

Leading brand experience agency Cramer—a 2016 It Lister—on using b-to-b meetings to build culture, the evolution of the event layout, and the power of content and social engineering



TRENDING IN EXPERIENTIAL

PART 1: STRATEGIC APPROACHES.



EVENT MARKETER: *Much has been said about target audiences valuing experiences over material goods and services.*

BRENT TURNER: And brands are responding in force. We've entered a new era of marketing. For consumers and brands, the excitement is in this experiential sector—in

that live, in-the-moment space. This new era has also broadened what we mean by the term "brand experiences." New types of engagements are now on the table. The worlds of mixed reality, virtual reality, and augmented reality are coming into play. Online is amplifying offline. And live events are feeding the rest of the marketing mix. People's tastes and expectations for experiences have transcended, so we are now—more than ever—finding opportunities to turn even the most tried-and-true moments, like a leadership meeting, into something bigger.

RICH STURCHIO: We used to work with companies with centrally located employee bases. Their teams would see each other in the office daily, then, once or twice a year, they would get together as an organization. And that structure formed that company's culture. Over the past decade, companies have become more versatile. Our clients are actively closing offices and encouraging people to work from home. Videoconferences and webcasts are becoming a substantial part of how people do business. But, all that connectivity—no matter how seamless and elegant it is, does not foster culture. That technology provides a way to meet, but not a way to get personal and understand what a company's culture is. This has put an emphasis back on meetings. The best companies are now looking at their meetings, large and small, to build culture and make connections between employees and between customers.

MARK WILSON: There's nothing like having a group of people in a room, engaging them in some way that's emotional, impactful, intelligent—and then feeding off the energy of having a group of people together. It's about alchemy of moments.

EVENT MARKETER: *How are you connecting those moments to a centralized story?*

WILSON: In the b-to-b event space, our stories are about individuals and the impact that businesses are having on individuals. We recently did an event for a global software company. This was a conference for their social business unit—a team that sees the value of a story. If you bring a bunch of social software executives and users together, the natural inclination is to show them the latest and greatest products, what's happening, and what's coming out. But if you show them the impact they are having on companies and societies and different groups of people and the way they facilitate communication and the massive impact, you take it to another level. So, we told a really compelling story about farmers in Tanzania. The story was all about how the global software company's products impacted and influenced the lives of farmers in Tanzania, which is far more compelling and far easier to grasp. And then we brought the farmers onto the stage at the event. It is a far more compelling way to demonstrate the impact of content when you're telling a true story, and when you're telling a story that has real impact on the people at your events.

STURCHIO: That type of storytelling directly correlates to people wanting to buy and work with and for companies they believe in. We've seen that shift, especially with younger consumers. They have strong bonds with companies, because they want to believe in those companies and know that they're doing good things and the right things. And, oh yeah, by the way, our product is good, and look at who we're helping. It's about bringing to life that "this is the kind of company we are," more than just, "here are the products we offer."

LINDSAY NIE: And in many cases we're leaning more and more on technology to make those connections—and in most cases, make them feel smaller. That's the big picture we're looking at—making a meeting for 2,000 people a series of small connections rather than one big one-to-many connection.

TURNER: If you think about the earliest cultures, they were built as tribes around campfires telling stories, building affiliations, and building communities. In business today, we see it with company cultures and the stories of founders and folklore. To keep driving brands forward, we've got to get those people together to tell those stories to build that culture.

PART 2: AT THE EVENT.



EVENT MARKETER: *Lindsay, how quickly is technology providing the catalyst for getting people together?*

NIE: Faster and faster. And, more than ever, we can power, inspire, and—even purposefully—facilitate interactions that may not have ever happened before without technology. Now they are going

to take place, because the right pieces of technology were in place to make them happen. For example, we're already using smart name badges and bracelets that tap into the wearer's social media data to let other people know that they, together, have something in common. Maybe they're from the same place, maybe they're on the same sales team—and so on. It's technology that is, literally, lighting up the paths for future bonds between people.

EVENT MARKETER: *And how are you rethinking the modern b-to-b event layout?*

WILSON: We are often asking: how do we move people around in a space so that they connect better? How do we create seating that is different? How do we set up a room? How do we set up a general session that breaks into two keynotes in the afternoon that then drags you into a marketplace so that you have a personal experience? From a staging standpoint, what is becoming typical for screen size just keeps getting bigger. And with massive screens, the size and scale at which you can do things is just beautifully cinematic. We're teaching all of our creative folks—designers, creative directors, technical directors—to think cinematically. How do you make use of all the real estate that's on the screen all the time to create a compelling experience? That's not just about doing a video. We're treating all of our events like they're going to be broadcast experiences. Because, if you've got 5,000 people in a venue or more, for 80 percent of that audience it is a broadcast experience anyway. They're seeing everything on IMAG. And a much larger audience is tuned in on the live stream as well. At end, we are designing and engineering experiences that are relevant and important to each individual. I would borrow a concept from hacking, which is social engineering. I think we're in the social engineering business as much as anything else.

EVENT MARKETER: *And you're also in the content engineering business.*

STURCHIO: Definitely. At all the large-scale events we work on, we are now cutting content for several audiences. We have the archived audience, which is the easiest one. They'll see content days, months, and years after the event. And then we have the live audience in the room, that is the group that we get judged on the most. For them we create the in-room experience. And the online audience is getting a little more weight now than it used to. It's becoming very important that we have something that looks good online. And that requires different technologies, and obviously that's a different director and a different way of communicating altogether, for the small screen.

PARTICIPANTS



RICH STURCHIO
PRESIDENT



BRENT TURNER
SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT



MARK WILSON
EXECUTIVE CREATIVE DIRECTOR

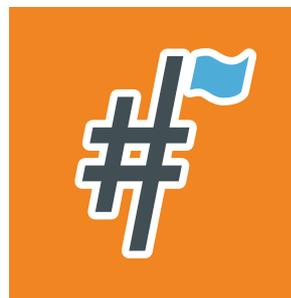


LINDSAY NIE
HEAD OF CREATIVE TECHNOLOGY

EVENT MARKETER: *To bring it together, how is technology pushing that content envelope even farther?*

NIE: Live 360 video is going to change the game—and not just live video where you sit and you look around with 360-degree video of the stage and the audience around you. But we're playing with elegant experiences that bring a layer of interactivity to the live 360 experience. For example, if you were in your VR headset watching a large meeting, and there's a IMAG off to your left, in a 360 view when you look at that monitor you may have custom content just for you—content not seen by the people in the physical room. When, again in your glasses, you turn around, behind may be a virtual expo hall. So, on one side, you have an expo hall, and in front of you is the keynote speaker, and now you're in your own 360 environment that is a merger of the live 360 stream and a fully digital environment. That's the next frontier in broadcast experiences for us.

PART 3: BEYOND THE EVENT.



EVENT MARKETER: *Content lends itself perfectly to the event's continued use as a social sharing platform.*

TURNER: We're seeing the rise of social-driven businesses. To Rich's earlier point, as marketers themselves are going more remote and tools like Slack

have come into the workforce—and Yammer, Salesforce Chatter, Jibe, and Facebook@Work—we now have the platforms

that can provide the best of social media tools within private, secure corporate environments. With this software, we can take and make sharable moments in ways that two years ago, we didn't have the secure-yet-social tools for that amplification. Now, more and more of our clients have those social networks built into the fabric of their business that we can utilize at their events.

EVENT MARKETER: *Are certain types of meetings more sharable? Are certain attendees more likely to share?*

STURCHIO: Absolutely. By their nature, leadership and internal meetings need to restrict their social sharing to some of the private, internal social platforms Brent just mentioned. In comparison, user conferences, industry events, and other experiences that bring together external audiences get more actively tied into public social media channels. However, some of the shine has worn off on social media. While large social walls are still a component of a user conference, they are not drawing the crowds they once did. More and more, we are working with clients to find new purpose for social within and around an event. The more open-ended approaches of “here’s our hashtag, please post something about what you are seeing here” is becoming passé.

EVENT MARKETER: *Where is social media going for your events? What is driving the lift that your clients would be looking for?*

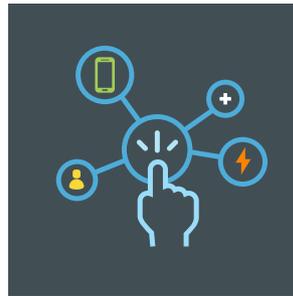
WILSON: It is all about finding and integrating that unique purpose social media can have for your attendees, and especially your advocates and ambassadors. For example, Seenit is a great platform for bringing the audience into the story capturing and telling. Within Seenit, we can direct people to collect types of social-friendly video, then collect the videos, and turn it into some great additional authentic and sharable content. Of course, directly on other social platforms—like Twitter and Instagram—contests, challenges, and other fast moving activities are always a hit. And, more recently, things like Snapchat Geofilters allow us to give attendees new types of exclusives—things that let them show off their affiliation with our clients’ brand—but in a brand appropriate and fun way.

EVENT MARKETER: *You mentioned a number of third-party platforms, but what if we go back to the events themselves. Are event apps becoming as passé as hashtags?*

NIE: Today, every meeting and event has an app. Big events, small meetings, they have an app because it is easier than ever to find a platform and create an app. But, like with social media, we find the purpose of the app is not always clear. While event marketers may think event apps are now requirements, more and more we find ourselves asking them: do you really need an app? Are you using it the right way? Is it just there for a schedule? Is it tying into a company’s Yammer or Slack so that they can do sharing right there, where they normally communicate with peers? If the event has a trade show with different booths, can the app work with BLE beacons to help track and map attendee movements and connections? Or, if there is a networking session, can the app help attendees make connections

through an interactive badge, rather than exchanging a business card and trying to remember who was who later? It’s a lot of questions, but once we get to the purpose, the answers come quickly and easily. Because, from apps to larger scale experiential technologies, we’re focused on sitting down with clients and helping them figure out how technology in their specific event make sense and provide value.

PART 4: THE CLOSING.



EVENT MARKETER: *If we have this chat again in a year, what will be different in the experiential space?*

STURCHIO: There are two big things that will continue their fast rise. The first is, with consumer demand for experiences continuing to grow, more and more marketers will be stepping into the experiential space. From

the more formal meetings, conferences, and events to increasing investment in nontraditional experiences—the activations, pop-ups, tours, and on—the rate of experimentation and adoption within the experiential will continue its rapid growth. The second is, with the increase in brand-led investments, more and more technologies and vendors will enter this space. For example, each year, Cramer researches and publishes an Event Technology Landscape. It is a “supergraphic” that categorizes the names and logos of event technology vendors—from the established to the newest startups. The growth of this landscape is staggering. Cramer’s recently published 2016 edition, grew exponentially year over year. You put these two trends together, this is truly the experiential era of marketing, and it is an amazing time to be an agency working in this space.

EVENT MARKETER: *Finally, speaking of Cramer, for the marketers who want a little taste, what is Cramer all about?*

TURNER: Our focus is on inventing, crafting, and fueling content-driven experiences. With people like Mark and Lindsay and their expanded teams, we are now using creativity and technology to invent things—truly invent things—that haven’t been done before. Additionally, one of our largest strengths is that craftsmanship that goes into what we do. This is our production chops to deliver, on time, everytime. When those lights come on and you have to be onstage, we hit every detail and nail every piece that gets you there. And finally, we are experts on the concept of fueling these experiences, be it with building up a brand’s tribe-like communities to turning individual events into a long-term content marketing engine. Global brands come to us to do more than just launch an experience for one moment in time. Beyond a single moment, they need to fuel their marketing and expand relationships with those who are vital to their success. And that’s where Cramer plays: We create brand experiences for global brands and passionate challengers. And, for brands who are ready to achieve more, let’s go.

CRAMER

Cramer invents, crafts, and fuels content-driven experiences that achieve more for global brands. Learn more on page 91 or at cramer.com.