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DESIGNING EXPERIENCES

For Today's Changed Audiences

How to create events that are relevant and future facing

The Core Four Framework for the Future of Events

The traditional definition of an event—a gathering of people with shared interests in a specific location at a specific time—has become obsolete in the face of the rapid changes brought about by societal, behavioral, technological and macroeconomic shifts.

Audiences are more empowered than ever before to choose how, when, where and in what mediums they attend events and consume experiences. Today, equal opportunities for participation & connection must be delivered across spaces, places, time & channels.

The new definition of an event is:

A gathering of people with shared interests who meet in the mediums where they are.

It's imperative that we develop a new framework for creating impactful, connective experiences that are tailor-made to meet the preferences and needs of today's audiences. Enter: **The Core Four—distinct elements that work in tandem to create powerful experiences that are authentic, accessible & enduring.**

Embrace Change to Harness the NEW NOW™

Prior to 2020, many event professionals believed that people would be perpetually willing to travel to a specific location during specific dates to gather, connect, learn and participate—arguing that attendees were not only willing to travel, but preferred the in-person experience.

Even as people's behaviors shifted, many held onto the status quo—even though a one-size-fits-all model isn't optimal for audiences with varying needs & preferences. Then, in the pandemic's face of uncertainty and turmoil, the event industry made the kind of colossal pivot that usually takes years to happen organically.

Some event & experience professionals are still waiting for a return to stability & normalcy, where they can book speakers, vendors and venues without having to worry about the new challenges of disaggregation, hybridization, asynchronous content and remote attendance, but the reality is that there is no returning to what was.

The breakneck pace of innovation has eliminated "normalcy" as a viable option, with an average of 58% of customer interactions taking place over digital mediums by July 2020. A multi-year adoption took place within months—and the rapid acceleration of change & innovation requires us to keep up or risk being left behind.

Amid this change, all we have is NOW—and NOW is always NEW. Embracing the NEW NOW means seizing & harnessing constant change, becoming more agile & adapting our experiences to meet the ever-evolving landscape of human behavior, expectations, needs & norms. The only thing that's now truly constant is change.

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Nike: Creating New Value in the NEW NOW

When the pandemic forced the cancellation of Nike's 2020 Annual Women's Half Marathon in San Francisco, the brand quickly pivoted. Nike created a virtual race experience, inviting participants to run the course at their own pace & submit their times online.

More than 23,000 participants around the world took part. By creating a new event format that was accessible & engaging amid countless unknowns, Nike strengthened its connection with its audience—and created a new value offering, launching its "Fearless Virtual Race" in 2021 under a new brand initiative called "Run Fearless."

Say Hello to ARL™ (All Real Life)

In the past, events were either in-person (IRL) or virtual (URL). In the NEW NOW, boundaries between physical & digital are increasingly blurred—especially as tech including virtual reality (VR), augmented reality (AR) & artificial intelligence (AI) become more ubiquitous. The global market for VR & AR in events is anticipated to reach $16.7 billion by 2025.

Experiences now exist beyond time and channels— they are ARL (All Real Life). People toggle seamlessly between physical & digital—and these experiences are equally real & valuable. ARL can also boost performance, with 41% of event planners focusing primarily on seamless virtual/live integration as a way for them to improve their experiences.

ARL acknowledges that the medium of an experience shouldn't be limited to a physical location, a digital platform or particular channels. Instead, experiences should take place across these elements, tailored to fit audience behaviors & needs. ARL experiences are as agile as today's audiences—whether they're together or remote, now or later, live or live streamed.

Using ARL to Bring Fashion Week to Life

Metaverse Fashion Week (MVFW) was a VR & AR experience on Decentraland featuring 3D models, allowing attendees to view & interact with featured designs in a virtual environment.

Using a range of AR tech including holographic displays, interactive installations & VR headsets, MVFW welcomed more than 108,000 guests & distributed more than 165,000 virtual wearables—all apart from the physical catwalk.

Give People the Power Through THERE•ness™

The time, place & medium of any experience is now relative to each individual participant. There is no one-size-fits-all approach for the countless configurations of audiences' lives—and 73% of event professionals say that personalization & data-driven marketing are priorities.

Gone are the days of a single kind of experience in a single place at a single time. Experiences now must meet audiences where **THEY** are—or risk failing to meet them altogether.

Experiences for the NEW NOW transcend distance and spatial boundaries because their designers understand that audiences are empowered to choose how they attend, consume & engage—whether it's right here, right now, wherever they are, or elsewhere and at another time.

THERE•ness delivers experiences that empower audiences to participate in the ways THEY choose-- which also empowers them to more deeply connect & find belonging.

Netflix: Meeting Audiences in the "Upside Down"

For the highly anticipated fourth season of "Stranger Things," Netflix offered audiences several ways to experience Hawkins, Indiana—putting them in the driver's seat for each one. The brand created "Upside Down" portals and appeared in places from Australia's Bondi Beach to the Empire State Building & Malaysia's Kuala Lumpur tower. It collaborated with Dominos to offer a "mind-ordering" feature on the pizza chain's app & teamed up with Doritos to put on an '80s-themed concert. It offered full immersive experiences in London & New York City.

By meeting audiences where they were, Netflix built authentic excitement that helped the "Stranger Things'" fourth season rack up a staggering 1.4 billion hours of views within the first 28 days—becoming the streaming service's second-most-watched show.

Spark Connections That Become Community

People are built for human connection—to feel valued and to align & interact with others with shared values. However, the last few years have left us with an experience deficit & a human interaction debt.

As experience designers, we have the power to counteract this interaction deficit with community-focused connection touchpoints—by being intentional about fostering exploration, discovery, mastery & shared experiences. For example, Peloton surveyed members of its Corporate Wellness program & found that 90% ranked it as one of the top three benefits offered by their employers, with 97% noting improved wellbeing & 30% using the program to network & better connect with colleagues.

People attend events, but they join communities.

The purpose of events & experiences is to connect and to sustain those connections so they become our communities long after the event or experience are over. By creating experiences that spark connections & nurturing them to form communities, brands can reap the rewards of brand affinity, loyalty, advocacy, increased market share, ROI & revenue growth.

Moz: Mobilizing Community for Event Buzz

Every year, over 1,000 marketing & search engine optimization (SEO) professionals & agencies converge in Seattle for MozCon. Before attendees even purchase their flights, they can interact with one another in SEO provider Moz's Facebook group.

This active community builds excitement for MozCon months before it takes place, with veteran members sharing advice with newer guests on which speakers & sessions can't be missed. At the event, MozCon strengthens its community by providing a stage dedicated to its members—with opportunities to pitch themselves & become part of the event via 15-minute stage sessions.

Use the Core Four framework to design & deliver events & experiences that resonate with the shifting audience behaviors & preferences of today. Integrating these concepts in response to continuing landscape change will help you create relevant solutions now and into the future.

Like What You See? There's More Where This Came From.

Nearly two-thirds of business leaders say their companies need new digital solutions to survive and thrive in today's evolving environment. But what should you focus on—and how can you use it for business transformation?

That's where n·Spiro™ comes in.

A multimedia, multichannel, multifaceted thought leadership platform, n·Spiro delivers the Big Five to help you move with—and get ahead of--change:

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CITATIONS:
BizBash & Touchcast: How Redefining Virtual and Hybrid Event Experiences Gives Planners a Competitive Edge
Eventsforce: How Much Personalization Should We Do at Events?
Fever Newsroom: Stranger Things: The Experience Will Bring the Upside Down to London
Grand View Research: Augmented Reality Market Growth & Trends; Virtual Reality Market Growth & Trends
Little Black Book: Nike Keeps Runners Running with Launch of "Fearless Virtual Race"
McKinsey & Company: How COVID-19 Has Pushed Companies Over the Technology Tipping Point—and Transformed Business Forever
Vogue Business: Metaverse Fashion Week to Return Next Year
Yahoo: One Year into Peloton Corporate Wellness—90% of Members Rank Peleton Top Workplace Benefit
Zippa: 20+ Compelling Event Statistics [2023]—How Events Improve Marketing

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