

# 2024 Trends in Events/ Experiential



## Introduction

Our experiential strategy team is currently examining what will shape our creative approach to events and exhibitions in the upcoming months. As you'd expect, there are a couple of overarching trends that influence everything we do.

However, what remains consistent is the value that experiences bring to our clients through emotional immersion and genuine expression of brand values.

# Macro trends

– Broad trends affecting us in the next 5 years...

## There are three trends affecting our world:

### Slow ahead

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The baseline forecast from the IMF is for global growth to slow from 3.5 percent in 2022 to 3.0 percent in 2023 and 2.9 percent in 2024, well below the historical (2000–19) average of 3.8 percent.

On the flip side, global inflation is forecast to decline steadily, from 8.7 percent in 2022 to 6.9 percent in 2023 and 5.8 percent in 2024\*.

We are still in a situation of cautious stability – not doom and gloom, but certainly not driving growth.

#### What does this mean?

Businesses are likely to be:

- reviewing budgets
- reviewing suppliers
- retrenching into the knowns
- wherever possible

This doesn't necessarily mean less demand for creativity and ambition. But it does mean tighter budgets, more internal accountability, increased demand for measurement and proofs of value from agencies. It also means a doubling down on those events, exhibitions and approaches that clients believe have worked and will continue to deliver results.

### Eco Shock

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2023 delivered one of the hottest summers ever recorded, along with stronger and longer hurricane seasons. Western nations are starting to feel the adverse effects of climate change. Consumers are looking to brands to act.

This will result in a demand for more direct approaches to sustainability from businesses and corporations.

In addition, scope 3\* reporting requirements in 2025 mean that **all businesses in the EU will have to get to grips with the impact that their supply chains have on their carbon emissions and sustainability targets.**

The change will begin in 2024, particularly for businesses that run an April-to-April business year, as they will need to have made their transition by the beginning of 2025.

#### What does this mean?

This will impact all levels of marketing, particularly in experiential.

Exhibitions need materials and travel costs are easy to manage on carbon budgets, meaning both of these areas will come under more scrutiny and be perceived as smart places to make quick wins for businesses that are determined to demonstrate their commitment to net-zero and to a more sustainable economy.

### AI Approaches

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We are still in the infancy of AI understanding. It's still not well understood, but remains exciting and inspirational for clients. Businesses are working out what it means for them, so the experiential responsibility is to help brands communicate that to their customers, perhaps using AI!

Generative AI is starting to impact on individuals' experience – brands will start to use it to hyper-personalise experiences and communications.

However, they may be cautious about revealing how AI is used in devising their projects and products.

#### What does this mean?

It will become increasingly important for brands to be clear on the use of AI in creative communications and the ways that agencies use it in their own work.

Transparency and success go hand in hand and can actually generate excitement around brands' stories beyond the experiential spaces.

**What are the  
trends influencing  
our experiential creativity  
and strategy in 2024?**

Experiential trend one:

# Keeping it real

- Sustainability is no longer the buzz word or exciting new offer. It's becoming a hygiene factor, as we all attempt to get to grips with climate impacts.
- Brands will continue to need robust proof of sustainable approaches, thoughtful creative and reassurance.
- Brands must also be authentic with their DEI approaches and be wary of simplistic, 'tokenistic' approaches that will generate backlash.
- Agencies will need to work with clients to help them to be clear on what they stand for and find better ways to bring their intentions and objectives to life.
- Authentic DEI remains a concern for many brands, with more taking a solid approach to creating inclusive spaces, activations and experiences for their clients.

**92%**  
of all CO2 emissions generated from EURETINA 2022 came from air travel (IPCAA, 2022)

**23%**  
of consumers feel more negative towards a brand that remains silent at an important social moment (Savanta, 2023)

## Who's doing it well?



Source: Vodafone

### Vodafone at Mighty Hoopla

As Official Connectivity partner of Mighty Hoopla, Vodafone's ambition was to use the power of 5G and technology to make live music accessible and inclusive, for deaf and hard-of-hearing fans.

Vodafone combined cutting-edge haptic and AI technology with their 5G network to enable deaf and hard-of-hearing fans to feel live music in a new way through innovative haptic suits, which were a first for UK festivals. #UnlimitingPeople.

Participants used the suits during sets to tailor vibration levels to suit their own level of deafness. Other support included BSL, subtitling and captions on assets so they were accessible to everyone.



### Emota, formerly WRG, for AstraZeneca at ERS

The booth we designed and created with AstraZeneca won "Best designed stand incorporating sustainable goals" at ERS Congress 2023. The focus of the experience was to bring the creative foundation of "Changing the Landscape of Respiratory" to life.

Sustainability was the focus from start to finish in design, production and delivery. Simple techniques were used. For example, switching all screens to black at night delivered an 18% reduction in energy consumption. No plastics were used on the booth and all laminated chipboard used non-toxin based resins. Flooring was made of 50% recycled material and was 100% recyclable.



Source: SWNS

### Rick Astley and Specsavers

Rick Astley recorded a version of his hit song 'Never Gonna Give You Up,' with the lyrics as they are commonly misheard, to draw attention to hearing loss with Specsavers.

The track was teased out on radio, and was followed by a big reveal directing people to the a 'making of' video and a simultaneous launch across Specsavers' social media platforms.

In the launch week of the campaign, hearing test bookings increased by 66%, and organically generated 8M views on social media within the first 48 hours.

Experiential trend two:

# Product brand vs corporate brand

For our healthcare clients, individual drug brands are crucial. They are recognisable to HCPs (health care professionals), essential for marketing to patients and are the key to distinguishing different modes of action. For a long time, brands have driven the design of Congress experiences. However, experiences are beginning to move towards a more corporate-brand-focused approach.

Booth experiences that bring to life the values and identity of the master brand allow pharmaceutical companies to communicate expertise and forward motion, which is also good for recruitment and retention. More importantly, a consistent brand expression can build trust and understanding that outweighs individual drug approval issues.

This is one way to combat the uncertain financial landscape of 2024.

For these reasons, therapy areas increasingly want to show up as one-Oncology, one-Neurology and so on, all expressed under the company brand. But this requires a strategic understanding of what one-Oncology might mean for them, rather than simply pasting new branding onto a stand.

Agencies who help clients evolve and meet their needs by understanding their values and offer in a physical space, will stand out in this highly competitive market.

## Who's doing it well?

### EMD Serono/Merck KGaA

To make a bold statement and establish EMD Serono as the key brand in the US market, Merck KGaA focused not on product, but on brand. The stand was designed to reflect the boldness of both HCPs and EMD Serono themselves, creating stand-out, raised engagement and brand recognition.



Experiential trend three:

# AI activations

Within experiential marketing, brands are beginning to use AI to create more responsive, personalised activations. AI's ability to sort and respond to large data sets means that interactions can become more exciting by creating less friction for the end user.

We will start to see brands using AI to improve customer experiences as virtual assistants respond to feedback and individual queries by suggesting changes.

However, it will become increasingly important for brands to be clear on the ways brands and agencies can use AI for creative communications. Agencies will help brands to communicate what they need to say about their own approaches.

There is still bias within AI systems and although brands will need to be clear about their approach for the end users, transparency and success go hand in hand and can actually generate excitement around brands' stories beyond the event spaces.

**53%**  
or professionals said  
their company plans to  
invest in Generative AI  
over the next five years.

Source: Euromonitor International Voice of the Industry: Digital Survey, fielded August/September 2023 (n=198)

## Who's doing it well?



Source: RayQube

### Frito Lay

RayQube helped Lays Potato Chips catch the attention of visitors in FIFA Fan Zones Dubai in 2022. They designed a fun, unique football activity to attract people to their pop-up booth, prompting customers to become involved. Algorithms powered by AI **studied players' activities to make real-time adjustments to game dynamics** — this improved user engagement and connection with brands.



### Inizio

Inizio has developed a set of approaches to working with AI and also with Generation AI to explore faster and more accurate ways to deliver marketing copy iterations and design approaches through AI-human partnership.

Patient Lay Summaries have been created more swiftly and marketing materials have been evaluated for effectiveness. They have developed a set of principles to guide use and application, which are publicly available.



Source: The Coca-Cola Company

### Coca-Cola

Coca-Cola created Coca-Cola Y3000 Zero Sugar with the help of AI. The limited-edition beverage **pulled inspiration from human and machine intelligence to develop a unique flavour profile** that depicts a utopian future.

Experiential trend four:

# Human happiness

For decades, we have focused on the needs of the individual. The pandemic revealed how much we need connection for happiness. In fact, social connection is fundamental to our wellbeing. The 2021 World Happiness Report found that those of us who experienced an increase in connections during the pandemic reported greater life satisfaction, more resilience and better mental health.

Paradoxically, AI is refocusing us on what it means to be human and the importance of in-person moments.

In 2024, we will see brands reinforcing human connection through storytelling and customer service, but it's also going to become increasingly important to think about how you can bring in real life human touches to the marketing mix. Leaning into emotional responses will pay dividends.

Experiences have always offered a way for businesses to cement personal relationships with sales teams, leaders and brands themselves. As we continue to find our way through the deep fakes and AI answers, a real human person or a shared human experience will be more trusted, more positive and therefore deliver crucial brand connection.

## 47%

of UK consumers who are concerned about the increasing prominence of AI are specifically concerned about having to interact with AI more than people (e.g customer service, emergency response).

## 55%

of consumers said they shopped in stores that created engaging experiences.

Source: Euromonitor International Voice of the Consumer: Lifestyles Survey, fielded January/February 2023 (n=40,691)

## 94%

of consumers feel more connected to a brand after an experience.

Source: AgencyEA

## 58%

of US consumers say communicating with an actual person is what makes an interaction with a salesperson or customer service department a good experience.

Source: Mintel 2024

### Who's doing it well?



Source: Disney

#### Disney's Wonder of Friendship: The Experience

The Experience was an immersive pop-up attraction with multisensory spaces that took visitors through a journey of friendship, centred on Disney stories and characters. It was an immersive, shareable journey through the friendships of Disney's best-loved characters, celebrating and creating human connection.



Source: Starbucks



Source: BBC

#### The BBC Earth Experience

Continuing a trend of in-person experiences that generating educational value and revenue around the world as people seek to do things together, BBC launches their Earth experience. **It is an immersive audio-visual journey for all ages to enjoy together**, featuring epic footage from the iconic television series, Seven Worlds, One Planet, and bespoke narration from Sir David Attenborough.

#### Starbucks Holiday Sips

Starbucks' 2023 holiday campaign promoted the Season of IRL. It focused around the idea of getting together with friends – tapping into the human happiness trend and its strong resonance with Gen Z and Millennials.



Experiential trend five:

# Hybrid hope

The West is starting to experience the effects of climate change. As heat domes, droughts, fires, floods and increased hurricane activity start to impact more frequently and severely, businesses will come under increased pressure from the public and governments to find new solutions to demonstrate their contribution to keeping our temperature increase as close as possible to 1.5 degrees.

Added to this, from 2025 the EU will require commercial organisations doing business inside Europe, whether based there or not, to report Scope 3 emissions. These are the emissions generated by a business' supply chain.

All of this will generate a need for businesses to find quick wins that cut emissions and demonstrate a commitment to Net-Zero targets.

Cutting business travel is a quick way to preserve your carbon budget. However, businesses still need to hold global meetings, bring leaders together and work with stakeholders face to face.

Moments of in-person connection are also essential for humans to thrive.

## So, the answer is not purely virtual events – but hybrid experiences.

Since the pandemic, experiential agencies have evolved their delivery, platforms and creativity.

They know what works and what doesn't in the virtual space and therefore are better equipped than purely online providers to manage the hybrid challenge: the difficulties of bringing together audiences in very different spaces whilst making them all feel valued.

Agencies must lean into their experience and not shy away from guiding clients into genuinely hybrid event experiences. Building events and immersions that take into account in-person audience needs and don't just pump content at people via digital platforms will deliver great work, enable better business, and play their part in tackling the challenge of climate change. Agencies that have only one or the other would do better to look for an accomplished partner, rather than trying to master these challenges in the face of increased pressure.

At the 2022 IPCAA Annual Members Meeting, Dara Conlon, Executive Vice President of EURETINA, provided a staggering insight:

**The CO<sub>2</sub> emissions generated by 1 attendee travelling from one European city to another is comparable to the CO<sub>2</sub> emissions of hosting 2,000 virtual attendees.**

## Who's doing it well?

### GlaxoSmithKline

GSK use a hybrid event to harness a pivotal moment in their history; the demerger of their brand alongside the launch of a new brand driven by a purpose that puts their people first. GSK wanted an event that brought the entire company together as one.

The activation included a live satellite broadcast from five global locations, with watch parties around the world, a 3D platform and a London live event.

Overall, **39,467** people took part, with **26,752** viewing online and **12,715** spread across **235** watching parties.



Source: GSK

# Emota

Inizio Engage