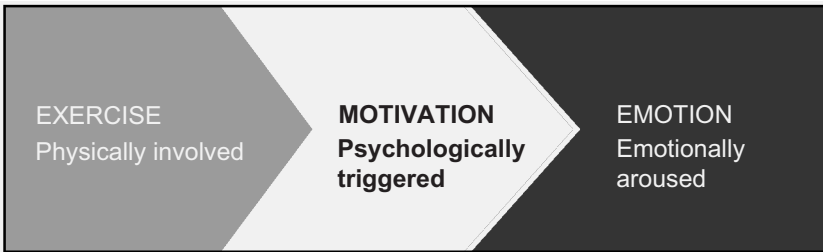
Traditional ways of learning, i.e. visual and auditory, are not particularly efficient. But when meeting target groups you can use other means than just these two senses to attract people’s attention. You can involve them

Traditional communication is ineffective – face-to-face meetings are the way of the future

physically by letting them try things out themselves, so they can transform messages or values into something relevant and practical. Once they have understood those messages the word will spread either internally or externally with a domino effect.

Messages on paper are lifeless and leave far too much to chance; they are based on the assumption that the recipient will correctly interpret the meaning of values based on their own associations and experiences. Messages delivered through physical involvement, interaction and dialogue should immediately trigger the behavior and level of understanding your company is seeking.

Motivation: Psychologically Triggered



In any management and marketing situation it is wise to examine the concept of multiple intelligences, i.e. that people respond at different levels (some to words, others to numbers, pictures or music, etc.) The more you can acknowledge that all communication revolves around learning, the more you will appreciate the importance of providing the right physical environment and involving as many of the senses as possible. Basically, the more you can stimulate and motivate the recipient, the more valuable they will find the exercise.

All communication revolves around learning

An ability to think like the target group is prerequisite to being able to influence their comprehension, behavioral patterns and opinions. The keywords in this context are *empathy* and *engagement*.

As Danish philosopher Søren Kirkegaard (1859) once said:

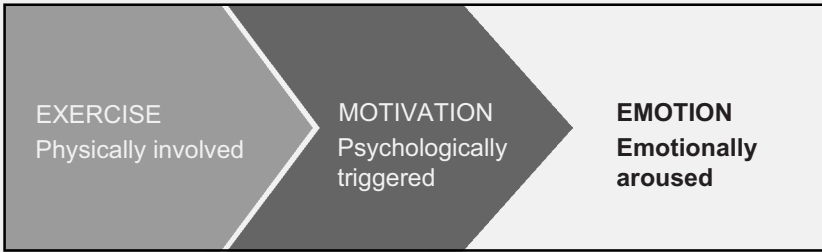
“...when you truly wish to transport someone to a certain place, you need to find him first and take it from there. This is the secret to the art of helping. Anyone who is unable to do this is under a delusion if they believe they can truly help others. If you really want to help someone, you need to understand more than them; but first you need to understand what they understand. If you do not, then no amount of additional knowledge will help.”

Yet another reason why so much communication fails to make any impact is a lack of empathy. External motivation (i.e. the situation in which messages are delivered) plus certain kinds of incentives can also put people in a positive frame of mind. This could be a pleasant environment, a competition incentive, or extra time off. Internal motivation is at its strongest when we ourselves take the initiative to learn. External motivation is at its most powerful when we feel enriched or entertained, or when we feel that we have developed as individuals. This can also be self-motivating because the driving force is our need to develop our sense of self.

Traditional media utilizes one-way communication based on association techniques and classic learning styles. This corresponds to grinding a message into people’s heads and to trying to force an association between their earlier experiences and your current messages. This kind of communication can only make people feel favorably disposed towards companies through conditioning. For example, you might link a service to a known symbol and try to make your target group follow suit. This works, but it does not make the products or services more meaningful, nor does it encourage people to develop strong opinions or preferences.

Traditional methods provide only superficial meaning because they fail to involve the body. Advocates of hedonism, Hirschman & Holbrook, have said of this kind of learning, “It is unlikely that a consumer could generate a detailed, multi-sensory, imaginative sequence without having some access to a relevant real experience.”²⁹ Messages must be anchored in genuine experiences if people are to relate to them both in body and in mind.

Emotion: Emotionally Aroused



We sense, feel, learn and interpret things through our bodies

As research into the brain has demonstrated, we sense, feel, learn and interpret things through our bodies. So we strongly encourage you to give people an experience that will entertain, arouse, motivate and enrich

them. If you can make a difference and influence people’s opinions and behavior through your own behavior, you will reap multiple benefits.

Animal Welfare Through and Through: “Exemotion” in Practice

As an example, we have chosen to explore a Danish animal welfare organization’s campaign against inhumane animal transport, where the physical meeting and the Exemotion model were used to involve people and get them to interact. The campaign is an example of the chain reaction that can be generated through a strong, emotional experience.

From April to October 2003 the animal welfare organization raised a petition against animal transport. They achieved impressive results both internally and externally. The campaign was spurred by a TV program called *The Report*, which was broadcast on DR1 (Danish Broadcast Cooperation) in January 2003. This heart-rending documentary showed the horrifying conditions animals were forced to travel under during their transport from Denmark to southern Europe for slaughter.

The campaign aim was to force the politicians to change legislation so that animals could only be transported in Europe for 8 hours at a time. The animal

welfare organization chose to raise a petition in order to influence legislators in Denmark and the European Union through lobbying.

The campaign had both an external and an internal focus: it was designed to attract new members and involve existing members actively as volunteers in the battle against inhumane animal transport conditions. Focus groups from previous campaigns indicated that constituency chairmen and members alike wanted to be more actively involved in the organization's work instead of only passively contributing through financial contributions.

The campaign was supposed to build on the outrage and debate that had been provoked by the TV program, but the level of involvement and social interaction was not as high as the organization had expected. More action was called for. Alternative methods were required in order to encourage members of the organization and the adult Danish population to sign a letter of protest addressed to the Minister for Food, Agriculture and Fisheries. The aim was to collect 500,000 signatures equal to 12% of the Danish population signing before the Council of Ministers meeting took place. This was scheduled for October 2003.

A cause as emotional as animal welfare demanded giving people the opportunity to physically experience the real-life conditions in the hope that they would become so outraged that would feel duty bound to take action. The message was brought to life with the aid of a genuine cattle transportation lorry, which then toured the main cities in Denmark. Inside the lorry were information and gut-wrenching posters of animals suffering during transport.

As well as being the platform for the campaign the lorry functioned as an external motivating factor. It also had a symbolic function, because if people could actually see, hear, feel and smell what it might be like to be trapped in such a vehicle, they would be more motivated to sign the petition. The organization also hoped that in addition to signing, people would sympathize so much that they would go on to become members or sponsors.

Creating massive popular support demanded a clever PR strategy. Two of the animal welfare organization's ambassadors – both famous singers – were involved in bringing the message to life because they were very popular with the media. Other media used for the campaign were TV, weekly magazines, emails, Newbie cards, the internet, members' magazines, etc. All of these were critical to facilitating the nationwide chain reaction required for the petition to succeed.

A website called *max8hours* was designed to give people a chance to follow the animal transport around Denmark and see how the petition was doing. The site featured a discussion forum where people could share their feelings and motivate each other to take action. A “tip-a-friend” function was made available so that people could email friends and acquaintances and encourage them to participate, either by signing the petition or by collecting more signatures themselves.

Newbie cards with labels were handed out during the tour. The labels were designed to fit coins – the two-dimensional medium that changes hands most often. These would help to spread the message and attract people’s attention to the *max8hours* website. The campaign generated a lot of word-of-mouth and hand-to-hand information and it succeeded in penetrating those often inaccessible communication channels between people.

Participants were given petition forms so that they could get actively involved in influencing the politicians to change the legislation, improve transport conditions and spread the message. Petition forms were also sent to veterinary surgeons, pet shops and other physical contact points where animal lovers meet. All members and volunteers were encouraged to put up petition forms at work, in supermarkets and elsewhere. The organization’s magazine also encouraged members to get friends and acquaintances to help with the petition. The active involvement of both existing and potential members achieved better results than had ever been seen in Denmark – or the rest of the world, for that matter. Twelve percent of the adult Danish population signed the petition³⁰. All signatures were made in person, since digital signatures are invalid.

The result speaks volumes about the effect of the campaign: 22,067 people joined the organization as members – an increase of 50% compared to the previous 6 months. Donations from private individuals totaled USD 200,000. 66,000 people visited the *max8hours* website. 475,718 people signed the petition, which was very close to the target. The media coverage during the campaign corresponded to almost USD 500,000 worth of advertising³¹. The campaign cost was only a fraction of that amount.



The campaign illustrates both the strength of the physical meeting and of getting people involved and interacting socially. Moreover, the strong

Emotion and behavioral effects created through combining experiences with traditional media (in the form of word of mouth information and media coverage) are also evident – proving that meaningful and emotional messages have a significant impact.

Chapter 5

Companies and Experiences

Companies and Experiences

Experience-based communication is about making your values work and getting people to appreciate them. The best way to bring messages to life is to dramatize them. The word *Drama* derives from the Greek verb *dran* (“to act” or “to do”) and it refers to words and actions used to express a particular message.

Experience-based communication focuses on how a company’s values and messages are experienced in physical meetings with customers. It also helps you to determine whether promises are being fulfilled, and in what way. These promises are expressed creatively through various sensory elements and staging. *Experience-based communication is not about creating the perfect experience; it is about creating trustworthy experiences.*

Reality is not perfect. As German poet Bertol Brecht once said, “People should be given what they want – and what they don’t want.” It is the tiny

Experience-based communication is about making your values work

errors, the individual moments and the subtle details that combine to create the whole. People are very quick to find fault, and things that appear to be too perfect are perceived as being false and untrustworthy.

Your values and messages must be anchored in reality (i.e. what your company is really like); otherwise they will be little other than a superficial veneer created for marketing purposes.

Traditional, non-marketing issues such as management, PR, architecture and design, etc. must support the messages you send, both internally and externally. Unethical practices and other kinds of misleading behavior will damage your messages and brands, because they will reveal a failure to live up to your promises. Messages that are not based on genuine values internalized across your entire organization can be damaged by the mismanagement of non-marketing issues, and the damage done happens much faster than it can be repaired. Therefore it is important to take a holistic approach since that is how people experience and relate to things – whether they are employees, suppliers, the media or consumers.

The purpose of this chapter is to increase your awareness of the advantages of communicating through the experience media. We will show you how

experiences can influence people's behavior, i.e. how dramatization and staging in the "experience environment" can have a dramatic effect on learning. This chapter will also accentuate the importance of having a strong, multi-sensory identity.

How thick is a thick book? Different people would have different ideas on this. If you had just read a sturdy children's book out loud, then the term "thick book" would mean one thing, but if you had just finished Umberto Eco's "The Name of the Rose", it would have entirely different connotations. Only by giving messages form and supporting them with the right behavior can you establish a common frame of reference.

As experience architects we recommend demonstrating your values on a regular basis by dramatizing them in some kind of social context

Messages that are not brought to life lose their relevance as the surrounding world develops

internally. Values and messages crave form; otherwise they end up fading away on the paper upon which they were written.

The danger of not bringing your messages to life is that they will have to be explained in order to be fully

understood. These messages will also lose their foundation and their relevance as the surrounding world develops, which will rob them of their potency as behavior modifiers. People's perception of values and messages – regardless of whether they are managers, employees, suppliers, investors or consumers – changes as they develop both personally and professionally, and as socio-cultural dynamics change.

The dramatization of messages through symbolic acts such as role-plays, events, installations and happenings helps companies stay abreast of developments. It also ensures that messages preserve their vigor and continue to be supported by everyone. This is vital for both internal and external relations.

Experiences are an excellent management tool because they allow companies to gauge whether their messages have been successfully brought to life and whether people have understood them and are interacting satisfactorily. Experiences also assist external communication – as the increased use of experience marketing and sponsorships indicate. Experiences help companies to differentiate themselves. They add value, and by anchoring messages in corporate values, make them easier to understand.

The process of bringing messages to life really puts them to the test.

Bringing messages to life really puts them to the test. Are they trustworthy or not?

For instance, if one of your values is *passion*, how is this expressed in practice? Can you honestly say that this value is an integral part of daily life in your organization? And can you find situations in which your customers experience that passion through their

senses? If you can answer yes to this question then the value is strong; if not, it is weak or perhaps even dead.

Dramatization sets things in motion. Experiences that encourage direct involvement allow companies to demonstrate their values and make their messages easier to comprehend and remember. As Albert Camus once said, “You cannot create experience, you must accumulate it.” These wise words are worth remembering.

Sensory Organizations

Like people, companies have senses; they use their employees to interpret and communicate with the surrounding world

Companies should perceive themselves as organisms with senses; they use their employees to interpret and communicate with the surrounding world. And being comprised of many individuals, companies have countless contact points internally and externally. All of these individuals should react like a single entity. They may not sense, learn and communicate

in the same manner as the company does, but fundamentally the same factors apply.

Understanding how people experience things is vital if you want the senses to control the experience. The senses provide a window to the world, and through them a company can target people’s minds. When all five senses

are integrated a message really comes to life. In a face-to-face dialog, people understand messages immediately. And because all other distractions are eliminated they are free to focus in both body and mind on what is being communicated.

Since the senses work together they should be perceived as a single entity. German writer and philosopher Johan Wolfgang von Goethe once said, “What characterizes one sense also characterizes another; hands want to see things, eyes want to caress things, and so on.” This emphasizes the importance of integrating more than one sense into your communication. Targeting all the senses leaves nothing to chance. Audiovisual media alone cannot generate the same authenticity.

Since people have become more sensitive and demand meaningful and trustworthy experiences, companies should be more aware of the kind of experiences they are providing when communicating internally and externally. If messages are not perceived at a sensory level they will not be perceived as being authentic. Companies should therefore include experience-controlled and recipient-controlled media much more in their communication (Fig. 18).

The challenge is to get your employees to follow one set of behavioral principles; to give customers consistent experiences, and to work together to achieve a common goal. Projecting the right image is an absolute necessity and your employees must live up to that image in everything they do and say, whether they are dealing with internal or external contacts. This includes their physical appearance, attitude and behavior.

Many of the techniques used to improve perception and learning in individuals can be used with equal success across the entire organization. Companies have a much better chance of gaining people’s attention if they involve the sensory channels rather than the more inert types of media alone. This applies to both internal and external communication. This is a two-way street, as companies also become better at receiving information from the surrounding world. And no company should deprive themselves of the opportunity to obtain feedback, or of the dynamics that emerge from a healthy dialog.

Companies are expected to be open and ethical and this requires being acutely aware of the signals being sent to the outside world. The popular expression, “It’s not what you say, but how you say it,” applies just as

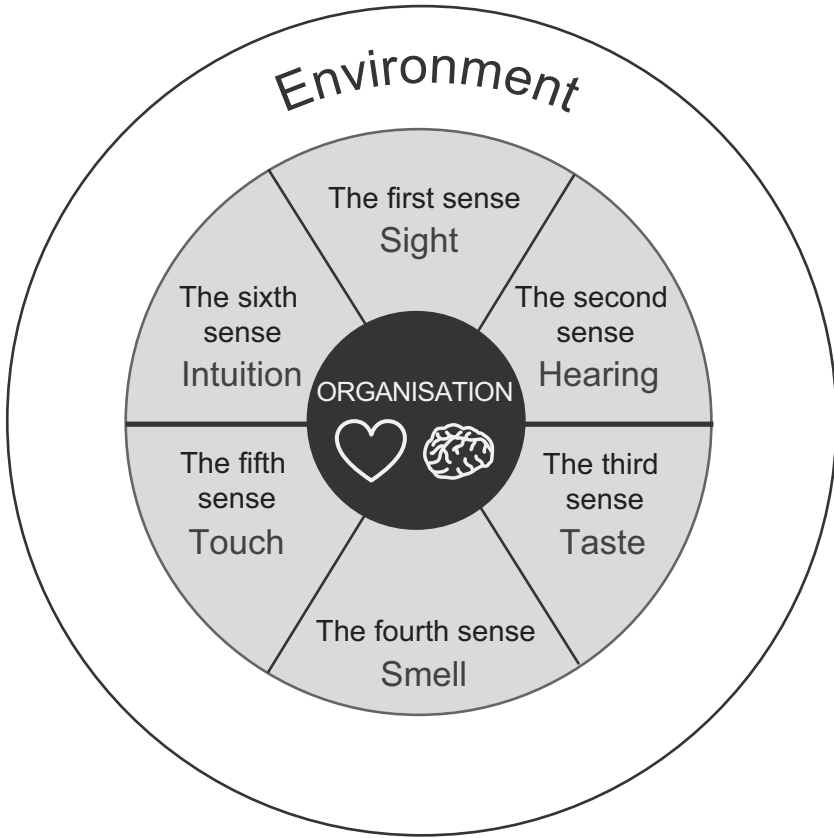


Fig. 18 The sensory organization (3rdDimension©)

much to companies as it does to individuals. Appearance is also an influencing factor. It pays to focus on behavior because openness means that employees, customers and suppliers will move closer to the body of the organization – not only to gain influence and build trust, but also because they *want* to experience messages through their senses. A

company can win many hearts by embracing its surroundings!

Staging can be valuable because it makes the experience more authentic and influences people

Staging – i.e. using actions and movement to communicate – can be valuable because it makes the experience more authentic and influences people emotionally. If

companies fail to put their employees or external recipients in a favorable state of mind, there is a danger that messages will be lost or misinterpreted.

So why not utilize the intensely motivating effect of the experience medium when communicating? Rather than using the age old, one-way approach that does very little for the learning process, it would be more effective to increase the number of physical meetings and improve their quality, and to make sure that meeting locations play a strategic and active role in the communication process.

There is far too little focus on sensory aspects such as the smells and sounds that visitors encounter when they enter your building, and the way your employees treat people they know compared to those they have never met. A company must be conscious of the verbal and non-verbal signals their employees send to the surrounding world.

The way a company is experienced and the way it is staged is often more important than its products, services or words. When messages lack motivation, foundation and support, it is often because they are not properly integrated. From a learning point of view the lack of sensory elements makes them neither easy to understand nor remember.

Learning Organizations

We know that people learn best when they are actively involved in the learning process. Two things are particularly important: the *physical surroundings*, which can motivate people and put them in a receptive frame of mind, and *the way in which messages are adapted*. To achieve the desired emotional effect your messages must be easy to relate to and easy to become involved with. To achieve this and to generate social interaction, companies should involve both their close and distant stakeholders as much as possible, and take an interest in the learning process. Three kinds of participation are required – namely the physical, the mental and the social – in order to optimize communication and learning.

The Experience “Space”

Wherever your company is in contact with the outside world, whether those contacts are short term or long term, it is important to create the best possible impression. In their marvelous book entitled “Building the Brand-driven Business”, authors Davis and Dunn describe the importance

Wherever your company is in contact with the outside world, it is important to create the best possible impression.

of charting all of the points where consumers come into contact with companies or their brands³². This could be at a reception area, over the phone, in the street, on websites or in shops.

Start by asking yourself these questions: What kind of behavior applies when customers do business with you? Do

they phone you? Do they visit you at fairs, or do you call on them? What kind of signals are you sending in your building, over the phone or during customer visits? All these details merge to create an overall impression, so you need a connecting thread. You can begin by charting all contact points, whether they are physical, electronic, short term or long term.

In their otherwise excellent book, Davis and Dunn seem to overlook the importance of experiences and the advantages of involving the senses in communication. Companies and brands should make their values (which are in essence, non-material) more tangible and comprehensible by incur-

Staging helps to create an atmosphere that puts the recipient in a positive frame of mind

porating actions, sensory elements and staging in their communication. If they fail to realize the importance of staging things correctly in relation to the way they are perceived in the real world, they risk creating a level of expectation they cannot possibly hope to meet.

They also risk behaving incorrectly in

the workplace *and* the marketplace.

The object of staging is to create an atmosphere that puts the recipient in a positive frame of mind. You must begin by deciding what kind of experience you want to create. What kind of experience *should* people have – and what kind of experience would you *like* them to have? Once you have determined this, you need to turn the physical environment into a total “value bubble”. What better way could there possibly be to attract and

retain people’s attention? No other external signals will interfere with yours because within this bubble you will be in total control of the communication process.

An experience can be viewed as a framework for a meeting between sender and recipient

An experience can be viewed as a framework for a meeting between sender and recipient – a temporary or permanent contact point for physical experiences. Since we are now dealing with the physical location, non-personal media such as telephones and advertising are not included; however,

messages communicated through these media must still be in keeping with those communicated within the experience framework. If they are, they will serve to strengthen the bond between sender and recipient.

A permanent contact point is more or less long-term. Strategic communication constantly emanates from it.

A temporary contact point generally exists only for a short period of time. It is often used for HR, sales and marketing purposes on a short-term basis (Table 2).

Permanent contact points	Temporary contact points
A company’s domicile, architecture Reception areas, offices, auditoriums, meeting rooms, parking lots, etc. (interior and exterior design) Shops (façades and interior design) Etc.	Receptions and jubilees Conferences, seminars Fairs Sponsorship activities Events for employees Teambuilding Travel incentives Sampling Meetings Etc.

Table 2 Permanent and temporary physical contact points (3rdDimension©)

It is the significance of the actions that determine whether they are permanent or temporary. For management it no longer suffices to perceive temporary contact points as being only that. It is important to acknowledge that every contact point is crucial to the company's communication – and

Companies must make their non-material values tangible by bringing them to life

reputation. Any employees working as representatives or at contact points should be aware that what they communicate has not only tactical significance; it actually reflects the company's core values. Experiences come from within; thus everything you do and everything that influences your

surroundings is a form of communication. Temporary contact points are often critical to motivation and the comprehension of values and messages, internally as well as externally. They often serve as a means of increasing awareness and encouraging involvement and social interaction.

Companies must make their non-material values tangible by bringing them to life. This means being careful of what you say and conscious of how things look, smell and taste. If you can create a total experience that recipients can absorb through body and mind, you will have the power to determine the price of values. The challenge is to create a number of fundamental values that are unique and trustworthy. But these should not have to be learned by heart or forced down people's throats. Your values should feel natural and be at the forefront of people's minds – and they should make sense to all stakeholders.

If you want your messages to get through you must be precise, flexible and open.

It takes more to communicate than the simple publishing of identity manuals and image brochures. If you want your messages to be understood you must be precise, flexible and open. You must also encourage the right kind of behavior. Whether it is a physical meeting, a phone call, a letter, a shop

visit or advertising, the messages your company communicates should engage and involve people.

From the moment a customer steps into a building or shop, that person will form impressions either consciously or subconsciously. These will contribute to making the experience positive or negative and make learning a part of the communication. The physical meeting helps to

Staging may be the most important factor where motivation and learning are concerned.

optimize learning, but the physical, mental and social staging of the meeting is equally important. The staging may be the most important factor where motivation and learning are concerned.

Dramatization and Staging

To get the most out of dramatization and staging you must establish the perfect framework for the messages you want to communicate, and stage the experience. What do you want to do – and why? And what kind of actions should be involved?

Dramatization – use voices and movement

When messages are brought to life through strong symbolic actions people understand more, learn more and react more positively. Dramatization and involvement also help to influence their behavior. When people feel moved and involved they begin to interact socially; in short, actions generate reactions.

When messages are dramatized, people understand more, learn more and react more positively

Staging of values and messages: Experience, Engage and Transform

Companies should take the *experience, engage and transform* approach very seriously. Think of your own company as an experience environment

comprising three spaces: the physical, mental and social. You must optimize each of these in order to be able to successfully transfer your values and make experiences memorable.

The *physical space* is how people experience the surroundings,
The *mental space* gets them actively involved,
The *social space* gets them interacting socially.

Given that people's behavior and opinions are increasingly dictated by changing values, moods, impulses, and the way companies stage themselves, the situation in which you deliver your messages is very important. When you look at the three experience spaces, new and novel

ways of communicating suddenly begin to emerge. You become more creative during concept development, and this increases the memory capacity of the recipient.

This trend is evident all over the globe. Companies and organizations are increasingly using architecture as an identity-enhancing tool. Top-ranking architect Jesper Gottlieb, whose company Gottlieb & Paludan is highly sought-after for corporate buildings in Europe, states that a company's architecture should reflect what it stands for. A company's standards and values should be incorporated into the construction process so that they become visible.

Gottlieb stresses that a company's architecture and interior design sends signals to the surrounding world and helps employees tune in to the values being emphasized. Gottlieb & Paludan have designed a new printing house for a magazine publisher in the north of Copenhagen. The entire alphabet has been engraved on the façade of the building, so no one can be in any doubt about how the company makes its living.

In Munich, Germany, car manufacturer BMW opened BMW Welt – a 75,000 m² architectural masterpiece in steel and glass. This is where more than 45,000 customers will collect the keys to their new cars each year. The idea is to purchase a car from a dealer, but collect it at BMW Welt. Upon arrival the owners are greeted by a BMW representative in an exclusive lounge. This is followed by a 6 hour personal tour of the factory, the information center and finally, the Premier level, where the car is handed over.

According to cultural theorist E.H. Schein it is no surprise that a company's physical appearance and interior design contribute to communicating values internally and externally. They are examples of artifacts, or as Schein puts it, "visual manifestations" that make the company's fundamental values and beliefs very visible. It is important, however, not to forget the significance of all the other senses. The key is to create a cohesive experience.

An example of a temporary contact point originally created through communication, but which became a long-term and significant marketing communication asset, is the Great Wall Marathon. Albatros Travel, a Scandinavian travel agency, wanted to arrange a marathon at this location in order to promote the service that has become their hallmark: tailor made, culturally rich trips to exotic destinations worldwide. The alternative

was to communicate using traditional media such as magazines and newspapers.

Since the battle for attention in the travel industry is very fierce, Albatros Travel chose to involve people in this symbolic act. They invited a famous actor who was starring in a very popular TV series called “Island Cop”, where his character was often seen jogging in his spare time. The owner and manager of Albatros Travel also participated in the marathon, which generated excellent PR and media coverage. Many participants were interviewed for local newspapers in their local areas. The concept was very newsworthy, and Albatros core travel competence - tailor-made travels to the whole world - was profiled intensely.



*Great Wall Marathon participants
(Photograph: Albatros press photograph)*

The marathon was such a resounding success that it went on to become an independent operation with gigantic potential in the form of sponsorships and advertising value, both for the rapidly expanding Chinese market and for the prosperous Chinese middle class. This proves that some experiences can have such huge symbolic value that they become businesses in themselves, where any money invested in marketing is quickly recovered and healthy profits are secured for the future.

The Great Wall Marathon is a valuable communication platform for the huge Chinese market, generating enormous earnings from relevant sponsors such as the Coca Cola Company, Nike, and others seeking to strengthen their position in China. Some 88 million Chinese people were exposed to the marathon during its first year via a TV program that was broadcast twice on local-channel CCTV5³³. The Great Wall Marathon has existed for nine years, and the concept has been used by Albatros Travel at other locations (e.g. the Karen Blixen Marathon at Mount Kilimanjaro in Kenya).

By utilizing the experience medium internally and externally, companies can create staged, short-term contact points where management get to meet employees and where target audiences get to see products. To understand how you can work with this concept, let us look at the advantages of staging messages in more detail.

The experience medium creates an attraction zone, where senders and recipients are involved physically, mentally and socially. This zone helps to optimize learning (Fig. 19).

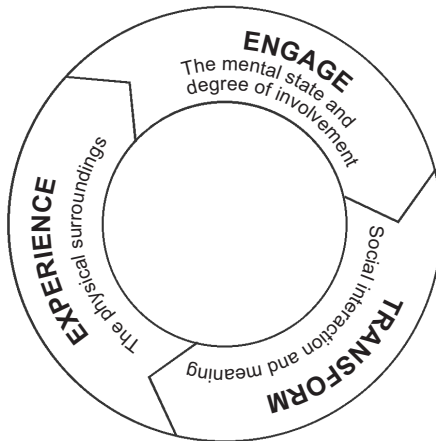
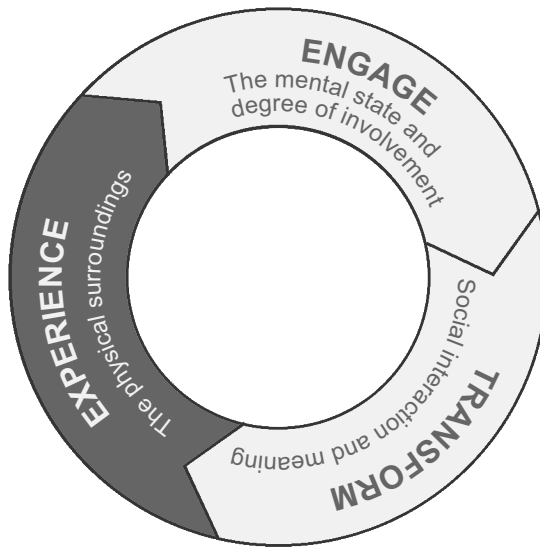


Fig. 19 The experience environment (3rdDimension©)

The Experience: The Physical Space



The physical space is where the symbolic act or experience takes place. Take museums and galleries, for instance. Specializing in exhibitions and performances, they share many common traits and experiences from which companies can learn. The new, Danish–Jewish Museum in Galejhus in Copenhagen is a perfect example³⁴. Daniel Liebeskind, the world famous architect who was involved in designing the new building at Ground Zero in New York and other prestigious buildings, devised the concept for this new museum.

Liebeskind based his ideas on the very human and symbolic act that has bound Danes and Jews together since World War II, where many Jews were smuggled from Denmark to Sweden in fishing boats. Several symbolic acts manifest themselves in the museum’s form, structure and lighting. The structure is based on the Jewish concept “Mitzvah” – one of the interpretations of which is “to perform a good deed”. The sloping floors remind visitors of the deck of a ship and these floors symbolize the rescues and the four planes: Exodus, Desert, Revelations and The Promised Land. The museum is a fine example of how physical environments can have great significance on the impact of messages and the way in which they are interpreted.



Danish Jewish Museum in Copenhagen by architect Daniel Libeskind (Photograph: Danish Jewish Museum Press Photography)

We might compare experiences to the theater, which consists of a stage on which actors perform. The scenery helps to accentuate the story and choreography by giving us an idea of where the story takes place, and by creating a certain atmosphere. As message-enhancers, scenery and props are excellent tools for the experience medium.

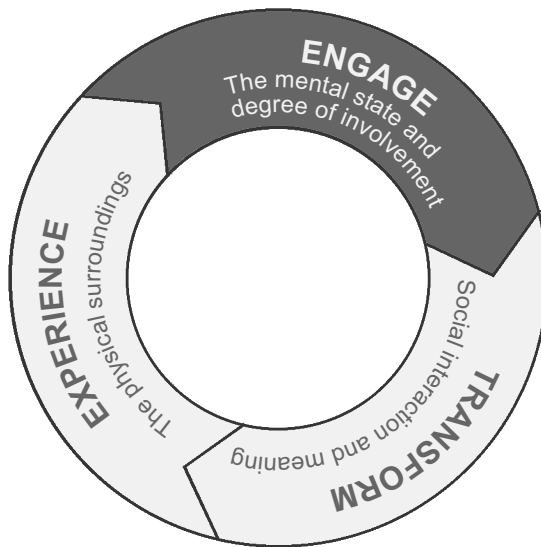
The physical space helps to bring messages and values to life by appealing to the senses

The physical space brings messages and values to life by appealing to the senses. The scene your company sets will form the platform for meetings between senders or brands and the

target audience. The physical space is where the values being communicated actually manifest themselves. This space also encourages the recipients to behave according to plan.

The physical space has a major impact on people's emotions, making them more receptive to your messages. A company's architecture and interior design, i.e. its buildings, offices, reception area, etc. constitute the physical environment in which employees work, and it is important that emphasizes the signals you wish to send. If a company utilizes experience-based communication, the physical location must fully support the message in order to meet people's expectations. The choice of surroundings, and the situation in which messages are communicated, will dictate whether meetings with your target audience will be positive and memorable.

If the physical framework is in place, then the sender and recipient will have a common frame of reference through which they can communicate effectively. The physical space makes messages tangible. Many memorable moments have been created in this manner – one example being multi-media artist Jean Michel Jarre's grandiose performances. In 2004 he staged two concerts – one in the Forbidden City and one in Tiananmen Square in China. He has also staged magnificent concerts at the Pyramids, the Acropolis and the Eiffel Tower.

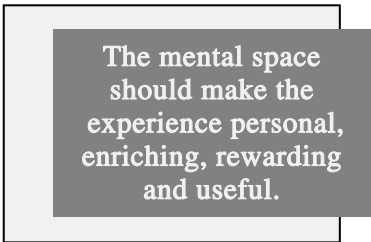


The Mental Space Emerges When Recipients Interpret and Interact with the Physical Space

The mental space emerges when recipients interpret and interact with the physical space. The ambience created when staging values and messages affects the recipients' moods. The knowledge they gain from participating in an activity is what constitutes the mental space. This space is purely subjective; how they interpret things depends on their personalities, expectations, knowledge and interests, etc. No two experiences will ever be alike, because it is the recipients who contribute and attribute meaning to them. This is yet another reason why experiences make such good differentiators; being subjective, they cannot be replicated.

When recipients are given the opportunity to become involved in the experience, make their own choices, think for themselves and contribute, they feel as though things have been tailored to meet their needs. Suddenly people attach their own values and aspirations to your messages. The mental space should make the experience personal, enriching, rewarding and useful.

The Engagement: the Mental Space



The mental space should make the experience personal, enriching, rewarding and useful.

The physical space creates an ambience that affects people's disposition. Therefore it is very important to meet their needs and get as close as possible to *their reality* when staging the experience. Show empathy when communicating. For instance, what kind of interests, attitudes, behavior and

demographic and psychographic characteristics do your recipients exhibit? What kind of emotional content do you want to provide? What kind of involvement are you looking for? It is important to understand how people actually experience their situation in order to determine their needs.

German philosopher and sociologist Jürgen Habermas developed a theory about society called Lifeworld. This world has traditions, norms, education and culture. In Lifeworld all the activities are coordinated by people in a spirit of mutual understanding that either already exists, or is created through communication. In the world of business, companies need to be

aware of which norms and values people find important – keeping in mind that recipients do not always share the same values. Individuals today are looking for meaningful experiences and they will not feel involved unless the company is able to adapt its messages effectively.

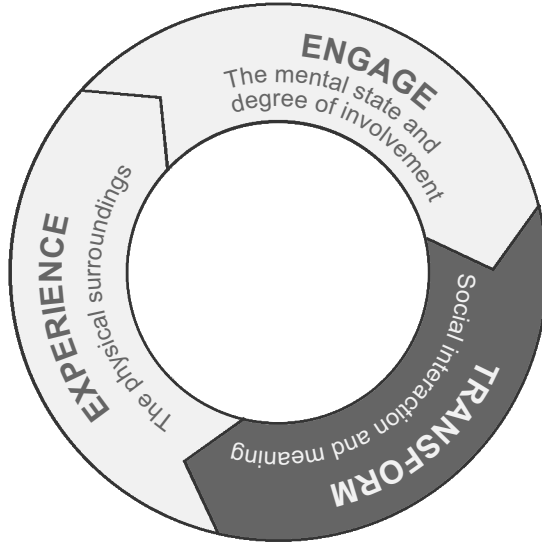
In the US the Charles Schwab investment bank has realized the importance of meeting customers face-to-face. It opened a series of new branches, each of which was adapted to suit the local area. For example, the interior and exterior design of the Chinatown branch was inspired by Chinese culture, and the building was staffed with Chinese people. The Wall Street branch was given a more business-like, Western appearance with arch-American employees and so forth. In daring to show its true colors, Charles Schwab demonstrated that the companies that win are the ones that can project themselves into their customers' shoes – and the ones that come closest to them physically.



The Chinatown branch of the Charles Schwab investment bank, with a façade that fits the local area. New York, 2003 (Photograph: 3rdDimension©)

Management and marketing communication must be far more experience-based and recipient-oriented than it is today; otherwise it will seem out of touch with the world of the recipient. Companies can achieve their goals through dialog, interactivity, stories and experiences. Charles Schwab is an excellent example of a company that has understood how to create a

mental space that reflects the customers’ reality without altering its core values. Today customers respect the bank and feel genuinely involved; the mental space has made the bank’s values personal and useful.



The Transformation: The Social Space

The social space creates a harmony between people which arises from the opinion-exchanges that always occur in social contexts

The social space attaches behavior to values and facilitates interaction between a company and its audience and between senders and recipients. Human beings are easy to influence in social contexts because we all need to ask for advice or share our experiences with others. We also like to have our opinions confirmed. Within the experience space, companies can create a

social space by having designated areas where people can meet and talk, either with senders or each other, about what they have experienced.

The social space creates a harmony between people which arises from the opinion-exchanges that always occur in social contexts. We are all influenced by the opinions and reactions of others, and this is why social interaction strengthens our comprehension of messages. Organizational

learning theories assert that so-called “hallways” (meeting places such as canteens, smoking rooms and coffee bars) play an important role in the formation of opinions in companies. If active socialization does not take place internally then something undesirable can happen: small subcultures might develop and people may begin to obstruct each other’s work. Externally, social interaction can make people feel more closely tied to the product or brand behind the experience because they get to meet like-minded people who share their interests.

At cinemas a major part of the experience is the atmosphere itself. We register other people’s reactions and are quickly absorbed by the ambience. A cinema-medium survey showed that people’s reactions, the atmosphere and their expectations are the reasons why they remember advertising better when exposed to it in cinemas³⁵.

Think of the last time you went to the theater. During the interval people always exchange their opinions, and since everyone notices different things, their perceptions tend to complement each other. Therefore the staging of

**Collective activation
makes messages
easier to absorb and
interpret**

the social space is an important and self-enhancing element in relation to the total staging of values and messages. Without this space, communication lacks the positive catalyst or collective activation brought about by social interaction (Fig. 20).

Collective activation generates a more positive response and more active processing of the message.

AN ATTENTION-GRABBING EFFECT

Other people’s involvement, laughter and applause make you pay more attention.

AN ATTENTION-REINFORCING EFFECT

If other people are excited and encourage you to try things out, you want to experience the same things.

AN OPINION-SHAPING EFFECT

When other people react positively, you tend to do the same.

Fig. 20 *Collective activation (3rdDimension©)*

The experience space should reinforce people's positive frame of mind and the receptiveness engendered by the physical and mental spaces. The social interaction that harmonization creates acts as a catalyst for the transfer of values and comprehension of messages. The increased involvement helps you to focus and maintain contact with people for longer periods than would otherwise be possible, as they feel that they are in good company.

Companies can benefit from assembling their most passionate customers or employees in a social context, where they can cultivate their common interests and enjoy a unique experience. To facilitate this it is important to create designated meeting areas where participants can discuss what they have seen.

An excellent example of how a social space can be utilized to the maximum is the American car make, Saturn. To attract the attention of today's women, Saturn decided to introduce a fireplace and sofa area in each shop, where customers could enjoy coffee, tea and soft drinks. They also introduced supervised play areas and a cell phone monitoring service to give their customers more time to shop.

An example of a global company that understands how to create and optimize a social space is the enzyme manufacturer, Novozymes. This company created a unique experience that served as a dramatic social platform for all "Zymers" around the world. In 2005 Novozymes celebrated its fifth anniversary, and they wanted to do this in style. The management, led by President and CEO Steen Risgaard, developed a new 10-year business strategy called "Ten in Ten". The objective was for Novozymes to increase its turnover to DKK 10 billion by 2010.

Since the company wanted its employees worldwide to understand and remember the new strategy, they made communicating it a part of the anniversary celebrations. Their goal was clear: they wanted their staff to understand how much the management valued the contributions they had made to the success of the company during the 5-year period, and how important they would continue to be in achieving in the new objectives. The management wanted to make the employees feel a sense of co-ownership of the strategy.

Achieving this with 5,000 employees in countries as far-flung as Malaysia, Brasil and Australia was not going to be easy. The idea was to find a symbolic action powerful enough to communicate the management's

acknowledgement of the employees, plus Novozyme's fundamental values. On the day itself the scene also needed to be set for Steen Riisgaard's presentation of the actual strategy.

The symbolic action was linked to the obligatory presentation of an anniversary gift to the employees. The gift was a small tropical plant called "Codiaeum Variegatum". This contained all the ingredients of the symbolic message the management wished to communicate. Also called "the fire plant", it has a unique ability to mutate. New shoots differ completely in form and color to the mother plant. This plant was a perfect analogy for Novozymes' values and what the company wanted to achieve through research – which was to think innovatively when "unlocking the magic of nature".

The anniversary gift comprised a rustic wooden box containing a plant pot, a bag of earth, a watering can, a bag of fertilizer and a plant support. These elements encapsulated the company's values, the way they felt about their employees, and the direction they wanted to take in the future. Steen Riisgaard summed it up in the following letter:

*Dear Zymers,
Over the last five years we've grown from a tiny shoot into a solid stem.
We've put down deep roots and found the ideal conditions for continuing
to grow and flourish.*

As a symbol of our business you're being given a plant called Codiaeum variegatum – also known as a Croton. The unusual thing about this plant is that it sports, or mutates. This means that every shoot and leaf is unique. The plant creates new forms and colors all of the time, and nobody can predict exactly what it will do next.

In this respect it's a good analogy for Novozymes. As a business we stand on the brink of a brilliant future where only our imagination limits what we can achieve, where our technologies could take us in countless different directions, and where together we can create fantastic biological solutions to solve all kinds of challenges.

I hope that this gift will help us all to remember this goal, so that we can feel pleased to be part of something amazing and very special – every day.

*Best wishes
Steen Riisgaard*

When communicating, Novozymes made the conscious decision not to take the easy way out by presenting the strategy via the middle management or at conventional conferences. On the day itself they created “mini jungles” in communal areas, with butterflies, tropical plants and the sound of cicadas in the background. Various symbolic actions were performed throughout the day to support the message. For example, in the morning, unwary employees were met by smiling “Park Rangers” bearing gifts in the form of delicious “jungle snacks” and tropical fruit juices, etc.

The greeting card accompanying the present informed the employees that they were to attend a number of events revolving around the new business strategy. The highlight of the day would be a gathering in their canteen, where, surrounded by tropical plants and accompanied by the mellow strains of a steel band, a management representative would tell them all about the new strategy and present their special, symbolic anniversary gift.

This example shows how the dramatization of messages can put people in a positive frame of mind, and how messages can function as a point of reference for the future. At Novozymes the message has definitely lived on; years later, people still remember it: The plant is displayed in all of Novozymes’ reception areas, with a measurement stick that indicates how much it has grown. The plant also continues to thrive in many of the employees’ offices as a reminder of the day, the strategy and the vital role every one of them plays in achieving the “10 in 10”. They must strive for perfection and be innovative every single day.

The social space not only makes messages useful and easier to sense, it also makes people feel more involved. When messages are sensed, they become the object of social interaction.

Experiences Come from Within

This book offers another important suggestion: to make everything you communicate heart-felt and value-based. From management to end users, messages must be brought to life and supported by appropriate behavior. Companies must give their values form and support them with interesting stories that people can share.

The heart model (which follows shortly) suggests that experiences are identity and value-based, and that they must come from within and be

communicated in all contexts. This helps to create a pact between the company and the surrounding world, describing how each one views the other. The model also accentuates the snowball effect that arises from motivation and understanding, showing that each and every layer communicates values and important messages.

Communicating through the experience medium helps companies to



influence and involve their audiences. By increasing the precision, understanding and flexibility of internal and external communication (through eliminating noise) it reduces the number of messengers and shortens the distance between sender and recipient.

Companies are becoming more and more aware that communication must work both internally and externally, and that it is dangerous to make promises externally if they have no foundation internally. One company that manages to maintain a perfect balance is the Scandinavian do-it-yourself store, Silvan, whose external philosophies also have an internal focus. The company's "DIY employee of the month" scheme – where five extra holiday days are given to employees who make their own home improvements using Silvan products – generates massive internal support. The message the company is sending is evident: that their employees are DIY people too (Fig. 21).

The necessity of having both a connecting thread in communication and an internal focus was illustrated in a survey conducted by consultancy firm, Valoer & Tinge³⁶. This indicated that an average of 80% of employees in the companies surveyed did not understand their corporate values and strategies. The survey also showed that out of 100 managers, 81 had written their values down but found it very hard to remember any of them. These results resemble those found in a survey conducted in 2007 by Louws Management Corporation in the US. The survey showed that while 80% of advertising and marketing professionals say they are strongly aware of their company's brand positioning; only one fourth of them can clearly articulate their company's brand position to clients, customers or prospective clients.

To enhance communication between management and employees, managers must improve their own ability to communicate, and support their messages with the appropriate behavior. Naturally they need a framework in which to do this.

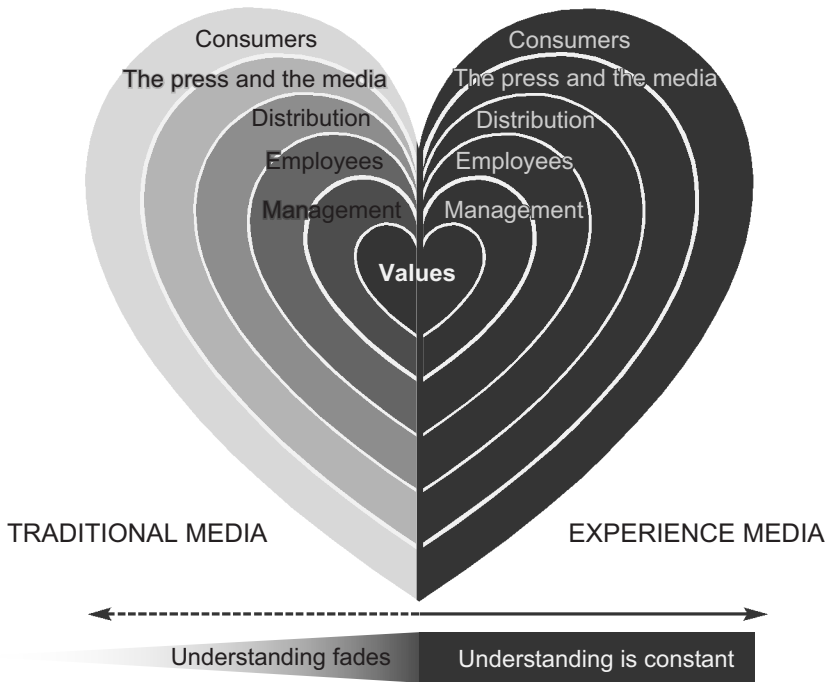


Fig. 21 *The heart model (3rdDimension©)*

There are plenty of examples of good results being achieved when communication is supported by the appropriate behavior. When prominent leader Lars Kolind was at the helm of hearing aid manufacturer Oticon, the company became one of the first to adopt a horizontal management style with open offices “on wheels”. Kolind set a strong example and inspired the rest of the organization to become incredibly engaged in what they were doing. Kolind is no longer CEO but his values live on: the managers are still visibly involved in the communication of the company’s values and they maintain an open-door policy to this day.

Bringing messages to life is hardly a novel idea; in the 19th century the great Danish educationalist Nikolaj Grundtvig stated, “Whoever desires to bring things to life must themselves be brimming with life.” Grundtvig’s philosophy and visions as an educationalist inspired entire movements in Nordic societies including the High School Movement and the Cooperative School Movement. His words are still very much alive and his ideas are still being debated today – an achievement that must be the envy of any manager.

The truth is that the past often catches up with the present, and we have to acknowledge that all of the technological advancements that make life and communication easier will never be able to replace the human element.

Fastcompany.com ran an article on extreme jobs, in which they interviewed David Clark, MTV's VP of Global Marketing Partnerships. David Clark has one of those glamour jobs that make people think "Where do I sign up?" He travels constantly, following the music scene around the planet. In late January, in his Times Square office, he was frenetically working to turn the MTV Asia Awards in Bangkok into a tsunami relief event and mapping the launch of the network's 100th channel, in Africa, in the spring. Clark knows he is a lucky man. He also knows how easily his job can suck the hours out of his week – a realization that has become more acute since the birth of his baby, Nicholas, 18 months ago. "Since our son's been born, it's become more difficult," he says. "I'm still figuring it out."

Because Clark is "the global guy" at MTV, there are few hours in his day when some part of the world is not clamoring for attention. He wakes up at 6:30 a.m. to the alarm on his BlackBerry and spends half an hour answering the 30–40 messages that have piled up, before he even gets out of bed. His little son can already mimic daddy's BlackBerry thumb dance. After a few calls to clients in far-flung time zones, Clark heads to the office, where the barrage doesn't die down until late afternoon.

Then there is a brief pause as Asia goes to bed and Europe goes home to dinner. Still, by 4 p.m. one day, Clark had 578 unread messages clogging his inbox, and Latin America was desperately trying to get his attention by phone. In the evenings he tries to get home for an hour with his son, and then it's back on the phone and email until he collapses into bed at midnight. That is when he's not in Singapore or Rio. Curiously, instead of reducing the need for travel, all this connectivity has actually increased it. Clark says: "My theory is that there comes a time in any project where you just need to be face-to-face."

Ultimately the strongest kind of communication is the personal kind. No other media can match the power of a face-to-face meeting where messages are communicated through dialog and experiences. If this is beginning to sound sensible then you have truly understood the meaning of the heart model: it is not only about touching people, it's about moving them too!

**Touch people - and
move them too!**

When a company’s communication is based on its core values it becomes a platform for all communication. Thus any external communication must also work internally. What sense is there in

communicating certain values to consumers if your own employees have difficulty understanding and living up to them? The only way they can become ambassadors for those values is by absorbing them to such an extent that they become part of their daily lives. A company’s values must be firmly lodged in the hearts of its employees before they can become evident in everything they communicate.

Within the world of the theater, people talk of the *fascination point*. It is common knowledge that actors must be passionate in order to communicate and win the hearts of their audience. We believe that managers should follow this example and communicate in a way that is both fascinating and heartfelt. It is important to create an internally founded and externally accepted common basis for communication – whether it comes from the management, the communication department, the employees or the marketing department. The heart model also encourages the elimination of traditional divisions between internal and external tasks, since they only confuse the signals being sent.

If you learn how to use the heart model the experiences you create will be actively and automatically integrated in the analysis and strategy phases through actions and behavior. The model also helps you minimize the gap between the company or product’s real value and perceived value.

Companies often invest considerable resources in external consultants who perform identity and cultural analyses in order to define the main characteristics and differentiating factors. This often results in a set of refined values that express how the company would like to be, but these can be hard to recognize in real life. Without the introduction of measures that lead to purposeful behavior which is perceived by internal and external stakeholders as being absolutely genuine, values tend to end up as hollow words.

Identity manuals and descriptions on how to integrate values are by no means the best way to communicate. It takes inspiration, learning and involvement – and management must be prepared to lead the way. A task as important as ensuring that employees understand the company values and are motivated to support them cannot be left to a reference manual or a

PowerPoint presentation. These will only cause more confusion. Some companies put up banners to remind employees about the importance of values in their everyday work. But the question is: Do values become a way of life just because they are on a banner? The answer is definitely no, because this type of communication fails to motivate and involve the recipient physically.

One of the reasons that Oticon's "Spaghetti Organization" became such a resounding success was that CEO Lars Kolind led the way. Rather than using manuals and speeches to try to sell the company's new values of *openness, flexibility* and *less bureaucracy*, he encouraged a change in behavior. He introduced open offices where the staff had to be prepared to roll their possessions from one area to another, which forced them to be more open and more flexible. He also placed an oversized shredder in the mail room on top of a huge transparent column that penetrated the reception area, so that the staff and visitors could see that the company was moving towards a paperless, less bureaucratic way of life. These physical changes made the new values exceptionally easy to relate to.

Messages get trapped in print, often without any clear, creative form and without being a part of any communication policy. This very common problem can cause frustration, conflicts and misunderstandings both internally and externally. Messages that lack a solid foundation do not engender support, involvement or sympathy.

Experience-based communication helps you avoid the value gap that often exists due to a lack of understanding or differences between internal and external perceptions, because it is based on the dramatization of messages and storytelling. And being accurate, flexible and trustworthy, experience-based communication encourages dialog. Wherever they land in the value chain, your messages will be heard, seen, tasted, smelt, felt and perceived to be absolutely genuine.

No company or manager worth their salt would turn down the opportunity to be able to move people, involve them and get them to socialize. If you can make your employees, suppliers, customers or consumers your ambassadors, you will achieve tangible results.

Precision, Flexibility, Dialog, Trustworthiness and Understanding

A Higher Level of Accuracy

When a message is communicated from management to the rest of an organization it often happens vertically. It filters down through the communication chain. Unfortunately, the more messengers there are, the higher is the risk that the content of the message will be distorted. A well-known game that illustrates this is when a group of children are given the task of passing on a story: the first child makes up a story and then tells it to the child next in line, and so on. The last child then gets up and tells repeats the story for the whole group – and this version is never the same as the original. And the more messengers there are, the worse it gets!

The CEOs of McDonalds and the Coca Cola Company believe that personal meetings are crucial. Each year they have “Mac-days” and “Go Red” days, where managers become employees for the day – either by working in their restaurants or by visiting any level in their supply chain. So employees are in no doubt that the management is interested in what they are doing.

External consultants can also benefit from the improved understanding that arises from physical meetings. Few consultants visit their customers with the aim of experiencing the organization and their employees. But consider this: if you are going to represent a company and really appreciate the uniqueness of its customers, a factual briefing via e-mail or a meeting with the marketing and personnel departments will not suffice. People need to *feel* messages and experiences. A visit made with the sole aim of observing a company’s culture offers much deeper insight than a general briefing.

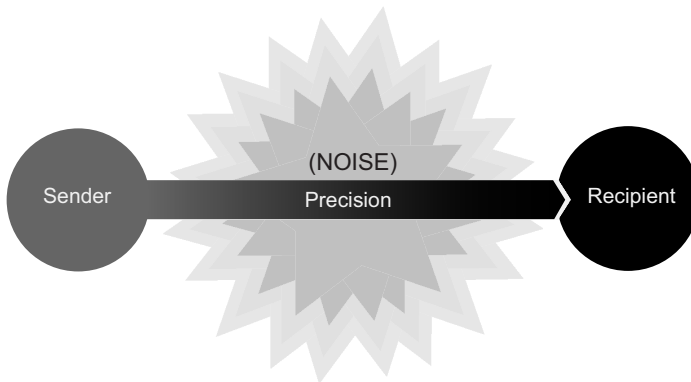
Experiences seduce people to open their eyes and pay attention

Companies can make their external communication more precise and easier to understand by avoiding traditional one-way media, and either meeting their target audience personally or inviting them to events instead. Experiences

force people to pay attention, and they find it easier to remember messages when they have been given a unique frame of reference that stems from a face-to-face exchange.

More Dialog and Flexibility

Companies that operate in dynamic and constantly changing markets need to be flexible in order to be able to adapt and stay ahead of the competition. Most external communication media lack the flexibility of experiences, and they often reach the recipients too late. Identity manuals, action plans and internal memos are often outdated before they have even been distributed – if they get seen and read at all. Communication does not take place in the here and now because things are not sent and received in real time.



When a message finally reaches the end of the line it will often have lost its significance, which means that it will no longer be in accordance with the sender's intentions. There is a high risk that it will be misinterpreted or fail to reach the people it should.

If the chosen medium fails to encourage feedback and a dialog with the sender, or if recipients cannot verify that their perceptions are correct, then misunderstandings are likely to occur.

Experiences and two-way communication encourage dialog and feedback

These can result in conflicts, and the lack of opportunity to provide feedback will reduce the employees' motivation. This is why experiences and two-way communication are preferable; they encourage dialog and

feedback both internally and externally. They also ensure that objectives remain within the overall frame of reference of both the employees and other stakeholders. The larger the target group and the more fragmented the organization, the more serious and self-fuelling conflicts can become.

More Trustworthiness

Do people perceive communication to be trustworthy? This question is crucial to efficiency because it determines whether messages actually reach their destination. Trustworthiness depends not only on the content of the message but also on the sender’s credibility. Messages conveyed

Personal messages inspire a good deal more trust than signed memos

personally by the management of a company inspire a good deal more trust than signed memos. To put it simply, impersonal messages lack authenticity.

Employees often feel that the management has very little understanding of the culture of the rest of the organization; no understanding of their day-to-day problems, and a lack of faith in their ability to perform effectively enough. If the managers cannot win the trust of the employees, and if they fail to acknowledge and respond to the realities they face, conflicts will ensue.

If, for instance, a supplier produces a set of guidelines telling their dealers how to interact with customers in shops, they may well be met with resistance. As far as the dealers are concerned, the guidelines may be totally out of touch with reality. One way of avoiding this situation is to communicate with dealers through experiences which give them an opportunity to voice their opinions and influence decisions. It is not about selling messages; it is about giving individuals experiences that turn them into volunteers.

The Volkswagen car manufacturer invited all of its VW dealers to a castle on a beautiful island. Rather than trying to force the dealers to accept the new TDI Cup campaign they gave them the opportunity to experience it prior to the launch. The dealers were invited to provide feedback and participate in a lecture and a dinner. This experience made the messages seem more meaningful and more authentic.

Another example is a large, Scandinavian refuse-collection company that claims to take its work very seriously – winning contracts because of it. But consider this: if their reception area were to resemble a disaster zone, customers or business partners would immediately recognize that the reality was not at all in keeping with their projected image. In today’s open and transparent society, values can all too easily lose their credibility – at

which time they lose support both internally and externally. Rule number one is to live up to your values 100% because values can no longer be camouflaged.

Let us take another hypothetical situation with the refuse collection company, in which they find an excellent way to live up to their cleanliness value, which is not directly related to the simple removal of garbage. Let's say that the company actually *refuses* to remove the garbage at one customer site because it was neither properly sorted nor included in the contract. If this refusal is followed by suggestions as to where the refuse could be sent, then the company's cleanliness value will appear even more trustworthy. The moral of this story is that it is not *what* you do; it is *how* you do it that lends credibility to your values.

More Understanding

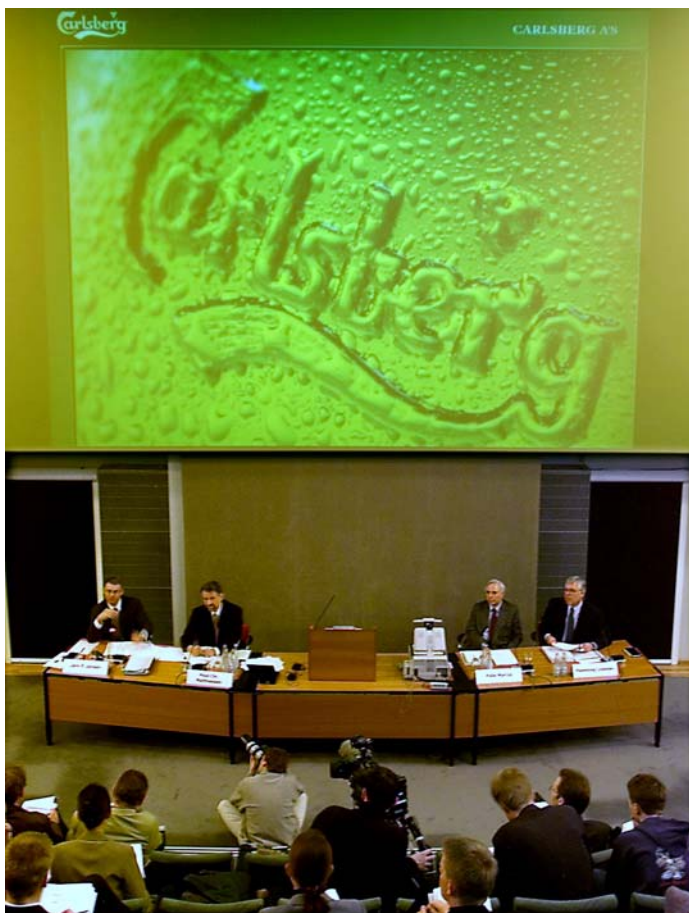
When people have difficulty comprehending certain messages, an understanding gap emerges. This can be avoided by choosing a communication channel that allows you to achieve the desired accuracy, flexibility and level of understanding. Traditional internal and external marketing channels (e.g. newsletters and printed advertising) require a certain degree of self motivation on behalf of the recipient, which limits their efficiency when it comes to communicating complex messages – particularly internal ones generated by management.

Messages become
more meaningful
when they engage
body and mind

Messages become more meaningful when people experience them physically and psychologically. If you can involve employees, suppliers, customers and consumers in the communication process, they will

become immersed in the experience in both body and mind. And you will have improved their understanding, made them feel more supportive, and influenced their behavior.

Sender/
Recipient



In 2000, Carlsberg Breweries' presentation of their annual accounts turned into a minor catastrophe. Subsequently the price of the company's shares fell. Questions posed by analysts, investors and the press went unanswered, and both the CEO and the management were perceived as being too passive (Photograph: Polfoto)

The staging of values and messages on an internal basis may not be considered significant but is extremely important nevertheless. One example could be a press conference covering a company's presentation of its annual accounts. The importance of such an event should not be underestimated, because stock-exchange listed companies are extremely vulnerable to speculation and lack of trust. Things can turn sour if the staging and the presentation are poor – even if the figures are good! A CEO who appears to lack vision; who fails to present himself well or who underestimates the importance of the staging of a press conference can cause the market value of a company to drop. A paucity of motivation can

have a critical effect on the understanding of messages both inside and outside the company.

How Experiences Function Internally

The model below summarizes the advantages of working with experiences in internal communication. The message is clear: that companies whose messages come from within and are properly dramatized stand a better chance of motivating and educating their employees (Fig. 22).

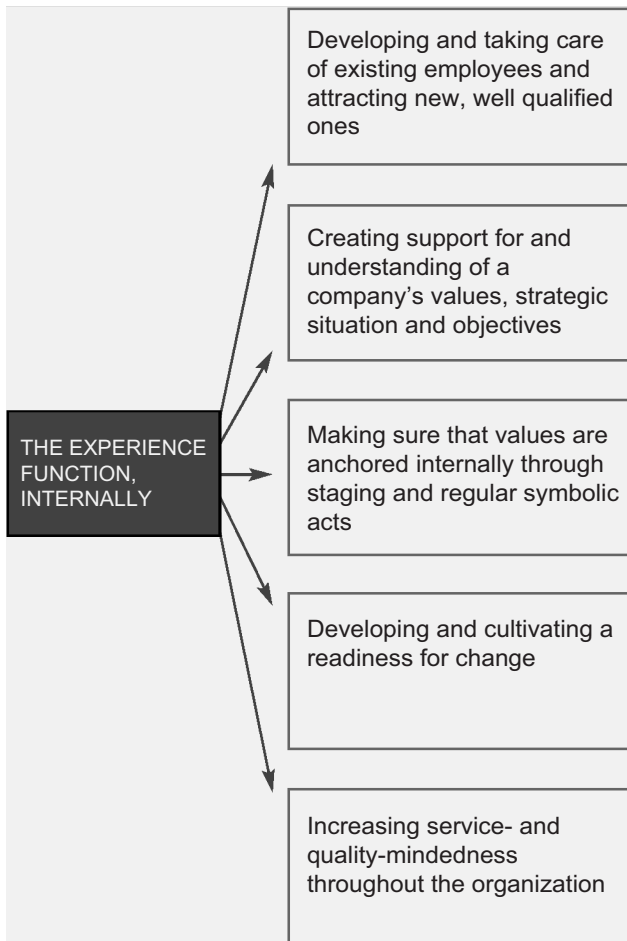


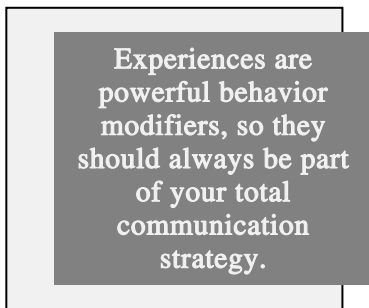
Fig. 22 The function of experiences internally

An illustrative example of the importance of staging internally is a campaign that was designed to launch a number of consumer durables throughout northern Europe. The products were staged along with other innovative products in order to take advantage of the synergy between message and target audience. All of the products fell into the same category: design-wise they were advanced yet easy to use, and none had yet been released to market. All of the exhibits were prototypes, apart from the product being launched. The event also included presentations by futurologists about changing trends.

The strategy was this: the product was to be perceived as an exclusive, easy-to-use, visionary solution. Potential buyers were invited through direct mail and PR. However, no resources had been allocated to introduce the exhibition to dealers (shops), so the dealers had difficulty understanding why they were supposed to market other company's products. Despite the fact that they had distributed a manual carefully describing and illustrating the concept, they still had to field criticism and questions that had arisen due to a lack of comprehension. Significant internal resources were channeled into explaining and selling the idea to those dealers.

This emphasizes the benefits of creating experiences designed to motivate and enlighten employees and salespeople *prior* to launching important campaigns. One dealer who had been invited to an exhibition in his local area said: "Oh, I can see that it's a great idea – I understand it now." Confucius could not have put it better: "I see and I forget. I hear and I remember I do and I understand". The exhibition was a success and created significant media coverage. The news also spread by word of mouth. This example underlines one of the unique strengths of experiences, which is *news value*.

The Sensitive Identity



Experiences are powerful behavior modifiers, so they should always be part of your total communication strategy.

Internal and external communication must be recipient-oriented in order to be taken seriously and meet people's expectations. Remember that any products and elements of a company that can be sensed (i.e. the sensitive identity), will be subject to close scrutiny.

A company's Sensitive Identity should be based on its values.

A company's sensitive identity should be based on its values. Consider this: How do people experience your values? And what kind of experiences should you create in order support your messages? The challenge is to formulate your sensitive identity in a

way that makes it easy to see and comprehend. You can facilitate this by making sure that your employees present a united front whenever they are in contact with the outside world (Fig. 23).

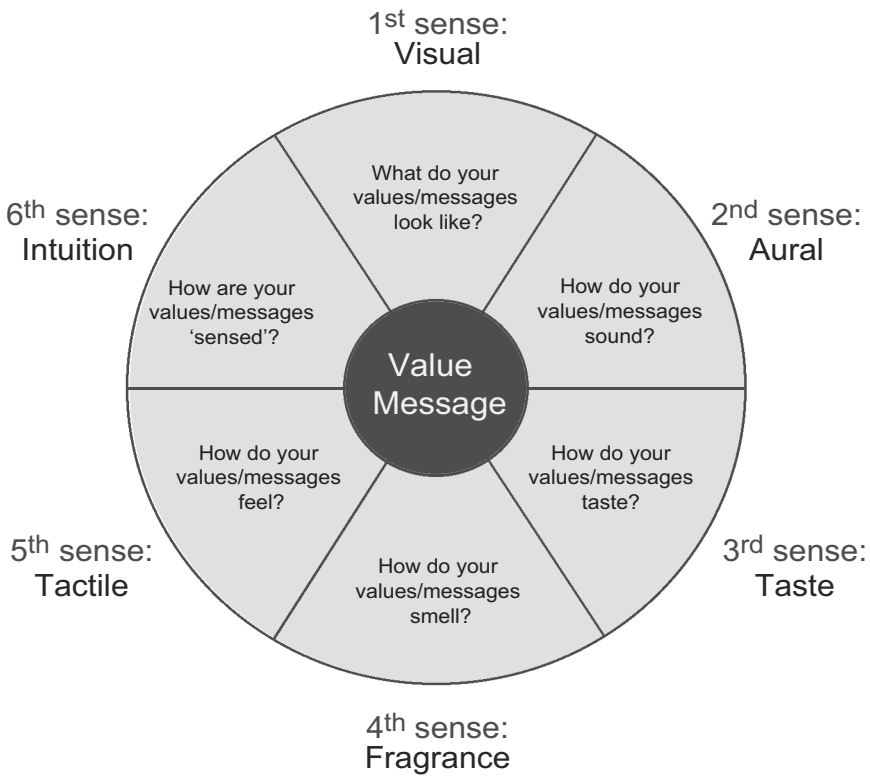


Fig. 23 The sensitive identity (3rdDimension©)

Formulating Your Sensitive Identity

Having defined and formulated your fundamental values the next step is to ask how you, your values and your messages is experienced like. How do they feel, taste, sound, look, and smell? When you can answer these questions you will know how your values are experienced. If the experience reflects your fundamental values, then your sensitive identity is strong. But if your messages and values cannot be sensed and demonstrated, their impact on employees and other interested parties will be disappointing.

Having considered how *you* experience your values in terms of sound, sight, smell, touch and taste it is useful to pose the same question to a representative selection of other people within your organization and externally. Do have they similar perceptions, and are their answers consistent? Obviously there will be variations, but if one person says that your values sound like a jet taking off, and another person says they sound like a piece of harmonious piano music, then there is a conflict.

One ingrained perception is that the visual sense is the most important one. Most companies can describe what they look like, and they are very conscious of the visual element. However, if you ask people how their company is experienced then the answer is often the same: “Well, you see...” This is a pitfall because people’s perceptions exceed simple visual interpretations; they also include non-verbal behavior and the way things smell, sound, feel, taste and are sensed.

By giving people the opportunity to sense your company and your products you can discover whether they are being represented correctly, whether they are being experienced positively, and whether they make people feel involved to such an extent that they interact socially.

When determining your sensitive identity it is essential to identify your core senses. It would be a mistake to try to integrate all five senses if this does not feel natural and relevant. It must be authentic. Often a sensitive identity will consist of only one or two senses. Take a hearing aid manufacturer, for instance. With hearing as a core sense, it follows that they should use sound to demonstrate their abilities in this field. It should be an integral part of the dialog at every contact point with the outside world. They could create a sound logo and use it as a switchboard waiting tone, a ring tone for employee cell phones, or feature it on their website etc. The company could also install a “sound lab” at its headquarters or at their retailers, where visitors could see and perhaps experiment with some of the

types of technology being used in product development. This would show people how innovative, serious about research and willing to sharing knowledge the company was.

In 2001 the American consultancy firm Harvest Consulting Group introduced a model called BrandSense™³⁷, many of the principles of which appeared two years later in a book called “Brand Sense”, written by Martin Lindstrom. The BrandSense™ model differs from the sensitive identity Model in that it does not include a sixth sense or attach any importance to learning via physical involvement and the staging of values and messages. By carefully considering whether their brands can be sensed, companies can gain a more holistic view of their entire communication strategy. The model actively and systematically ensures that experiences become part of the analysis and strategic development phases.

This model can help your company determine the value of its strategies and bringing them to life. It can also help you close the gap between the actual value of a product and its perceived value. This gap exists because the boundaries between companies and the surrounding world are fading fast. There is more communication between stakeholders across internal and external spheres, and in order to cope with this increased transparency, any signals you send must harmonize both internally and externally. This is why it is vital to involve *all* of your stakeholders in defining and developing your fundamental values.

The primary goal is to make your values truthful. There is a danger in choosing values that are attractive to external stakeholders because if they have no foundation in daily life your employees will be completely unable to relate to them. Nor is there any point in choosing values that glorify the company because this will also damage their credibility.

For values to become the foundation of a company’s identity or brand they must be organizationally and historically well rooted, yet express what the company stands for today – and where it is headed in an increasingly recipient-oriented world. Unfortunately this is easier said than done: a survey carried out by communication consultants Valoer and Tinge indicates that when it comes to expressing values, most companies have difficulty. Statistics show that most of them use the same twenty terms³⁸ (Table 3).

Most frequently used values
Competence
Quality
Trustworthiness
Customer focus
Responsibility

Table 3 Most frequently used values (Valoer and Tinge 2001)

What is striking is that companies fail to live up to many of these values, and to be honest, how can a company differentiate itself from the competition when it shares exactly the same beliefs? Values are determined by the surrounding world and by the market. What really differentiates one company from the next is how it transforms its values

What really differentiates one company from the next is how it transforms its values into behavior, via experiences.

into behavior, via experiences. A concept such as the sensitive identity is particularly useful because it increases awareness and focuses on experiences as a differentiating factor.

In the future all companies, institutions, interest groups, etc. will have to take the issue of bringing values to life very seriously. Their

multi-sensory aspects must be harmonious, there must be synergy between them, and they must be given the correct form in all internal and external communication. This achieved, you will have taken a major step towards anchoring your values so firmly in the organization that they can be actively and physically integrated in your communication. Your credibility and trustworthiness will remain intact because your actions and behavior finally reflect your fundamental beliefs.

Multi-Sensory Identities: Silly or Serious?

It can sound rather comical to ask how values and messages sound and smell, but consider this: if you were visited by a mint salesman with bad breath, what kind of impression are you likely to get? In the food industry such things are not considered silly at all. Chocolate needs to smell good; otherwise we are not inclined to eat it. During product development such sensory aspects are the object of meticulous analysis, and products are carefully tested before being released onto the market.

Sensory aspects are in focus in other sectors too – including the car industry. For instance, Audi has a special “nose team”³⁹. Around 500 different components inside each new Audi model are evaluated by one of the most sophisticated instruments of them all: the human nose.



Audi's “nose team” consists of three women and two men. They perform quality tests from the earliest stage of product development until the cars leave the production line (Photograph: Dougie Ferth)

Harley Davidson has patented a sound, and Alfa Romeo has developed the special sound that emanates from their exhaust pipes. Would it be possible to imagine or even visit a company with its own fragrance? Smell is surely a part of the experience!

In England, Barclays Bank achieved great success by portraying itself as the homely bank that offered coffee to visiting customers. This helped to create an atmosphere in which people felt comfortable. Barclays Bank shifted its focus from technology, products and prices because these competitive parameters were no longer considered important. Such experiences are hard to copy because they are unique and take place between the bank and their individual customers. The initiative benefited Barclays in several ways: there were increases in customer loyalty, employee satisfaction and communication efficiency.

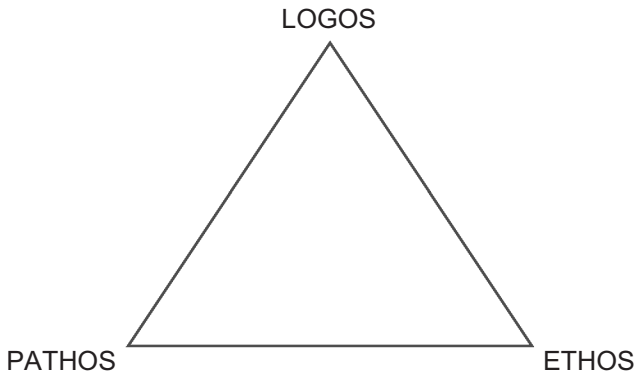
This emphasizes the fact that it is often the little things that count the most. You do not necessarily have to invest heavily in developing a unique “company fragrance” or a new interior design. The process of exploring the sensitive identity will increase your awareness of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats involved when staging messages and trying to influence behavior. The most important thing is to be aware of how your employees behave and what kind of experiences they deliver when dealing with each other and other interested parties. If you stage and dramatize your messages and experiences, you will achieve better results.

It is interesting to note that neurological research shows that taste and smell make people more attentive and that these senses are closely related to sight. For instance, the smell of jasmine has a stimulating effect that makes us focus better and see more clearly too. So the idea of integrating all senses into your communication is perfectly logical. After all, well-stimulated employees must be every manager’s dream!

Staging and dramatization achieves better results

As individuals we are very conscious of how we look, speak, dress, smell and feel, etc. We are also conscious of our sentiments and norms. We are good at staging ourselves on the basis of our own perceptions. But if we try to act in ways we cannot live up to, we soon slip up. The external self is closely linked to the internal self.

In ancient Greece the philosopher Aristotle talked about three virtues that are important to communication: Pathos, Logos and Ethos. Pathos is about being able to influence the recipient’s emotions. Logos is about being able to understand messages through sober reasoning, and Ethos is about being trustworthy. It is important to influence the heart and the brain, but to be truly successful it is crucial to be perceived as being authentic.



The same applies to companies and brands that in principle can be characterized as “personalities”. These form the framework for the experience, but if there is any inconsistency between the identity and the way in which the company is experienced, then it will seem insincere and people’s attitudes will change. Companies must appear to be authentic – from the way they look to the way they smell, feel, taste and sound, etc. A strong sensitive identity based on the way the company is experienced will help you retain good employees and attract new ones. It will help you attract new customers too.

Charting your sensitive identity will help you ensure that any active or passive communication is consistent with the real-life experience. Active communication – whether it is advertisements, sales materials, brochures or the interior design of a reception area – will only be beneficial when conveying the right messages. And passive communication between companies and customers (e.g. emails, letters, invoices and orders) will only be beneficial if they are in keeping with those messages.

Charting your Sensitive Identity will help you ensure that all communication is consistent with the real-life experience

In today’s transparent society companies can no longer get away with claiming to be something they are not. Customer loyalty can only be won by making the right promises, and keeping them. Products must be good – but they must also deliver unique experiences. The various senses shown

in the model are not equally weighted, nor do they make up a proportional part of total impression. However, the sum of all five senses ends up being greater than five because the synergy effect creates a kind of “sixth sense”, which could be said to be the *spirit* of the organization. It floats somewhere, just out of reach, but it can be sensed and understood intuitively.

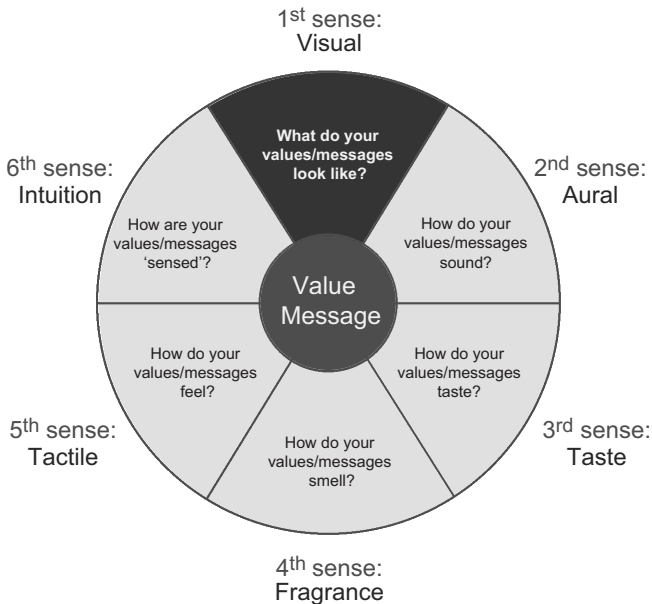
Apple Inc. possesses a “sixth sense” or “spirit” – as do Sony, Microsoft and Dell. What these four companies have in common is a founder with a powerful personality. A company’s spirit is often related to a solid personification of its values, yet having a strong founder is not essential. This spirit can become apparent in the way in which the company stages itself and its products. Apple’s president Steve Jobs has sent some crystal clear signals in his time, one of the strongest being his return to work (after having stepped down) in order to get the flailing enterprise back on track. His dedication to sponsoring non-profit organizations also sends clear signals both internally and externally, contributing to his status as a living legend.

Velux A/S, a company that won worldwide recognition for its skylight windows, is characterized by an intuitive understanding shared by management, employees and customers. Velux windows don’t just let in light; they improve people’s quality of life. This spirit makes employees feel proud of their jobs and their company. And the management – ever ready to emphasize just how special their engineers are – refer to them as *daylight engineers*.

Velux’s sixth sense manifests itself in the little details: a simple angle hinge is not just a hinge, but an “adornment”. During a company presentation at a conference, Velux’s marketing director proudly displayed a photograph of an employee from a jubilee celebration who had had his head shaved and the word “Velux” stamped on the back of it. Thus the sixth sense also manifests itself in the value-based social interaction that takes place on an everyday basis – and in the reactions of recipients.

We will now discuss the significance of each sense and provide examples of companies that have benefited from integrating senses in their communication.

The Visual Identity: What Form do Your Messages Take?



According to Aristotle, all perception begins with sight. This is still the most important and most used of all the senses, and it is a fact that colors and shapes influence us. Visual and geometric forms have always played an important role in shaping the identity of companies and products. Absolut Vodka is a prime example of a strong visual identity. The shape of the bottle is such an integral part of communication that the company can afford to play with it in advertising in much the same way as the Guinness brewery does with the shape of their label.

A graphic identity is another tool that increases people's awareness of a brand and which helps to differentiate one brand from another. The MIT (Massachusetts Institute of Technology) uses a certain font for all graphic communication such as signs, leaflets, and advertising. Most companies are conscious of the need for their visual identity to appear harmonious and cohesive. When the visual communication is congruent it becomes a strong signature and increases people's ability to recognize things. This is because we are good at remembering shapes and pictures.

You may recognize this situation: you have been trying to find a product in a supermarket with no success. A shop assistant shows you where the product is, and then you realize that you were so focused on finding one particular brand – looking for a specific color, form or logo – that you overlooked everything else. We see what we want to see, and therefore sometimes fail to see other things. Other sensory stimuli can therefore be very helpful because they help to

Visual and geometric shapes have always played an important part in shaping the identity of companies and products

change behavioral patterns that have become ingrained – especially when shopping.

Changing people's habits can also be useful in business contexts by changing the way employees and consumers perceive messages. This is why people are often presented with untraditional sales ploys in shops. There is no doubt that our sense of sight plays a major role in helping us to distinguish between competing products.

Light can also be utilized to create simple yet powerful symbolic actions. The pharmaceutical company AstraZeneca is very active in the battle against cancer. In October 2003 they chose to celebrate International Cancer Day by illuminating their head office in Södertälje, Sweden with the light violet color that symbolizes the battle against cancer.

In 2001, pump manufacturer Grundfos formulated three new values: *Be; Think; Innovate*. They also had a new logo designed. A color was chosen for each value, based on the symbolism of colors. When the new values and logo were presented internally and externally, the colors formed part of the decoration both at a conference and a gala dinner. Indeed the colors were used actively throughout the evening. A strong symbolic action marked the end of the event: in Copenhagen harbor a wall of water was raised with the aid of the company's pumps, right in front of the astonished



Pharmaceutical company AstraZeneca's head office in Södertälje, Sweden, 2002. The building was lit up on International Cancer Day with the color that symbolizes the battle against cancer (Photograph: AstraZeneca press photograph)

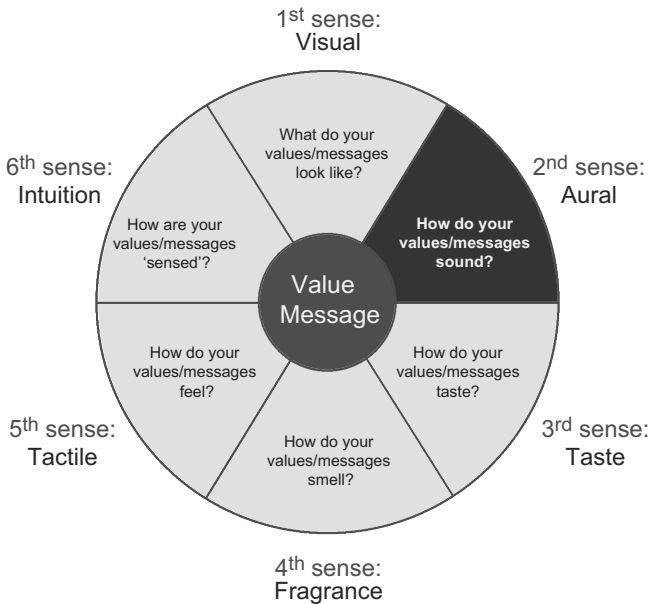


Global pump manufacturer Grundfos used its own pumps to raise a wall of water in the harbor in Copenhagen for the benefit of the employees. A film presenting the new branding universe was projected on this wall (Photograph: 3rdDimension©)

employees. Most of them had expected to see fireworks. Instead they witnessed the company’s new brand film being projected on the wall of water. This was also illuminated with the company’s new colors, and the film was accompanied by music composed specifically for this occasion.

Such a symbolic act is far more memorable than a PowerPoint presentation, and clearly demonstrates that dramatized messages can have a profound impact on the audience. The symbolic act is still a living story in the company.

The Aural Identity: How Does Your Message Sound?

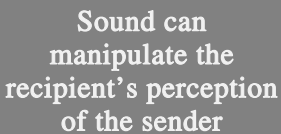


Why is so little attention given to environmental sounds in companies? Sound can influence people’s perceptions not only of a product but also an entire company, association, restaurant or domicile. Often it is the minor details that count. AOL and McDonald’s are well-known examples of companies that use celebrities to build their brands. Pop-star Britney Spears recorded the famous AOL sentence “You’ve got mail”, and Justin Timberlake recorded the “I’m lovin’ it” phrase for McDonald’s advertisements.

Visual and aural elements have long been used in TV, radio and internet communication. Jingles help to make TV and radio spots successful. Most people recognize the characteristic sound of the Intel processor; it has helped to convince people that this specific, generic component in computers is the best choice.

Product engineers have been interested in acoustic design for a long time. The fact that Audi has taken out a patent on the sound of its car doors shutting is only the beginning, showing how significant a sound can be when it comes to people's perception of the quality and attractiveness of a product.

Take washing machines and household appliances, for example. The sounds they make can influence the consumer's purchasing decision. The



Sound can
manipulate the
recipient's perception
of the sender

grinding sound that a coffee mill produces has a dual effect: it tells us what the appliance does *and* creates pleasant associations of taking the time to make and enjoy a good cup of coffee. Where product development is concerned, sound can manipulate the

recipient's perception of the sender. This is why acoustic design continues to be an important parameter.

The aural aspect of the sensitive identity is vital. If you have ever been out driving in the country, listening to radio ads for various well known brands you have probably noticed that they are often accompanied by soundtracks ranging from classical music to pop. The sound has nothing to do with the products that are advertised, and the soundtracks have a distracting effect that can damage the value of the brand and the company's sensitive identity. Confusion arises because local radio stations often choose the background music themselves. There are no guidelines for this – or if there are, they are ignored.

Other examples of the significance of sound are the tunes companies play when putting callers on hold. One company that has paid careful attention to this is the Tivoli Amusement Park in Copenhagen. Tivoli plays Danish composer H.C. Lumbye's famous *Champagne Gallop* to waiting callers. This tune is so closely linked to Tivoli that people immediately connect it with the park's symphony orchestra and pleasant experiences in the magical gardens. And this puts them in a positive frame of mind.

There is no point in playing classical or any other kind of music without first considering what kind of signals you want to send to the person at the other end of the line. Is the music related to your company values? Does it make people feel favorably disposed towards your company – and are the associations it creates in keeping with your identity? Far too often the experience is arbitrary and the music is just an annoying noise that makes the waiting time seem even longer than it already is.

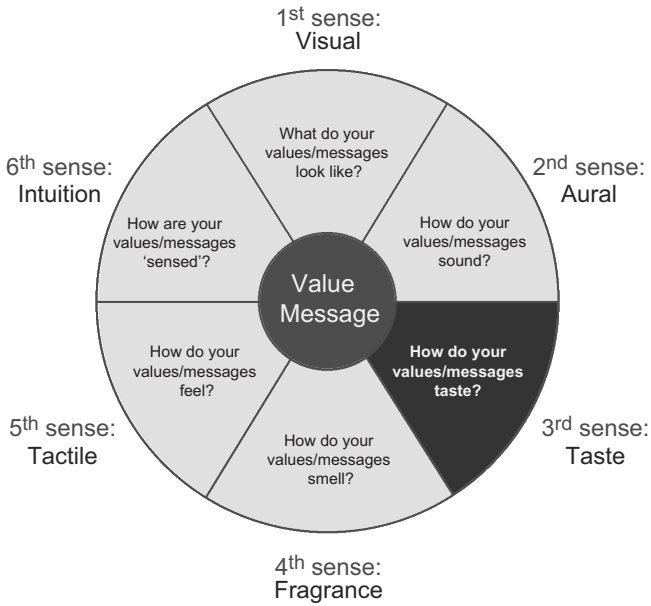
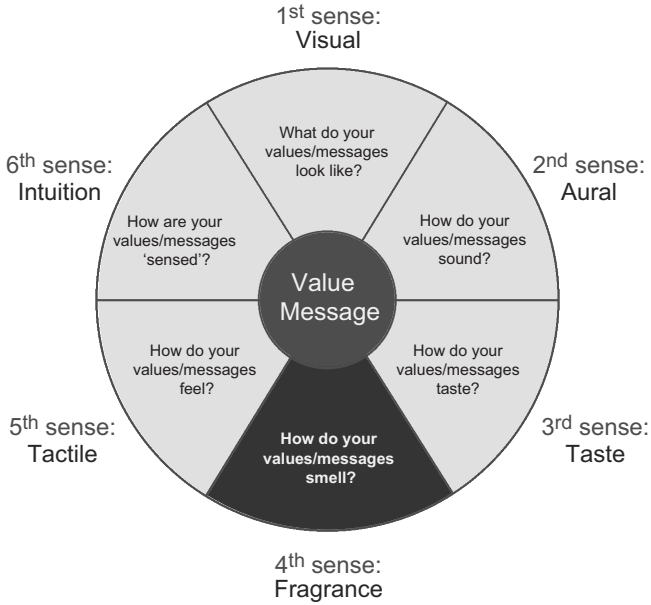
Sounds can alter our perception of time and put us in a good mood. Sounds cannot work miracles but they can help to ensure that when a conversation finally begins, it begins on a positive note. In Moscow, Russia, 12 actors have recorded messages to replace the usual monotone recordings usually heard in the Metro. They include: “This is the last stop.” “We’ve made it – what good fortune.” And “Sokolniki station – my favorite.” The metro plans to introduce the celebrity service on all red-line trains for a trial period as part of the celebrations to mark its 70th anniversary. As Sergei Miroshkin, Deputy Head of the Moscow metro told the Moscow Times, “We’ll see what people’s reactions are. We can’t be certain that everyone will like it.” The use of celebrity voices in metro announcements is an excellent good example of sound branding.

Companies also tend to overlook the effect of sound on the well-being and productiveness of their employees. It can improve their perception of their environment and also their understanding of the company’s values. Many companies have begun to develop their own sound logos for integration at every contact point featuring sound – i.e. ringtones, PCs, doorbells, telephone waiting tones, web pages, etc. So why don’t you get your own sound logo, based on who you are?

The wine industry faces quite a dilemma today because every twentieth bottle of wine is discarded because it tastes corked. The logical solution is the screw cap, partly because it saves money and partly because nothing goes to waste. The problem is that consumers would no longer be able to enjoy the *sound* and ritual of the bottle of wine being opened. For many people a screw cap would ruin the entire experience, and it will be interesting to see whether these perceptions will affect the producers’ decision to migrate to screw caps.

- Sound can enhance the value of a product or a company
- Sound supports messages by conjuring up mental images and evoking feelings
- Sound can put people in a positive frame of mind

The Fragrance and Taste Identity: How Do Your Messages Smell and Taste?



When companies communicate internally they very rarely use the senses of smell and taste to strengthen their values and messages. Surveys indicate that people remember aromas 80% better than any stimuli coming from the rest of their senses. Within the field of aromatherapy much research has been performed into the effects of smell on the human psyche. Aromatherapy – one of the oldest arts of healing - can be traced back to 4,500 BC, where the Egyptians used ethereal oils for medicinal and cosmetic purposes and for wellbeing in general. These oils also had antiseptic qualities useful in the mummification process.

When ethereal oils were inhaled or applied to the skin they were found to have an amazing effect on the human psyche – and this is just as true today. The correct fragrances can help companies create the favorable disposition so important to motivation and the comprehension of messages.

Smells can influence people's perception of a company

The smells that meet people when they enter a building or a shop influence their perceptions of the company. Real estate agents have discovered the significance of smells on the sales process. They often ask homeowners to bake buns, put flowers on tables and light candles before potential buyers come in for a viewing. The odor and the atmosphere are extremely important because they help to convey the spirit of the house, which gives people a much better idea of what it would be like to live there, recalling mothers baking perhaps.

An American survey showed that people waiting in queues at a bank became less impatient when there was a pleasant smell compared to when there was no smell at all. Smells do have a major effect; the smell of smoke will put you on the defensive while a waft of cedar will make you feel calm and relaxed. Smells can also trigger mental images; the smell of pine is loaded with values because it conjures up cozy scenes at Christmas. Companies should therefore utilize smells more often when promoting

Smells help people to remember information and experiences

products or services, to trigger the desired associations.

Smells also help people to remember information and experiences. The American Lewis Thomas once said: "The act of smelling something,

anything, is remarkably like the act of thinking. Immediately at the

moment of perception you can feel the mind going to work, sending the odor around from place to place, setting off complex repertoires through the brain, polling one center after another for signs of recognition, for old memories and old connections.”

Smells are closely related to memories. The sharp smell of rubber, for instance, will make some people remember inflatable beach balls and childhood experiences, while others will remember rainy days in a tent at a music festival. Smells are more effective than pictures at evoking strong feelings because they conjure up memories of events that mean something emotionally. For years, German companies found it really difficult to sell cleaning materials containing chlorine, until they discovered that chlorine triggered unhappy memories of the disinfectants used for cleaning buildings damaged in World War Two. It is wise to remember that there can be cultural and individual differences regarding people’s perceptions of smell.

Research carried out by the American Smell & Taste Treatment Research Foundation has documented the significance of fragrances on people’s perception of a product. As an experiment, two identical pairs of Nike trainers were placed in two separate rooms in the same shop. One of the rooms had no odor, while the other smelt of flowers. Eight out of ten pairs of Nike shoes were sold from the fragrant room because shoppers felt that these shoes were better than the ones in the other room. They were also willing to pay more for the shoes from the room that smelt nice. So it has been scientifically proven that smell and taste have great influence on the value of a product.

Singapore Airlines make sure that on their aircraft everything smells good – from the stewardesses’ perfume and the menus on board to the hot, damp towels given to passengers just before touchdown. Everything has been thoroughly thought through. Another example is the BA Arrival Lounge for business class travelers at Heathrow Airport, where British Airways uses smells such as “freshly mown grass” and “salty sea air” to create a soothing and relaxing atmosphere.

One rather bizarre example is a Japanese watchmaker who has built a small odor box into his alarm clocks. In addition to emitting a sound the clock releases a smell that makes its owner feel quite restless. Smells can definitely differentiate one product from another!

Amusement arcades and casinos have long been searching for fragrances that can keep people at their machines for longer periods. Shops lead the way when it comes to exploiting consumer environments because they know what works and what doesn't. Why not use the smell of coconut oil or citrus flowers inside travel agency branches? Or the smell of eucalyptus in business cabins on trains to stimulate the brain and counteract sleepiness? Or even the smell of lemon balm in the rest cabins, to make travelers feel sleepy and relaxed? There are countless opportunities for combining a unique mix of ethereal oils that have various effects on the human mind, and which improve the indoor climate through bacteriological purification. The table below shows the effect of just a few of the fragrances used in Aromatherapy (Table 4).

The effects of fragrances	
Orange	Warms and refreshes
Cedar wood	Restores balance and is relaxing
Grape	Mood lifting and stimulating
Sage	Stimulating – also sexually
Lavender	Reduces stress and is refreshing

Table 4 *Effects of fragrances (aromatherapy)*

Although *taste* is regarded as insignificant (unless your product is supposed to be eaten) there is no reason why companies selling exclusive products cannot serve exclusive beverages for customers visiting their showrooms. Some reception areas have little bowls of sweets or biscuits. In Denmark at Christmas time the smaller grocery stores often put delicious food samples on the counter – not to sell more, but to make customers feel welcome. Taste is often symbolic and it can help to accentuate a message and make it more stimulating. Different tastes can help to whet our appetite, as can other stimuli. Our bodies and brains are stimulated when we taste things. Sugar provides energy for the body and so on. At a conference it can therefore be a good idea to have sweets and other refreshing morsels that stimulate taste and consequently help to sharpen the wits and improve concentration.

- The sense of smell is the most effective at helping people remember things and it creates the strongest associations regarding place, time and space. Sense and taste are mood influencers and they affect people emotionally.
- Fragrances can enhance the value of a product or service.
- Taste is inextricably linked with smell.
- Taste can support fragrances and messages.

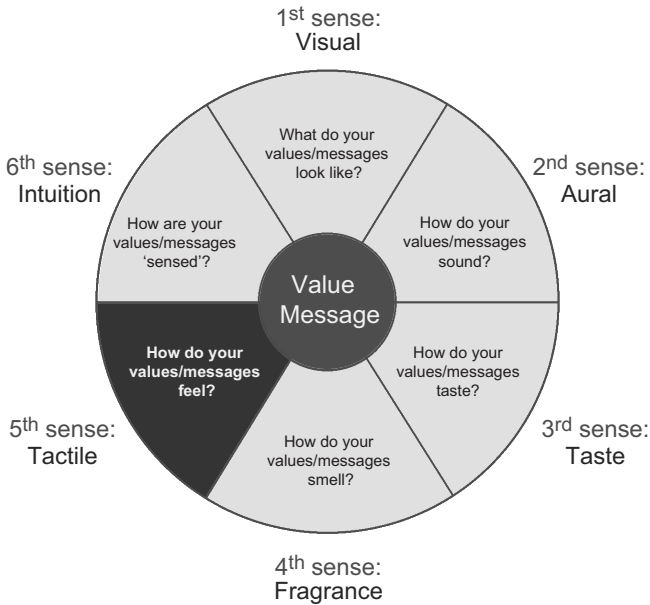
Companies should remember this when trying to bring their core values and messages to life.

A stamp is an important icon in relation to the services performed by a mail service company and as such, should communicate a message. In China a special stamp was released to celebrate the Year of the Pig. When people scratched the front of the stamp, it smelled of sweet and sour pork, and when they licked the back of the stamp, it tasted of the dish too. This is an excellent example of how to use taste and smell – this time in an amusing fashion – to support a message.

Smells have such a high recollection value and such a strong psychological and physiological influence that they can actually enhance the identity of a brand. American company Demeter Fragrances has worked for Disney, Toyota and other companies wishing to incorporate fragrances into clothes, shoes, buildings, cars, etc.

In Ancient Greece the storyteller Herodotus told how King Cambyses of Persia died without leaving an heir to the throne. The new ruler would be chosen from the Persian nobility. The Persian aristocrats agreed that the future king would be the nobleman whose stallion was the quickest to neigh at dawn. In the evening the stallions were lined up at the town gates, and everyone waited anxiously. But there was one man who did more than just wait. This was Oibares, stable master for the highly esteemed Dareios. That same evening Oibares had rubbed his hands in the genitals of a mare in heat. Using this stimulating smell the cunning stable master made his master's stallion neigh as soon as the first ray of sunlight emerged. And so it was that Dareios, who went on to become one of the world's greatest statesmen, took over the throne of Persia through the invisible power of smell.

The Tactile Identity: How Do Messages Feel?



Have you ever stopped to consider what proportion of a company’s communication actually touches and moves the recipient? One of the first lessons salespeople learn is how to shake hands properly. Personality, body language and physical contact are crucial to communication. If people do not warm to you, you will lose points immediately and from there on it will be an uphill climb.

Very little communication influences people’s tactile sense or results in close emotional contact, but at Universal Studios in the US they create a close-to-natural experience of explosions, waterfalls, car chases, etc. Seats and floors in their cinemas vibrate when the plot calls for it, and fans that blow air or drops of water in the direction of the audience all help to make the experience more authentic.

Body language and physical contact are crucial to communication

The tactile sense can also influence how people perceive the quality and value of a product. Do clothes fit properly, will they last for long, and of what kind of material are they made? One of the primary reasons that

e-books never caught on was that people prefer the real thing. We like the

feel of opening a book, turning the pages, closing it and being able to take it with us on a train or to the beach, etc. Being able to touch and sense the book is an integral part of the total experience. The French Telephone Company Orange is testing a novelty in 2008 - a physical e-newspaper in the form of an electronically gadget. A device much like Amazon's "Kindle". Their thinking is right. By giving the e-newspaper a physical form, it has the better of two worlds; always updated news in real time like on the internet and at the same time the script and feeling of reading a traditional newspaper. It might work better than the e-book did.



A warm and solid handshake says much more than words (Photograph: 3rdDimension©)

Within the car industry it is a fact that a large part of a car's value lies in the interior design, the choice of materials, the ergonomics and the driving experience. Different materials trigger different mental images and feelings. For instance, wood is more natural than plastic. And leather and wood are warmer than metal and glass. A Nokia cell phone with a metal cover is more expensive than one with a plastic cover, yet in every other aspect they are identical. Two types of paper might look similar but they do not feel the same. The paper that feels thicker and contains more chalk is typically more expensive than ordinary printer paper, even though both types weigh 20 g.



The exclusive interior of the VW Phaeton. Interior design and choice of materials can have a major influence on the experience of actually sitting in or driving the car (Photograph: Scandinavian Motor Company press photograph)

Due to the perceived naturalness and color of various materials, architects and interior designers spend a lot of time trying to create the right environment, form, appearance, etc. Take plants, for instance. Companies can buy real ones or plastic ones, and each type will send different signals. We can be fooled into believing that a plant is real, but if we feel it with our fingers, its true nature will be revealed – and if it is just an illusion we are likely to be disappointed.

If the design of a chair seems to be more important than the level of comfort it provides, it will convey one message. But if it is soft and comfortable it will convey an entirely different message. There is great signaling value in the way offices, reception areas and shops are designed. At the metro stations in Copenhagen there are no benches and toilets – and this is deliberate. Since travelers are not supposed to stay on the platforms for very long, the only facilities available are upright, short-term “butt supports”.

The perfume industry takes the design of flacons very seriously, since their shape and texture help to emphasize the feminine or masculine side of fragrances. The hairdressing industry is another area in which tactile

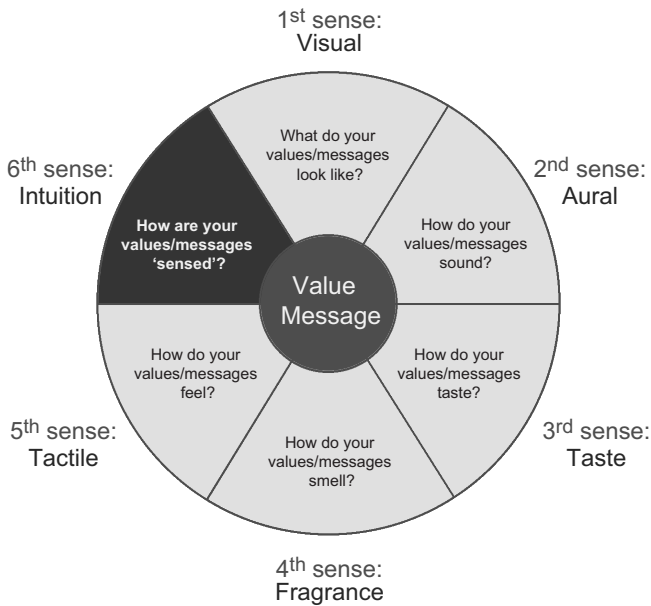
impressions play a pivotal role. The feeling of having your hair carefully washed and your head gently massaged is heavenly. This aspect may not be as important as the skills of the hairdresser, but there is no doubt that it influences the total experience.

Values that can be felt seem more trustworthy and genuine

- The tactile sense activates the whole body
- Feelings have major signaling value
- The tactile sense reveals whether what we experience is genuine

Often the tactile sense is completely ignored as a means of communication. But it can be used to great effect in the experience medium, where you can get in close contact with recipients.

The Intuitive Identity: How Are Your Messages Sensed?



Intuition – bull...! Some people may find this concept a bit too “alternative”. On the other hand, the alternative world is quite fashionable at the moment, so why not? Parapsychology is not what we use to explain the sixth sense; intuition is the sum total of the five senses working together. We sense many things without being conscious of it. Therefore

we often experience a feeling of déjà vu – that we have been somewhere or heard something before. We probably have, but we cannot remember the actual context because our senses only perceive a very limited part of reality: the reality at which our attention is directed. But we do perceive things and events around us without being fully conscious of them. And it is the patterns and feelings that make us believe that we have been somewhere before, heard things before or seen things before.

The intuitive identity of a company or a product is a *story*. We feel the spirit, the unique character, the *atmosphere* that pervades the organization. We sense its history, the pleasure of working there, the openness of the staff, etc.

Often the intuitive identity will be the same as the fundamental assumption of cultural theory: that it is the unconscious part of a particular identity that acts as the common denominator for various values and for some of the more manifest aspects of culture.

Singapore Airlines: a Strong Sensory Identity

In 2002, Singapore Airlines was elected Singapore’s top brand. This accolade is awarded to the company with the highest market value, and which uses brand-building as a strategic tool to differentiate itself from the competition, to increase customer loyalty and to improve results. And Singapore Airlines truly deserved this award. In 2001–2002 the company made a surplus of USD 9.448 million. The airline has won several awards – often the same one, year after year. Singapore Airlines lives up to what it promises and provides an authentic Asian experience, offering service, luxury and a taste of perfection. Unlike other international airlines this one has consciously avoided using price as a competitive parameter; instead they focus on creating unparalleled travel experiences through simple, multi-sensory experiences.

Singapore Airline stewardesses are internationally acclaimed due to the company’s consistent marketing of their “Singapore Girls”. The airline has always used its own stewardesses in its advertising campaigns. In 1994 a wax model of one of the stewardesses was exhibited at Madame Tussaud’s Wax Museum in London – the first wax model of a commercial symbol!

How Does Singapore Airlines Look?

Singapore Airlines’ design manual (color guidelines) is based on the Far Eastern culture, where colors should preferably be soft and relaxed. These

colors are used for interior design, aircraft interiors, uniforms, etc. For instance, the fuselage of their aircraft is decorated with a gold streak – a feature that has been there from the outset. What characterizes all the colors is that they reflect a pleasant personality and enhance the Asian dream and the image of the Far East.



Two Singapore Airlines stewardesses wearing the traditional Sarong Kebaya. This has been used in many advertising campaigns (Photograph: Singapore Airlines press photograph)

The job of stewardess is considered to be very prestigious in Asia – with good reason. The stewardesses play a key role in the operation of the company. As ambassadors for the airline's values they are instrumental in bringing messages to life and turning them into sensory experiences. To equip them for this task Singapore Airlines puts them through a rigorous training program. They are also taught how to apply their make-up so that it always looks natural in the harsh artificial light. Skin specialists analyze their skin and give them careful instructions about the type of make-up to use, and hairdressers advise them on how to style their hair, etc.

The stewardesses wear two-piece uniforms which are inspired by the traditional Sarong Kebaya. These uniforms are also used in advertising campaigns. They come in three different colors (blue, green and orange), each of which symbolizes a different rank.

The airline has a logo of course, but the Singapore Girls have become even stronger “logos”, achieving iconic status in the Far East. This was a conscious strategy from the beginning, developed in cooperation with Australian branding specialist, Batey.

How Does Singapore Airlines Sound?

The airline uses melodious Asian music not only for their advertising but also in flight. The company has also worked with psychologists to improve the brief welcoming speeches and announcements made by the captains and stewardesses.

How Does Singapore Airlines Smell?

The airline has developed its own Singapore Airlines fragrance, which is used in the hot, damp towels given to passengers before and after meals and prior to touchdown. This fragrance is exotic – and unforgettable. A special perfume has even been developed for the stewardesses and named after them.

How Does Singapore Airlines Taste?

Singapore Airlines focuses a great deal on the culinary experience. As an important part of Asian culture, food is also an important part of the traveling experience. When the destination is the Far East, the dishes must be Asian. International chefs have created exciting menus that are easy to prepare on board.

How Does Singapore Airlines Feel?

The airline makes an effort to ensure that passengers feel comfortable during flights – particularly the long distance ones. They have developed an entertainment program where passengers learn relaxation exercises designed to increase blood circulation. This contributes to making the travel experience more pleasurable. In many planes they have installed stall bars so that passengers can do stretching exercises. One of their most recent ideas is the so-called “Singapore Airlines Suites”. This has been described as

“experience the pleasure of sleeping on a standalone bed, not one converted from a seat”. People can read about the Singapore Airlines Suites experience on the manufacturer’s website (<http://www.singaporair.com>).

Singapore Airlines operates with a modern fleet of airplanes, and this is a conscious strategy. Their aircraft are never more than 4–5 years old, so they always offer the latest, most comfortable facilities. Singapore Airlines was the first airline in the world to introduce faxes, telephones and free drinks during flights.



A female passenger enjoys “the widest and longest business-class bed in the sky”. This is yet another example of how interior design can enhance a product or service. The service on Singapore Airlines is second to none (Photograph: Singapore Airlines press photograph)

How is Singapore Airlines “Sensed”?

Bernadette Doran, an expert on the psychology of uniforms, described her impression of the spirit of Singapore Airlines: “Imagine stepping into a plane for your first Singapore Airlines flight to Malaysia. As you begin to settle in, the flight attendant approaches, smiles and asks whether you’d like a magazine. And your expectations soar as high as the 747. Your conscious mind may or may not register it all, but nothing is lost on your subconscious mind as the attendant stands in front of you in the rich glory of her two-piece uniform. Every stitch of the authentic embroidery seems to whisper an ancient story to you, silently spinning wondrous traditions and mysteries of the exotic East.”⁴⁰

Doran’s experience gives a good impression of the signals that can emanate from a company, provided that it has a strong intuitive identity and history. We sense things and impressions even though we are not conscious of the fact that they are there. Often the people who actually know the identity cannot formulate exactly what it is about, because this requires viewing things objectively.

Experience, Engagement, Social Interaction and the Sensory Identity

The formulation of a sensory identity will provide a clear picture of how messages and values are experienced, not only in relation to a company’s physical contact points but also its passive communication. It must also provide a total picture of all communication internally and externally, and act as the common denominator for all messages and media.

The formulation of a sensory identity also helps to ensure that messages and values are supported by the right behavior and brought to life at all contact points – whether they are physical, electronic, one-dimensional or multi-dimensional. If, in addition to this, you can stage and dramatize your company’s physical, mental and social spaces, you will have created the optimum conditions for the transfer and understanding of messages. When the “experience space” is rooted in the sensitive identity it creates strong, value-based internal and external communication, which encourages both internal and external stakeholders to become involved and interact (Fig. 24).

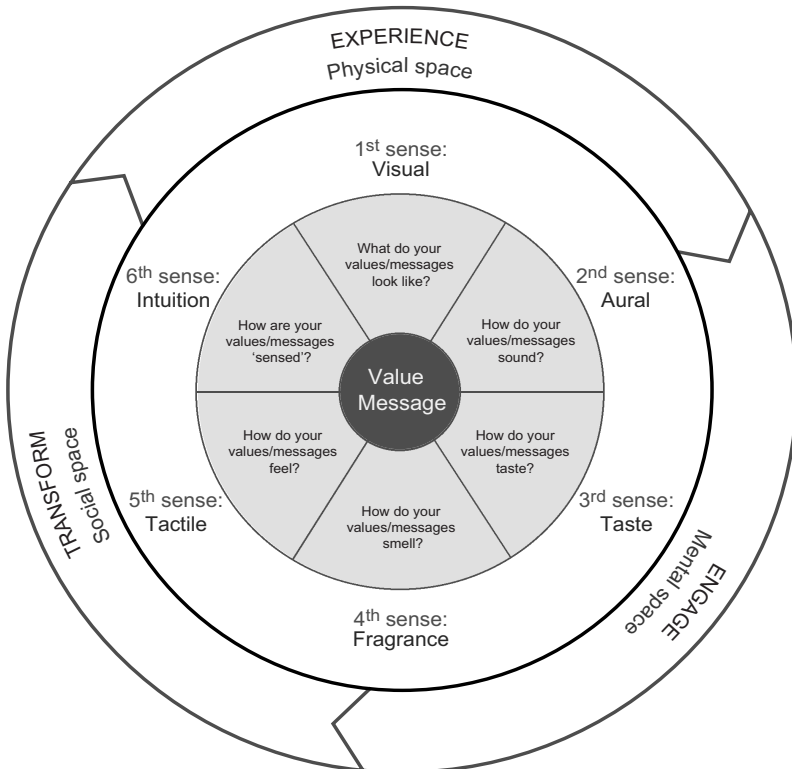


Fig. 24 The sensory “experience space” (3rdDimension©)

Chapter 6

Networks and Experiences

Networks and Experiences

It is a well known fact that networks are important to both individuals and companies. This section of the book describes how valuable experiences can be in building those networks. Basically relationships are at their strongest when they include a physical element, so a well-planned and professionally staged physical meeting will lay a solid foundation for a

Experiences can help to define the size, quality and nature of a network


strong network. Experiences can help to define the size of a network, the members and the quality of each individual relationship.

An important criterion for building a successful career is the ability to network effectively. These days, professional skills and qualifications are simply not enough; you need a strong and attractive personality as well. Good personal and professional networks help you to obtain greater knowledge and influence, find new friends and customers and, not least, unearth new opportunities. A rich and dynamic network requires being extrovert and willing to maintain and develop relationships – and to create new ones too. Networks are built on trust and an ability to get to know people. They are also about social interaction between colleagues and about friendships that put both parties in a helpful and cooperative frame of mind. When you really think about it, who are you likely to trust the most – someone whose face is familiar or someone you have never met?

In the introduction we stressed that knowledge is a crucial resource and competitive parameter in today’s society, where the tertiary sector creates most of the values. As knowledge plays an important role to growth, the ability to acquire new knowledge via external networks becomes increasingly important. This is essential to continued innovation and progress. Manuel Castells says in his book about the Network Society, “In an economic system where innovation is critical, a company’s ability to gather knowledge from many sources becomes the foundation of the innovative firm.”⁴¹

Companies must build solid internal and external networks in order to create the optimum conditions for knowledge sharing. In this way better results are secured. Every individual within a sound network will enjoy benefits, although some will benefit more from their network than others. Commenting on the advantages of a good network, Soulayma Gourani, a

network specialist says, “You brand yourself and your company. Employees develop a personal relationship with their company and they spread your messages to potential buyers, partners or colleagues without people thinking that they are hard-selling your messages.”



One of the most efficient tools for network marketing is experience-based communication

Network marketing will assume a still more central role in our communication toolbox in the future. Marketing through networks can be crucial to the success of the individual and the entire organization. The link between experience-based communication and network marketing is apparent: the

strongest networks are facilitated through physical meetings i.e. physical contact points. And this makes the experience media one of the most efficient tools for network marketing.

Use Networks Physically!

When communicating, rather than thinking of people as recipients, think of them as participants. Or even better – as *potential ambassadors*. As individuals we do not want to passively listen and watch; we want an opportunity to relate critically and independently to what is being communicated. If only one-way messages are used, and if these are only one- or two-dimensional, they will only contribute to projecting a superficial and shallow image of a company or product to potential ambassadors.

Traditional media alone cannot make management and marketing communication clear and sincere; this can only be achieved through experience-based, recipient-oriented media. If you want loyal employees and customers – and if you want them to value your company and your messages – you need to adopt more untraditional methods. You must communicate in a fashion that wins the support of your stakeholders, so they become motivated and feel a sense of ownership. Otherwise it will be difficult to create an information flow that encourages involvement and social interaction.

Not all of a company’s relations are equally important, but all lifelines are valuable when it comes to the organization as a *whole*. Without a strong

network with close personal relationships, valuable information is lost, because the trust and exchange of knowledge that is so essential to the quality of relationships has not been established. This can damage profits and the individual company’s influence and future prospects.

The philosopher Grundtvig once said: *“The life and vigor of a single man’s faith and reasoning will be evident only when there is an exchange between him and his fellow human beings.”*⁴² This was a stern warning not to invest all of one’s resources in networks based on electronic or printed media. Networks or relationships will only be vigorous if based on trust and mutual understanding, and these can only be established through one or more physical meetings. Our sense of obligation and level of involvement is much higher towards people we have met than to those with whom we communicate only electronically.

Networks or relationships will only be vigorous if based on trust and mutual understanding

In today’s global society a business contact with whom you have had no direct dealings can easily be replaced with someone of a similar caliber. Different forms of contact, such as text messages, phone messages or physical meetings, make you feel varying degrees of obligation. It is easy to

ignore a person who sends a text message, somewhat harder when they have phoned you, and very hard when they are standing right in front of you.

Physical meetings, whether for the purposes of business or pleasure, always provide an experience and an opportunity to establish a joint frame of reference. They help to improve the quality of the contact even when it involves non-personal forms of communication. If you can put a face to a person who is calling or emailing you, and if you can relate that person to a positive experience, then communication immediately takes place at a much higher level.

The quality of information and knowledge directly depends on whether we use and contribute to individual relations in a company’s network. Philosopher Martin Buber once said: *“To establish a genuine conversation and relationship, each and every participant must give something of themselves.”*

The only reason not to use physical meetings is if they are too expensive and time-consuming. Learning and knowledge exchange does take time,

and if information is to be remembered then it must be communicated in a relevant context so that people can really absorb it. Even though meetings demand great resources they should be regarded as investments and included in a company's short- and long-term planning.

The experience medium is connected to the personal, physical meeting between one or more people because it builds on interpersonal communication. The occasion could be a reception, dinner, press conference, fair or sales meeting, etc. Personal meetings play a central role among the elements contributing to experiences.

On the other hand, the success of a physical meeting in a network depends on the situation. A meeting in itself is not a guarantee. It is the people in the networks and the experiences you have with them that determine what you gain from the individual relationships. However, the staging and the experience of a meeting has a motivating effect on the people who are involved and can increase other people's understanding. We make this point because we wish to accentuate the need for greater awareness of the strategic and tactical significance of networks. Networks should be used to exploit what is often referred to as "win-win situations".

Stage Physical Meetings

One of the advantages of using the experience medium is the close personal contact established with recipients. Experiences should provide a strong emotional starting point in communication in order to create good relations with recipients. Experiences are valuable because they help to strengthen the ties between management and employees, products and target groups, etc.

It is our perception that meetings in the western world have developed into cozy, coffee-drinking affairs and the social aspect is, of course, an integral part of a meeting. But imagine that you have invited an interesting customer to visit you. Your conference room looks very much like any other, as does your presentation (except perhaps in the choice of colors). The content of messages is important but it is a fact that people – even when they are taking rational decisions that demand an objective approach – are still affected emotionally. We still use our hearts when making decisions.

This is not to say that all management meetings or conversations between employers and managers should be staged; on the contrary, that would seem false and inappropriate. However, a meeting of a special character and importance – e.g. a conference at which doctors are presented with a new pharmaceutical product; a meeting with potential customers, or a company jubilee (all physical meetings where the expectations are high) – can be utilized far better through the experience medium. Experiences help to create strong relationships and positive impressions.

Think about a physical meeting where you attempted to communicate particularly important messages. What went well, and what didn't? Did the participants know each other well? Where was the meeting held? What did you gain from it, and what did the other party gain? As a company, how do you actually arrange meetings? How good are you at putting yourself in the spotlight? And finally, did you succeed in making a lasting, memorable and positive impression on the participants?

Most people would probably agree that when participants know each other well there is a greater chance that everyone will benefit. The same happens when you call someone on the phone; if you know them and you leave a message then they are much more likely to return your call. But if it is a new and untested relationship, you might need to call more than once. If you have a meeting with a potential customer, then the first impression i.e. how you present yourself and what you say, will determine the success of the connection. For instance, how much do you really know about the customer? The American president Abraham Lincoln once said: "When I'm getting ready to reason with a man, I spend one third of my time thinking about myself and what I'm going to say and two thirds about him and what he's going to say."

An advertising agency in Denmark turned an old aircraft into a conference room, thereby sending a clear signal that they strive to be different. Today the spoken word alone is not enough; it is the way you stage your company and the way you behave at meetings, conferences, receptions, seminars, symposia, jubilees, etc. that will determine how your company will be experienced.

Experiences add a dimension to traditional meetings that makes people feel involved. Experiences also give people an opportunity to meet and socialize with others who are on the same wavelength. This alone can be a strong reason for attending. The physical environment and experience are important exterior motivational factors, which help people to comprehend

and remember your messages. Your ability to understand and get involved with the participants will determine whether or not they take you seriously. As we have said, the social environment is critical to binding people together and forging strong networks.



Clay pigeon shooting during the Audi 4-wheeler Allroad event. A professional hunter and shooting instructor teaches participants how to shoot (Photograph: 3rdDimension©)

Audi has built good relations with dealers and potential buyers through a dedicated, long-term effort to forge a strong network. The launch of the Audi Allroad 4-wheel drive (a high end car) was incorporated into an experience where dealers, accompanied by the press and potential buyers – particularly company managers – were invited to a multi-dimensional experience. It lasted half a day and included a presentation, a test drive, shooting exercises, golf training and lunch outdoors. In just one day, Audi managed to involve the participants, get them to interact socially *and* make them part of a database.

The participants were given a memorable experience, knowledge of off-road driving and the opportunity to socialize and expand their networks. The event told the Audi story in an intelligent fashion and the company

added new links to its network. The managers were targeted through hunting shops and golf shops in larger cities that were asked to invite their three best customers to the event. This was an intelligent move because Audi then benefited from the good relations the sports shops enjoyed with their customers.

Company managers are notoriously busy but the twofold incentive was enough to get them to participate. Not only did they have an unforgettable experience; they were also able to expand their networks.

An example of how NOT to communicate with company managers would be to send them an invite to test-drive a new car at their local dealer, enclosing a model car as a gimmick. Their immediate response would be: “What would I gain from that?” When it comes to cars, an invitation to a test drive is not a differentiating factor, because anyone can send one of those. To be different, why not offer to deliver the car to the manager’s office or home address, with a license to use it for a week? That would be a real experience – and very convenient too!

One example of how effective experiences can be in involving people and developing networks is the way IKEA manages their store openings. The concept is called “The IKEA way”. An important objective of any IKEA store opening is to involve the local stakeholders before, during and after the event itself. Wherever they open, IKEA strives to make people in the local community proud of the store, actively encouraging them to embrace it as a neighbor and potential employer.

IKEA often uses sponsoring as a tool to demonstrate their involvement in the community. A typical example is when they built a pedestrian tunnel under a very busy road, so that children in a nearby neighborhood could get to a school that had been cut off by a busy road. And when a number of ancient chestnut trees growing along one of the roads had to be felled, they planted plenty of new ones to replace them. IKEA has also donated energy-saving light bulbs to local schools and organizations. And IKEA retailers often sponsor activities linked to children, the environment and design.

IKEA engenders a feeling of ownership among citizens, businesses, authorities and politicians, either by allowing them to be heard or by allowing them to participate actively in store openings. The company’s employees are always involved in the opening ceremony to create as much goodwill as possible.

Business software alliance (BSA) is an international software and hardware company whose objective is to limit the number of illegal software licenses used by companies. An important mission for the alliance is to eliminate software piracy. Some years ago a survey showed that software piracy had become a major problem among most small and medium size companies. In the beginning BSA launched campaigns that shared one common trait: in a lecturing tone they stressed that what people were doing was illegal and unethical in order to scare them into paying their licenses.

Although the campaign helped to a certain degree, it failed to have the desired effect, so BSA had to find a new way to influence the behavior of companies and organizations. A new strategy was devised in 2004. BSA decided to take a more communicative and instructive angle through short conferences and meetings designed to make companies aware of the advantages of having legal licenses and of taking security seriously. The series of short conferences was called “Protect Your Company”. BSA also used networking in the sense that they cooperated with a number of important players to show that companies in the industry were willing to support each other. These partnerships also showed that BSA enjoyed wide support in the universal battle against illegal licenses.

BSA cooperated with two main organizations – the Chamber of Commerce, and the independent IT Industry Association. These partnerships provided a common frame of reference for all parties plus valuable insight into each other’s values. And contrary to previous campaigns, BSA and the two associations could now communicate as a single entity. And they organized a conference designed to illustrate the advantages of operating with legal licenses.

It was important to invite suppliers of license-control tools to this conference, because they specialized in SAM (software asset management) – so three more SAM partners were found. Using case studies and experiences as examples, they shared their knowledge of software and accentuated the financial advantages of legal licenses. Furthermore, a representative from the accountancy firm KPMG was chosen to give the first talk at the conference, because their surveys indicated that many companies were in possession of illegal software. A lawyer then explained the consequences for any company discovered using illegal software.

The strongest companies expand their networks through social interaction

The “Protect Your Company” conference evolved into a strong platform where BSA functioned both as a sender and a catalyst for social interaction. The attending industry representatives were given an opportunity to share their experiences

with others, build new networks and find new customers. The conference was beneficial for everyone because it offered a unique chance to attract new and industry-relevant quality contacts due to the well planned, well staged and highly instructive program.

In their book, “Co-operation”, Brandenburger and Nalebuff describe the importance of thinking holistically and strategically when trying to build strong relations. The core message of their book is to create value that is tangible. By viewing and treating players like *complementors* instead of *combatants*, companies can increase the value of their products or services for all concerned. The SAM partners who were involved in the conference were complementors in the sense that they contributed to making BSA’s services and tasks more valuable – and vice versa.

According to Brandenburger and Nalebuff, the creation of relationships is crucial to the quality of a company’s services and network. When the experience takes the form of a conference its strengths are evident: communication is optimized and the quality of the contacts is increased. The complementors that have been assembled gain deeper insight into the strengths and values of other members in the network, who then go on to attract new complementors. The strongest organizations are those that continuously strive to expand their networks through social interaction.

Albert Einstein explained the danger of lack of social interaction: “Humans see themselves, their thoughts and feelings as something that is detached from everything else. But this is an optical illusion inside the human mind. This deception is like a prison, and it means that we concentrate solely on our own personal wishes and that we love only few people, who are especially close to us. The challenge for us must be to free ourselves from this prison by striving to expand our circle of social interaction so that it encompasses all living creatures – and all the beautiful nature that surrounds us.”

Quality, Number: and Who?

Any company or individual possesses a certain amount of information and knowledge. But if we are to obtain even more, then we are dependent on good networks. The larger your network and the more information you

A relationship is strong only if both parties can benefit from each other

have, the more attractive you become. But this does require an ability to learn from others and teach them in return; remember that a relationship is strong only if both parties can benefit from each other.

Physical meetings force us to move towards each other. Learning theory and brain research have demonstrated that we learn best when we involve our bodies and our senses, and when we actively involve the person to whom we are talking. But this requires being in direct contact with people. If you use the experience medium and create an appropriate framework for the meeting, you will be able to motivate people and make it easier for them to absorb and remember the information. Experiences help you to optimize learning in any context through strengthening the mental and the social “spaces”. The ability of the Roskilde Festival organization to build a network of volunteers is a prime example of how an experience can make people feel so involved that they willingly rally to the cause.

Generally there are three parameters that determine the strength and value of a relationship:

- *Quality*: the more physical, the better.
- *Quantity*: the more people involved, the more information becomes available.
- *Identity*: the better you are at finding the right people, the more valuable the outcome will be.

These three rules are very much connected: it would be dangerous simply to increase the number of contacts without being sure of their quality and with no knowledge of what they can offer and what you yourself can offer. If you do not talk to the right people, then your message may be perceived as irrelevant and uninteresting, and in the long run your reputation and ability to build relationships may be harmed.

Not all relationships or knowledge is valuable, so it is important to find the right people to cooperate with and the appropriate suppliers and customers.

There is a risk that you will be marginalized and not considered worth talking to or visiting, in which case you will have only a peripheral position in your network. You must ensure that your relationships are mutually beneficial and that you surround yourself with the right people. According to Shakespeare, Caesar once said, “Let there be fat men around me.” It seems that in ancient Rome, being a fat man was synonymous with being powerful.

If all three requirements of a good relationship are met, you will gradually occupy a central position in your network because your knowledge will grow, people will think more highly of you and then they will recommend you to people they meet, etc.

Quality

The quality of a relationship depends on whether there has been a physical meeting and whether those meetings are regular. A network model based on the laws of natural science shows that if you meet people in your network on a regular basis, you will gradually gain a more pivotal position⁴³ (Fig. 25).

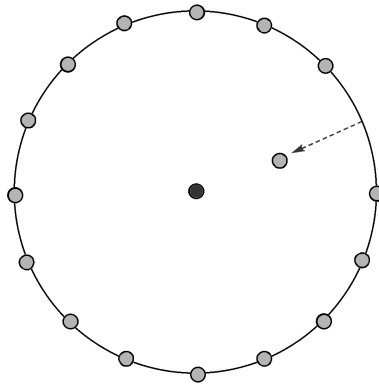


Fig. 25 A simple network model (Sneppen and Rosvall, 2003 – view the network model at <http://www.3rddimension.com>)

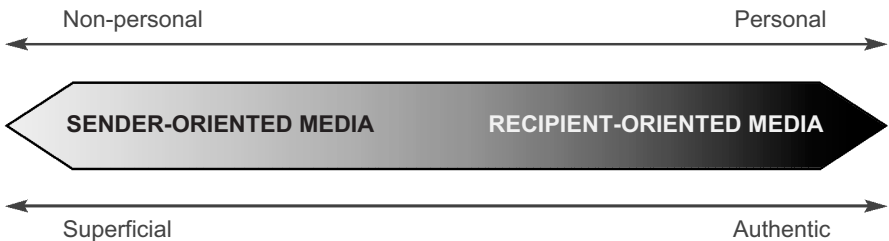
The experience medium wins hands down when it comes to how well various media are sensed. No other media can replay an event and make it seem authentic and real (see Fig. 7: “The sensory quality of media”). The

sensory qualities of media vary: the more senses a medium can influence, the more authentic people’s perception will be and the greater their involvement will be. By making messages multi-sensory and tangible, the experience medium brings them to life.

Experiences also bring people together, giving the sender an opportunity to communicate directly and immediately with the recipient. Consequently the boundary that characterizes traditional media (between sender and recipient) is eliminated. We cannot talk about a sender and a recipient in the conventional sense because there are actually *two* communicators. Recipients are also communicators because they contribute to the experience as it unfolds. This involvement makes them feel that communication takes place on their own terms rather than being forced upon them.

Experiences are characterized by the fact that the sender is always physically present. Traditional media provide no opportunity to meet recipients face to face, so there is no interaction or dialog between them. Traditional media are interactive *only* in the sense that they provide an opportunity for feedback. When interaction takes place during physical meetings, it can by definition only happen when we are together with others in the same location at the same time. When the sender is face-to-face with the recipient and wishes to communicate a message, then the means that are available are not limited to one person and their actions. The sender can actually stage the situation in order to increase people’s receptiveness at the moment of communication.

This strategy differs greatly from other media, where neither the sender nor the recipient has any control over the way in which the message is received – or the situation. This applies to print and outdoor media, TV, radio, etc. It is the circumstances at the moment of communication that determine whether messages get through. If there are too many other irrelevant factors, it will have a negative affect on the experience and the level of comprehension.



When a message is communicated through the experience medium, it will often take place in a pleasant atmosphere and at a pace that allows the information to be absorbed. There is a slight risk that people will ask questions that steer the conversation in a less favorable direction, but then again, other questions will be very useful since they will provide an opportunity to clarify certain points. The most important thing is that

The Experience Medium optimizes the quality of the exchange

dialog helps the recipient to understand the message, and provides the sender with important feedback.

During a physical meeting, the sender has ample opportunity to make up their mind about the target audience, which

makes it easier to tailor the message to the needs and reality of the recipient. The Experience Medium really does optimize the quality of the exchange (Fig. 26).

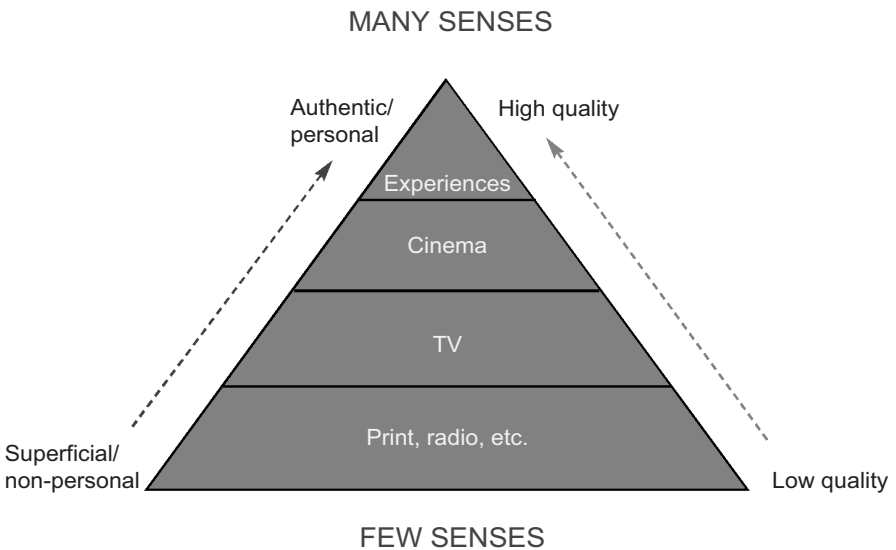


Fig. 26 How successfully can a medium be sensed? (3rdDimension©)

The qualitative aspects of media are becoming more significant and this is due to the inefficiency of mass media. Even though personal media have a higher contact price, this drawback is outweighed by the quality of the contact and the more effective use of organizational resources.

The Number: And Who?

Quality and *experience* are always in focus at physical meetings. But experiences can also help to attract and involve the right people and establish new and potentially interesting relationships. Good experiences attract people, and new contacts can be made for free! Think of LEGO and LEGOLAND, Albatros Travel and their Great Wall Marathon, Levis and their flagship stores. There are many examples confirming that experiences and physical meetings can help to expand a company’s network and attract a higher number of relevant, potential customers.



International courier DHL holds an annual relay race with 45,000 participants, making it one of the largest fitness events in Scandinavia. Many companies send representatives to it, and they gain first-hand experience of DHL’s line of business: they do their utmost to move the baton from A to B as quickly as possible (Photograph: Polfoto)

Experiences lead to new, potentially interesting relationships

The Rotary Club is a local and international network for business executives, managers and other professionals who want to develop their skills and get involved in community and international services.

With its 1.2 million members in 166 countries, Rotary is a prime example

of the importance of physical meetings in developing good relations. Weekly meetings help members to form acquaintances with large numbers of like-minded people, thereby strengthening their personal networks.

Rotary's concept of building networks and sharing experiences is well thought-through in terms of involving the target group. Meetings are held in different locations on a rotational basis – hence the name “Rotary” – and members contribute both to managing the club and to the meeting agendas. Presentations are made on business-related topics, or local or international issues; excursions are organized, and development projects are planned and initiated.

Rotary represents much more than knowledge-sharing and networking; the Rotary Foundation (which is funded by Rotarians) is involved in a wide variety of projects, from hunger-relief to healthcare and the promotion of world understanding and peace. The organization has managed to engage and involve its members in a number of important causes in areas in which they can make a difference. The Rotary Foundation funds 1-year youth exchange programs and other educational programs to advance international understanding. Such activities clearly demonstrate that the organization is living up to its motto: “Service above self”.

The difference between experiences and other media is that you distinguish between *attracting* and *beguiling* new contacts, and between *finding* and *nurturing* new contacts. You can certainly use external marketing and hope that mass communication and PR will increase the number of contacts, but you will be compromising on quality. Printed media and other forms of media that do not include physical contact fail to create strong relations because they fail to involve *people*.

Sponsorship is an excellent example of mass communication that affects a high number of contacts. Sponsors seek out the right people and “borrow” from the value or quality of an event. However, this is not always the best solution because companies do not have full control and ownership of a platform, so they cannot fully optimize the quality of the contact. They may attempt to make their sponsorship active – for instance through the experience medium – and they may be able to improve the quality of a network. But maximum engagement and social interaction can be facilitated only through physical meetings and platforms that basically are not shared with others.

Chapter 7

The Experience Medium

The Experience Medium

This chapter represents a change of scene: so far we have examined experience-based communication at a conceptual level, now we will review some of the tools. These will illustrate how the experience medium should be implemented in practice. You might want to use this form of communication for all of your physical meeting venues and contact points as part of long-term strategy, or you might want to take a more tactical line, using it as a short-term tool instead (Fig. 27).

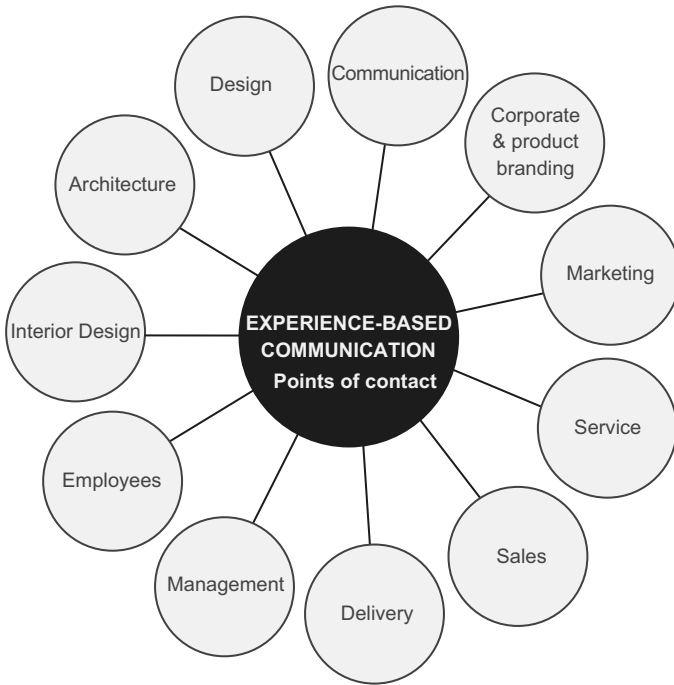


Fig. 27 The body and soul of experiences (3rdDimension©)

A complete implementation of the theories in this book would require a combination of multi-organizational and multi-disciplinary cooperation internally on the one hand, and external consultants such as architects, designers, interior design specialists and communication experts on the other.

The following section offers a number of concrete tools that become valuable as soon as the decision to use the experience medium has been taken. Rather than running through all of these, we will concentrate on the various types of *physical contact points* with particular focus on single, temporarily contact points of a tactical nature. These will be illustrated with examples from real life.

Since we will not be discussing project management, we will not be dealing with the production and implementation phases. These are well described in other books that focus on aspects such as management, quality, adaptation, dialog, details, planning, dynamics and good craftsmanship⁴⁴.

We will begin by addressing important concepts such as definitions, issues related to the interpretation of experience-based communication, symbolic acts and market segmentation. We will then summarize the process in terms of analysis, strategy and development, and conclude with an overall evaluation.

Terms

In the introduction to this book we defined experience-based communication as the conscious utilization of physical meetings and locations as a means to build relationships and become significant to a given target group. When working with this tool we chose to make the definition of experience-based communication even more precise:

A physical meeting between the sender and recipient of a message, in which symbolic acts are used to facilitate maximum understanding and motivation.

This definition builds on the arguments presented in this book. Symbolic acts allow companies to support their messages with the appropriate behavior. And the staging of experiences facilitates multi-sensory learning and the physical involvement of the recipient. This is a prerequisite to creating the involvement and social interaction that enables people to sense and utilize experiences.

Symbolic Acts

As a company it is important to signal that you are stable yet ready for change. One of the strengths of the experience medium is that it can be adapted to suit a particular time and place. The experience is, in itself, modifiable. But the experience medium must be used proactively – and one way to do this is through conscious, symbolic acts.

Symbolic acts can express themselves in many ways but they all have one thing in common: they communicate messages through behavior. A symbolic act can therefore be defined as *a message which communicates meaning, through behavior that involves the recipient.*

A significant symbolic act currently gaining in popularity is Earth Hour, an environmental happening arranged by WWF’s international network WWF-World Wildlife Foundation. The first one took place in Sydney in the spring of 2007. 2.2 million people participated, and energy consumption fell by 10%. Thirteen cities all over the globe have signed up for the 2009 Earth Hour event (“Turn off the lights for one hour”), and more are expected to join in. The purpose of this symbolic act is to emphasize the importance of reducing CO² emissions.



Sydney by night during Earth Hour (Photograph: Michael Bowers, FAIRFAXPHOTOS.COM)

A symbolic act is a message that communicates meaning, through behavior that involves the recipient

Martin Bender, Head of Secretariat for Copenhagen Eventures, was astonished to see how powerful symbolic acts could be: when the Great Belt Bridge between Zealand and Funen in Denmark was opened in 1998, it became the world’s second largest suspension bridge. As a result, the ferries were decommissioned. And Mr.

Bender was responsible for the farewell ceremony. When the King Frederik IX ferry symbolically passed under the bridge, Denmark’s monarch, Queen Margrethe II, cast a bouquet of flowers onto it to commemorate the 100th birthday of her late father.

The experience made such an impression on both the organizers and TV spectators that when the Sound Bridge (between Denmark and Sweden) was inaugurated in 2000, people once again expected bouquet-casting to be part of the opening ceremony. And the organizers built this into the program. But since it was more customary for the royal representative to drive through the red ribbon in a limousine, the royal court rejected the proposal. Nevertheless, flowers were thrown at the inauguration of the Sound Bridge by the Queen – simply because people expected it and the Queen understood this.

Symbolic acts are characterized by the fact that they bring messages to life very convincingly and make a memorable impression on participants and observers alike. For just a modest outlay, symbolic acts can have a major effect and generate both media coverage and positive word of mouth.

For a modest outlay, symbolic acts can have a major effect

Grassroots organizations and non-profit organizations are often very skilled when it comes to creating distinct, symbolic acts and this is because they

depend on their ability to capture the attention of the media and people in general. Take Greenpeace, for instance, and how cleverly they have organized demonstrations against nuclear power plants and ships carrying genetically modified Soya beans. Another prime example is how the AIDS Foundation commemorated AIDS Day in major cities across the globe by placing small candles around the edges of their lakes. A commercial company can actually benefit from using the methods of grassroot organizations. The concept of astroturf (artificial grass) marketing was



Inaugurations of bridges are generally accompanied by strong symbolic acts. On 14 August 1999, the final element for the Sound Bridge was symbolically put into position. Crown Prince Frederik, heir to the Danish throne, then met his cousin Swedish Crown Princess Victoria in the middle of the bridge, which was also a strong symbolic act. This event later initiated the profoundly choreographed staging of the opening ceremony, which primarily targeted the press (Photograph: Polfoto)

coined by US Senator Lloyd Bentsen of Texas to refer to situations in which people with no political agenda present grassroots perspectives on

major issues. Astroturf marketing is the notion of promoting your product or service in forums designed for discussion and not for advertising where the promotional message is projected in a context that is in no way related to promotion.

Symbolic acts do not necessarily require major resources; primarily they depend on creative ideas. The effect of a good idea will often surpass that of sophisticated and expensive advertising campaigns, because the idea itself makes a memorable impression on people. Where rituals are concerned it is the *human* aspect that prevails – not glossy paper, prose, provocative puns, alliteration, etc.

The more pronounced a symbolic act is, the more of a guiding light it will be

The more pronounced and motivating a symbolic act is, and the more it influences people’s behavior, the more of a guiding light it will be. Where total communication is concerned, all behavior will revolve around it.

Dr. Grant McCracken – one of the world’s foremost cultural anthropologists – defines symbolic acts as the transfer of meaning from products to individuals through possession of the product. He describes the phenomenon thus: “A symbolic action, or ritual, as it is more conventionally called, is a kind of social action devoted to manipulation of the cultural meaning for purposes of collective or individual communication and categorization. Ritual is an opportunity to affirm, evoke, assign, or revise the conventional symbols and meanings of the cultural order. Ritual is to this extent a powerful and versatile tool for the manipulation of cultural meaning.”⁴⁵

McCracken talks about four types of rituals: *Exchange* (gifts), *Possession*, *Repetitive* and *Cleansing* (Fig. 28).

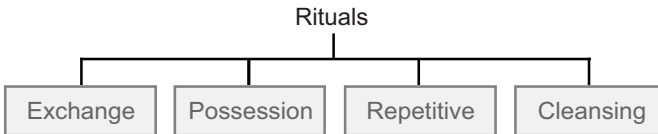


Fig. 28 *Rituals* (McCracken 1988)

The *exchange* of gifts takes place because the sender wants to transfer the values of the present to the recipient, who would perhaps not otherwise have received these values for fear of some financial or other kind of risk.

The *possession* ritual is when people show others that they own a particular product, partly because they want to possess or reflect the values inherent in the product or brand, and partly because they hope that a transfer will actually take place.

Where *repetitive* rituals are concerned, there is an assumption that the values “purchased” through products and brands may disappear again, making it necessary to repetitively transfer their meaning and significance.

The *cleansing* ritual takes place especially when people buy second-hand products and used cars etc.: the new owner has to erase any meaning the former owner might have attached to it in order to feel a sense of true ownership.

The strength of experiences is that they touch people emotionally and are perceived as gifts. Depending on their nature, experiences make recipients feel that they share ownership (possession) because they contribute to the experience themselves. And so they actively help to spread the word. A wonderful example of this is the Great Wall Marathon, whose participants helped to create the marathon and the event (the story). They also spread the word to friends and acquaintances before, during and after the marathon.

The strength of traditional media is the repetitive ritual, which is ideal for creating long-term attention and awareness. For example, Starbucks’ “Third place” concept would have had zero value if the company had done nothing to promote it, and if their customers had made no attempt to recommend the experience to friends. This is how the experience medium supplements traditional media, and vice versa.

The experience medium will often be dependent on other media before, during and after an event because this is the only way to notify the target audience. You can use such things as invitations to draw people’s attention to the experience – especially if it is being held somewhere out of the ordinary.

Since the experience itself is short-lived, other media must be used to support it, prolong the effect and enhance its meaning and significance in relation to the target audience prior to, during and after the event. The figure below illustrates this (Fig. 29):

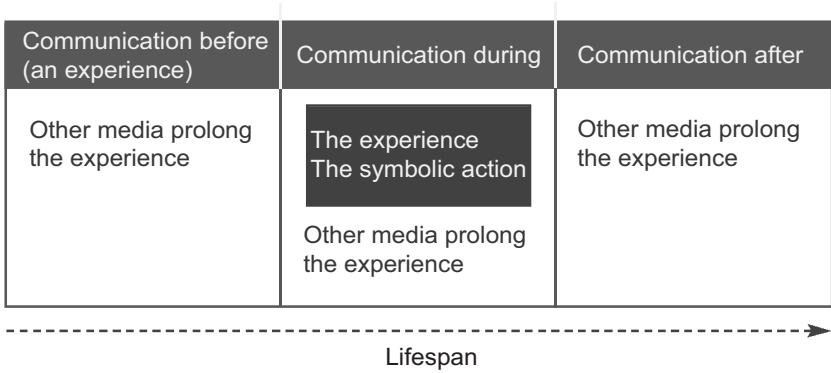


Fig. 29 Life expectancy of experiences (3rdDimension©)

McCracken’s four rituals emphasize their importance in creating meaningful behavior and communication. The word “ritual” should be viewed in the general sense rather than as the ultimate definition of symbolic actions. McCracken describes rituals as a one-way affair (from sender to recipient) but this does not apply in real life. It is important not to forget the transfer of meaning that takes place from recipient to sender, because this is one of the greatest strengths of the experience medium.

When messages reach their target groups and exist in social contexts, they often have an affect that the sender had not anticipated. Take the Cult and Retro phenomena, for example, which have emerged in subcultures and spread to larger groups. This kind of transfer is frequently stronger and more meaningful than the manipulated and commercial form so often seen.

Depending on the objective, a symbolic action can be many things: a company anniversary, a meeting with investors, staff arrangements, collections, demonstrations, sampling, etc. Anything that can symbolize a message through behavior is considered a ritual. Such acts are particularly important when a change of some kind occurs. This might be a company merger, relocation or any other situation that requires you to pause for a while, regain your footing and boost team spirit.

If you communicate a message by meeting your target audience, engaging them in verbal and non-verbal dialog, and giving them an experience, the effect will be powerful indeed. Many initiatives come under the definition of “rituals” which, through dramatization and by involving the senses, breathes new life into a company’s messages.

The symbolic act of christening a ship with a bottle of champagne is a well known ritual. At the launch of the Aurora in 1999, Princess Anne failed to smash the bottle, however. The superstitious among us would consider this to be very bad luck indeed. And the Aurora did have bad luck: she broke down on her maiden voyage; the crew became infected with the Norovirus, and she suffered total engine failure in 2005.

It's all about magic. The figure below illustrates that the perceived value often doesn't follow the resources put into the experience/activity. Little actions can create a huge effect and create more magic than large scale actions. It's never the basics, such as food, drinks, location and the set-up, and also not the comfort of chairs and tables that people value the most. These things are expected to be fulfilled, so they are not less important. Often it's the unexpected, the add-on and the ability to relate to the message or be influenced that is of most value.

When Camilla, Duchess of Cornwall, christened the Queen Victoria cruise ship, the champagne bottle also refused to break. The following day the newspaper headlines read "Queen Victoria Cursed" and "Camilla and the Cursed Christening". Less than a month after the launch of the QV, 300 of the 2,000 passengers came down with the Norovirus. Being "cursed" may sound silly, but the importance of such rituals should not be underestimated. Where symbolic acts are concerned, planning is crucial. In this particular case, to prevent things taking a wrong turn, the organizers should have had a particularly thin champagne bottle made especially for the occasion!

Segmentation: Experience Typology

Experiences can be characterized in two ways: the segmentation of markets and the location of target groups. The typology below is not all-embracing; it categorizes types of experiences on the consumer and producer markets and on the public and institutional markets. Ultimately the foundation is the physical meeting in all its forms: conferences, fairs, charity events, jubilees, flag days, etc. where staging and a unique experience will secure a more intense communication of messages, greater learning and consequently, better results (Fig. 30).

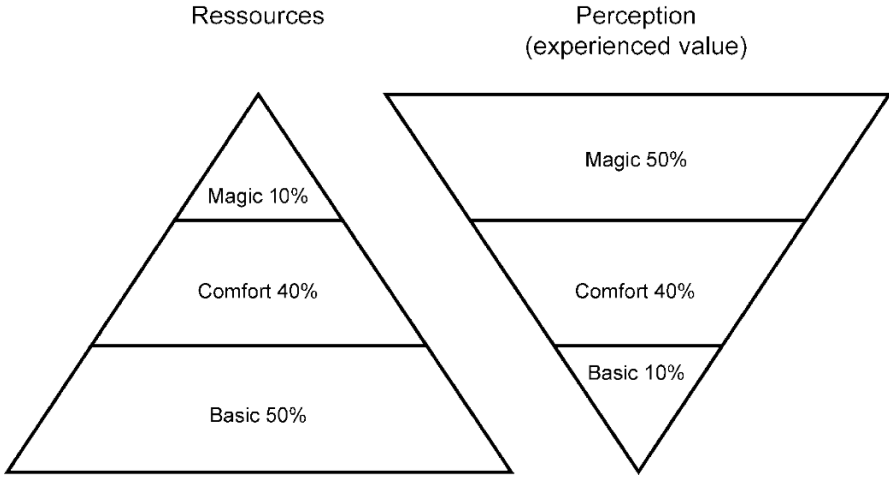
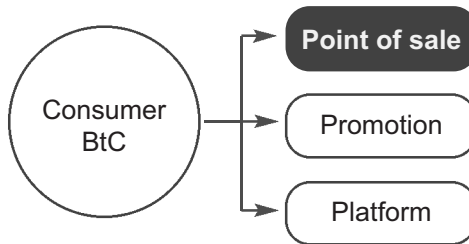


Fig. 30 Perceived value of an experience (3rdDimension©)

Consumer Experiences (BtC)

What characterizes BtC experiences is that they will often have a BtB effect, because various initiatives targeted at end users will obviously influence all parts of the chain that are involved. This happens internally in companies, among sales people (who use experiences as sales tools) and in the distribution channels that benefit from the magnetic force of experiences.

The Point-of-Sale (POS) Experience



POS experiences take place inside shops or in close proximity to retailers

Point-of-sale experiences are also known as “In-store”, “Point-of-purchase” or “shop” experiences because they take place in shops or in close proximity to retailers. These experiences are the least spectacular type because they are bound by the

many restrictions of the shop medium. A POS experience is stationary i.e. confined to a certain time and space. Since the experience takes place more or less at the same time as the decision to buy, it has a very good chance of ensuring more sales than traditional advertising. The POS experience can therefore be advantageously used as an expansion of other measures taken by a company to facilitate the final influence in the effect hierarchy.

The influence of experiences on the sale of impulse products is particularly pronounced. A major Swedish survey shows that 90% of decisions to buy such products are taken inside the shop. Consumers are very susceptible to shopping impulses at the point of sale.

In the retail trade, experience marketing differs from traditional marketing in that it can provide a strong emotional starting point for improving customer relations. Experiences are also a very effective way to improve footfall in shops. POS experiences are often used in connection with openings and similar sales efforts, and shops are often willing to accept experience activities on their premises because they help to improve sales.

Most consumer experiences take place outside the working hours of the target groups, because people need time and resources to participate.

POS experiences take place where products are sold, so they should not be mistaken for sales promotion. As a form of marketing communication, sales promotion is essentially non-personal in that it neither involves the target group nor invites people to participate or engage in dialogue⁴⁶. Sales promotions are often very limited, short-term, consumer-oriented initiatives, the goal of which is to encourage people to make spur-of-the-moment purchases. Sales promotions can range from price reductions on selected products, demonstrations and sampling to competitions and sales

displays, etc. A product demonstration cannot be classified as an experience because its only aim is to show the functionality, not to give recipients an experience that addresses their psychological or inner needs.

One example of a particularly effective POS experience was Johnnie Walker's "Black Unseen" experience, which was implemented primarily at restaurants. Johnnie Walker is a Diageo brand of Scotch whiskey produced in Kilmarnock, Scotland. It is sold in almost every country in the world, with yearly sales in excess of 150 million bottles. The Black Label brand contains 40 whiskies, all of which have been aged for a minimum of 12 years.

The Black Unseen experience was all about whiskey tasting. The purpose was to teach the target group the difference between single malt and blended whiskey. A trained "waiter" asked guests whether they would like to taste and learn about whiskey, and then proceeded to allow them to view and feel the ingredients and, while blindfolded, smell the four aromas. It is well known that when we are deprived of our sight, our other senses are strengthened, so this was exactly the right approach.

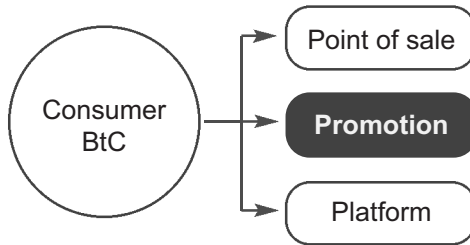
This experience was a resounding success: the guests that were involved made a more human connection with the Johnnie Walker brand because of their dialog with the waiter, and the spectators acted like a magnet for other guests, who wanted to see what was going on. The social space was actively exploited to attract people to the experience. And it ended up generating more sales at the specific POS.

Another perfect example of POS experiences is OMO – one of Unilever's washing powder brands. Rather than just promoting the product on its ability to clean clothes, Unilever decided to create a unique experience for one of its target groups. At Roskilde Festival – one of the world's largest out-door music festivals – they installed a number of washing machines and made plenty of washing powder available, and people who had spent the night knee-deep in mud were more than happy to use them! With very limited means the company managed to differentiate themselves from the competition and generate goodwill in their target audience.



Free laundry service at the Roskilde Music Festival (Photograph: Lever Fabergé)

The Promotional Experience



Promotional experiences differ from stationary POS experiences in that they search for target groups. They are not bound by time and place. Promotional experiences are flexible, making them easy to take to the target group, both in time and place. The advantage of this is that if a location proves to be impractical, it can be changed, and should unforeseen situations emerge, they can be exploited. Promotional experiences target people wherever *they* are – outside the usual commercial environments – and the products are not available for purchase during the experience itself.

Promotional experiences seek target groups; they are not limited by time and place

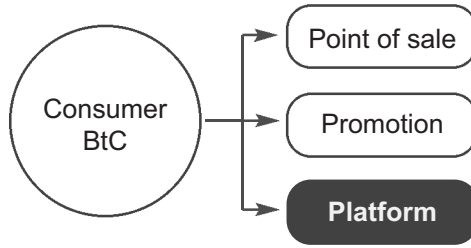
Volkswagen arranged a nationwide VW Golf tour in 2000. VW wanted to soften their rather rigid image, so rather than just emphasizing factors such as technology, quality, comfort and cost, they used a promotional experience to show the brand from a different and more light-hearted angle via the Golf Cabriolet. The campaign was christened “Golf on Tour”. In cooperation with local dealers, VW took to the streets and visited the sidewalk cafés and restaurants that people frequented during the summer. The car was on display and a team of nine dancers, singers and musicians provided entertainment.

This approach created an atmosphere designed to strengthen VW Golf’s image and make the car attractive in a much more cheerful fashion. Various lifestyle-promotion objects, such as lighters and Frisbees with the VW logo, were handed out for free. Passers-by were also given a Golf lifestyle magazine with competition coupons, etc. These were supposed to be handed in to local dealers, thereby attracting people to the showrooms and providing valuable input for a large database. Once again, one of the most important aims of the campaign was to secure the support of the dealers, so from the day the campaign was launched, photo journals were posted regularly on VW’s website.

Another example of a promotional experience is Baileys Day. Baileys Original Irish Cream is a liqueur based on Irish whiskey. The trademark is currently owned by R & A Bailey & Co, which is owned by Diageo Plc in the UK.

Baileys Day takes place every year at the beginning of December, at different locations in the 130 countries in which Baileys is available. The experience is run by Diageo employees, who hand out merchandise samples and free Baileys of course! Besides being a sales and awareness promotion, this event is considered an ideal way for employees to meet consumers as they go about their daily lives. A typical setup is an outdoor bar in the center of a city, or a lounge-like setting in a shop. On one occasion a Baileys representative dressed up as a cow and went skating on an outdoor ice rink in the center of Copenhagen to mark the fact that Baileys had entered a contract with 1,400 dairy farmers to supply milk from 35,000 cows, exclusively for Baileys cream liqueur.

The Platform Experience



A platform experience works on a large scale and typically can evolve into a profit-making business in itself. This may add long-term, strategic potential. This kind of experience has the power to attract target audiences and thereby encourage them to participate voluntarily.

A platform experience can evolve into a profit-making business

Organizing a platform experience is a very demanding undertaking. The best way to explain this is through a real-

life example: the Danish brewery Tuborg’s “Green Concert”. This is an excellent example of a platform experience that has evolved every time it has been held. The concert functions as an integrated platform for Tuborg’s internal and external communication and is based on the concepts “Tuborg does something about music” and “A little greener...” This (and the previously mentioned Great Wall Marathon organized by Albatros Travel) is an ideal example of a platform experience that becomes so attractive to the target audience that it develops into an independent, profit-making business through which a company earns money from marketing its products.

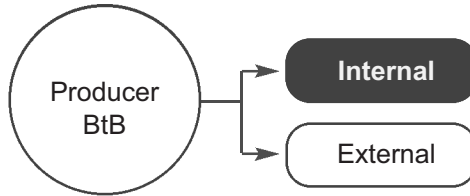


A “Green Concert” arranged by a Danish foundation that helps people who suffer from muscular atrophy. These concerts, which are held nationwide during the summer, attract large crowds and many Danes now regard them as a tradition. Employees of Carlsberg Breweries, among others, have access to the back stage area, which offers VIP facilities and other benefits (Photograph: Scanpix)

Producer Experiences (BtB)

On the producer market, experiences can take the form of internal and external meetings, arrangements, symposia, networks, fairs, etc. Consequently the target group may be anything from employees or suppliers to customers, investors or business partners, etc.

Internal



Internal communication experiences are designed to inform and motivate employees, their relatives and any other people involved with the daily business of the company.

Internal experiences target anyone involved with the daily business of a company

Novozymes, a world leader in the creation of bio-industrial products through the use of enzymes, decided to develop a new internal branding platform (version 2.0) for release in 2007. Unlike its predecessors, the “Rethink Tomorrow” platform began further along in the value chain,

focusing on the benefits for the company’s customers and society as a whole. These benefits were anchored in sustainability, which was a key concept. In 1987, The World Commission on Environment and Development (now the Brundtland Commission) defined sustainable development as *“development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs.”*

In Novozymes’ opinion, sustainability also means keeping their core competencies intact. And this has become a primary focus of performance evaluations. All measurements must be linked to the company’s objectives – sustainability being one of the corporate goals.

The vision was that the Novozymes organization of the future should be able to monitor the risks in its market and adjust its activities accordingly,

in order to ensure the wellbeing of its networked, stakeholder eco-system. But the company also wanted to enable employees and customers to monitor and measure their personal social responsibilities as well.

The challenge was to develop an engaging experience through which the new internal branding platform could be introduced on a worldwide basis to all employees – from white- and blue-collar workers to scientists. The purpose was to make them feel receptive towards the new platform, and ensure that the somewhat complex message came across so clearly that, should employees ever be required to describe what Novozymes stood for, they would not hesitate for a second.

The idea was to make the employees an integral part of the platform and encourage them to contribute as much as possible to the company and the new branding. They would be asked to take stock of their surroundings, their customers and, not least, the world in general. And in the process they would learn that being part of the bigger picture was what sustainability was all about, in the Novozymes sense of the word.

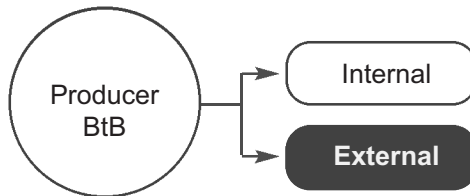
The experience involved a series of specially developed games and competitions designed to engage and involve the employees in the “Rethink Tomorrow” platform. All activities were closely linked to Novozymes’ current personality and values, and to the acquisition of knowledge – particularly in the area of sustainability. The participants were taught about the new platform and given all the right tools to spread the word. To ensure maximum involvement and co-ownership, they were encouraged to create parts of various games themselves – including a totally new board game dealing with the subject of sustainability. This game created such a powerful “social space” that it ended up playing a pivotal role in the communication platform itself.

Through the game, people learned about the effect of various actions on the environment; different species of animals; the climate; global warming; pollution; water resources, etc. By communicating in a lighthearted manner the company managed to sidestep traditional barriers such as resistance to change and lack of motivation. The mechanics of the game and the topics it covered made it easy to demonstrate what Novozymes stood for.



Novozymes' CEO, Steen Riisgaard, at the launch of the game (Photograph: Novozymes)

External



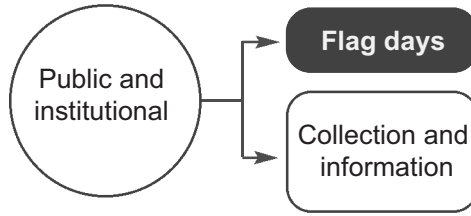
Experiences used for external communication on the producer market are often targeted at a wide variety of stakeholders, shareholders or their representatives, stock analysts, political connections, distributors, strategic partners, etc.

Public and Institutional Experiences

Experiences on the producer market often target a wide variety of stakeholders

Public authorities, political parties, non-profit organizations and institutions generally focus on awareness-raising, charity and the provision of services to various target groups in society. They might also focus on attracting attention to a national, regional or local flag day, or a general interest event.

Flag Days



Flag days can include company anniversaries, jubilees or epoch-making changes or events in the life of a person or company.

Cherry Blossom Day is a prime example of a flag-day experience. In Japan they celebrate the blossom of the cherry trees, called Sakura. During spring, viewing parties and festivals are held all over Japan, where people picnic and make merry during the day, and the festivities continue into the night.

Cherry blossom viewing (Hanami) has been a Japanese custom since the seventh century, when aristocrats enjoyed admiring the blooms and penning poems.



HRH Queen Elizabeth II's Golden Jubilee concert with 12,000 guests in front of Buckingham Palace. This event was a conscious attempt to improve the image of the British monarchy (Photograph: Scanpix)

Queen Elizabeth II celebrated her 50th jubilee with four days of festivity and two huge concerts in front of Buckingham Palace. Well-known artists such as Dame Kiri Kanawa, Sir Paul McCartney, Sir Elton John, the rock group Queen, Eric Clapton, Phil Collins, Aretha Franklin and Tom Jones all performed live. The concert was the Monarchy’s attempt at appeasing a disgruntled population: opinion polls conducted after Princess Diana’s death showed great dissatisfaction with the way the tragedy had been

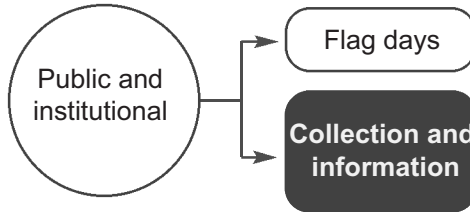
Flag days can be a company anniversary, a jubilee or epoch-making changes or events in the life of a person or company

handled. In response, the Queen flew the Union Jack flag at half mast and appeared live on national television to thank the British people for their deep compassion.

Prime examples of public flag days include the inaugurations of the bridges over the Sound between Zealand in Denmark and Scania in Sweden, (1997), 50th jubilee celebrations held across Europe in countries liberated during World War II (1995), and the 200th jubilee of the birth of Danish storyteller, Hans Christian Andersen (2005).

Prime examples of public flag days include the inaugurations of the bridges over the Sound between Zealand in Denmark and Scania in Sweden,

Information-Gathering and Awareness-Raising



Experiences can be used in the public and institutional domain for gathering information from citizens and various groups in society, and for increasing media attention and enhancing visibility when running awareness-raising campaigns on health, traffic safety or animal welfare, for example. Experiences can also contribute to setting the political agenda.

Experiences can be used for gathering information, increasing media attention and enhancing visibility.

Earlier in this book we mentioned a Danish animal welfare organization that raised a nationwide petition in favor of a maximum of eight hours for the transport of animals. This was a prime example of how experiences can be used as a tool for awareness raising and information gathering.

In March 2003 the Business Software Alliance organization (BSA) launched an awareness-raising campaign about the lack of ethics exhibited by people who copy software without a license, and about the untrustworthiness of companies that have no proper licenses. The discussion about “good corporate governance” was highly topical in the wake of the Enron scandal in the US in 2002. The question that BSA wanted to pose to their target group was whether a person can be a serious and competent manager if they are in possession of stolen software.

BSA used the slogan “Serious companies don’t steal, surely?” to draw attention to the fact that 26% of software used by companies was used without proper licenses. The conference featured three guest speakers, and three representatives were chosen to illustrate the problem. The “black sheep” was personified by a racing cyclist with illegal stimulants in his luggage. The “good” business manager was represented by the Business Woman of the Year, who acted as an advocate for the significance of ethics in creating a successful career. The person in the middle – the “unblemished expert” – was a theologian and debater. The conference was held at a higher education establishment, with the dual purposes of generating PR and media coverage and influencing potential business managers.

When the Danes held the presidency of the European Union in 2002, the Danish Ministry of Economic and Business Affairs organized a Council of Ministers for those ministers responsible for economic and business-affairs in the EU. The Danish presidency was focusing on growth and on a united Europe, and it wanted to make the public aware of these aims.

The purpose of the meeting was to attract attention to growth in Europe; to attract media attention; to create photo opportunities that could help to market Denmark in the rest of the EU, and to spread the message about initiatives to facilitate growth. And so the organizers decided that the meeting should be accompanied by a strong action with a dual objective: to symbolize growth in a way the general public could understand; and to involve and motivate the ministers and ministries to pursue the growth objective.



The magnificent Maersk container ship – one of the largest in the world – also symbolized growth. The fact that it was still under construction, combined with the dramatic lighting, contributed to this message (Photograph: 3rdDimension©)

The idea was to find a large Danish company that symbolized growth and accomplishment. The final concept made use of one of Maersk's new container ships that was still under construction; a very untraditional piece of scenery! The ship was ideal also in a wider sense because it helped illustrate how Maersk's values signify growth. The 30-storey high bridge was used and the journey up there was accentuated with lighting and other special effects. The artists Bosh & Fjord were asked to build a sculpture that would support the growth message through a spectacular, symbolic action. This centerpiece was called "Forum" and it consisted of a transparent, illuminated sphere with small peepholes.

Each of the participating ministers was asked to place a symbolic object – in this case, a "time capsule" – into the sculpture. Each capsule symbolized growth in their respective countries.

Having contributed their ideas for growth to the content of the sculpture the participants really embraced the message. Today the sculpture doubles as an EU award that changes hands whenever the best entrepreneurs in the EU are elected. The event on Maersk's container ship won press coverage throughout Europe, thereby helping to spread the message to its population.

The Forum sculpture was unveiled by Danish Minister of Economics & Business Affairs, Bendt Bendtsen. The European Ministers of Economic & Business affairs placed their individual symbols of growth inside the sculpture, which functioned as a physical meeting point during the entire event.



The Belgian minister contributed a model of the cartoon character Tintin's moon rocket to symbolize growth and prosperity in a united Europe (Photograph: 3rdDimension©)

The Environmental Assessment Institute was another fine example of public authorities using the Experience Medium to set the agenda and support their messages with the correct behavior. The institute invited some of the world's most influential economists, some of whom were Nobel Prize winners, to a meeting entitled "Copenhagen Consensus 2004". The meeting – and the feeling that decision-makers were actually defining goals and solutions rather than just talking – helped to elevate this important message and spread it not only via the media but also the participants' networks. This was a strong symbolic action with a clear message: prioritize the challenges the world faces, find opportunities and seize them!



Author of “The Sceptical Environmentalist” and “Cool It”, Bjørn Lomborg, at a press conference in Copenhagen, February 2004, where journalists are being informed about the Copenhagen Consensus 2004 event (Photograph: Scanpix)

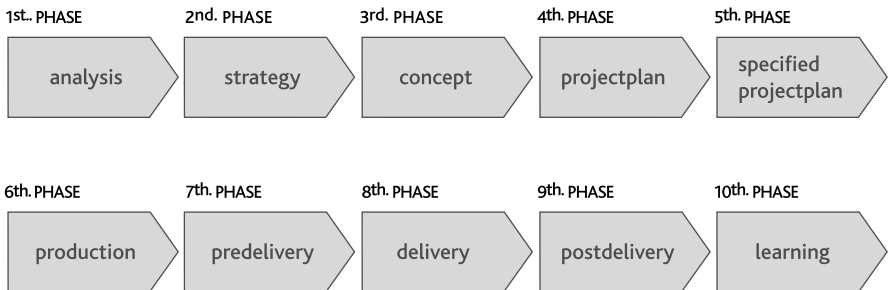
The Environmental Assessment Institute, managed by director Bjørn Lomborg, tried to stir up a debate about the prioritization of money spent on solving some of the world’s most challenging problems. In 2004 a 5-day meeting was held in Copenhagen, the aim of which was to identify the world’s most serious problems and prioritize how they could be resolved. This would ensure that problems such as climate change, epidemics and malnutrition would appear on the political world agenda.

As input the participants read ten different scientific articles, which had been written especially for the event by renowned economists. They then considered which problem should be resolved first: that 800 million people were starving; that over a billion lacked clean drinking water, or that billions would be affected by climate changes? The result of the conference was that the AIDS catastrophe should be given the highest priority.

The vision was that the *physical meeting* would contribute to a better prioritization of the world’s great challenges, which in turn would facilitate a debate and motivate decision-makers and other influential players to create better living conditions for the world’s population. The encounter was a telling example of the strength, obligation and motivation inherent to the physical meeting, where people socialize and experience a feeling of mutual understanding. When people meet, they perceive messages to be far more trustworthy and genuine.

The Process

In the following the various considerations will be discussed.



Analysis

The objectives of experience-based communication are many and varied, depending on whether it is being used tactically or strategically, internally or externally. Of course, companies that utilize experiences consciously must first have established their overall communication objectives.

Some of the most general aims are to:

- Attract the attention of your target group
- Motivate distribution – make people aware of what you stand for
- Improve the reputation of your company or brand, both internally and externally
- Create PR and goodwill
- Gather information for your databases
- Test your product and your market
- Motivate your internal and external contacts
- Create strategic alliances

Often, tactical aims will be included to help you achieve your strategic aims:

- Organize trials and sampling to increase awareness
- Create footfall
- Generate sales

The trial phase is a particularly important stage in the purchasing process and consists of three elements: *Attention*, *Trial* and *Purchase*. In this context the strength of the experience is evident: it gives recipients an opportunity to see how a product works in real life, and try it out for themselves.

Companies often attempt to achieve more than one objective simultaneously. Since these are either self-explanatory or have been discussed earlier, we have chosen to describe the specific strength of experiences only in a market research and PR context.

Experiences are useful for product and market research because they can be used as trial runs. You can gather valuable information and ideas about the preferences of the target audience in relation to products and services. And you can find out whether a product needs to be adjusted or adapted to fit the market better or to live up to the consumers' perception of your image, etc.

No matter what the objective of the experience is, it is a good idea to utilize the valuable feedback mechanism discussed earlier. Listen actively and use the information that emerges from the person-to-person dialog. This can provide a clear idea of what makes a customer select or reject a particular product – a benefit that cannot be attained when products or services are marketed in the traditional one-way fashion.

Experiences provide ample opportunities for PR activities through which relationships can be built with target audiences. A strong PR platform can minimize the cost incurred when informing people about an experience. This is advantageous in the sense that it makes messages visible and trustworthy through media coverage and word-of-mouth. It also draws attention to your company and your activities.

According to Public Relations theorists Tod Hunt and James E. Grunig, PR can be carried out in several ways⁴⁷. The practice of PR is generally a company's planned and continuing effort to establish and maintain goodwill and a common understanding between the organization and its stakeholders and surroundings.

Hunt & Grunig mention four perspectives that are more or less appropriate for individual kinds of campaigns: press coverage, public information, two-way asymmetrical and two-way symmetrical PR. Where experiences are concerned, companies often rely on press coverage and word of mouth. Therefore PR is important in most experience contexts, because it disseminates positive information about products or brands. Media coverage influences the consumers' perception of a company or a product only indirectly. PR must support the aim of the experience, because when the two work together they can ensure a wider share of voice in a media world already saturated with messages.

A few years ago the Carlsberg Brewery decided to open The Jacobsen Brewhouse next to the Carlsberg Visitors' Center, which is located in the original brewery (built in 1847). This was all part of the launch of a new super-premium beer called "Jacobsen", named after the founder of Carlsberg Brewery, J.C. Jacobsen.

The launch was designed to meet an increasing demand for well crafted specialty beers. People seemed to be moving from "good food and good wine" to "good food and specialty beer", and at the turn of the millennium new micro-breweries began springing up all over Europe. In just five years, Denmark became one of the top five destinations for beer enthusiasts in the world.

The brand manager and head brewer of Jacobsen chose to promote this exclusive beer through traditional print media and PR. To get the most out of their PR-strategy they took a story-telling approach, focusing on their founder; his dedication to supreme beer, and the company's heritage. They decided to support the image of Jacobsen by producing a limited vintage beer that would be matured, in new oak barrels, in their large underground crypts.

To support the exclusive image, each bottle was corked, sealed with lacquer and given a label designed as a lithographic print by a well-known artist. The aim was not only to generate PR but also to raise the bar for what beer can be! Beer matured in new oak barrels tastes exceptional. Vintage No. 1 worked as a unique physical manifestation for Jacobsen's values and is currently the most expensive beer in the world.



Jacobsen Limited Edition, Vintage No. 1. Sold at a premium price of \$400 per bottle (Photograph: Carlsberg Press Photography)

This intelligent PR-stunt generated maximum press coverage. This helped to enhance the supreme image of Jacobsen beer, and differentiate this standalone brand from the Carlsberg parent-brand. The company also chose to exclusively distribute Jacobsen beer to gourmet restaurants by traditional horse-drawn carriage. The Carlsberg Visitors’ Center still has its own stable and horses as part of the visitor experience.

Over the last decade, storytelling has gained in popularity – and quite rightly so. Companies use it to communicate their values; to give their products strong identities; to add value and to educate. Storytelling also increases a company’s PR value; public relations being the goal of communication.

Unfortunately the values communicated by many companies bear no resemblance to how they are actually perceived by the media. Firstly, journalists do not want to be force fed with stories and secondly, stories that lack heart and soul are utterly untrustworthy. In order to survive

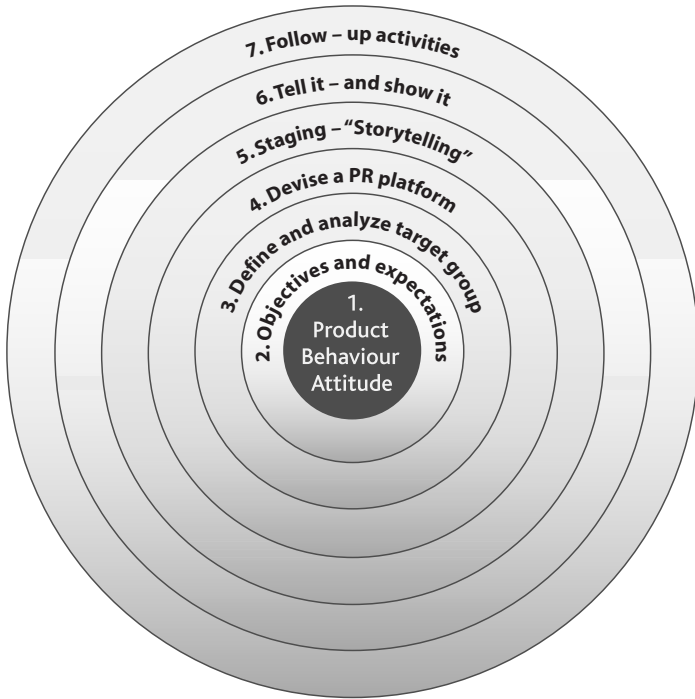
closer inspection a company’s stories must be genuine and supported by the appropriate behavior – and this can be achieved through incorporating sensory experiences into the storytelling. Don’t just tell it, show it. Get physical when delivering your message.

Use the five senses to stage your stories and you will attract the attention of the media.

Use the five senses to stage your stories and you will attract the attention of the media – but first you must find the heart in each of your messages. Then you will be able to make them interesting and relevant for

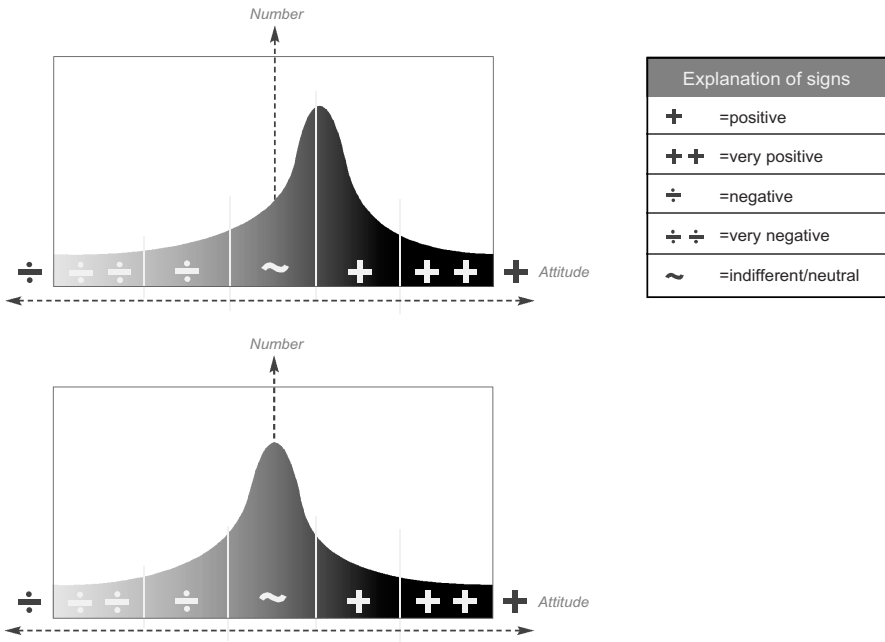
your target group, and potentially change the way people perceive your organization.

The model below shows how experienced-based communication applies in the field of PR.



In PR an often-used maneuver is to try to encourage large groups of people who are feeling slightly negative to become either indifferent or even a slightly positive. The positive group then becomes the majority and the balance changes completely. Experiences can be very useful for this purpose because they can reach groups and areas that are difficult to penetrate through traditional, sender-controlled media.

Using experiences in critical situations or where there is a serious need to change opinions due to a lack of involvement and empathy promises significant advantages. Imagine that a large group is negatively disposed towards your company or message, and that a small percentage of that group is extremely negative and impossible to sway. For example, if you wanted to influence second-generation immigrants in an area plagued by racial problems, the experience medium could help you to find people on their own “turf”, in their own reality. And because the meeting would be face-to-face, they would feel more involved and the message would be easier to understand and accept. This hypothetical target group and other marginalized groups are difficult – if not impossible to influence through other, sender-controlled media. The illustrations below show how experiences can minimize the number of negatively disposed people:



Companies should also try to benefit from yet another function of PR, which is crisis management. This can be used to protect your brand if something goes awry in connection with an experience. It would be wise to define various “unfortunate scenarios” that your company should be able to handle through crisis management.

It is important to remember that experiences and messages must come from within (see also the heart model). Once you have defined your communication objectives, you can devise a communication plan. In all analysis the important thing is to know yourself and the people with whom you wish to communicate. Who are you – and who are they?

For experiences you also need to ask the following questions: Where do members of the target group meet physically? Has a physical location already been established or is it necessary to set up a new one? What makes you tick? What makes the target group tick? And why do you want to influence them?

What is crucial in this context is to find a symbolic act that makes it possible for sender and recipient to meet physically, mentally and socially on the basis of something shared and relevant: the experience itself (see

also the model above). An experience will become an asset to communication only if it is consciously staged in order to encourage mutual involvement and social interaction. Riding the fastest rollercoaster at a fairground is an experience. Watching an international football match is an experience – but it is not enough to attach yourself to “other people’s” events. Recipients will only become truly engaged if they are actively involved in the messages – and this requires contributing mentally to the physical experience. Traditional sponsorships no longer suffice; today the Danish brewery Carlsberg arranges experiences inside Copenhagen’s largest football stadium, where home matches are followed by live music, and where the best players mix with their supporters.

There are many examples of unconventional sales efforts that, by catching people’s attention through flashing lights or wind machines, almost approach being an experience. But a machine cannot facilitate involvement and social interaction on its own, because there is no dialog and no emotional impact. The human aspect – empathy – is important, because it helps people to interact socially in relation to messages.

The sensitive identity is useful when analyzing a company because it forces the organization to bring its messages to life. What form should these messages take? And how should they smell, taste, sound and feel? Experiences vitalize messages, but if they are not staged and if recipients are given no opportunity to sense them, they will lose impact. The experience medium is vulnerable to sensory impressions from the surrounding world, so it is important to control the situation as much as possible.

When using the experience medium, try to work with the *total* experience to ensure that it is fully in keeping with your objectives and sensitive identity (fundamental values). The model below summarizes how the formulation of this identity serves as the foundation for choosing symbolic actions and experiences designed to encourage involvement and social interaction between sender and recipient.

Choosing Symbolic Actions

Actions that fit the occasion should only be chosen after careful consideration of the match criteria selected. These could be product and service, desired image, target group profile, etc. If the experience you design fails to match the target group, you risk meeting people physically but not mentally and socially. The experience then becomes a shallow, irrelevant event or activity that provides little more than a moment’s

entertainment or a way of passing the time. So do think carefully about the involvement and social aspects, and create experiences that come from within (Fig. 31).

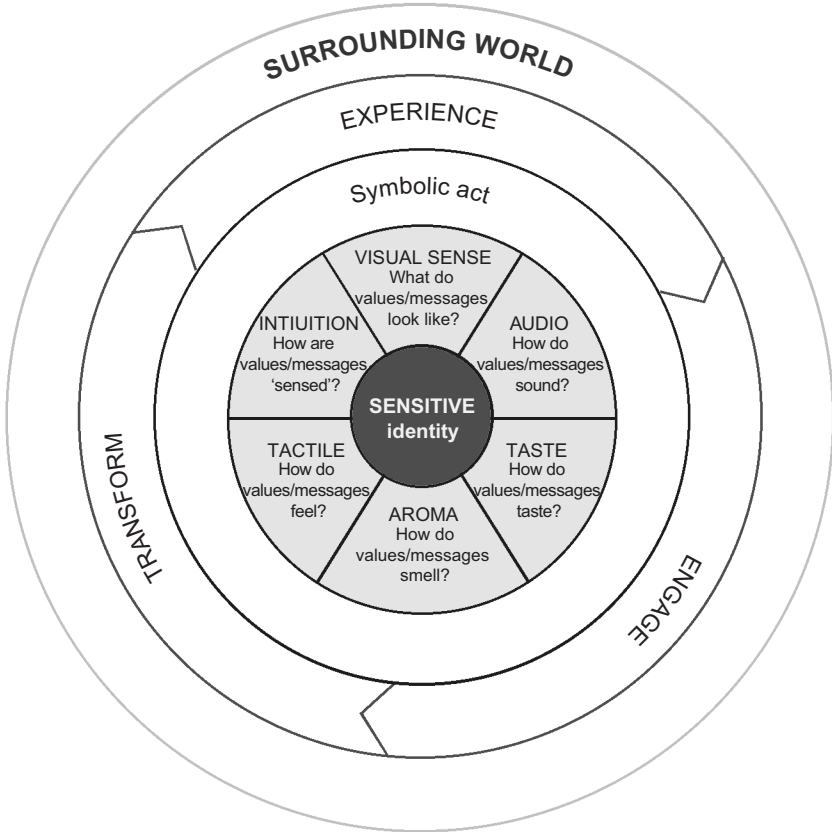


Fig. 31 Experience-based communication (3rdDimension©)

Never choose an action for the sake of it or just because it has worked in other contexts. A short cut is often not the best option; it is preferable to use compatible activities. What kind of ritual and behavior seems natural, or in a figurative sense, connected with your service? Are there any physical meetings and locations where people would find your services relevant, attractive, instructive, enriching or refreshing? Often it can be advantageous to exploit themes such as sports, culture, social contexts, history, popular music, art, etc.

Do not be modest when selecting symbolic actions; base them on the values you wish to convey, and on the interests of your target group. These things are crucial to the significance of experiences in communication (Table 5).

Match criteria
1. Image link
2. Product link
3. Target group link

Table 5 Match criteria (3rdDimension©)

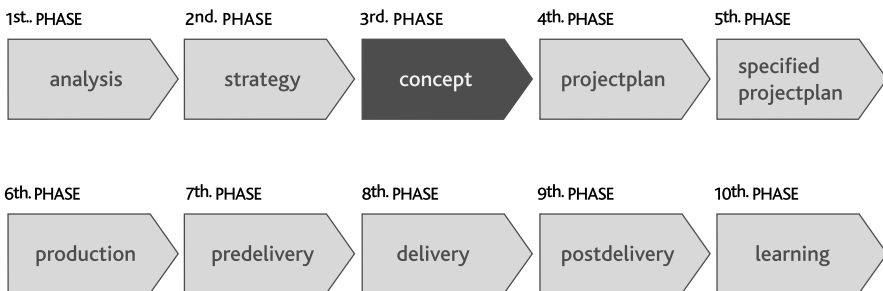
Product link: This is the product itself, connected to an obvious action such as a utilization situation. There should be a compatible link with social contexts or other experiences connected to or associated with the product

Image link: Which actions or activities, if any, are connected to the desired values? Choose compatible (matching) activities that either already have, or will have, a positive effect through association and involvement.

Target group link: Choose activities that are of interest and relevance to the target group. Determining the demographic, psychographic and behavioral profile of the target group should put you on the right track.

Having decided on an idea for a matching symbolic action, you must ensure that the experience will be perceived as being trustworthy and genuine when being staged and developed further. People must be able to use it and *sense* it.

Strategy and Concept



Based on the analysis and the ideas that have emerged, the final concept begins to take shape. And based on the budget, the resources, agreed objectives, target groups, competitors and trends, a strategy is devised. And various questions will be answered in the process:

- What kind of message do you want to communicate?
- What should the story be – and how will you dramatize it?
- How will you involve and influence your target group so that the message becomes relevant?
- How will you achieve maximum impact and understanding?
- What should your campaign look like?
- Which elements and media will be the most effective in helping you achieve your objectives?

When the idea has been developed it will be placed in the value chain, where it can be used operationally and meet the set objectives. This approach differs from the traditional communication approach in that it aims to bring the message to life. Only when you have decided how to stage your message should you choose and prioritize your media. To dramatize your message and make it trustworthy you must allow *the experience* to govern all communication; otherwise you risk sending incorrect or misleading signals.

The model below indicates how individual media should be prioritized and how they can contribute to bringing messages to life (Fig. 32).

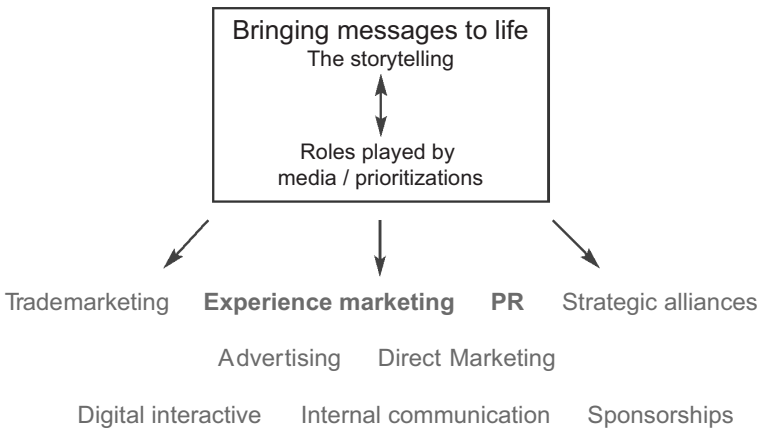
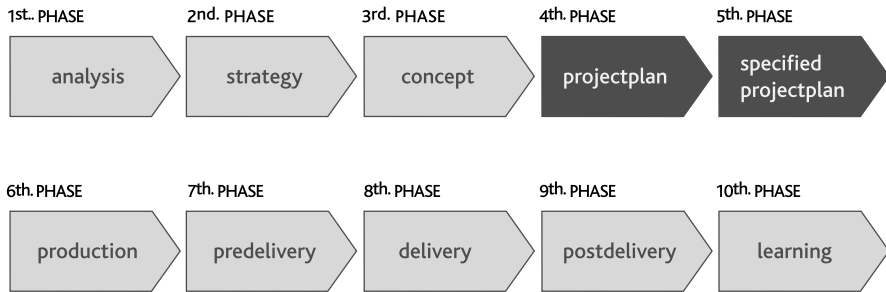


Fig. 32 Experience communication (3rdDimension©)

Procter & Gamble’s (P&G) Pringle chips were re-launched in Europe in 1999 with the promise “Once you pop, you can’t stop”. P&G decided to use music to communicate with the young target group. On the day of the launch in Copenhagen (which was dubbed “the Big Bang”), P&G staged a large concert in cooperation with a nationwide radio station. The concert was attended by consumers, business associates and the company’s sales organizations, and it formed the platform for all communication prior to and after the event. P&G used in-store and outdoor media, promotions, print, electronic media, etc.

Project Development



The experience space must promote optimum learning and comprehension, and any symbolic actions must be staged and designed to ensure clear and unambiguous communication. The way you develop the various elements will decide whether the *Experience*, *Involvement* and *Social Interaction* factors have been successfully incorporated into the delivery of the message. The transfer of meaning and the value of a message depend on the success of the physical meeting: this is the moment of truth. It is when you meet the recipients that messages are truly put to the test. Analyses, concepts and ideas are vital elements, but development and implementation are equally important because the staging has a major impact on the motivation of the recipients.

Unlike sponsorships, where companies borrow values from well known objects that people already associate with a certain image, experiences have no such predetermined associations. This is because the target group often has no reference points or previous experiences. So the staging of the experience space will have to be tailor-made to fit your communication objectives.

The model below illustrates how an experience takes shape and how the process of creating your medium and message works (Fig. 33):

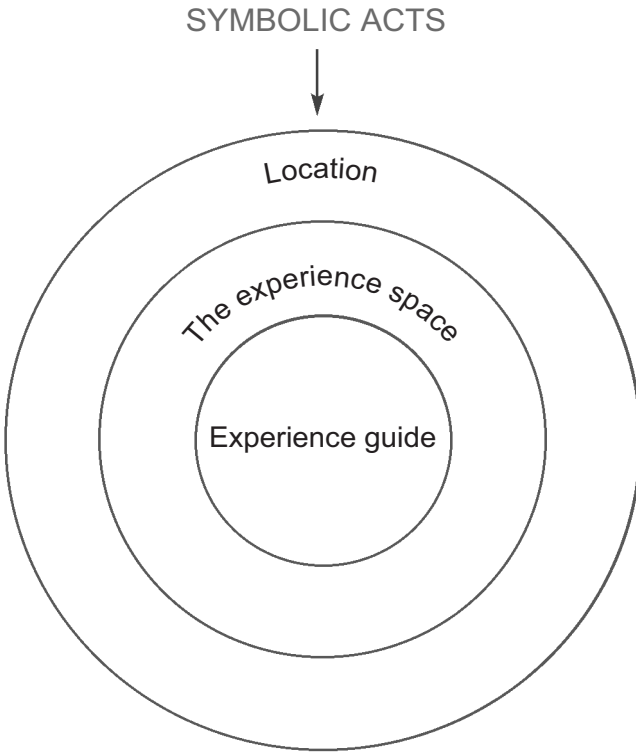
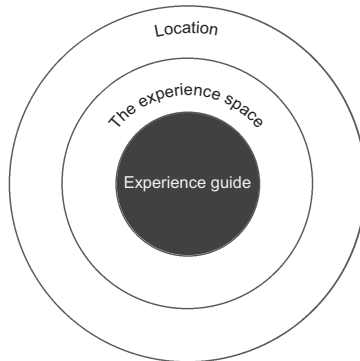


Fig. 33 Elements of how symbolic acts are staged (3rdDimension©)

The Experience Guide



The platform for the experience medium is the physical meeting – the interpersonal communication. No matter how well-defined your strategy is or how well staged the situation, the experience will either work well, or not at all. It all depends on the person who is guiding the experience. The experience guide – a manager, employee or external consultant – is your most important ambassador for messages.

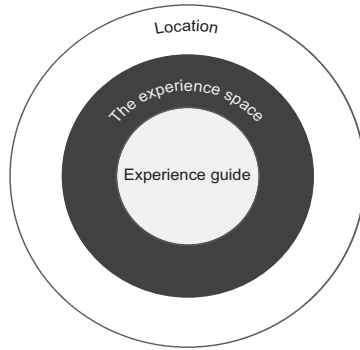
The Experience Guide is your most important ambassador for messages

The experience guide will be the face your company presents to the surrounding world. It is therefore important to be aware of their specific role when it comes to selling experiences and communicating messages. Since they present or represent your company’s values, feelings and opinions, these guides must be aware that any verbal and non-verbal communication must be in stringent agreement with the messages you wish to send. They must therefore be carefully selected, matched, cast and trained (Table 6).

Roles played by the Experience guide
To be practical
To convince people
To establish values
To strengthen values
To establish relationships

Table 6 Roles played by the experience guide (3rdDimension©)

The Experience Space



The experience space comprises the physical, mental and social space. Of these three, we will be focusing on the elements in the physical space. These include audio-visual equipment, scenery, decorations, signs, music, etc. The scenery consists of elements that can be sensed, i.e. music, light, decorations, equipment, etc. These will be governed by the creative idea or ritual chosen, and therefore cannot be described in general terms.

The scenery elements are an important part of the experience, so you should try to include the highest possible number of stimuli to convey your messages through multi-sensory learning. In addition to enhancing the ritual and message, these elements should involve the participants physically and encourage them to interact socially.

The experience space comprises the physical, mental and social space

An important aspect in the experience space is to incorporate areas where participants can interact – meeting points or small islands where they can chat and socialize. This interaction helps to enhance the effect of an experience.

The symbolic object is an important, physical proof of the experience that participants go through

Another important part of the experience space is the symbolic object – i.e. some physical, memorable proof of the experience. In connection with the Microsoft Integration experience, all employees were given a CD of the song that had been recorded, plus a

ring tone for their cell phones. Symbolic objects keep experiences fresh in people’s memories for longer periods of time and they can even become a subject for discussion socially.

The Location

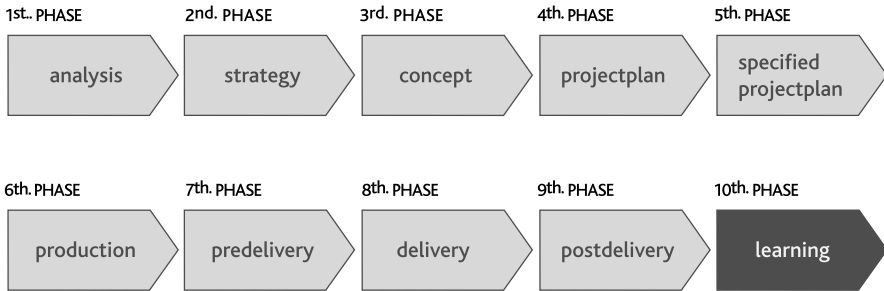


Depending on the type of experience you choose, the significance of the location varies. But the choice of location is vital. Most promotional experiences revolve around continually finding advantageous locations (the right places, the right people, etc.). When you choose a symbolic act, the matching criteria can help you find locations that offer synergy between message, target group and the product or service itself.

Can you think of any venues that are strongly connected with your values? Or is there something else that can enhance the experience or message? Locations can help to build people’s expectations and they can have a positive effect on the entire experience. Find out which fairs, conferences, events or centers are relevant for your product – i.e. places where your target audience is well represented.

The experience location is usually an integral part of the experience space itself, whether it is a landscape, castle, amphitheatre or design center. Locations can help to strengthen a message. Imagine driving down a noisy highway with music playing on the radio. Now imagine being on a country road in an open-topped sports car, with warm wind in your hair! The surroundings make a world of difference. Similarly, the staging of an experience is crucial to making people more receptive to the messages you are communicating.

Measuring and Learning



Despite the widespread use of the experience medium there are very few methods or evaluation tools by which its impact in communication can be measured. This causes problems when trying to determine how effective experiences are; how they can be improved, and in what kinds of situations they should be used. The only way to overcome this problem is to develop specific methods and learning/evaluation tools. As a solution the final section of this book provides some ideas on how to actually measure the effect of experiences.

Measurement Methods

To assess whether the experience actually met your objectives you must evaluate it *from the very beginning*. People rarely think about this issue in the long term, so they appraise the *process* only. Impact assessment is ignored for financial or other resource-related reasons, or simply because people are afraid of discovering errors. As experience architects we recommend measuring the effects of the experience *before* evaluating the actual process. Because if you cannot document the value of communication experiences, how can you improve performance the next time around?

Many other problems must be solved when assessing the impact of experiences. For instance, how do you measure the strength or value of the relationships built within the target group? How do you measure the state of mind created by an experience, or the development of networks over a period of time? Every experience is unique – and unique to every participant. This makes the number of opportunities to compare experiences rather limited, which complicates assessment.

Chapter 8

Experience Architecture in Real Life

Experience Architecture in Real Life

A company's identity is defined by the way it is experienced – and this is what experience architecture seeks to characterize. In chapter one of this book we described an encounter with a well-known consultancy company, which revealed a major disparity between what the company thought it stood for, and how it was perceived by the world at large. The humanity value was nowhere to be found, either in the company's internal and external architecture or in the behavior of its staff. This is probably because they have difficulty understanding how it applies to their working lives.

If this is the case the company would need to do some soul searching in order to define its true values, or become more adept at making its values tangible, engaging and meaningful. More likely still is that the company has underestimated the importance of authenticity in physical meetings, and the impact each touchpoint can have on people's perceptions. Consequently the target group, seeing no evidence of the pledged value, loses faith in the company.

The physical frameworks in which we work, meet, negotiate and sell play a major role in creating an image of trustworthiness and value for those involved. How often have you considered whether the experiences your company provides are perceived as true to your values, mission and vision? Are you aware of the impressions you convey? And do you frequently test whether your values, mission and vision are apparent at all of your touchpoints? Most companies believe their values to be visible and authentic – but the real-life experience often tells an altogether different tale.

The moment of truth is the physical meeting. Since products and services are often identical and easy to substitute, the most important differentiation parameter is the way we behave – i.e. how we treat customers and how we deliver products and services in stores, on the net, at offices and conferences, etc. The behavior of the staff and the framework itself play a vital role for the experience and consequently the value of a product or service. We might venture to say that products and services are just props, and that it is the ritual experienced during the acquisition that determines the real value. Therefore all products and services should be turned into experiences. The degree to which a promise is fulfilled, and consequently the perceived value, is directly proportional to a company's ability to do what it says it will do.

“An idea not coupled with action will never get any bigger than the brain cell it occupied.”

(Arnold H. Glasow)

What's the Secret of Experience Architecture?

Experience architecture charts a company's physical touchpoints and calculates the sum of their perceived value. It tracks target groups as they journey through the system, and evaluate their perceptions of their interactions. It measures whether touchpoints live up to the company's strategy, mission, vision and values – and their ability to meet the needs of the user. This includes all of the important target groups, from employees and customers to suppliers, partners, investors and other stakeholders.

Experience architecture also provides a unique overview of a company's touchpoints, plus insight into the opportunities for interaction internally that make a touchpoint accessible externally. These opportunities are called “feelers” and they include emails, correspondence, the internet; resources the touchpoint either owns or shares and which affect the meeting experience to a greater or lesser degree. Focusing on the customer experience requires managers to think holistically about every touchpoint and phase in the customer lifecycle. It also demands a holistic approach to designing and improving experiences offered to the target group.

It is the Chief Executive Officer's responsibility to ensure that all employees understand that they play a pivotal role in helping the company fulfil its promises, and that they have a major impact on the desired customer experience. The Head of Human Resources, Chief Sales Officer and Chief Marketing Officer should also be involved in orchestrating the customer experience across all channels, partners, business units and stages in the customer purchasing cycle.

You may feel that all customer insights have already been monitored and registered in your CRM system. And your competitors may feel the same way. But ask yourself this: Does your selling cycle match the desired experience in each interaction with a customer? Are you aware of the importance of staging at every encounter? Are your people well aligned, and do they share the same reference points when interacting with stakeholders? Also, have you defined the signature experience of your company? If the answer is yes, then you are ahead of most of your

competitors. Your employees and partners probably think highly of you, journalists print your stories with enthusiasm, and you have loyal customers who hold you in high esteem. However, if the answer is no, read on...

All companies have a unique “DNA” and a form of Experience Architecture

All companies have a unique “DNA” and a form of experience architecture, but only the fewest have a complete overview of that architecture. More important, only the fewest actually measure how well each individual touchpoint performs in relation to the

company’s mission, vision and values. If your mission statement includes being innovative, ask yourself whether your target groups experience that innovation. If your vision is to be a market leader globally, can this be sensed in encounters with your company? By architecting the way people experience your company you can ensure that your mission, vision and values are reflected wherever interactions take place.

An optimized experience architecture will help you to develop your business by:

- Creating a unique corporate “DNA” that makes your company easy to recognize for employees, customers and the world in general.
- Building a larger, more loyal customer base, by making any contact with your company a positive experience.
- Inspiring and motivating your employees.
- Developing a strong and honest relationship with the press.
- Creating a resource-saving synergy between your sales and marketing division.
- Gaining access to new markets via unique business platforms, products and services.
- Taking shortcuts to your most important target groups.

What Does Experience Architecture Yield?

Until now we have focused on describing individual, permanent and temporary touchpoints dealing with marketing or communication. But in all companies, both large and small, it is strategically important to gain a holistic view of all existing touchpoints. Experience architecture yields analyses and evaluations that are anchored in the perceived value of the

company’s touchpoints. And such intelligence makes an ideal foundation for decision making.

The model below (where symbolically, the heart of the model is the heart of the company) illustrates the first step in the experience architecture process, which is to define the heart of the organization – i.e. its mission, vision and values. Ideally these should be brought to life at all touchpoints in the company’s architecture, thereby creating the strands of a unique company DNA that can be perceived and understood by your audiences.

The inner and outermost circles chart all physical touchpoints as either permanent or temporary (see Chap. 5 for more on these two definitions) (Fig. 35).

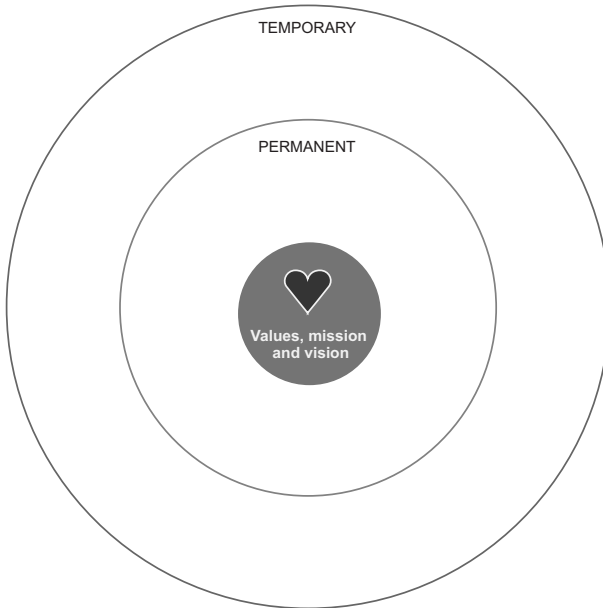


Fig. 35 Experience architecture base (3rdDimension©)

The next model illustrates the hypothetical mapping of various permanent and temporary touchpoints. The different tones of gray in the examples located in the inner and outermost circle signify the importance of the touchpoint (high, medium or low), based on whether the target group is primary, secondary or of little or no influence.

Top-level touchpoints target primary decision makers with the power to close the sale.

Medium-level touchpoints target secondary target groups (people who have indirect influence on closing the sale).

Low-level touchpoints indicate target groups with little or no influence whatsoever (Fig. 36).

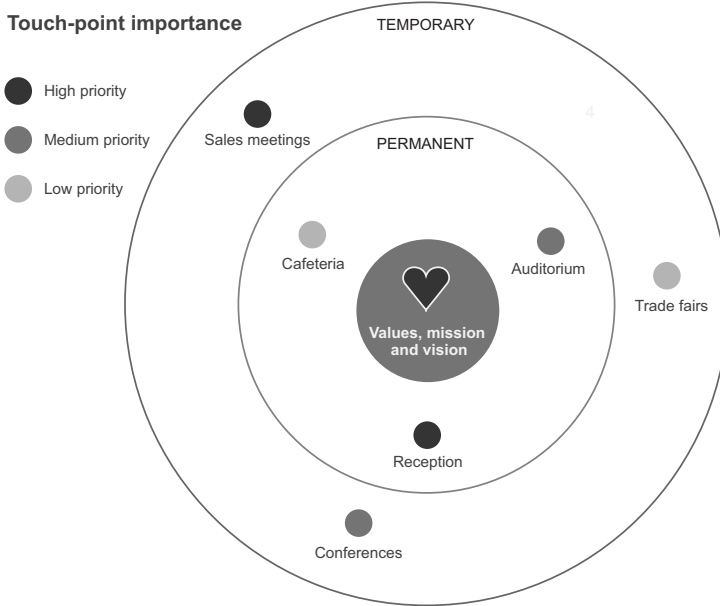


Fig. 36 Experience architecture touchpoint importance (3rdDimension©)

Each touchpoint is given individually rated on a scale of 1–10, where 10 indicates that the company’s mission, vision and values are fully perceived by the target audiences.

Consider whether *your* values can be experienced in the physical and social spaces, and whether the recipients have been sufficiently involved in the mental space. Also, have you created strong symbolic actions involving the relevant senses, which demonstrate that your company is keeping its promises? Optimize these parameters and your score will be high – as will the perceived value.

Each touchpoint should also pursue tactical objectives that support the company’s business plan and strategic goals. Such objectives will vary depending on the type of company, and the score will reveal whether the

touchpoint is actually meeting the set objective. With optimized Experience architecture, *all* of your touchpoints should score top marks.

The model provides a foundation for strengthening, up or downscaling, omitting touchpoints or creating new ones. In the short term, Experience Architecture allows you to cut costs and make improvements, since non-productive activities become visible and thereby remediable. In the long term it can help you to introduce new touchpoints where important target groups can meet in innovative and productive ways. The Ecco Walkathon is a prime example of a unique touchpoint that was created with the purpose of meeting the target audience face to face.⁴⁸ The participants were in no doubt as to what this shoe manufacturer stands for and excels at.



Participants in the Ecco Walkathon – “Walk for life” (Photograph: Polfoto)

From Strategy to Reality

Experience architecture puts management in a position to evaluate where a particular initiative will have the greatest effect in terms of strategy, earnings, cementing values or a company’s reputation.

A survey performed by global consultancy company Prophet revealed that only 53% of a company’s strategy ever gets implemented⁴⁹, primarily

because the employees and other stakeholders have difficulty understanding it. A survey performed by Harvard Research confirms this. On average, 60% of a strategy is understood in the short term, but after 3 months only 10% is remembered. This is due to the way the information is delivered. Our experience is that the further away from the management the employees are located, the less they understand and the less supportive they feel.

Companies can stray from their strategies for three reasons: (1) the strategy was wrong; (2) it was poorly communicated and (3) people either failed to understand it or did not follow it. In a way, strategies are like speeches. “There are always three speeches, for every one you actually gave. The one you practiced, the one you gave, and the one you wish you gave.” (Dale Carnegie 1938).

Use experience architecture as a tool to see *your* strategy implemented successfully!

Maintain a Clear Overview

Messages accompanied by the appropriate physical, mental and social staging are so much easier to understand. Thus, companies must make their strategy tangible and relevant to all recipients, wherever they may be



Companies must make their strategy tangible and relevant to all recipients.

– otherwise their employees will not be inclined to change. More of the same can be good, but it is seldom the solution in an ever-changing world characterized by increasing demands from all target groups. Performance-wise, the bar is getting much higher,

forcing companies to find new ways of achieving their goals before their competitors do.

Strategies are complex mechanisms and companies can all too easily lose the overview. Practices such as *off-shoring* and *outsourcing* may help to increase a company’s competitive ability, but a one-dimensional focus on a single process can be fatal – as a famous umbrella manufacturer in the UK recently discovered. This century-old company was renowned for its craftsmanship; its products one of the hallmarks of the English gentleman. But stagnating sales and tougher competition drove the company to move production out of the heart of London to a factory somewhere in Asia.

Design and quality-wise, the Asian-made umbrellas were as fine as the originals, with the exception of one small thing – a label saying “Made in Malaysia”. Interpreting this as an abandonment of the company’s values and traditions, the customers promptly discarded the brand.

This moral of this story is never to lose sight of the big picture when defining and implementing new strategies. The expression “To handle yourself, use your head; to handle others, use your heart,” sums this up perfectly.

Walking the Talk

Strategies can fail for a number of reasons:

- They lack heart.
- They are based on management viewpoints only.
- They fail to acknowledge the value as perceived by the company’s target groups.
- They are implemented without sufficient explanation, acknowledgement and involvement.

When the rationale behind a strategy is hard to comprehend, it can be met with such resistance that it will end up on the shelf – only to see the light of day on special occasions. To succeed, a strategy must be realistic and trustworthy. Decisions can be communicated directly via the behavior of the management, or indirectly through the choices and decisions they make. Any failure to “walk the talk” with the various target groups will inevitably result in a waste of resources – not least human resources.

Value-wise a well designed framework can nurture the behavior the management desires. The three zones in the experience Space (physical, mental and social) can act as a catalyst in achieving strategic objectives. All assumptions made by the employees – and by the company relative to its role and its surroundings – are taken into account, as are the responsibilities of each individual touchpoint. For instance, are the touchpoints addressing the right people in the correct manner at sensible intervals? And do the users find them useful? The number of interactions alone will provide an indication of a particular touchpoint’s success.

Companies have a tendency to focus on individual touchpoints for tactical purposes only. This can create a “silo culture” in which the long-term goals that ought to unite people and give them a sense of purpose simply

fade away. A more holistic, user-oriented approach will help you to introduce strategies that will instigate change, secure your position and have a long-term effect not only on your company’s reputation but also its profitability. These strategies must be visible in everything you do; otherwise conflicts and misunderstandings will arise and ruin the experience for important stakeholders, making it difficult to maintain the necessary momentum.

Core Senses Are the Key

One of the greatest benefits of experience architecture is that it allows a company to define its core senses. These are your ticket to the experience economy, because without a name and logo, what is left? What senses are important for you to own? If your products or services resemble other companies’, then it is time to define your core senses. Today, understanding the impact of the experiences you offer in encounters with target groups is even more important than the unique features of your

The perceived value exceeds the actual value

products. This is because the perceived value exceeds the actual value.

When did you last ask your employees, partners, customers or ex-customers how they experience your organization? Are they impressed by the quality of your products and presentation materials, or the services your employees provide? Is it the shop concept, the proactive sales approach, or your reputation for being a responsible member of the community that keeps them coming back? Or have they felt pestered by salespeople making different offers on different products, whose efforts should have been better coordinated?

This type of information can help you to design a symbolic action or signature experience that can be given to anyone coming into contact with your organization – whether it is your reception desk, sales department, production facility, HR department or distributors. Defining what makes your company unique is essential in a globalized market where “me-too” products and services can pop up anywhere. Companies in traditionally wealthy countries should focus on strengthening their unique competencies in order to remain competitive. Answers to questions on how your company looks, sounds, feels, tastes and smells will reveal how authentic

it is perceived to be, and whether the experiences you would like to convey are the ones you actually deliver.

Imagine This...

Imagine being a company that sells windows and doors – of which there are so many alternatives on the market. By conferring with your staff and customers you might discover that one of your signature experiences is the smell of pine. This is a differentiating factor because, unlike many other companies, yours has its own distributors with their own warehouses. You could use this to your advantage by making sure that visitors are always given a tour of the warehouse, where they can *inhale* the quality of your products! You could also have letter-paper that smells of pine – and present a pine sapling to every customer who shops with you. You could make it public that you plant a pine tree each time every your reach certain objectives – if you are in a position to actually do this.

During a walkabout in production you discover that your company uses more heartwood than your competitors – making your products healthier. You also hear that the Science Museum in London is showing people how to ascertain whether wood is healthy by tapping on it. So why not make that part of the ritual in your shop? Don't just *tell* your customers about the importance of using high quality raw materials; *show* them. And in the process, prove that you are living up to your core values.

Experience architecture will help you ensure that all of your touchpoints operate on the same wavelength, and that they are using their physical, mental and social spaces to involve people in an experience that showcases the very essence of your company.

The Refuse-Collection Company: A Case Study

An illustrative example of the value of experience architecture is a refuse-collection company which describes itself as an enterprise that takes the sorting of garbage very seriously – and wins contracts because of it. When analyzing this company we unearthed and evaluated several touchpoints important to its mission and vision. These are shown in the model below (right side), where the touchpoints are grouped according to importance and their average score calculated (Fig. 37).

Experience Architecture™ Real-life touch-points

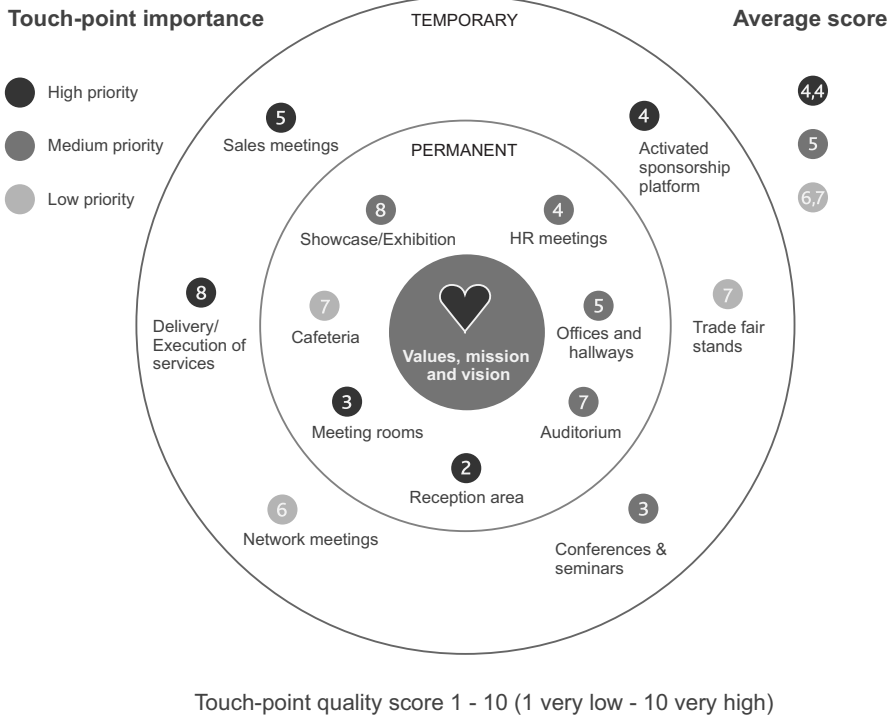


Fig. 37 Experience architecture refuse-collection company 2007 (3rdDimension©)

One of the most important touchpoints was the headquarters itself, which provided the framework for the final sales meetings with major customers in the public sector, whose business was vital to the company’s earnings. Unfortunately this framework was not optimal. The company’s reception area was messy and old fashioned; the plants were half dead, and old newspapers were floating about on the tables. This was hardly in keeping with the modern, squeaky-clean image the company liked to portray. Also, the mahogany-furnished meeting rooms created a heavy, dusty atmosphere. Lighter, cleaner and simpler furnishing would have created a more welcoming and credible atmosphere for a sales meeting – which would have contributed to the negotiation process.

Another touchpoint was the use of sponsorships. The waste disposal company had sponsored a football team for many years, but this had little relevance for the company's mission, vision and values, and absolutely no link to its services, target groups or image. Customers were sometimes offered match tickets – as were the employees, as a perk. Consequently two vastly different groups were thrown together without even being aware of it. The sponsorship served no other purpose than to advertise the company's logo, which on closer inspection created no more awareness in the local community than anywhere else in the region. With such little relevance and value, the management wisely chose to cancel the sponsorship and use the resources to improve performance at other, more important touchpoints.

Trade Fairs and Other Events

The waste disposal company's presence at trade fairs was also a tradition and considered an absolute must, since all of their competitors were in attendance. The management invested a great deal in this touchpoint in order to make a positive impression. Our analysis revealed that this touchpoint was also irrelevant because the company's primary and secondary target groups were not even present. Statistically it generated no orders at all, and the costs were increasing year by year. Since this event scored 7 out of 10 on our measurement scale, the company chose to keep trade fairs as a touchpoint – but only ones that would put them in direct contact with their important target groups.

They also considered whether their resources would be put to better use elsewhere – a move that would demand innovative thinking and a break with traditional industry events. Experience Architecture helped the company to define the nature, location and interests of its target groups. Suddenly, climate change conferences became a possibility, where topics such as sustainability and waste disposal would be on the agenda. Such events would strengthen the company's image and provide access to any private enterprises that might find their messages relevant.

Local community meetings also showed promise as touchpoints where, by making presentations for local boroughs, the company could promote their environmentally-friendly image and gain access to end users – who also have some influence.

Turning Rivalry into Results

Conferences were also identified as potential touchpoints – both internal and external ones. The management viewed these as being very important, but our analysis revealed a poor score in several areas – one being the company’s sales and marketing departments, who were not the best of friends. Separate budgets had caused them to follow different paths.

The marketing department handled conferences, which they considered an important tool for building networks and good relations. Unfortunately the sales force saw these events as little more than an opportunity to chat with colleagues and go home early; customer relations not being their highest priority. And so they huddled together during the breaks, making no attempt to interact with the specially-invited, well-qualified participants. No concrete goals had been set for the sales force, and their managers wandered in and out, sending strong signals that the event was of only minor importance.

Upon completion of our evaluation some simple measures were taken – such as greeting customers properly and setting targets for meetings and phone calls. The middle management performed activities with the sales force prior to, during and after the conference, to make certain that they understood how vital this meeting was. Certain salespeople – including managers – were given concrete roles to play, which helped to increase their sense of ownership. They were also briefed on how to answer questions on the day itself. And during lunch, they sat next to potential customers, which gave them an opportunity to establish a dialog without seeming too aggressive.

Go Do What You Say You Will Do

As the above example shows, by mapping your experience architecture and by prioritizing and measuring the performance of each touchpoint, you will be able to ask the right questions, expose your strengths and weaknesses, and react accordingly. Only then can clear strategies and actions be initiated to ensure the long-term continuity of profitable revenue; this being the prime objective of any organization – and the CEO in particular.

Although it may seem an elusive goal, it is genuinely possible for experience architecture to have a positive and long-lasting effect on the performance of a business and its people.

Chapter 9

Epilogue

Epilogue

The words, sentences and illustrations in this book cannot possibly demonstrate the true depth and strength of experience-based communication, nor can they optimize learning and understanding nearly as powerfully as a *personally, physical staged meeting* could have done.

These ideas are already fading. The vigor, joy and visions behind each and every statement lost their energy as soon as we stopped typing. The moment the spoken word was projected onto the static surface of the computer screen, the opportunity to create the social interaction, so vital to the successful communication of messages, was lost.

Therefore our final, somewhat distorted symbolic act will be to encourage you to direct your attention away from these words and images, and on to the real source of our enthusiasm: take a peep through the punch-hole at reality – because that’s where the true experiences are.

Step out into your organization and experience your employees, customers and products with every fiber of your being. See, hear, smell, taste, feel and sense whether your values and messages are being properly experienced, and whether they involve people, move them and encourage them to interact socially at all your meetings and contact points.

Have faith in the messages conveyed in this book, because faith can move mountains. Through your actions, our messages will be brought to life. And together, we will have made a difference.

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About the Authors

Jens Ornbo (born 1963)

As CEO and co-founder of the 3rdDimension consultancy group, Jens Ornbo has a wealth of experience advising professionals how to explore the full potential of the Experience Economy. Jens has advised companies and organizations for many years and has helped in the launch of new concepts and enterprises in many countries around the world. As well as managing 3rdDimension, Jens teaches at further education institutes and is a popular guest speaker.

Claus Sneppen (born 1964)

Claus Sneppen has a Master's degree in Business and Communication and is an officer in the Danish Army. Claus has been working with Experience Communication both in Denmark and abroad since 1990. As co-founder and partner in the 3rdDimension consultancy group, Claus spends his time teaching companies and organizations how to master the art of Experience Architecture and Experience-based Communication.

Peter Franklin Würtz (born 1974)

Peter Würtz has a Master's degree in Design and Communication Management and years of experience working with the Experience Economy. As a partner and consultant in 3rdDimension Experience Architects, Peter focuses on developing Experience concepts and advising customers on how to utilize Experience Architecture. Peter also teaches at several further education institutes in Denmark.