

RED SKY THINKING

A New Lens on Brand Experience
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RIDING THE NEW WAVE OF BRAND EXPERIENCE

2022 will be a comeback year for brand experience and experiential. The dreaded spinning wheel for our industry's economic recovery is almost over, and we're finding brands are eager to return to events and experiential marketing.

Recently, Red Havas published the annual **Red Sky Predictions Report**, where we tracked an overwhelming change in the ways we approach communication and connection. The pandemic gave brands permission to experiment with technology and fresh innovations to engage with their customers in new ways. Our audience is now at their peak of acceptance, allowing brands to continue to push the boundaries to find enhanced connections with a post-COVID audience.

The accelerated innovations of the last two years will continue to play a pivotal role in the world of brand experience. However, the most important insight we've uncovered from the pandemic is this: The key to building real, lasting relationships between brands and audiences boils down to our basic need for human-to-human engagement and shared experiences.

We invite you to explore the six trends that will shape the brand experience landscape by bringing a new appreciation for what is unique and moving about these shared experiences.



1

A NEW BREED OF RETAIL
EXPERIMENTATION

The pandemic has driven record sales for e-commerce, but that doesn't mean brick-and-mortar retail is dead — it just needs to be re-imagined.

The retail industry has recently experienced rapid, large-scale disruption as e-commerce has gone from strength to strength across the globe off the back of the COVID-19 pandemic.

To overcome this shift, brands will need to further distinguish themselves by providing unique in-store experiences. Experiential retail will be a key trend to revitalize the customer experience in physical stores and add value by creating deeper and more meaningful relationships with the brand. Retail will no longer be seen as a pure sales strategy, with the demand for immersive and shareable moments driving a renaissance of experiential retail in a way that digital means cannot.

For example, Canada Goose recently evoked the sights of nature, sounds of the Arctic and touch of real snow with its new concept store

in Toronto. Designed to push the boundaries of e-commerce and retail, **The Journey** is an inventory-free retail concept. It invites guests to explore the power of Canada Goose performance luxury apparel through inspiring digital content, interactive product displays, and the next generation of its award-winning Cold Room activation.

Shoppable experiences are also on the rise as brands embrace this new form of brand experience for customers. Nothing is off limits — from shoppable luxury videos to shoppable hotel rooms, and even interactive cooking shows. As we're living in the era of "TikTok made me buy it," brands are expected to produce more authentic retail matches to consumer lifestyles and social media habits.

There's no doubt online retail will continue to play an important role, but that doesn't mean the physical space won't remain a key area to build strong brand affinity. If leveraged well, experiential can add further value to the consumer journey to help bring a brand to life and give it a competitive edge.

TREND FORECAST

The pandemic has accelerated the expectations around traditional bricks-and-mortar stores. In 2022, we will see brands merge experiential and retail to completely reimagine the retail experience, adapting to new customer expectations and innovations and turning the store into a destination.



2

IN SEARCH OF
NEW OUTLETS FOR
WANDERLUST EXPERIENCES

The desire to escape the everyday after long-term disconnection, along with political and social unrest, will propel consumers to look for new forms of entertainment. Wanderlust experiences provide consumers with a liberating antidote to months of disconnection, creating a newfound sense of comfort, control and happiness.

People have turned to screens, gaming and streaming platforms to “escape” the confines and monotony of the home. The knock-on effect of this boom in content consumption for brands means that the stakes are higher than ever before when it comes to holding consumers’ attention. And, to keep up, it is imperative that brands begin to take inspiration from the creative universes currently reigning supreme — film and gaming.

This changing landscape of destination marketing has given our industry an opportunity to be more adventurous in terms of the types of interactions they can create to drive a new wave of brand experience escapism.

Travel brands have obvious advantages in marketing escapism. After all, their core business involves persuading people to escape their place of residence. Tourism Iceland is a brand that’s certainly pushing the boundaries of new and innovative ways to explore escapism. Its latest effort encourages homebound (unable to travel) people around the world to record their scream, which is then released into the beautiful, vast expansive wilderness and unspoiled landscapes of Iceland. Visit the website [here](#) to record your own scream.

TREND FORECAST

With human attention a scarce commodity and brands competing for their customers’ attention, escapist experiences provide a powerful tool to engage, entertain and captivate new audiences.



3

READY FOR THE
METAVERSE

The latest paradigm shift for the internet is well underway. The metaverse is the next iteration of immersive digital experiences, and 2022 will be the year that it takes shape. Companies are already working on emerging technologies that will transform interactivity and connectivity in the shared virtual realm. For now, our industry has embraced the advancements in gaming, immersive digital experiences, avatars, augmented reality and virtual reality to play with multiverse activations.

Major gaming titles such as Fortnite have normalized brand activations being woven into virtual settings, with users playing and socializing with brand assets, along with newer gaming platforms such as Roblox creating unique immersive multimedia experiences like **Gucci Garden**. **Decentraland** is also one space to watch out for. This rapidly expanding 3D virtual world is owned by its users, allowing them to create virtual structures — from theme parks to galleries — and then charge users to visit them, all powered by Ethereum blockchain technology.

To create brand experiences of the future, we must keep a finger on the metaverse pulse — thinking in three-dimensional. While the infrastructure may seem frightening, brands can all get started by experimenting with the core elements of the metaverse to drive integration in the experience economy.

Alternatively, get collaborating. We're activating in an era of powerful brand partnerships that would seem surreal in any format other than digital. Gaming platforms and new technologies are embracing brand engagements to tap into wider audiences and create next-level evergreen communities. The metaverse is a shared space after all.

TREND FORECAST

We're yet to enter the metaverse in its truest sense. Virtual worlds have boomed in popularity, but we're missing the ability to seamlessly jump between them. That, combined with mass adoption of wearable tech, will be the real take-off moment. In preparation, we will see brands explore the components that will make up the metaverse: virtual experiences, gaming, AR, VR and 3D design.



4

USING CO-CREATION AS A
CREATIVE AGENT

The next era of digital platforms sees creative power being in the hands of the user. Thanks to this TikTok-rich generation, we are embracing the concept of having no boundaries in how we connect and engage with content, experiences and communities.

Within the cultural context, collaboration and co-creation are highly valued and welcomed, with (almost) nothing being too far-fetched. The ability to experiment and even partner with competitor brands in pursuit of innovative opportunities has become an attractive flex to audiences hungry for new stimulation.

In 2022, brand loyalty and advocacy will be fast-tracked for savvy brands that understand the reward of having their consumers be a part of the creation process; being open to shared ownership and creating a sense of belonging.

As a result, the brand experience landscape is going to become more unfiltered, personalized and frictionless. We have stopped trying to be Instagrammable and instead desire to become more craveable.

Edutainment is also pushing co-created content craftsmanship to new heights, as demonstrated by Girls Who Code and Doja Cat, who teamed up to launch the world's first codable music video for the hit song "Woman." As users visit the **DojaCode** site, they are able to unlock hidden video content using basic coding languages. The interactivity gives fans the opportunity to alter key creative elements, unveil hidden easter eggs and give a new generation of fans an insight into a career opportunity in the computer science field.

TREND FORECAST

The mindset has shifted from creating campaigns for audiences to creating them with communities. Rather than anticipating cultural influence, it's time for brands to co-create and contribute to culture in meaningful ways. Giving access to brand opportunities, spaces/ places and creative resources to audiences that need it most can forge deeper relationships that go beyond the campaign.

A person with short, light-colored hair, wearing a tan hoodie, is seen from behind, looking towards a vibrant city street at night. The street is filled with neon signs and advertisements. On the left, there are signs for 'SAMSUNG', 'Coca-Cola', and 'XINSHIJI'. On the right, there are signs for 'JEANS' and 'McDonald's'. The scene is illuminated by the colorful lights of the city, creating a high-contrast, urban atmosphere.

5

BESPOKE STILL MATTERS

Consumers are craving more meaningful connections with brands, and they expect brands to understand and respond to their individual needs. They want something that's unique to them —not the mass marketing strategies and experiences of the past. With travel restrictions lifting, local escapes in the form of micro-adventures have become beloved for their positive effects on mental and emotional health.

One of the many lessons that the pandemic taught the experiential industry how to quickly respond to the needs of the market. Just as PR adopted an ever-shifting, always-on approach without sacrificing its creativity, experiential will need to do the same, creating solutions which can quickly and efficiently respond to the market.

This same concept can be applied to brand experiences. In northern Michigan, clothing brand M22 is synonymous with adventure, discovery and community. M22 is more than a clothing label; it's a travel and adventure brand that has brought this to life with curated **micro-adventures** celebrating the wonders of Lake Michigan along with its surfing, boarding and adventuring locals.

When we think about how bespoke experiential has already evolved, the nature of micro events and online mini events offers a seismic opportunity for the industry as part of a truly omnichannel, holistic marketing strategy. By jumping on social trends and consumer data, we can create interactive online/ offline experiences that make our audiences feel just as connected as in-person experiences.

TREND FORECAST

Many may not be quite ready to dive headfirst into large-scale events. Combined with hyper individualization, micro experiences will offer enriching, personalised experiences.



6

EVERYONE IS WELCOME

People have spoken up, and there is now a societal imperative to make experiences more diverse, equitable and inclusive. This includes addressing both visible and invisible disabilities. From big accessibility issues to little frustrations, providing equal access to experiences matters because people with disabilities are a huge consumer group and the biggest minority group in the world.

The world isn't designed for everyone, but from tactile markings on beauty products, to LEGO Braille bricks, to **Tommy Hilfiger** using innovative design twists to make getting dressed easier for all, some brands are rising to the challenge.

Many experiences became more accessible when they shifted to virtual with digital accessibility features. Accessible sites allow for additional means of site navigation and present information through multiple sensory channels, such as sound and sight with captioning. The combination of a multisensory approach and a multi-interactivity approach can enhance real-life experiences as well.

For the first time, the Super Bowl halftime show had ASL interpreters and two deaf rappers: Sean Forbes and Warren "WaWa" Snipes appeared alongside some of hip-hop's most celebrated performers to be sign language interpreters for the show and enhance the experience for all by lending their own artistry to the performance.

TREND FORECAST

By combining physical and digital brand experiences, we're finding new opportunities to enhance experiences for all. Providing equal access to all must be considered throughout the planning process to ensure that accommodations can be made should people need them.



**COME
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UNBLINKERED THINKING UNEXPECTED IDEAS

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