

MEDIA
MONKS

(RE)ACTIVATE CUSTOMER OBSESSION



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MONKS**

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INTRODUCTION

The rapid spread of the COVID-19 coronavirus around the world has prompted brands to act fast to protect both customers and employees. As of February 2020, 84% of Chinese business trips were canceled.¹ As the virus continues to make its way westward, several big-name events have been canceled or postponed as well: South by Southwest, the E3 tradeshow, Coachella and many major sports seasons. According to eMarketer, the combined economic loss of such event cancellations and postponements could surpass \$500 million.²

“More than half of US B2B marketers said that in-person events and tradeshow were an effective channel for driving conversions,” continues eMarketer’s report, noting that in-person experiences are more widely recognized for driving conversion than other channels—more so than email and product demos, for example. Long regarded as the go-to strategy for building closer connections, it’s not just the tentpole events or big names worried about such cancellations. Brands of all sizes are wrestling with making difficult decisions for how they can retain a close connection or help their audience in a moment defined by two words: social distancing.

These are very real concerns, though the situation presents a positive, too: the “we’re all in this together” moment has reinvigorated brands with a sense of societal responsibility and has inspired them to think outside the box to support their employees and the public in new ways. Consider Delta’s CEO Ed Bastian who pledged to forego six months of his salary to avoid layoffs, CVS offering delivery of medications to customers for free, and utility companies suspending utility shutdowns for customers that are experiencing financial hardship.

We’ll look back on this moment as a time in which brands have realized the value in living up to their commitment to service, finding ways to build impact and provide comfort to their customers. This is the recipe for customer obsession—in which

an organization “focuses its strategy and its budget on the technologies, systems and processes that win, serve and retain customers,” as defined by Forrester.⁴

Brands may be unable to meet their customers face-to-face in a situation like we’re experiencing now, but customer needs aren’t going anywhere. How can a brand coordinate to reach increasingly distant audiences precisely when connection matters most? The coronavirus pandemic is prompting brands to catch up to a trend that’s taken shape throughout the years: digital transformation, through experience-led solutions that serve to digitize in-person connections. Having explored the latent creative potential in connecting people online since the days of dial-up, this is something we’re built for, as exhibited by the transformative work and best-in-class digital activations you’ll find here in these pages.

“A customer-obsessed enterprise focuses its strategy and its budget on the technologies, systems and processes that win, serve and retain customers.”

Forrester, Inc.

This report will explore how brands can pivot one of their most dependable strategies to building connections—the in-person brand activation—in favor of digital ones that are unbounded by time and space. From mapping out goals within the customer decision journey to retooling your team to become more agile in meeting the shifting needs of an increasingly digital consumer base, this guide will equip you with the questions, answers and perspective you will need to connect meaningfully with today’s consumers.



02



(RE)THINK CUSTOMER CONNECTION

Whether a conference, a series of talks or even a live entertainment show, brand activations have long served as a critical touchpoint for organizations to intimately connect with their key audiences. And what each of these activations have in common is how they feed into the brand story: IBM's codeathons, for example, bring together a diverse community of coders that aim to improve the world, while Adobe MAX features inspirational keynote addresses by leading figures in the world of art and creativity.

When done right, brand activations aren't simply opportunities for networking, generating leads or upselling clients—they're opportunities for building communities and strengthening the connections between people. It makes sense, then, that the showroom floor is ground zero for a brand that wants to significantly improve its customer obsession strategy, cultivating impactful relationships with consumers and meeting their needs where and when it matters most.



CRAVING CONNECTION

Over the years, customers have connected increasingly through digital, whether it's keeping up with friends and family, building communities around subcultures and interests or even finding a significant other. In these ways, digital has permeated relationships that are both personal and professional. Yet many branded events, conferences and tradeshow—which ostensibly exist to get people together and get them talking—are still built to provide the “full experience” only to those who can attend in-person.

This flies in the face of where consumers spend much of their time—whether it's filling an idle moment, or when seeking comfort and connection in an era of immense disruption. As the COVID-19 coronavirus spread throughout the world in early 2020, for example, quarantines and travel restrictions forced organizations to face this truth: that investment in digital experiences are not only practical, but necessary in meeting customers' needs today.

“Everything has been moving remote and online in one way, shape or form over the years,” says Henry Cowling, Managing Director at MediaMonks San Francisco. “This is the chance

for brands to really look at that, and reinvent how the digital experience looks and feels, because they'll need to do it eventually.”

To illustrate this point, let's take a quick look at how a typical business conference or entertainment event functions digitally. Despite the wealth of touchpoints and technology available, few live brand activations offer more than simply livestreaming video of the event and backchanneling audience interaction through social media. While these features may be useful to virtual participants on a base level, they ultimately fail to build that sense of community and camaraderie that drives participants to these activations in the first place. In essence, they treat digital as an afterthought and offer a lesser experience to users because of it.

“This is the chance for brands to reinvent how the digital experience looks and feels, because they'll need to do it eventually.”

Henry Cowling, Managing Director, MediaMonks San Francisco

But what if brands took a more digital-first approach to how they hosted live events—or even began to offer digital-only ones? Yes, webinars exist, but in a drive to become more customer obsessed and truly meet their audience’s needs through assistive content, brands will need to think outside the box and well beyond the walls of the convention center.

“We should think about events the way we would think about a platform, like an online customer decision journey,” says Cowling. “How can we follow our delegates through a digital space to connect the right people to the right experience?”

This is the question that our book aims to explore: how brands can not only pivot an activation to digital for practical purposes, but rather infuse customer obsession into every stage of the planning and execution processes, resulting in something bigger and better—such as a platform or program of touchpoints that feed into a total brand experience.

“We should think about events the way we would think about a platform.”

Henry Cowling, Managing Director, MediaMonks San Francisco

ADOPT A CUSTOMER OBSESSED MINDSET TO MEET AUDIENCES WHERE THEY'RE AT

When augmented with digital technology, brand activations have the ability to compress time and space—bringing together a diverse community of people from across the world to build something together. MediaMonks has long felt that culture is defined at the intersection between physical and digital ecosystems; to this point, Gen Z consumers in particular have shifted their attention away from social networks and towards gaming, driving a trend toward niche, insular communities. This became obvious with a Marshmello DJ set performed in the popular video game Fortnite, which was attended virtually by 10.7 million players and watched by 27 million viewers on YouTube, and showcases what types of experiences resonate not only on the horizon, but right now.

“Companies that are customer obsessed have the happiest, most satisfied customers and enjoy the highest revenue growth.”

Forrester, “Use Personalization To Drive Loyalty and Customer Obsession”

This is the benchmark that brand activations must reach to meet consumers in the spaces that are important to them—perhaps not always on a video game platform like the one mentioned above, but presented in a way that makes sense to the brand story and provides a similar level of connection and intimacy between audience and brand.

According to a report by Forrester Principal Analyst Emily Collins, “Companies that are customer obsessed have the happiest, most satisfied customers and enjoy the highest revenue growth.”⁵ This is because purpose is woven together with customer needs, which are infused into the brand’s DNA and embodied through the various experiences that it offers. Crucial to customer obsession is the need to become customer-led and insights-driven, both of which increased digital maturity through the innumerable data that brands can collect and activate through tech-infused experiences.

The rapid shift to a need for digital experience is certainly a tough, if not traumatic, situation for some brands—whether they’re smaller and lacking the resources, or are operating at a lower digital maturity. But if anything, now is the opportunity to break free from the “business as usual” approach that comes with organizing the same event year in and year out. Instead, brands can improve their social listening, transition to agile operations teams and reinvigorate their sense of purpose to build better, more accessible and more assistive digital events for audiences both local and global. Let’s get started.

03



(RE)DEFINE YOUR STRATEGY

Developing best in class, digital activations requires many brands to rethink the approach they've used in organizing more traditional events in the past. This chapter invites you to reflect back on those previous strategies to determine where and how they've been effective—or not. Because there's no direct, one-to-one translation from an in-person activation to a digital one, the questions below should get your mind thinking about how working in a digital format might prompt you to reevaluate your goals or develop entirely new ones.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE FOR YOUR EVENT, AND WHY TRANSLATE IT TO DIGITAL?

Before building any digital experience, you must have a clear vision of what you want to achieve—and the same goes for translating a traditional event or activation into a digital format. First, begin by zeroing in on a clear understanding of the event's purpose, and how that ties into the brand's overall goals. While any marketing directive should have KPIs and business goals in mind, don't lose sight of the significant, measurable impact you want the event to make within your community. Such is the secret on the road to customer obsession.

On that note, understand that organizations might pivot to a digital-first event strategy for several possible reasons: they want to retain value when circumstances threaten an in-person event's cancellation; they want to showcase their digital maturity and present innovative, new experiences to consumers; or they simply want to make themselves more accessible to their audience by fitting content within the context and micro moments of their daily lives.



What matters is that your digital brand activation is supportive, and not strictly commercial. Remember, connection is key.

“The idea is to make the brand relationship really personal and supportive,” says Anneke Schogt, CEO of IMA, our influencer activation team. She notes that partnering with influencers, who have already forged deep connections with their audience through shared values and purpose, serves as an easy way for brands to tap into that mindset.

Given the COVID-19 pandemic that has prompted brands to

reallocate budgets and strategies in particular, brands might even consider how to inject an element of social good in the new experiences they aim to offer. Folding@home is a project that allows users to donate excess computing power to aid in the research of finding treatment to disease—including the COVID-19 coronavirus. Rather than simply donating money to a similar cause, brands might consider offering compelling content that, as consumers watch or interact, powers such an investment in social good. Pairing creative ideas and brand purpose with technical innovation like Folding@home is just one way a technologically mature mindset can help brands uniquely cater to audience needs—not just now, but while preparing for the future.

“The idea is to make the brand relationship really personal and supportive.”

Anneke Schogt, CEO, IMA

The sentiment fits within a whitespace identified by MediaMonks founder Wesley ter Haar. “For me, the real push of this decade is recognizing intent and understanding the personal journey we’re creating with individual users,” he told audiences at CES earlier this year. “Which is more about the age of assistance to me. Yes, there is data, but it will be used in a way that’s assistive to me, and that’s the empathy that’s been lacking from engineering.” Taking this holistic, assistive approach is necessary to meeting the needs of today’s increasingly digital consumers.

“The real push of this decade is recognizing intent and understanding the personal journey we’re creating with individual users.”

Wesley ter Haar, Founder, MediaMonks

HAVE PREVIOUS EVENTS BEEN WORTH THE INVESTMENT?

As the spread of COVID-19 prompted the mass cancellation of events and activations around the globe, a feeling of existential uncertainty became palpable: what if we get through this only to discover that such events weren't even necessary after all? Of course, there's no need to jump to such a conclusion—as discussed in the previous section, successful brand activations are built around achieving a clear, authentic, one-to-one connection with audiences and communities.

“Events are high-engagement and really important for the brand to connect with their customers, making it an important opportunity for them,” says Jessica Wehage, VP and Group Account Director at Firewood Marketing, our embedded team group that merged with MediaMonks last year. For our programmatic sister company MightyHive, for example, intimate events are crucial to facilitate close conversation and build relationships by celebrating clients' wins.

So, brand activations will always have a use and a purpose. But how can brands zero in on what needs to change to reach an

increasingly digital audience? Warren Chase, COO of Firewood, speaks to futureproofing as brands look to reassess their approach to digital, one-to-one consumer engagement: “Brands can change how they’ve been doing this,” he says. “They don’t have to rely solely on the big event going in; they might integrate other, digital-only spaces there,” such as establishing programming that includes a series of always-on content, unrestricted by agendas and unbounded by place.

“Brands can change how they’ve engaged. They don’t have to rely solely on the big event going in.”

Warren Chase, COO, Firewood Marketing

Measurement is key for discovering the effectiveness of your brand activation strategy, both past and present. “Strategically, when it comes to executing a brand digitally, I’m thinking: how are we building the right tools to track and measure effectiveness?” says Wehage. The benefit to digital brand activations is that they lend themselves better to gathering data for effective personalization throughout the journey, from lead-up and registration to beyond the event itself. “There’s a

difference between measuring someone who actually comes to an event in-person versus those who come to a livestream or a webinar, because you're not sure how long or focused that engagement is," says Wehage.

“There’s a difference between measuring someone who actually comes to an event in-person, versus those who come to a livestream.”

Jessica Wehage, VP & Group Account Director, Firewood Marketing

And when it comes to measurement, brands must yet again approach it as an opportunity to transform. In an interview with eMarketer, Adobe CMO Ann Lewnes described how going all in on digital skillsets was critical to deriving the impact of marketing efforts. “There was a lot of upheaval in order to make this work,” she said. “The biggest driver was relentless focus on the end goal and not just technology, but process and people.”⁶ This deep investment in propelling the digital culture of the team was critical for achieving the analytics and numbers needed to power its marketing efforts and build relationships more effectively.

It's also important to ensure your digital activation feels on-brand, something that many easily lose sight of in the chase for more innovative solutions and shiny new use cases. While brands should do more to translate their in-person activations than put up a livestream, ensure that your alternative fits the overall brand experience.

“There’s a huge opportunity in building personalized experiences, where originally an attendee would just be another face in the room.”

Warren Chase, COO, Firewood Marketing

In Chapter Five of this book, we'll explore some examples of best-in-class digital activations and how they support the specific goals of brands and their audiences. Powered by personalization and offering a sense of ownership to users, they forge an intimate relationship with consumers right from the get-go. “There’s huge opportunity in building personalized experiences, where originally an attendee would just be another face in the room,” says Chase, provided brands have a clear vision of what that might look like.

HOW DO YOU INJECT EMOTION INTO THE EXPERIENCE?

An engaging virtual experience should be more than just a series of videos on a streaming platform. For an in-person event, simply being in a place surrounded by other people is a significant part of the experience; when it comes to a virtual one, brands must carefully consider how users discover and explore content, going from piece to piece. “You must try to figure out the interactive component strategically, like you would have at an in-person event,” says Wehage. “You need to make sure it’s consistent and sends the right content, making sure delivery is on-point.”

Cowling mentions TED Talks as a great example (albeit built on a simple idea) of an organization bringing the in-person experience to those far away. While the TED platform comprises of video collections, their delivery is contextual and relevant to individuals’ unique interests, and are augmented with transcripts, references and reading lists. “What TED did so ingeniously was package up the corporate event for people online,” says Cowling, noting how snackable content better fits the digital habits and consumption of today’s audiences.

It shows how even a small tweak to contextualize content can make a big impact on the overall experience and usability to virtual attendees.

“ You must figure out the interactive component strategically, making sure delivery is on-point.”

Jessica Wehage, VP & Group Account Director, Firewood Marketing

Still, other brands might consider how to really reimagine and reinvent what an event can look like or achieve when purely digital. Just like any customer experience strategy, the idea behind a virtual brand engagement must be backed by an effective and seamless experience. Remember, events are a strong manifestation of the brand's purpose and thrive on interpersonal relationship building—which elicits memories, connections and entertainment that spark inspiration.

HOW DO WE ANTICIPATE DISAPPOINTMENT, BUT TAKE THIS AS AN OPPORTUNITY TO INSPIRE SOMETHING BETTER?

On that note, it's also worth mentioning that attempts to translate an in-person experience to a purely digital version may cause up-front disappointment to fans and attendees. This is especially true if the need to pivot were caused by a larger societal issue like the COVID-19 pandemic, prompting people around the world to stay at home and distance themselves from one another.

“Brands shouldn’t aim to think about virtual conferences as replacement of what they had previously scheduled. It’s impossible,” says Kate Richling, CMO at MediaMonks. “For many categories—take music festivals—there is no one-to-one translation. The emotional impact of listening to your favorite band at Coachella, standing in the desert amongst friends, simply can’t be replicated at home, even with VR and emerging tech.” Instead, she advises that brands look into how they can inject emotion into their delivery to build lasting impact.

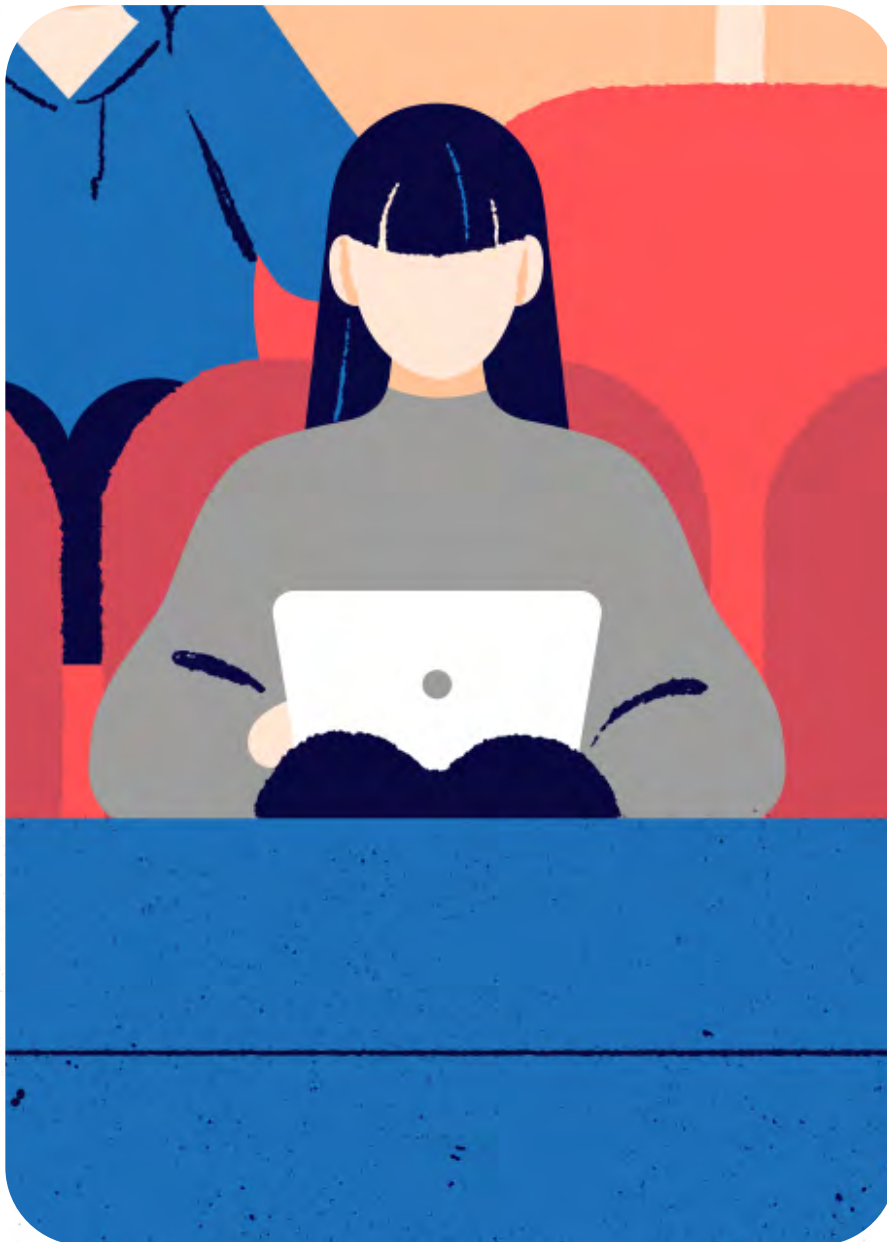
“Brands shouldn’t think about virtual conferences as a replacement of what they had scheduled. Look to iterate and reimagine to build lasting digital impact.”

Kate Richling, CMO, MediaMonks

While that might sound like a challenge, it’s well within brands’ means. The drive for connection remains strong: as the COVID-19 virus grew stronger in China, Chinese users who could no longer go out to see music shows began the “cloud clubbing” trend, in which DJs perform sets that are livestreamed to at-home audiences. Chinese platforms like Bilibili and Kuaishou have struck deals with these clubs, implementing virtual face masks that viewers can pay to gift the performers. It’s a playful, innovative response to a situation that has also caused much anxiety and stress, prompting people to come together through a native digital behavior. In fact, China’s Strawberry Music Festival took some of its scheduled performances to Bilibili.

“How do we not only keep working, but make things better?” Cowling asks, offering food for thought to brands. “How do we leverage these behaviors and meet customers where they are: at home and on mobile?” In developing digital activations,

brands must take inspiration from their consumers and how they're engaging with one another—an important part of being insights-driven and consumer-led in the customer obsession strategy.



***In developing digital activations,
brands must take inspiration from
consumers and how they're engaging.***

Whether iterating upon an existing event plan or developing a new one entirely, having a clear strategy is key. Once you've begun to reevaluate your goals and how you intend to build stronger, more direct connections with your audience, it's time to think about what shape your live, digital brand activation may take—a process that we've laid the groundwork for in the next chapter.

04



(RE)GROUP AND PLAN

An unexpected need to pivot can be a true test for your team, as it will likely present new challenges and needs it wasn't built for at the outset. A team that had organized to host a live, in-person event, for example, may lack the skillset required to execute an event in a purely digital context.

These brands may need to lean on vendors and creative partners, perhaps in new and embedded team models that enable brands to execute much more quickly. Speaking of how the COVID-19 spread has tasked brands across industries to quickly shift gears, Marco Iannucci, Senior Director of Strategy at Firewood Marketing, notes that such a challenge is two-fold: brands will not

only have to reallocate budgets and operations to respond to an audience that's social distancing, but must also anticipate shifting back to normal once the pandemic is contained.

"Operations can't move fast enough alone to change what could be a short-term ask," Ianucci says. "You can't reinvent your marketing team so drastically by yourself for something that we all plan on, and hope, is past us sooner rather than later."

And the bigger the company, the more complicated this maneuver might be; agility is key to shifting mindset and strategies. Consider this, for example: you're a global brand that hosts hundreds of events a year, both internal and external—some of which are regional versions of the same event. In digitizing these events, you'll need to select where and how to shoot each—requiring both local knowledge and expertise, balanced with global brand consistency.

Operating as a single team around the globe, it's a balance we've been able to achieve for our clients. Two in-house studios built for fit-for-format content—based in Los Angeles and the Netherlands—enable our team to quickly shoot, edit and deliver content at speed and proximity with clients, an essential capability in an uncertain time where production teams are postponing projects and waiting for COVID-19 to be contained.

“ You can’t reinvent your marketing team so drastically by yourself for something that we all plan on, and hope, is past us sooner rather than later.”

Mark Iannucci, Sr. Director of Strategy, Firewood Marketing

This speed helps with another major content challenge brands face: the volume of content to be produced within a tight deadline. Because shooting so much content could be logistically difficult, you’ll also need to prioritize which of those would be better off canceled or which could be combined together. This need to prioritize and centralize content is just one example of how brands can (and should) plug in with creative partners when needed to quickly fill in capabilities gaps or offset strains.

WHEN SPEED IS KEY, PARTNERS GIVE YOU SUPERPOWERS

When brands are augmented by an external partner, they're better equipped to anticipate and execute the changes needed to reach consumers in the most effective ways available.

Aaron Nava, Digital Director of Circus, which merged with MediaMonks in early 2020, mentions how Circus' focus on helping brands become more data-driven is essential in proactively responding to emerging opportunities. "One of the things we do is in the data: in social listening and finding the right trigger areas in regions where things are happening," he says. "And from there, we're able to develop a point of view for brands."

To that point, our own research tracking social conversation beginning in the first week of WHO's declaration of the COVID-19 pandemic—including 40 million mentions with reach across 711 million users—has helped identify a critical understanding of consumers' mindsets around the world. Examples include uncertainty about the cancellation of flights purchased long ago, or even trending jokes and memes that people use to cope and connect in an anxious time.

“Social listening and finding the right trigger areas helps us develop a point of view for brands.”

Aaron Nava, Digital Director, Circus

These insights, collected just as conversations start and emerge, provide important perspective to brands as they begin to identify how to meet audiences' needs on a local and global level.

In working with some of Silicon Valley's finest by augmenting their efforts with custom-built, scalable and embedded teams, we're well-versed in helping businesses quickly pivot at speed. “Think of a doctor working in an emergency room,” says Chase. “As a professional, you need to be ready for anything, because that's what you do. As marketers and agencies, we're trained in the customer decision journey and building experiences that provide value, and can be there to help brands in situations like this.”

BUILD LASTING CONNECTION

Your creative partners should be experts in understanding the customer decision journey. As you approach how to execute a digital brand activation, at least for the foreseeable future, consider how it fits within the overall journey and brand experience. We've seen before how brands might offer a great in-person event, only for it to feel largely disconnected from its digital presence. But planning a best-in-class digital activation must begin with an understanding of the user journey, and smart short-term steps that ladder up into long-term strategic solutions.

“The challenge is to deliver on the original intent of digital: interactive, tactile and personalized moments of magic that drive conversation, conversion and commercial opportunities.”

Wesley ter Haar, Founder, MediaMonks

Ensuring a digitized event fits well within the larger, overall relationship-building strategy again boils down to purpose.

“As we come to grips with a world where we can’t shortcut to experience through physical engagement and personal proximity, the challenge is to deliver on the original intent of digital,” says ter Haar. “Interactive, tactile and personalized moments of magic that create conversation, conversion and commercial opportunities.” In the next chapter of this book, we’ll showcase some examples of how these elements have come together in personalized, one-to-one digital experiences that each aim to fulfill a specific purpose, building indelible, emotion-driven experiences to consumers.

Finally, depending on the circumstances that prompted you to adapt an in-person event into a digital activation, consider how the two might coexist—like offering a smaller digital activation in the interim, with the original plans taking place at a later date. For example, a performance at a major music festival that’s been postponed until much later in the year could make use of the extra time to develop a series of musical programming built for social media consumption—whetting the appetite of ticketholders as they wait for the main show.

This gets at the heart of how digital activations can help your brand retain a stronger presence in audiences’ daily lives, rather than focus on a one-off event that ultimately doesn’t make a lasting impact. Consider, for example, the simple act of building social spaces and interest groups around specific

topics relevant to your digital activation, or democratizing panel Q&A's through your digital platform of choice. Even partnering with influencers to serve as ambassadors is a simple way to build lasting connections digitally.



“What we do is about tapping into communities.”

Anneke Schogt, CEO, IMA

As Schogt says, “What we do isn’t about influencers—it’s about communities. We tap into communities, which is where the strength of influencers lie.” Ultimately, brands will have to consider how they’re already building community through their events, and how digital-first tools, behaviors and social features can help them do that even better.

05



(RE)IMAGINE WHAT'S POSSIBLE

Throughout this book we've discussed why moving to digital has become so essential to customer obsession: it's where people are. While this change has been incremental over several years, brands have only begun to recognize the imperative to elevate the role of creatively differentiated digital experience with the rapid spread of the COVID-19 coronavirus throughout the world—prompting brands to react just as rapidly to the needs of their increasingly at-home audiences.

Every brand has a different customer decision journey in mind. How can digital help accomplish the goals they've set?

So, what could a best-in-class brand activation look like—and how, specifically, can they accomplish the goals you've set for your brand? Every brand has a different customer decision journey in mind, with different touchpoints to serve their audience—and when considering the COVID-19 pandemic in particular, each industry is affected differently by consumers' staying home and self-isolating. Below, we offer a handful of example activations that each seek to accomplish different goals. As you read, consider which needs or experiences fit most naturally in the customer decision journey that you have in mind, and how a similar experience might serve your customers.

TO INFORM

Whether at a trade show or an owned event, brand activations offer an important opportunity for brands to inform and educate audiences—whether diving deep into tutorials or providing thought leadership that builds up a brand and its partners' successes. This goal is relatively simple to translate to a virtual experience by digitizing content and hosting it on

a web platform—though brands can achieve much stronger impact by offering increased personalization and a strong recommendation engine.

Take the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame as one example, whose website—redesigned and launched by MediaMonks—provides visitors with a taste of the museum experience without having to leave home. Users can explore any of the 300+ inductees, including media and digitized artifacts relevant to the artists they browse. Visitors can also preview items found within the museum’s many exhibits. While the website serves partly as a guide and partly as a vehicle to drive ticket sales, it is also a great example of making informative content more accessible to those who can’t make an in-person trip.

A large part of this process was building a CMS and tagging content to allow the museum to easily update its collection as it grows and curate new tours as they’re offered. Balancing a consistent design language across the website with the distinct flair and character of each inductee, the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame website shows how brands can make exploring content libraries more fun and personalized.

TO ENTERTAIN

By nature of being digital, a virtual brand engagement helps entertain audiences no matter where they are and has the power to bring them together in a shared experience—and in a time of social distancing, consumers are hungrier for content and entertainment than ever. In addition to impressing consumers, Tommy Hilfiger's Tommy Now AR+ experience, produced by MediaMonks, made an exclusive, location-based experience more accessible and entertaining for everyday people. Using a volumetric capture technique, we translated fashion models into 3D, digital models rendered in AR, allowing users to turn any surface they could point their phone at into a catwalk.

A virtual brand engagement helps entertain audiences no matter where they are, and has the power to bring them together in a shared experience.

As if experiencing the show live and in-person, users could get up close and personal by snapping their favorite outfits from any angle. From there, they could share their unique video of the show or add specific looks to their wishlist. Mixing

innovation, social sharing and the convenience of online shopping, the AR experience shows how brands can make their activations more actionable and entertaining through emerging tech.

TO CONNECT

One of the biggest reasons that audiences flock to brand activations or conferences is to connect closely with a brand—with features like community-building, interactive workshops and stimulating discussion that inspire emotional connection. Certainly, all of that is lost in a digital event, right? Wrong. In digital, almost anything becomes possible, which means you can create truly unique, differentiated experiences that build brand love.

The car configurator tool that we built for Genesis achieves this by providing a videogame-caliber experience to building the perfect Genesis car. Letting users test colors, features and even different lighting conditions, the gorgeous WebGL platform lets users envision what their life with the car could look like—then put in an order for that exact custom model at their nearest Genesis dealership.

***Even in a time of social distancing,
consumers still have needs to fulfill.
Brands can make that experience more
fun and engaging.***

During this moment of uncertainty, people may not be crowding car lots: according to data from eMarketer, 32.7% of consumers said they were currently avoiding shops in general due to the COVID-19 pandemic in February 2020, and 52.7% said they would avoid them if the situation worsened.⁷ Still, consumers have needs to fulfill—and as they extensively research products online, brands can make that experience more fun and engaging. In the case of Genesis, the configurator shows how brands can translate a showroom demo experience to a more personalized, emotionally driven one.

TO ACCELERATE

One of the main purposes of a corporate event is to exhibit the value of a product and service in an effort to generate leads or capture investor interest. This can come with the challenge of clearly, concisely explaining the value of an innovation without becoming wrapped up in jargon and buzzwords—at such an event, seeing truly is believing. But with attendees at home,

how could a brand bring complex supply chains and processes to life?

“VR is a great way to create telepresence events from home, but the impact COVID-19 has had on supply chains will slow headset production, and market penetration is fairly limited.”

Lewis Smithingham, Director of Creative Solutions, MediaMonks

This was the challenge we solved with IBM Food Trust, in which we pitched the power of blockchain on the food chain with an intuitive AR experience. Able to explore a model cityscape and see how each step of the supply chain benefits from blockchain technology, industry stakeholders could easily see the technology’s impact in action. In reallocating budgets for digital experiences like this, it might be tempting for some brands to go all the way and build a fully immersive virtual reality experience—though such an experience won’t be realistic for many users at home.

“VR is a great way to create telepresence events from home,” says Lewis Smithingham, Director of Creative Solutions at

MediaMonks, “but the impact COVID-19 has had on supply chains will slow headset production, and market penetration is fairly limited.” But smaller-scale AR activations that demonstrate a brand story or use case offers an accessible way to scratch that mixed reality itch.



TO SPARK

You don't have to totally reinvent the wheel to offer an innovative presentation that invites the mind to wander and reconsider what's possible. To support Intel's presentation on artificial intelligence at their own business event, SHIFT, we built a full kit of 3D animations and custom sounds that turn the routine slide deck format into a dynamic speaking opportunity. Bringing concepts to life in simple but stylish fashion, our custom kit shows how brands can spark the imagination regarding even the most abstract concepts to viewers both near and far.

The examples above showcase just a handful of ways that brands can translate their goals into compelling digital experiences that reach and emotionally engage faraway consumers. Whether it's simply augmenting a talk with unparalleled multimedia design, offering a personalized platform that invites users to organically explore content, or streaming immersive experiences that break down barriers with emerging technologies, the possibilities really are endless—and are exciting enough to position brands that host such events as true innovators in their field.

CLOSING REMARKS

If this book has taught you anything, it's that now is the time to evolve your outlook on brand activations. Brands can no longer solely rely on large, complex experiences that connect people simply by virtue of standing in the same room—rather, digital brand activations of the future must hone in on accomplishing one or two goals that help your brand better meet the needs of your audience when, where and how it matters most. This more focused, intentional investment in digital experiences helps to support what MediaMonks founder Wesley ter Haar calls “interactive, tactile and personalized moments of magic that create conversation, conversion and commercial opportunities.”

Brands can no longer solely rely on large, complex experiences that connect people simply by virtue of standing in the same room.

Whether you aim to quickly pivot an in-person activation idea into a digital format or seek to imagine what else could be possible when augmented by digital technology, you should now have the tools you need to prioritize goals and build a team—internally, externally or a mix of the two—to realize them.

And that focus on goals is key: while we often think and work on the cutting edge of tech, we don't believe in pushing emergent technology just for the sake of looking innovative. We believe in using technology to tell powerful stories that connect with audiences through assistive, one-to-one connections. Often, these are stories that could never have existed before. For this reason, recognize this moment as an opportunity to reassess and evaluate where digital fits within your budget and customer experience roadmap. Doing so will put you on the path to connect in truly new ways, reinvigorating your audience relationship and becoming customer obsessed in the process.

INTEGRATING FORWARD WITH MEDIAMONKS

MediaMonks is a premium digital experience partner, helping brands better understand and connect with their audiences, building brand love in the process. Deeply engaged and committed to our clients' success, we help brands integrate forward and retain stronger control in their creative, content production and delivery—bridging together several diverse capabilities from across the S4Capital family in a single, end-to-end offering.

Whether applying data to optimize a campaign's relevance or helping clients deliver total branded experiences across a digital ecosystem, our capabilities include a mix of strategic consulting, data auditing, production optimization and digital transformation. You can find us spread across the globe in 40 locations, 29 countries with over 3,300+ people.

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