

Enhancing the application of experiential marketing in the arts

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ABSTRACT

While experiential marketing has become a cornerstone of recent advances in retailing, branding and events marketing, there is potential for its application in arts marketing to be extended and improved. The two main goals of this paper are to introduce and explain the Pine and Gilmore experiential marketing framework¹ and its relevance to arts marketing; and to discuss the implications of Pine and Gilmore's work for two specific areas of arts marketing: the unique dimensions of the arts experience, and the strategic and tactical steps involved in staging an experience.

INTRODUCTION

While recent research on arts marketing covers a wide array of topics related to the relationship of the arts customer to the arts product or service, a common thread can be discerned: importance of the arts *experience*. Kotler and Scheff discuss several dimensions of the arts experience, such as feelings of association with the arts, emotions and motivations.²

Bhattacharya *et al.* examine the arts organisation membership experience and the value-added services it provides.³ McClellan *et al.* introduce the notion of persistent presence (physical and visual elements, seasons and performances, validation [external constituents], artistic product, and people [administrative, artistic and volunteer]), which delineates with insight the multidimensional nature of the arts experience.⁴ In an empirical study of service quality in museums, Yucelt identifies several dimensions that drive satisfaction with the museum experience, including the quality of offerings, amenities and convenience.⁵ In a study of symphony audience segmentation, Garber *et al.* found that, while the actual symphony performance was an important driver of satisfaction, it was '... perceived only as a component of an entire evening's entertainment experience ...'.⁶

These studies indicate that arts organisations are increasingly recognising that a marketing orientation is essential to their success. This, combined with the fact that their product is almost always experiential in nature, puts arts marketers in a unique position to apply the principles of experiential marketing to their efforts. While it may be true that many arts marketers successfully manage the experiential marketing aspects of their

efforts, there is certainly room for more extensive and formal application. As Kotler and Scheff discuss, a fundamental philosophical resistance to business and marketing principles still exists within the arts management realm.²

Pine and Gilmore introduce a provocative framework that explicates a shift from service-based marketing to *experience*-based marketing. The gist of their argument is: as service-based marketing offerings become increasingly commodified, a transition must be made to providing customers with memorable experiences in order to achieve competitive advantage and customer satisfaction.¹

In general, this paper seeks to build upon the work of Garber *et al.*,⁶ Petkus⁷ and Yucelt⁵ by continuing to explore the value of customer orientation in arts marketing. More specifically, the two main goals of this paper are to introduce and explain the Pine and Gilmore experiential marketing framework¹ and its relevance to arts marketing; and to discuss the implications of Pine and Gilmore's work for two specific areas of arts marketing: the unique dimensions of the arts experience and the steps involved in staging an experience. The objective is applicative: arts administrators can use the tools herein to increase their understanding of the experiential dimensions of their offering and the way in which they can form the basis for a marketing strategy.

MOVING BEYOND SERVICE TO EXPERIENCE: APPLYING THE PINE-GILMORE FRAMEWORK

Transitioning to experiential marketing

In their book, Pine and Gilmore extensively develop the idea that modern economies are making the transition from the marketing of services to the marketing of experiences; that all market offerings

are acts of 'theatre' that 'stage' these experiences. The general aspects of Pine and Gilmore's work that are relevant here can be summarised by the following points:¹

- modern economies have evolved from the delivery of commodities to the delivery of goods, from goods to services, and are in the process of evolving to the delivery of experiences
- as services become increasingly commodified, customer perceptions of competitive advantage diminish, as does satisfaction
- the delivery of experiential market offerings involves engaging customers in a memorable way
- all actions of the organisation contribute to the 'performance' of the experiential market offering.

As evidence of the relevance of their approach, Pine and Gilmore cite US Bureau of Labor statistics showing that consumer price indices, employment growth and growth in gross domestic product have all increased at a faster rate for experiential offerings than for commodities, goods and services.¹

Much of Pine and Gilmore's work is designed to help businesses make the transition from a product or service market offering to an experiential market offering.¹ In the arts, however, the market offering is, in most cases, inherently experiential. But simply having an experiential offering is different from actively and deliberately *marketing* that offering in an experiential way. This paper directly addresses this difference by introducing a framework through which arts marketers can strategically and tactically identify, enhance and deliver their inherently experiential offerings.

The following sections examine two specific applications of Pine and Gilmore's

experiential marketing framework: the dimensions of the arts experience; the steps involved in staging an experience.

Dimensions of the arts experience

Pine and Gilmore outline four ‘realms’ of experience: entertainment, education, aesthetic and escapist.¹ The entertainment realm involves a passive participation in the event — the elements of the experience are simply taken in. Indeed, this may seem like an obvious aspect of the arts experience. By applying this idea holistically, however, arts marketers can incorporate entertainment into areas outside the performance or the ‘art’ itself; from pre- and post-event refreshments to hybrid events (eg musical concerts at art galleries) to creatively written and produced museum newsletters.

The second dimension — education — involves an active participation in the arts experience, from which the participant acquires or increases skills and/or knowledge. Masberg and Silverman discuss aspects of personal experience at a heritage site, including learning, social benefits and aesthetics.⁸ Many arts offerings include educational dimensions such as pre- or post-event lectures, background or interpretive write-ups in event programmes and special educational programmes. The potential for increasing the educational dimension of the arts experience is often great, however. One barrier may be the fact that those who curate or produce arts events often have a great deal of knowledge about the work, and thus sometimes underestimate the desire of their target audience to attain similar knowledge. By increasing the educational dimension, arts organisations can essentially ‘train’ their audiences to become more highly involved in the arts, and therefore more likely to repeat and expand their patronage.

While the entertainment and educa-

tional aspects of experience involve an absorption of sensory stimuli, the escapist and aesthetic dimensions involve an immersion in the experience. With the escapist dimension, the arts patron seeks to participate actively in the experience. For example, art museums will often provide experiences for children to work with styles or media that correspond to current exhibits. This type of experience allows the patron to ‘become’ the artist, and great potential exists to expand such experiences for audiences. Membership in an arts organisation can also act as a form of escapism, in which people create a new reality or role for themselves.

The aesthetic dimension involves a ‘passive immersion’ in the experience. According to Pine and Gilmore, the aesthetic dimension involves a more proximal or intense experience of sensory stimuli than does the entertainment dimension¹ (eg the difference between viewing a play from the back row and viewing it from the front row). The difference seems also to lie in the degree of authenticity of the aesthetic experience, but there is no value judgment implied. Indeed, the variation in the sensory intensity of the experience may be necessary to avoid either boredom or burnout.

In sum, the entertainment dimension involves *sensing*, the educational dimension involves *learning*, the escapist dimension involves *doing*, and the aesthetic dimension involves *being* there. Of course, these four dimensions are not mutually exclusive. Indeed, the richness of an experience is often a function of the degree to which all four dimensions are incorporated.¹

As an illustrative example, consider the Blackfriars Playhouse, in Staunton, Virginia, USA. The Blackfriars is an indoor theatre modelled on Shakespeare’s original indoor theatre in London, and is the

only Blackfriars replica currently in existence. The resident company, Shenandoah Shakespeare, performs three plays in repertory in each of three annual seasons.

The Blackfriars Playhouse encompasses all four of Pine and Gilmore's experiential dimensions. In the entertainment realm, the performance of the plays themselves provides the core, but is enhanced through live pre-show music and comic announcements. Educational programmes such as lectures and tours of the theatre serve to broaden the public understanding of the historical and theatrical dimensions of the Blackfriars experience. By attempting to create an authentic Elizabethan indoor theatre experience (eg simple sets and stage, hardwood bench seating, interaction between actors and audience and performing with the house lights on), the Blackfriars provides an opportunity for 'escape' into another time period. Finally, careful attention to the authenticity of details in woodwork, seating arrangement and decorative accessories contributes to the aesthetic dimension.

Again, however, merely providing these experiential dimensions is different from actively and deliberately marketing the Blackfriars as an experience. The next section details the strategic and tactical elements of Pine and Gilmore's experiential marketing framework.

Marketing strategy and tactics: Steps in staging experiences

Pine and Gilmore outline six key steps to 'staging experiences' as marketing strategy:¹

- developing a cohesive theme
- forming impressions
- eliminating distractions
- providing memorabilia
- ensuring that all the senses are engaged

— soliciting feedback for continuous improvement.

Though Pine and Gilmore present these as 'steps', they are intended to function more as a checklist than to occur in any particular order. For example, one could start with a theme and then begin forming impressions; however, it may be just as appropriate to analyse the impressions that one is providing and then discern a theme.

Developing a theme

Developing a theme for the experience involves establishing a unique, focused set of images and meanings for the offering — a 'single voice'. A cohesive theme gives an arts offering a unique identity and thus helps to create a more memorable experience.¹ The thematic element of the experience can exist at two levels: the organisation level and the event (eg exhibit, performance, show etc) level. This can be challenging for arts organisations whose mission is to provide a diversity of arts experiences. However, the singular voice can be achieved through consistency in marketing communications, support materials and in-facility communications.

Forming impressions

Forming impressions in experiential marketing refers to the creation of memorable sensory stimuli. Pine and Gilmore describe impressions as the "takeaways" of the experience ... how you would like guests to describe the experience'.¹ In discussing the formation of impressions, Pine and Gilmore use a set of dimensions delineated by Schmitt and Simonson: time, space, technology, authenticity, sophistication and scale.⁹ The strategic question that is implied by these dimensions is the degree of balance, both across and within categories, that is most desirable to the target audience.

The time dimension refers to the basic orientations of past, present and future.⁹ Different target audiences may tend to be interested in historical vs contemporary vs ‘futuristic’ arts offerings; however, some audiences will be interested in a variety of experiences across these orientations.

Space can refer to geographical space (at various levels, from world region to local region), or to more specialised spatial orientations, such as indoors vs outdoors, urban vs rural, etc.⁹ Various combinations of such categories are open to consideration for arts marketers, resulting in opportunities to provide a plethora of innovative offerings.

The technology dimension involves a natural vs man-made or a hand-made vs machine-made orientation.⁹ Again, opportunities exist for arts marketers to develop offerings that focus on one of these orientations, or that showcase various orientations for comparison and contrast.

The dimension of authenticity refers to the use of original vs imitative representations.⁹ For the purposes of arts marketing, this can apply to the basic dichotomy of, say, a museum’s presentation of original artistic works in contrast to a gallery’s presentation of reproductions. The authenticity dimension can also be extended to the performing arts in terms of artistic interpretation, for example the difference between staging a more ‘classical’ interpretation of a Shakespeare play as opposed to a more modern one.

For arts marketing, the level of sophistication of the offering refers to the basic ‘highbrow vs lowbrow’ dichotomy. Many arts organisations already recognise the segmentation implications of this dimension: larger audiences (at least in the short run) can be acquired by offering more ‘accessible’ or ‘popular’ art.

Finally, scale refers to the size and scope

of the offering.⁹ This can be represented in terms of physical space (the number of works in an exhibit, size of the performance hall etc) or temporal space (the duration of a single show, length of the run etc).

Again, the arts marketer needs strategically to determine the degree of balance, both across and within categories, that is most desirable to the target audience. Do they position themselves as ‘eclectic’ providers of arts experiences, or are they more unidimensional? In addition to target audience considerations, the arts marketer needs to assess competitive offerings and look for opportunities for differentiation.

Pine and Gilmore emphasise that these are by no means the only categories of impressions that exist. Others that may be particularly useful in the arts include genre, medium, artist characteristics, style and theme.¹ In the arts, merely including explicit references to these types of impression can enhance the experience for the patron, particularly in the educational dimension.

Eliminating distractions

As important as it is to provide appropriate sensory inputs into an arts experience, it is also important to remove or minimise inputs that distract from, diminish, or contaminate the experience. Pine and Gilmore (1999) refer to this as eliminating negative cues, and cite the Disney theme park tactic of having their ‘cast members’ (which includes *all* employees) always in character.¹ Arts marketers should conduct an audit of the entire experiential environment, looking for things that are inconsistent with the centralising theme, with strategic and tactical decisions regarding impression formation, or simply good customer service policies. A surly ticket window employee, an indifferent usher, or even

negatively worded signage (as in the infamous ‘NO ____, NO ____, NO ____’ common to museums and other arts spaces) can spoil what would otherwise have been a pleasant experience.

Providing memorabilia

Whereas forming impressions involves providing the audience or patron with memorable psychological or emotional aspects of the experience, providing memorabilia involves tangible ‘takeaways’.¹ Such items as programmes, souvenirs, prints and other ‘gift shop’ items are commonly used. But arts marketers should look for opportunities for more innovative, exhibit-relevant offerings whenever possible. Also, more personalised, customised memorabilia (autographed items with personal messages, items that are created by the guest etc) will enhance the level of involvement with the item and thus their totemic value.¹⁰

Engaging all senses

According to Pine and Gilmore, ‘the more sensory an experience, the more memorable it will be’.¹ In the arts, most offerings have a distinct sensory element (eg visual for paintings, visual/aural for theatre etc). The challenge for the arts marketer is to look for opportunities beyond those direct sensory stimuli. For example, providing food and drink, music, visual decoration and even fragrance can contribute to the overall theme of the experience and/or enhance customer satisfaction.

Soliciting feedback for continuous improvement

Any useful model of experiential arts marketing should include an element of feedback in order to account for continuous improvement of the arts patron experience.¹ While many arts organisa-

tions implement such things as post-event surveys, there are opportunities for more creative ways to solicit feedback. Indeed, by involving the audience in the process, the feedback can be perceived as part of the overall arts experience. For example, inviting audience members to special focus groups or ‘critiques’ can impart a sense of involvement that taps into the escapist and educational dimensions of experience. Arts patrons who feel that they have had a part in creating future arts experiences are likely to be loyal, dedicated patrons.

Table 1 depicts the experiential marketing implications for the aforementioned Blackfriars Playhouse.

DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The most obvious implications of the Pine and Gilmore experiential marketing framework are, as discussed throughout the paper, for the design and promotion of the market offering. However, adopting an experiential marketing orientation can affect other specific areas of arts marketing. Segmentation of the arts market based on different types of audience seeking differential experiences can help arts marketers refine their targeting strategies, rather than relying on standard demographic and psychographic variables. Marketing communications strategies can tap into the relevant dimensions of the arts experience in order to position arts offerings more experientially. Future research should explore empirically the specific implementation of these strategies.

Experiential marketing has interesting implications for the pricing of arts offerings. Pine and Gilmore state that the transition from a service-based to an experience-based economy will involve charging a fee for what was once provided

Table 1: Marketing application of steps in staging an experience: Blackfriars Playhouse, Staunton, Virginia, USA

<i>Steps in staging experience</i>	<i>Marketing application by Blackfriars Playhouse</i>
1. Develop cohesive theme	— strategic communication of authentic Elizabethan indoor theatre experience — consistent use of advertising tagline ‘We do it with the lights on’
2. Forming impressions	— emphasis on communicating historical focus — communicating details of indoor experience (lighting, seating on stage etc) — promotion of ‘handmade’ elements (chairs, costumes etc) — communicating degree of ‘accessible sophistication’ — strategic emphasis on authenticity and uniqueness
3. Eliminating distractions	— maintaining ‘modern’ lobby to emphasise authentic historical aesthetics upon entering theatre — maintaining consistent ‘voice’ across all marketing communications
4. Providing memorabilia	— sale of wide variety of souvenir items (general Shakespeare items and items specific to Blackfriars)
5. Engaging all senses	— emphasising multidimensional sensory experience (music, visual décor, hardwood benches, lighting etc) in marketing communications — sale of beverages (and allowing consumption in the theatre to promote authenticity)
6. Soliciting feedback	— implementation of audience surveys — encouragement of staff solicitation and reporting of informal feedback

for free (eg admission fees for experiential shopping malls, restaurants, retailers etc).¹ In arts marketing, a fee (eg ticket price, admission fee, membership fee) is already exchanged for the experience in many, if not most, cases. The implementation of a more robust arts experience might mean, however, that arts organisations would be able to charge more, as people realise the added value of a more complete arts experience. Empirical research into such price-elasticity dynamics would be of great value to arts marketers.

In order to maintain artistic integrity and pursue sustaining levels of commercial success, Kotler and Scheff have called for arts marketers to combine their traditional arts-centred approach with an embracement of marketing and business principles.² Despite ever-increasing evidence of the value of applying marketing strategies in the arts, the degree of acceptance and implementation still varies.¹¹ Continued fine-tuning of the

unique experiential factors involved in arts marketing may serve to increase the level of acceptance and implementation of a marketing orientation, to the mutual benefit of arts organisations and their patrons.

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