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Event-Marketing as Innovative Marketing Communications: Reviewing the German Experience

As a result of significant changes in their marketing environments and in consumer behaviour, marketers are confronted with the decreasing effectiveness of their classic marketing communications (Kroeber-Riel 1984) and, consequently, in need of new ways to position their brands in consumers' minds. Because nothing is more convincing than personal experiences (Nickel 1998), event-marketing creates new brand-related realities by staging marketing-events with which consumers interact. This would result in an emotional attachment to the brand (Zanger and Sistenich 1996). However, while event-marketing as an experience-oriented marketing communication strategy has become very popular among German marketing professionals and academics, researchers and marketers in English-speaking countries have widely ignored this innovative communication strategy so far due to a different understanding of the term (Cornwell 1995). Nevertheless, some European companies have successfully launched in recent years their first event-marketing campaigns in Ireland, the UK and the US, suggesting a much broader appeal than previously recognised. Thus, this paper is introducing event-marketing to an international audience by outlining its constitutive features and discussing its role in marketing communications, based on the lessons learned from the German experience, that are presented using mini-case studies.

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Introduction

Back in 1992, Adidas launched the successful “Adidas Streetball Challenge”-campaign, a series of street basketball tournaments embedded in the hip-hop subculture, with the aim to revamp its brand image and appeal to the increasingly individualised, but alienated youth market. Since then, event-marketing has become the darling of marketing professionals and academics in German-speaking countries (Lasslop 2003; Nufer 2002). Especially among practitioners it is more popular than ever to communicate with their various stakeholders through 3-dimensional brand experiences by staging marketing-events (Drengner 2003; Nickel 1998; Baum and Stalzer 1991). While event-marketing accounted for less than 5 % of the total marketing communications budget of German companies in 1993, this has increased to an average of 22 % in 2000 (Lasslop 2003; Zanger 2002, 2001). Approx. 300 event-marketing providers operated in the German market in 1999, worth € 2.5 billion, and reported an average growth in revenues of 20-30 % (Zanger 2001). In a study among both event-marketing providers and companies implementing event-marketing strategies in 2000, 78 % of the latter saw further growth potential and 40 % of them stated that they would increase their event-marketing budgets by an average of 18 % within the next years (Lasslop 2003; Zanger 2001). Given the stagnation in the marketing communications market in general, this growth was primarily achieved by replacing classic marketing communications strategies, which are more and more regarded as ineffective in grabbing attention and creating consumer awareness for a company’s offerings.

Although a comparison study by the George P. Johnson Company (2001) revealed similar trends in US event marketing (Drengner 2003; Lasslop 2003), these figures have proven to be of little value, as the studies in Germany and the USA were conducted with a very different understanding of what constitutes event-marketing. While event-marketing is a fashionable term in the US to describe a multitude of phenomena (Cornwell and Maignan 1998) ranging from events as products (Getz 2002; Goldblatt 1997) to sales promotions and sponsorships (Fan and Pfitzenmaier 2002; Meenaghan 1995a; Cunningham et al. 1993), in German-speaking countries it describes an experience-oriented marketing communication strategy that allows for interactive, multi-sensual dialogues between participating consumers and marketers. For example, Adidas-Salomon rejuvenated their brand image to “hip & trendy” by combining fun-sports, music, fashion, youth language codes and neo-tribe participation into the Adidas Streetball Challenge.

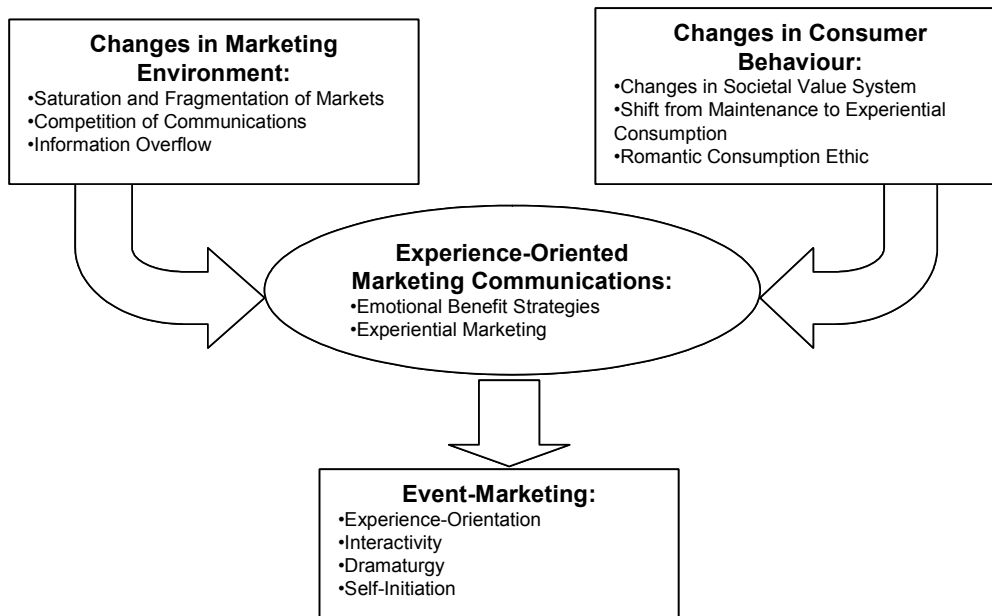


Figure 1. Factors Influencing the Need for Event-Marketing

The German event-marketing concept emerged in the late 1980s in response to significant simultaneous changes in both the marketing environment and consumer behaviour (see figure 1), which were caused by the effects of common marketing activities on German society (Levermann 1998; Mannion and McLoughlin 1995; Kroeber-Riel 1987, 1984). Because those residual effects demanded from marketers to adapt to those changes by developing and using new innovative marketing concepts (Brown 2002; Cova 1996), event-marketing strategies were designed to take advantage of the increasing need for experiential consumption in affluent societies (Opaschowski 1998; Patterson 1998; Cova 1997). However, although marketers in all affluent societies are confronted with similar trends as their German counterparts (Cova and Cova 2002; Firat and Shultz 1997; Meenaghan 1995b; Weinberg 1993), event-marketing strategies in the context of this paper have only materialised very recently in Ireland (Kirsner 2002), the UK (Fletcher 2003) and the US (Irwin and Greenberg 2003; Hiscock 2003). But they were mainly “imports” by Continental European companies such as Red Bull, Daimler Chrysler, Adidas-Salomon or Diageo. Consequently, relatively little attention has so far been paid in English-speaking literature to this new marketing communication strategy in terms of the understanding of this paper.

Therefore, the objective of this paper is to narrow the identified information gap by introducing event-marketing to an international audience and discussing its valuable communicative potential in dealing with current social and economic developments. To achieve this objective, the paper is

structured as follows. First, in order to ensure a common understanding of the term “event-marketing”, a thorough definition is provided by differentiating this innovative communication strategy from the multitude of other activities that are associated with “event marketing” in the literature. Following this, the key factors in the German marketing environment and consumer behaviour contexts, which resulted in the need for event-marketing, are discussed as a benchmark for comparison before identifying event-marketing’s constitutive features and outlining its role in an integrated marketing concept. Finally, this paper will conclude with mini-case studies of the Red Bull Flugtag and the Guinness Storehouse as examples of event-marketing in practice.

What is Event-Marketing?

When researching event-marketing, one is not only confronted with a plethora of conflicting interpretations of what actually constitutes event-marketing, but must also conclude that “the boundaries between event-marketing and other marketing communications are smooth” (Nickel 1998: 5). This makes a proper differentiation difficult. Indeed, in the USA “event marketing” has become a fashionable term to describe a multitude of activities and phenomena, which involve a combination of events and marketing. Thus, a plethora of publications have contributed to significant confusion in English-speaking literature (Cornwell and Maignan 1998; Cornwell 1995). Figure 2 outlines the differences between event-marketing in the context of this paper (shown in the grey fields) and other definitions found in the literature.

Basically, events can be divided into being commercial or non-commercial. Commercial events in return can either be products themselves (marketing of events) or be used as media within marketing communications. Most English-speaking literature does not regard event marketing as a marketing communication strategy and, thus, refers to the *marketing of events* within the broader concept of event management (Schulz and Berger 2004; Nufer 2002; Getz 2002; Goldblatt 1997). Here, event marketing is the whole process of planning, managing and marketing corporate and special events. A *special event* describes a unique moment in time or an occasion that is different from ordinary life and involves some celebration or ceremony (Nufer 2002; Goldblatt 1997), while *corporate events* refer to seminars, conferences and exhibitions that are organised by corporations or institutions and aimed at internal and external audiences (Schulz and Berger 2004; Getz 2002; Goldblatt 1997). In either case, the emphasis of the event management literature is on the efficient running of events by taking into account the operational aspects of technology, logistics,

catering, special effects and human resources (Nufer 2002) as well as the necessary promotion activities.

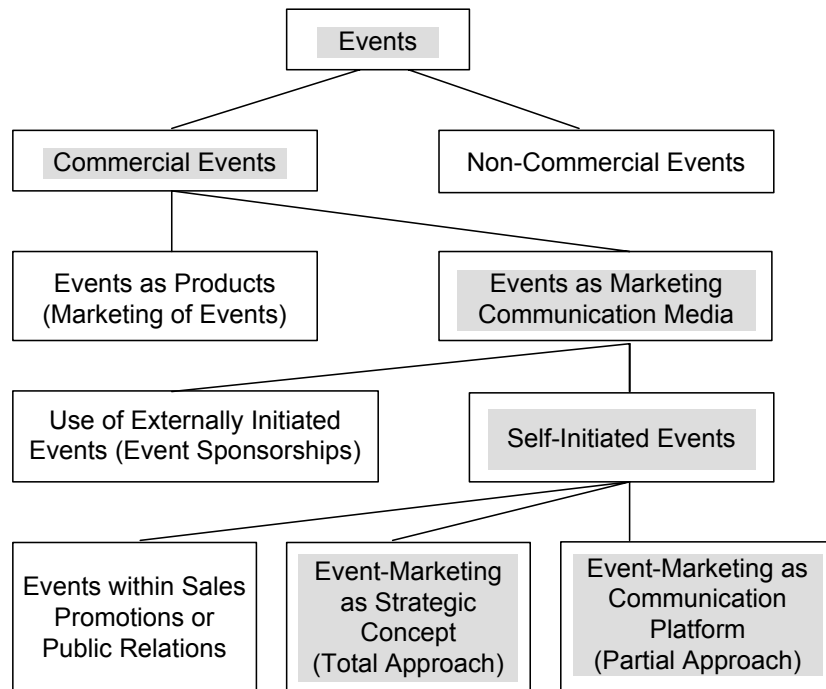


Figure 2. The Different Understandings of “Events” in Marketing Literature (Drengner 2003; Zanger 2002)

Cunningham et al. (1993: 407) proposed that *event marketing* is a term used to describe the integration of marketing mix elements around an event sponsorship to help the firm accomplish its strategic objectives. Thus, it has become increasingly popular in English-speaking literature to apply the term event marketing to the *marketing with events* as well (Cornwell and Maignan 1998; Cornwell 1995). However, this usually refers only to the commercial exploitation of external events and their properties in form of event sponsorships (Meenaghan 1995a). Cunningham et al. (1993) argued that sponsorship is not only an element of event marketing, but also differs on the basis that in event marketing measurable marketing objectives are established prior to the sponsorship and an appropriate existing event is carefully selected accordingly. Sponsorships, however, are only the financial contribution of a business to an object of interest out of personal involvement and “the desire to contribute to the community’s quality of life”, but not in order to target a specific segment or to achieve specific marketing objectives. Cornwell (1995) disagreed with this narrow definition and argued that the terms “event

marketing" and "event sponsorship" were often used interchangeably to explain the same phenomenon.

In this paper's context, however, event-marketing is regarded as an experience-oriented marketing communication strategy that is aimed at positively influencing customers' familiarity and attitude towards the brand, by staging marketing-events as 3-dimensional brand-related realities. In other words, the hyperreality of the brand is turned into a lived experience similar to that of a theme park, in which consumers can actively participate. Accordingly, Nufer (2002: 19) defined *event-marketing* as *an interactive as well as an experience-oriented marketing communication strategy within the framework of an integrated marketing communications concept, which involves the goal-directed, target audience and subculture specific staging of only for this purpose self-initiated events as well as their planning, implementation and control*. In current marketing practice and literature, Zanger and Sistenich (1996: 234) identified two co-existing approaches in implementing event-marketing strategies (see figure 2):

- **The partial approach views event-marketing as the planning, organising, managing and controlling of events in the framework of a company's marketing communication strategy.**
- **The total approach refers to event-marketing as an umbrella for all elements of modern marketing communications, which contribute to the development and implementation of an experience-oriented strategy.**

While the partial approach was too narrow, Zanger and Sistenich argued that the total approach would leave the concept wide-open for all kinds of activities from party-service to conferences. They concluded that, in order to strategically utilise its communicative potential, event-marketing has to create brand-related realities for consumers within a broader integrated experience-oriented marketing communications concept (Zanger 2001; Zanger and Sistenich 1996). Despite their point of view being widely shared and accepted nowadays, Zanger (2002) recognised, based on recent practical experiences, that event-marketing as a leading marketing communications concept in itself could be a prospect of success.

Marketing-events are the key media of event-marketing to communicate brand messages. Bruhn (2003: 328) defined an *event* as *a special social function or a special occurrence that can be experienced multi-sensually by targeted recipients and be used as a platform for communication* and demanded that an event must be a special and unique live experience that satisfies consumers' need for communication. As this definition did not offer any distinction from special events, Nickel (1998: 7) argued that *marketing-events are in behalf of marketers staged events, which in regard to companies or brands have the central goal to help*

participants obtaining experiences as well as to activate their emotions and which, at the same time, are suitable to contribute positively to the implementation of marketing strategies, i.e. in building up corporate or brand values. Thus, Nickel clearly defined marketing-events as events that are initiated by companies with the purpose of producing 3-dimensional brand realities, in which consumers can actively participate and gain emotionally beneficial experiences; an opinion that was also shared by Zanger (2002, 2001) and Nufer (2002).

Changes in the Marketing Environment

Technological advances in recent decades have not only led to improving living standards in the industrialised world at large, but have also imposed various new challenges to marketers. Never before have so many different industries been in a state of maturity or decline at the same time as in the past 20 years. Levermann (1998) estimated that 3/4 of all industries in Western Europe, the USA and Japan are already affected. The main characteristic of saturating markets is that market potential has been fully utilised by the available product range (Keller 2001; Kroeber-Riel 1984) and market share can only be increased or even held by marketers at the cost of their competitors (Levermann 1998). In addition, products can no longer objectively be differentiated on quality or functions so that brands, in the perception of consumers, become more and more interchangeable (Keller 2001; Schmitt 1999; Weinberg 1993; Weinberg and Gröppel 1989; Kroeber-Riel 1984). This perception is further increased by the high degree of "uniformity" in product and packaging design.

"If products (of various brands) are primarily designed according to functionality, similar technological features and attributes will automatically result in similar and, consequently, interchangeable product designs. The galleries of electrical domestic appliances such as fridges, ovens, or washing machines, in front of which the consumer is standing at his retailer, are typical examples" (Kroeber-Riel 1984: 211).

But instead of building a unique communication proposition to differentiate their brands from competition (Bruhn 2003), most marketers only tend to blur any existing distinctions even further (Schmitt 1999; Levermann 1998; Weinberg 1992; Kroeber-Riel 1984) by making comparable claims (Weinberg and Gröppel 1989) and relying on similar styles and designs in their advertising campaigns (Weinberg 1992; Kroeber-Riel 1984) or by primarily competing on pricing and sales promotion strategies with price wars often being the logical consequence (Levermann 1998). However, as a saturation of

markets is also an indicator of a society's wealth, where primary existential needs can relatively easily be satisfied, people develop more and more differentiated demands and expectations on offerings (Levermann 1998). This individualisation of needs, in return, is encouraging many companies to build competitive advantages by developing new market niches and serving smaller and finer segments, leading to an accelerating fragmentation of markets (Levermann 1998; Zanger and Sistenich 1996).

The result of the rising number of products with similar features and quality in more and more fragmented markets is an increasing level of competition. As a consequence, the use of classic marketing communications has multiplied (Meenaghan 1995b) in a way that German marketing academics already talk about a shift in affluent societies from a "competition of products" to a "competition of communications" (Lasslop 2003; Bruhn 2003). In difference to the competition of products, where only marketers with similar offerings in the same market rival against each other, the competition of communications describes a tense atmosphere in which everyone competes against anybody for the attention of the consumer. In 1975, print advertising campaigns in Germany had been run for approx. 25,000 different brands. By 1995 already more than 100,000 brands had been advertised in print media alone (Bruhn 2003; Levermann 1998). Though the amount of TV ads shown on any given day has dramatically risen from 90 ads on four TV channels in 1984 to 3,559 ads on approx. 60 TV channels in 1996, people's average TV viewing time in the same period of time only went up from 149 to 178 minutes per day (Bruhn 2003; Levermann 1998). The German readership of newspapers, magazines and journals is even declining (Lasslop 2003), despite the fact that the number of available titles has increased by 25-40% since 1985 (Levermann 1998) targeting more and more specified segments. Due to the arrival of satellite and digital TV, a similar "media explosion" has been witnessed in Ireland and the UK, where consumers are left with a choice of up to 227 programmes targeting smaller homogeneous audiences (Pasick 2004; Meenaghan 1995b). In this context, Bruhn (2003) is talking about a "nuclearisation" of the media.

The growing variety and fragmentation of TV and print media means that marketers have to further expand their marketing communications efforts by spreading their advertising campaigns over multiple media sources to reach target audiences without jeopardizing their effectiveness. While in 1981 the combined advertising revenues of the classic media print, radio and TV in Germany were € 5.62 billion, this quadrupled to € 23.29 billion in 2000 (Bruhn 2003). Ireland even saw those advertising expenditures increasing by 556 % from € 208 million in 1990 (Meenaghan 1995b) to € 1156 million in 2003 (Medialive 2004). German total advertising expenditures accumulated to € 31.5 billion in 2001 (Lasslop 2003).

Accelerating prices for media spaces and slots are the natural result of an increasing demand meeting more or less stagnant resources. Despite a growing variety of TV and print media on offer, German consumers concentrate most of their daily TV viewing time on the 7 main channels during prime time (approximately 7-10pm). Newspapers and magazines are usually read by Germans at breakfast, on public transport to work and during coffee and lunch breaks with an average reading time of approx. 40 minutes per day (Bruhn 2003). Therefore, German consumers mainly rely on either a daily national tabloid or a daily local newspaper and in average two weekly magazines. Consequently, in order to communicate to their target audiences, marketers from diverse industries compete for the same scarce media spaces and slots at the key prime time TV channels and the key magazines; thus, pushing those particular prices even higher and contributing heavily to the competition of communications.

In addition, the human capacity to process information is limited. In 1996, both German and US consumers were exposed to approximately 3600 selling messages per day (Lasslop 2003; Rumbo 2002). Being confronted with this information overflow and unable to cope, consumers have become accustomed to ignoring any information that they are not interested in (Kroeber-Riel and Weinberg 2003; Tse and Lee 2001). In 1987, the German information overflow reached a level of more than 98%. This meant that out of 100 ads, articles and other messages 98 ended up unprocessed on the "information dump", while the corresponding US level had already reached 99.6 % in 1980 (Kroeber-Riel 1987). Furthermore, consumers do not want to process mass marketing communications any longer (Lasslop 2003; Rumbo 2002; Kroeber-Riel 1987).

In fact, consumers respond with such a general low situational involvement towards classic marketing communications that print ads are automatically leafed over without any recognition (Bruhn 2003), while the remote does the same job on TV (Drengner 2003). Zapping, the means by which consumers avoid TV commercials by switching channels or physically leaving the viewing room to concentrate on doing other things during commercial breaks, is already a widespread phenomenon and of considerable concern to advertisers (Tse and Lee 2001; Reynolds and Hayden 1995). This further reduces both the effectiveness of their advertisements and the number of optimal advertising spaces. Under such circumstances, consumers can only be reached by increasing marketing communication activities further, which in turn contributes to the competition of communications.

Changes in Consumer Behaviour

In addition to a changing marketing environment, social trends, i.e. an increasing orientation towards leisure and recreation as well as a “desire for individualism”, are leading to significant changes in consumer behaviour (Opaschowski 2000; Schulze 2000; Pine and Gilmore 1998; Firat and Shultz 1997; Cova 1997). After three decades of growing material affluence and opportunities to accumulate possessions of material (i.e. TVs, cars, and electrical appliances) and immaterial products (i.e. holidays, sports and leisure), German society experienced a major shift in its core societal values. The traditional Prussian values of diligence, loyalty, duty, order, authority, tradition and morality lost more and more their importance. Raffée and Wiedmann (1988) identified four crucial trends that were changing values in German society:

- A higher ranking of social and hedonic values, such as job security, ecology, health, social commitment and nature.
- Pluralism of individual and social values leading to the acceptance of a multicultural society.
- A shift from duty and diligence to self-fulfilment and the experience of emotional benefits in work and society.
- The development of an active and critical society that questions the status quo and engages in civil rights movements from consumerism to environmentalism.

Ireland, as a residual effect of the Celtic Tiger, witnessed in the 1990s a similar shift away from its traditional conservative Catholic values towards more postmodern values (Turley 1995). With increasing material affluence, better education and, subsequently, socio-economic security, the need for spiritual guidance, certainty and comfort, the Catholic Church and its teachings were previously catering for, decreased in its importance to the Irish (Fanning 2001). A change in sex role attitudes meant that Irish women sought more often their self-fulfilment in activities and careers outside home rather than in their traditional roles as mothers and housewives (Fanning 2001; Turley 1995). Finally, although Fanning (2001) feared that the Irish started to compensate for the decline in religiosity with compulsive shopping behaviour, consumption is playing merely a role in defining one's self-concept by focusing primarily on emotional meanings and emphasising hedonic values (Turley 1995).

Thus, Weinberg and Gröppel (1989) suggested that the changes in societal values made evident a need for a new definition of the quality of life and identified five important trends that should be addressed by marketers' emotional benefit strategies:

- An increase in insecurity due to doubts in overcoming social, political and economical problems.
- A change in attitude towards classical values, such as the importance of property and career.
- A striving to simplify life due to a lack of insight into complex social processes.
- A shift in the central reference points of life from work to the private sphere. Self-realisation, education, leisure, recreation and social interaction rather than work and diligence become central focus in increasing one's quality of life.
- An increased need for sensitivity, which means a search for the quality of experience, the enjoyment of life and the closeness to nature are becoming the driving forces of consumer behaviour.

In particular, the last two points express the major shift from "maintenance consumption" to "experiential consumption" in the societal value system of affluent societies (Opaschowski 2000, 1998; Pine and Gilmore 1998; Weinberg and Nickel 1998). Maintenance consumption refers to the purchase of existential necessities and, thus, to the "compulsory section" of shopping that costs consumers' time. Modern marketing literature has internalised this form of consumption by presenting a picture of consumers who, in search for convenience, will buy those products and services (i.e. shopping on the Internet) that promise to save, even create time in their hectic lives (Fanning 2001; Kotler 2000; Schmitt 1999). This view, however, is contradicted by people's actual behaviour. In fact, consumers in affluent societies spend more resources in terms of time and money on shopping than ever before (Opaschowski 2000). The difference is that shopping itself has become the end while the purchase is little more than a by-product. Thus, as the "free exercise section" of shopping, experiential consumption refers in general to the obtaining of enriching emotional experiences by which consumers attempt to improve the quality of their lives right here and now (Kroeber-Riel and Weinberg 2003; Cova and Cova 2002; Firat and Shultz 1997; Weinberg 1992; Weinberg and Gröppel 1989).

Referring to Campbell, Opaschowski (2000, 1998) spoke in this context about a drift towards a romantic consumption ethic that has its origin in Rousseau's philosophical work "Emile":

"Teach him to live rather than to avoid death; life is not breath, but action, the use of our senses, our mind, our faculties, every part of ourselves which makes us conscious of our being. Life consists less in length of days than in the keen sense of living. A man may be buried at a hundred and may never have lived at all. He would have fared better had he died young." (Rousseau 1762/1993: 11)

While the Christian consumption ethic is determined by Maslow's existential needs with a focus on "having" by accumulating material wealth, security and order (i.e. family, career, house, savings and insurances) to ensure having a good quiet life, the romantic consumption ethic is all about "being". "Life means to live" and, therefore, to be active in pursuing "happiness" (Opaschowski 1998).

With increasing affluence and being less concerned with existential needs, consumers often find themselves in a vacuum without a specific goal - in a "state of non-being" (Csikszentmihalyi 2000). This feeling of having nothing to do leads to a decline in the quality of experience and self-esteem, so that shopping as a goal-directed activity fills the motivational void for a short time (Shankar and Fitchett 2002; Csikszentmihalyi 2000). In many Western societies, shopping has already been thought of as the new religion with branded goods as sacraments, and celebrated in the cathedrals of the 21st century - the shopping centres (Fanning 2001; Opaschowski 2000). However, because shopping as an activity is often little more than giving oneself "a little reward", in most cases it only contributes to a state of having by buying "moments of experiences and happiness" (Shankar and Fitchett 2002; Csikszentmihalyi 2000; Schulze 1998). Experiential consumption goes well beyond experiencing emotional benefits in the process of ownership transfers. It is driven by the desire to live, not to have, and therefore prioritises lived experiences over ownership (Shankar and Fitchett 2002).

Subsequently, consumption in affluent societies is drifting in areas that offer involvement in both individual and social activities, such as joining a gym, going to a concert, socialising in a pub, travelling or increasing one's horizon through further education. Very often, the possibility even to share meaningful consumption experiences with others in situational communities can be a significant contribution to consumers' quality of life (Cova and Cova 2002; McAlexander et al. 2002; Cova 1997). Therefore, the desire to experience life right here and now is leading to an increasing participation in leisure and recreation, entertainment and cultural scenes (Schulze 2000; Opaschowski 2000). As Shankar and Fitchett (2002: 507), in reference to Erich Fromm, proposed:

"The motivation to consume becomes redefined as an active process in which consumers seek to reinforce preferred states of being rather than a cycle of desire to have and own products ..."

As a consequence, marketers have either to develop and offer products and services that consumers can consume with the objective of experiencing favourable states of being (Shankar and Fitchett 2002; Schmitt 1999; Pine and Gilmore 1998), or to design marketing strategies, and marketing

communications in particular, which provide consumers with a platform to experience brands in a way that contributes to their quality of life.

Experience-Oriented Marketing Communications and Event-Marketing

The above-mentioned trends, which occur in all affluent Western societies (Cunningham et al. 1993), support the need for experience-oriented marketing communications. Marketers can no longer rely on traditional marketing formulas to reach their target audiences, but have to serve consumers' needs for experiential consumption (Cova and Cova 2002; Firat and Shultz 1997) by avoiding the clutter of classic marketing communications and taking into account the information overflow at the same time. In this context, experiential marketing has been developed to differentiate products and brands on the basis of their subjectively experienced contribution to consumers' quality of life (Schmitt 1999; Weinberg 1993, 1992; Weinberg and Gröppel 1989). The aim is to position the brand as a medium for a specific set of emotional consumption experiences (Weinberg and Nickel 1998) and, therefore, to build up brand loyalty by establishing emotional preferences for the brand (Schmitt 1999).

As humans' notion of reality is a mixture of personal lived experiences and media experiences (Weinberg and Nickel 1998), it is important that those sensual brand experiences are anchored in the world of consumer feelings and experiences, which make a genuine contribution to the quality of life (Weinberg 1992; Weinberg and Gröppel 1989). This must be achieved by means of an integrated mix of marketing instruments, including product and packaging design, distribution, advertising, Point-Of-Sales merchandise and PR, creating a unique web of consumption experiences (Kroeber-Riel and Weinberg 2003; Schmitt 1999). Because activation processes, and emotions in particular, have a tremendous impact on consumers' cognitive processes, sensual brand experiences established by experience-oriented communications offer the advantage of building up a unique USP in the mind of the consumer that would be difficult to imitate and, thus, sustainable in the long-term.

Although *experiential marketing* has become a common marketing practice and also led to the development of themed shopping centres worldwide, this concept has its limitations. Experiential marketing still relies on classic marketing communications (Schmitt 1999) and, therefore, increases rather than decreases the information overflow. While the content of the messages has changed from the provision of functional product information to the delivery of emotional brand experiences offering a certain degree of differentiation, the communication channels are still the same and, therefore, exposed to the competition of communications. Furthermore, from a

philosophical point of view, experiential marketing emphasises a state of “having experiences” by buying moments of happiness, which come with the brand as part of the ownership transfer. However, in terms of consumers actively experiencing the contribution of the brand to their individual quality of life, experiential marketing still falls short (Nufer 2002). This is the part where event-marketing comes into play as a further development in experience-oriented marketing communications. Its success stems from the ability to communicate on a level of “being” by involving consumers as active participants rather than passive recipients (Drengner 2003; Baum and Stalzer 1991).

The Role of Event-Marketing in the Marketing Communications Mix

Marketing Communications is generally regarded as the “voice of the brand” by which marketers inform, persuade, incite and remind (Keller 2001). Marketing communications can also emotionally arouse consumers. As the effects of any communication strategy will depend in part on the communication effects engendered by other communication strategies, marketing communication concepts should not be developed in isolation (Keller 2001). In this context, Zanger (2001) demanded that event-marketing, in order to be most effective, must be part of integrated experience-oriented marketing communications concepts. Otherwise, the outcome would be little more than the provision of short-term entertainment. However, event-marketing should be the strategic centre piece of this concept due the advantages of its following four constitutive features (Nufer 2002):

- ***Experience-orientation:***

The fact that consumers are encouraged to *actively experience* the brand by becoming part of a brand’s 3-dimensional hyperreality is the major difference between event-marketing and classic marketing communications, where consumers generally remain passive and distant recipients of brand messages (Drengner 2003; Nufer 2002; Zanger 2002). As personal lived experiences tend to be stronger than “second-hand” media experiences in determining consumers’ notion of reality, marketing-events are better equipped to convert marketing objectives in an experience-oriented way. Because they not only allow for visual and acoustic stimuli, but also for smell, touch and taste to intensify the brand experience (Nickel 1998), event-marketing leads to higher consumer activation and memorability (Nickel 2002; Zanger 2001). Furthermore, the brand experience offers consumers a contribution to their subjective quality of life (Varley and Crowther 1998; Weinberg and Nickel 1998).

- **Interactivity:**

While classic marketing communications is based on a monological provision of information, event-marketing offers a platform for *interactive and personal dialogues* (Drengner 2003; Nufer 2002) by involving consumers on a behavioural level (Zanger and Sistenich 1996). Because of participating voluntarily, consumers are not only highly involved in the event, but also tend to be open to interactions with other participants, spectators and brand representatives. Therefore, event-marketing is an ideal strategy to build up consumer-brand relationships (Sistenich 1999; Varley and Crowther 1998) and even brand communities (Cova and Cova 2002; McAlexander et al. 2002). Participants and spectators of the Adidas Streetball Challenge developed in co-operation with Adidas a fanzine-network for the Adidas Streetball brand, where they shared their hedonic values and interests. Thus, marketers are offered the opportunity to gather both feedback on users' perception of the brand and feedforward in form of suggestions for creative ideas and product improvements. In addition, event-marketing also provides an ideal means for interactively communicating the brand vision and values internally to staff members and encouraging them to personally contribute to a brand's success (de Chernatony 2001).

- **Self-initiation:**

The key difference between event-marketing and event sponsorship is that the latter is all about supporting independent, external events financially and logistically to gain from conditioned image transfer and public goodwill. In contrast, event-marketing is aimed at influencing consumers emotionally by *staging self-initiated marketing-events* that express the brand's hyperreality. One advantage is that the event property is fully owned by the marketer and, therefore, eliminates the problems that are normally posed by communication clutter and ambush marketing (Drengner 2003). Another advantage is that the marketer is in full control of the way in which sensual brand experiences are anchored in the world of consumer feelings and experiences (Nickel 2002; Nufer 2002; Weinberg and Nickel 1998). In other words, the event theme is completely built around the requirements of the brand message and the needs of the target audience as part of an integrated marketing communications concept (Sistenich 1999). Thus, events typically must be creative projects and should avoid the convenient, but ineffective me-too trap, often characterised by sales promotions (Nufer 2002; Zanger 2001).

- **Dramaturgy:**

Similar to a theatre play, event-marketing provides the stage on which marketers bring the brand's artificial hyperreality to life for their potential customers. But in order for consumers to emotionally experience the lived

brand-reality, it requires a *professional dramaturgy* that captures the imagination of the target audience and serves the increasing need for hyperreality and experiential consumption (Schulze 2000, 1998; Opaschowski 2000, 1998; Patterson 1998; Firat and Shultz 1997). For example, the idea of the Red Bull Flugtag is that participants give themselves wings. Therefore, the more the event-marketing strategy differs from consumers' everyday life experiences the higher is the degree of activation among consumers to engage with the communication platform (Sistenich 1999).

By keeping the theatre analogy, marketing-events can be imagined as *stages* on which marketers like *directors* bring their *plays* (the brand images) to life. Ideally, consumers are interactively involved on three levels. On the first level, depending on the nature of the marketing-events, a minority participate directly like *actors*. This minority is usually personally invited or selected via competitive application processes, which are integral elements of the experiential build up to the marketing-events themselves (Nickel 2002). On the second level, a larger number of consumers are indirectly involved as *spectators* who, at the same time, are creating and experiencing the atmosphere of marketing-events and often participate in additional side-activities. Also part of the second level are representatives of the local and national media who play the crucial role of intermediaries to the third level by reporting and commenting on the marketing-events. Finally, on the third level are those members of the target audience who, for various reasons, were not able to take part in the marketing-events. However, despite not having experienced the marketing-events first hand, they can be reached via word-of-mouth by participants and spectators from the other two levels, media reports and the marketers' various follow up activities. Consequently, follow-up activities, which work with the event theme and experience as part of an integrated experience-oriented marketing communications concept, are an important element of event-marketing besides the events themselves (Drengner 2003; Nickel 2002).

In general, event-marketing is not aimed at the achievement of short-term economic gains, such as immediate sales increases, but at the achievement of non-economic objectives in terms of contacts and communication. The objectives of event-marketing can be differentiated on two levels (Zanger 2001):

- **Operational objectives** predominantly deal with short-term effects, such as the level of emotional activation, the intensity of interactions, the willingness of participants to engage in dialogues or the number of direct contacts between participants and brand representatives.

- **Strategic objectives** are aimed at positively influencing brand familiarity, image, consumers' attitude and emotional attachment to the brand and, consequently, future buying intentions.

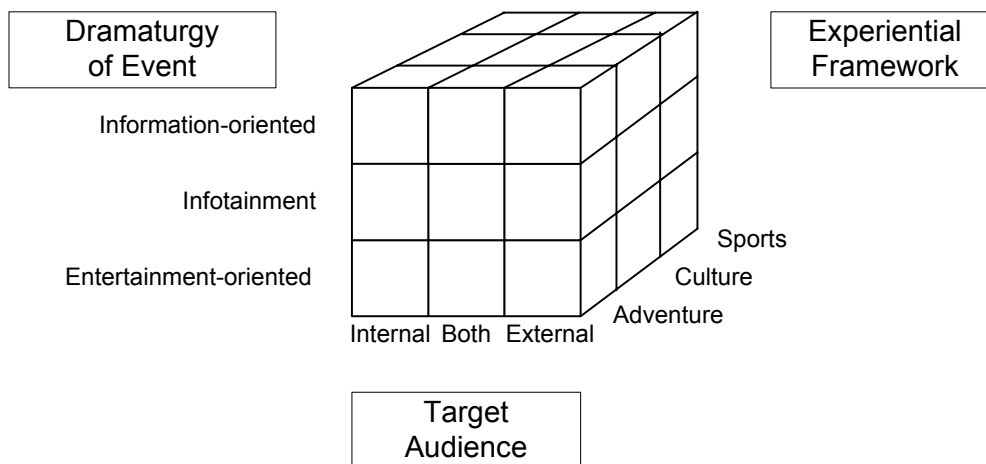


Figure 3. Event-Marketing-Cube (Based on: Zanger and Sistenich (1996) and Nufer (2002))

In theory and practice, this has already led to a variety of event-types within event-marketing. Based on Zanger and Sistenich's (1996) original model and Nufer's (2002) adaptation, the revised 3-dimensional "*event-marketing-cube*" (see figure 3) is a useful tool to outline the variety of options available to achieve both strategic and operational marketing objectives:

- The first dimension focuses on the target audience. Marketing-events can either be aimed at internal (corporate) or external (public) audiences or both.
- The second dimension focuses on the form of dramaturgy. According to Bruhn (2003), marketing-events can either be information-oriented (i.e. conferences or product presentations) or entertainment-oriented (i.e. competition or shows) or infotainment as a mixture of both.
- The third dimension focuses on the experiential framework (theme) with which consumers are encouraged to experience the brand. This can either be sports, culture or adventure.

Similar to Nufer (2002), this will result in 27 generic types of marketing-events that can be applied in event-marketing strategies, but should not be understood as a complete representation of all practical event-variations.

Another crucial factor in achieving marketing objectives is the creativity and uniqueness of the event-marketing strategy. Marketing-events à la carte

or me-too events, build on “once successful, always successful” formulas, are doomed to failure, as they may entertain customers but are unable to achieve the primary objective of creating unique brand-related experiences that lead to an emotional attachment to the brand (Nickel 2002; Zanger and Sistenich 1996). The following mini-case studies are aimed at giving an idea of how the theoretical event-marketing concept works in practice.

Mini-Case Study: The Red Bull Flugtag

The Austrian energy-drink producer Red Bull GmbH is worldwide famous for its humorous cartoon advertisements and the two slogans “Red Bull gives you wings!” and “Red Bull stimulates body and mind”. In addition, sponsorships of various fun and extreme sports are aimed to transfer the associated image of energy, endurance, alertness, concentration and reaction speed to the drink. However, one key element of Red Bull’s marketing communications concept is its self-initiated event-marketing strategy known as the “Red Bull Flugtag” (German for “*flying day*”). The Flugtag started back in 1992 and since then has taken place in over 36 cities across the world. It is an entertainment-oriented, public event-marketing strategy that offers the thrill of adventure as its experiential framework. The idea is to transfer both slogans into a lived experience for consumers by inviting members of the public to design and launch their homemade flying machines off a 6 metre ramp as far as possible across a river, cheered on by spectators and judged by a celebrity panel. In other words, the event is designed to reflect the brand’s association with creativity and innovation as a personal experience by stimulating consumers’ minds to give themselves “creative wings” (Wohlfeil and Whelan 2004).

For the Red Bull Flugtag in London’s Hyde Park on 3 August 2003, 40 teams out of an initial 10,000 applications (Fletcher 2003), who responded to a national awareness campaign, were finally selected as active participants to build their accepted designs and to leap off a runway built 6-metres above the Serpentine. Two dive teams, two pilot rescue boats and boats to remove the wreckage ensured personal and environmental safety, while catering, side-activities and visuals make sure that consumers associated the marketing-event with Red Bull and its slogans. Because the Flugtag attracted approximately 150,000 spectators, several big screens had been set up to those who could not catch a glimpse of the live action.

The contestants were judged on distance, creativity and performance by a celebrity panel, while the crowd had its vote via the clap-o-meter. Red Bull generally selects celebrities for this panel who themselves represent an energetic, sometimes anarchistic, youthful image such as Bam Margera (Jackass) and Avid Merrion (Bo’ Selecta!). The winning team could then

choose between a cheque of £5,000 or flying lessons. Apart from word-by-mouth by both participants and spectators, the national awareness campaign had also created a substantial media interest resulting in considerable PR coverage, i.e. ITV broadcasted an edited show at Saturday lunchtime. A specifically designated webpage consisting of photos, videoclips and anecdotes (www.redbullevents.co.uk/website/content.html) was designed to further leverage the personal brand experience into consumers' memory and create interest for further interaction.

Mini-Case Study: Guinness Storehouse

Although the Guinness brand has always been all about community, where people come together and share their stories, it was increasingly perceived in Ireland as a brand choice of the older, rural generations. In order to reconnect Guinness with younger Irish drinkers, who were switching more often to lagers and alcopops, the "Guinness Storehouse" in Dublin was opened to the public as a brand land in December 2000. Within the concept of event-marketing, brand lands are immobile corporate theme parks that provide an interactive mixture of entertainment and information around brand themes to consumers (Wohlfeil and Whelan 2004). Located in a former fermentation building, the dull industrial brick exterior leads into a foyer with a modern glass-and-steel interior symbolising a bridge between the heritage of the past and the demands of the future.

The 30 metres high glass atrium in the core of the building is shaped as a giant pint glass rising from the foyer up to the roof. Similar to the pouring of a Guinness pint, visitors now play the role of the settling Guinness drop, which they receive as an entry ticket. In other words, they experience the Guinness Storehouse by slowly working their way over seven floors, incorporating ten different areas, up to the Gravity Bar at the top. Each of the ten areas contains a range of displayed artefacts, graphic designs and interactive multimedia-shows that engage all the visitors' senses from visuals and sounds to smell, taste and touch. After a big screen welcomed the visitors to the world of Guinness with videoclips, the first area at the ground floor interactively introduces visitors to the four raw ingredients barley, water, hops and yeasts and their special qualities as the basics on which Guinness is made. The next level contains a graphically designed multimedia-show that is designated to Arthur Guinness, the foundation of Guinness and the Guinness family's contributions to the people of Dublin. This is followed by interactive areas covering the brewing process, life as an interpretation of what happens when Guinness and people are mixed together, the art of cooperage, transportation, Guinness's global success, its popular world of advertising and Diageo's drink-sensibly campaign by

actively engaging visitors in middle of the processes. Finally, like a Guinness drop, they settle at the top to enjoy their personal pint of Guinness in the Gravity bar with a view over Dublin City.

For internal marketing purposes, the Guinness Storehouse is not only home to the visitor experience, but houses a number of other facilities as well. One of the key areas is the Learning Centre, which features state-of-the-art training (How to pour the perfect pint) and conference facilities for holding motivation and training seminars. An events centre provides a number of first class venues catering for 20 to 1000 people for concerts, fashion shows, product launches or lectures. The Guinness Achieve, where records, artefacts dating back to 1759 are collected, preserved and stored, is also located in the Guinness Storehouse to document the history of Guinness. Finally, in the spirit of the experience economy (Pine and Gilmore 1998), a retail store is located at the exit offering a wide range of Guinness branded merchandise to "brand tourists". Despite not being the primary business, the success speaks for itself. Since December 2001, the Guinness Storehouse has already become the Number One tourist attraction in Dublin with more than 700,000 visitors per year. Furthermore, it has won several awards worldwide for "best brand experience" and "corporate themed entertainment".

Implications for Marketing Practice and Future Research

Several implications for international marketing practice and research can be drawn from the German experience. First, marketers should consider re-evaluating the return of their current marketing communication practices in terms of consumers' image perception and emotional attachment to the brand. Indeed, instead of pouring more and more resources in the decreasingly ineffective same old strategies, which are aimed at mass audiences and often interchangeable with those employed by their competitors, marketers should rather look for new and different ways to reach their particular target audiences. As a pull strategy within marketing communications, event-marketing allows marketers to concentrate their resources on highly target audiences, who are actually interested in engaging and interacting with the company and its brand-related hyperreality. Thus, by learning from the German experience, marketers would be in the position to achieve competitive advantages for their brands based on unique communication propositions that are difficult to imitate.

Second, marketers should strongly consider applying the transition from transaction-oriented marketing to relationship-oriented marketing to the business-to-consumer environments as well (Evans et al. 2004). However, the difficulty is that there is little direct interaction taking place between manufacturers and end users in those markets. And as Evans et al. (2004)

rightly pointed out, how many people want to have a relationship with a "Pot Noodles" or a can of coke? Relationships can only exist between people as part of an interaction process (Patterson 1998). By implementing event-marketing strategies, marketers can avail of the opportunity to provide their particular target audiences with an interactive stage for unique brand experiences by communicating the brand myth and heritage on a behavioural level (Zanger and Sistenich 1996). Thus, marketers are not only able to anchor the brand as a real-lived pleasurable experience into the mind of consumers, but also to engage in dialogues with their target audiences, which could result in obtaining valuable feedback and feed forward for brand development. In addition, due to its highly targeted appeal, event-marketing allows for social interaction between like-minded consumers as well, which is centred on the brand theme. This can either lead to the brand becoming an "embedded actor" in a particular subculture (Cova and Cova 2002) or to the development of a community with a shared interest in the brand (McAlexander et al. 2002). In both cases, the outcome would strengthen consumer-brand relationships on the basis of shared emotional experiences.

According to Zanger (2002), research in event-marketing has followed three phases. The first phase, covering most of the 1990s, was determined by the search for theories that were able to explain the effects of event-marketing. In the second phase, theoretical models were developed to determine the effectiveness of event-marketing from either an effects-analytical or a control-oriented perspective. Finally, the current third phase involves the empirical examination of models and influencing variables on event-marketing. However, all research to-date was conducted by German researchers and restricted only to its implementation in German-speaking countries. While a different understanding of what constitutes event-marketing may be a significant inhibitor in the stimulation process in English-speaking countries, companies such as Red Bull (Fletcher 2003), Daimler-Chrysler (Irwin and Greenberg 2003), Adidas-Salomon (Cova and Cova 2002) and Diageo (Kirsner 2002) have already proven in recent years that event-marketing strategies appeal to an international and culturally diverse audience as well.

This now leads to the interesting question: Why did event-marketing emerge in German-speaking countries, but not in English-speaking countries (not even under a different label), although marketers in most affluent Western societies are confronted by the same major changes in their marketing environments and in consumer behaviour as their German counterparts? Was it just another Columbus' egg, where simply nobody here thought of it before, or have researchers simply ignored new marketing developments in non-English speaking markets? Thus, further research is

required to narrow this significant information gap by identifying the key drivers and inhibitors in the stimulation and implementation process of event-marketing strategies.

Furthermore, because event-marketing is a pull strategy within marketing communications, where the target audience actively seeks to engage with the brand's hyperreality, its success is highly dependent on consumers' voluntary participation in marketing-events (Wohlfeil and Whelan 2004). Therefore, another important and interesting research question needs answering in order to determine whether event-marketing allows for a unique communication proposition in English-speaking countries as well: Why do consumers' participate in marketing-events that are specifically designed to communicate the same brand messages they usually tend to avoid by zapping? Consequently, the authors' ongoing research is aimed at investigating consumers' motivations for voluntary participation in marketing-events as a key factor in the implementation process and thereby developing a model of good practice (Wohlfeil and Whelan 2004).

Conclusion

As a result of significant changes in their marketing environments and in consumer behaviour, marketers in affluent Western societies are confronted with a decreasing effectiveness of their classic marketing communications and, therefore, are in need of new ways to position their brands in the minds of consumers. By taking the German experience as a benchmark, this paper has introduced the event-marketing concept to an international audience as an exciting new alternative in the marketing communications mix that actively involves consumers on a behavioural level (Zanger and Sistenich 1996). As nothing is more convincing than personal experiences (Nickel 1998), event-marketing appeals to same postmodern social dynamics that have driven recent developments in leisure, recreation, tourism and retailing by providing unique multi-sensual brand experiences in a hyperreal, but personally lived environment. However, while creating brand-related realities for consumers by staging marketing-events has become increasingly popular in Continental European countries, event-marketing strategies were not implemented in English-speaking countries until very recently. Therefore, further research in this communication strategy has been proposed.

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