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Brand activation plan example

Brand Activation isn’t a simple task. Because there are always new and dynamic ways to allow consumers to directly interact with a brand, many brands respond to possible brand activation efforts by going as large and broad in their campaigns as possible, without necessarily being certain that they can predictably tie the engagement they create to customer acquisition and revenue. In a narrower sense, brand activation can apply to campaigns and initiatives that help consumers feel connected with a brand. In this respect, activation is critical because generating personal, emotional responses form consumers is essential to building or maintaining any lasting brand. Doing this on a consistent, cost-effective and scalable basis is critical to having the most successful possible campaigns. Many brands are already finding ways to do this with new digital and omnichannel technologies. Instead of looking only to traditional, large scale, costly brand activation strategies, marketers now have the opportunity to focus on cost-effectiveness, accessibility and personalization with their brand activations to get better results on a consistent basis. Cost Effectiveness and Brand Activation Big brand activations are usually fairly expensive – they require anything from huge TV ad buys to in-store displays and representatives to promotional buys to experiential props (sound equipment creeping into marketing spend much?). Basically, any real big brand activation is going to take over you and your agency’s time and be the focal point of your marketing calendar. This campaign actually generated plenty of PR, but giving consumers a product for 1 cent (if they taunt a rival, of course) isn’t most brand’s idea of a sustainable engagement. Getting more users to download a mobile app, however, probably is. It’s important to make an impact with your leading campaigns, but practicing huge campaigns without smaller or iterative approaches can’t be the only way. In response to this issue, a lot of brands are starting to drop experiential activations because they’re just too expensive. On a broader level, marketers who still want the benefit of quality activations need to think about connecting experiences together in the ways consumers now expect. This is critical because consumers aren’t just spoiled for choice with content, but the amount of apps and brand sites they’ll give any reasonable attention to is limited. As consumers, we are actually running out of time in the day to absorb content. Even as brands begin to spend less on campaigns that rely on engagement, it’s becoming more important than ever to create a personal connection in order to acquire and retain customers. Instead of just spending more money to drive this engagement, cost effective, scalable activation means you should look for viral, user-generated or otherwise digital solutions to make up for the cost of things like 1 cent whoppers (even if it does drive users to an app). Generating mass appeal on command also has its own budgetary demands, which means where you can’t go all-in on a strategy, you need to focus on more one-to-one engagement with consumers year-round, allowing your brand to consistently and repeatedly stand out in a cost-effective way. According to Les Binet and Peter Fields, even though certain channels report better activation effects, they’re usually used less frequently. There are always tradeoffs in brand activation – how much you choose to spend is secondary to how distinct and unique your activation is. Source: EffWorks. Accessibility and Brand Activation This is where accessibility comes into play. Everybody has FOMO, but the good thing about FOMO (for a marketer) is that it drives us to take actions that keep us from missing out. However, if too many consumers can’t engage with your brand activation strategy, you’re the one who’s going to be missing out on opportunities to engage. Even though many brand activation campaigns are ambitious in reach, they inevitably can only directly engage a limited number of consumers. Like in the Burger King example above, of all the people who might’ve seen content from that campaign, how many actually took action to download their app or follow through on the 1-cent Whopper offer? The percentage would be relatively low – valuable as it may be – but the entry-point to activation is still a detour from the way customers would normally interact with the brand. Focusing on accessible activation is a better way to maximize the benefits of a campaign. Apps and microsites have been a successful way to do this for many years, but those are usually one-offs that see diminished engagement over time. Gathering email at a storefront or on a website is one entry point to creating more experiences, but that channel is saturated all the same. Finding ways to integrate the experiences consumers are accustomed to engaging most intensely with is the best opportunity to have flexible, scalable and effective brand activation approaches. It may be hard to believe, but even Avocados need a firm squeeze. Avocado’s from Mexico created a Wal-Mart-exclusive chatbot to engage consumers with various recipes and help about picking avocados. This was high-level engagement, but shows they didn’t have to break the bank. For instance, let’s say you’re launching a new product line in 50 stores across a handful of core regions. You’re going to target your approach to the stores that are closest to your most valuable consumers – they could be affluent or price-conscious, demographically specific, categorized by profession, or simply based on a map of where you find the highest density of existing loyal customers (identified by email or other means). If your campaign creative is effective and your promotional positioning is truly attractive, how are you going to make the most of the engagement you can generate once people show up in-store? Automating interactions, without necessarily asking people to download another app or subscribe to another email list, is one of the best ways to do this. Whether it’s through web interfaces, social media, messaging channels, or other preferred modes of communication, you can make the most of your core activation and avoid missing out on interested customers. If you’re activation is cost effective and accessible, then you can finally focus on incorporating a creative approach that allows the campaign to reach its full potential. Getting an Emotional Response From the Individual Consumer Sometimes, brand activation campaigns are by nature a group or mass experience. In these cases, being part of a group or movement means that a campaign isn’t necessarily personalized. This “feel” for things usually comes down to group events, observing unique public performances or generating in-store buzz with the launch of a new product. All of those are effective, however, these are also the kind of expensive and unpredictable activations that are causing the same drop in experiential marketing spend mentioned above. What’s more, if they don’t get PR, it’s hard to confirm if they really helped build or maintain your brand. Ultimately, one-to-one activations that go through flexible channels like web interfaces, messaging and social media are the most customizable way to achieve cost-effective, accessible and highly customizable brand activations. This not only fits better with today’s content and marketing landscape (while also working within the bounds of “bowling alone“), but also allows consumers to form relationships with brands in new and novel ways. If you develop an experience that reaches through these channels with flair, thoughtfulness, personality and a distinct voice or outlook, you can match what your consumer is truly looking for and turn that affinity into a longer-term relationship. Sally Hansen is one brand that has adopted an approach like this, and their use of messaging and Conversational AI (Learn more about what Conversational AI is) has helped create more opportunities for engagement and customer acquisition as a result. Nailcare brand Sally Hansen deployed Conversational AI to drive engagement over the holidays, collecting 11,000 emails in five days, with an opt-in rate of 85%. This is one example of a brand activation strategy that didn’t require massive investment, but did maximize engagement out of the reach it generated. Thinking More Broadly about Brand Activation These channels offer more opportunities than ever before to create an emotional impact on your core customers. Instead of large scale, unpredictable campaigns, integrating these possibilities with campaigns executed at any scale – whether local, regional, national or global – can enable your brand to get the best possible results. Brand activation can’t serve a catchall for how you try to get a message to your customers – it’s always at heart been about building loyalty among a brand’s core group of ambassadors. Emotional connection is a core component because it feeds the passion of your most loyal customers, who in turn connect the people around them with brands they’ll also love. If you’re thinking about a brand activation process that has manageable incremental costs, digital campaigns are the right place to start. Traditional approaches still have their place, but the reality is that they need to offer predictability, reliability and personalization the way digital marketing does. Conversational AI is one of the best tools to integrate these experiences for individual consumers, providing both the personalized marketing and activation possibilities you need to help consumers feel more connected with your brand. Contact Automat to learn more about what you can do to engage consumers in a scalable, cost-effective and emotionally impactful way with Conversational AI A term like “brand activation” is almost guaranteed to inspire skepticism among modern marketers. In the age of information overload, marketers face the challenge of separating flash-in-the-pan trends from truly valuable business tactics. But, we’re here to tell you this: brand activation is much more than an industry buzzword. In the past, it was merely considered a bonus if a brand resonated with its audience on a personal level. Now, these personal connections are essential to modern business success. In fact, personal value has twice the impact of business value when it comes to B2B purchase decisions (source). Marketers are constantly looking for new ways to cultivate deeper, personal connections between their brand and their target audience. Enter, brand activation. Today, we’ll walk you through the concept of brand activation, why it’s a valuable branding practice, and plus, we offer several tips and examples to guide you through successful brand activations. Let’s get into it! What Is Brand Activation? Brand activation refers to a campaign, event, or interaction through which your brand generates awareness and builds lasting connections with your target audience. Most brand activations are interactive, allowing audiences to engage directly with a brand and its products. The definition of brand activation is often misconstrued or confused with more general branding strategies. The confusion is understandable: building awareness and connecting to an audience is indeed the focus of most branding and marketing initiatives. But, brand activation refers to a specific campaign or event, an isolated experience with the singular purpose of elevating your brand — rather than the general, ongoing process of branding. Why Is Brand Activation Important? Imagine your company just launched yesterday. You know your target audience, but they don’t know you — and the few who are aware of your brand don’t have any meaningful connection to it. In order to get your brand off the ground, you need to make a splash. You need to generate engagement. You need to give your audience a reason to be excited about your company. In short, you need to activate your brand. According to HubSpot, brand activations are one-off, in-person events, experiences, and interactions that forge lasting emotional connections between a brand and their target audience (source). A brand activation will jolt your brand to life, garner attention from new audiences, and redefine how your existing audience perceives you. And with the right approach, brand activations can be remarkably effective — 98% of people feel more inclined to purchase a brand’s products after attending an activation (source). 4 Types Of Brand Activation It’s true that brand activation requires a lot of prep work, perhaps more so than the typical marketing activation campaign or event. But, the good news is, modern marketers who want to activate their brand have a wide variety of options at their disposal. Let’s look at some of the most effective marketing and brand activation strategies you can try today. 1. Experiential marketing Experiential marketing, sometimes referred to as engagement marketing, is an activation strategy in which a brand creates an immersive, real-world experience for the purpose of engaging with their audience. These experiences don’t exclusively involve a brand’s specific products, but also the values a brand believes in and the sentiments it wishes to relay to its audience. For example, let’s say you want to leverage experiential marketing to promote a photo editing software. You create a pop-up photo booth where people can take pictures with their friends and then receive stylized edits of their photographs to take home. This campaign drives awareness to your brand and generates interest in your product, all while providing a fun and engaging experience for your audience. Most experiential marketing campaigns involve live participation, often as a part of a larger event or show. But, virtual and augmented reality technologies have also paved the way for digital experiential marketing. Virtual tours, games, and interactive content enable your audience to engage with your brand from the comfort of their own homes. 2. Samples and free trial campaigns A sample campaign is one of the most tried-and-true forms of brand activation. The goal is simple: you let people try a product for free with the hopes that they’ll love it and want to spend money on it, or on similar offerings from your brand. Keep in mind, there’s a right way and a wrong way to pull off a sample campaign. Think about all the times you’ve struggled to avoid an over-eager shopping mall vendor who tries to force a free energy drink or snack or random knick-knack into your hands. It’s not pleasant, nor does it inspire you to check out or even remember the brand in question. Rather than accost strangers in less-than-ideal settings, choose your environment wisely. If you want to pull off an in-person sample campaign, consider upcoming events that your target audience is likely to attend. Fortunately, it’s even easier to orchestrate a sample campaign digitally. Simply put together a list of customer addresses, and send them a surprise sample of one of your products. Include a message which asks the recipient to share a picture of the free sample on social media. Or, if your company sells intangible products like software and technical solutions, you can craft an email campaign offering a free trial of your product. 3. In-store brand activation The purpose of brand activation is to forge strong connections between your brand and audience. Naturally, there’s no better setting for a brand activation than business headquarters. This method is most popular among retailers and other B2C brands. They host events at their stores, provide accommodations like food and beverages, and allow their audience to see and sample products in person. Ideally, people leave the experience with a newfound appreciation for these brands and how they treat their customers. This form of brand activation is less common among B2B brands, however. We understand why — desks and cubicles don’t exactly inspire the same appeal as a brick-and-mortar shop. But, a business office can still be fertile ground for an on-site activation. For example, you might invite your target audience to a cookout outside your office to celebrate the beginning of summer. While they enjoy their complimentary hot dogs and hamburgers, customers get the chance to interact directly with the people who create, market, and sell your products. 4. Industry events and trade shows Last but not least, trade shows and industry events provide ample opportunity to activate your brand. Whether you book space for a branded booth on the trade show floor, or host a live seminar or presentation, these events boost brand authority and introduce your brand to new audiences. Plus, an industry event is the perfect setting to try out other brand activation techniques like experiential marketing and sample giveaways. We’ve discussed a number of event marketing tips in the past, so we’ll move on from here. But, if you want to activate your brand by attending or hosting an event, here are a few great articles to get you started: 4 Tips For Effective Brand Activation Before we look at some inspirational examples, let’s review a few important tips to keep in mind for your next brand activation. No matter what method and setting you choose, these guidelines will help you craft the most rewarding experience for your audience. 1. Respect your audience. Brand activations often receive the less favorable title of “publicity stunts”. These are the over-the-top, annoying, transparent attempts to shine a spotlight on your brand at any costs. Let’s put it this way, a customer will remember an inconvenient interaction with a brand but not in a way that will win the brand more business. In fact, when brand activation goes wrong, it can have the complete opposite effect. Bad brand activation feels invasive, annoying, and crosses personal boundaries. This leads prospects and customers to purposely go out of their way to avoid your company. Make sure to plan and prepare your brand activation with your audience in mind. These campaigns should be fun and engaging, but avoid any activity that is off-brand, inappropriate, or irritating. When in doubt, we recommend discussing your idea with some of your top customers to gauge their response. 2. Humanize your brand. Human interaction is the fastest way to kickstart meaningful relationships with your target audience. No matter what method of brand activation you choose, it’s important to involve real human beings who represent your brand. For example, a giant billboard on a busy highway might draw attention to your brand. But, a pop-up booth run by three of your actual employees is a much more personal and effective way to activate your brand. Human interaction puts a face to your company, which humanizes your brand in a way that makes you appear more relatable and trustworthy. 3. Surprise your audience — without shocking them. A successful brand activation is a bit of a tightrope walk: it should be on-brand and respectful of your audience, but it should also surprise and delight your audience. The element of surprise is an effective tool for any brand. When your audience doesn’t expect a fun and engaging experience, that experience becomes all the more enjoyable. Get creative and take chances with your brand activation without straying too far from your company’s core values. Think of it this way, a brand activation is an opportunity to color outside the lines a bit — just make sure you’re coloring on the same page as your customers. 4. Listen to feedback. Brand activations are centered around interacting with your audience. But, in order to be effective, that interaction must be a two-way street. Your audience should come away from the experience with a deeper understanding and appreciation for your brand, and vice versa. Make sure you collect feedback before, during, and after a brand activation. Leverage social listening to gauge the tone of public conversation surrounding the campaign. Document positive and negative interactions that take place during the activation, whether it’s a digital campaign or a live activity. We also recommend surveying your audience once the campaign has wrapped up. Then, use their feedback to determine whether your brand activation achieved its desired effect. 4 Examples Of Successful Brand Activation The best brand activations are wholly unique and creative — but that doesn’t mean you can’t draw inspiration from other successful brands! Let’s wrap this topic up by looking at a few of the most memorable brand activations we’ve ever come across. 1. Apple Apple is one of the biggest and most identifiable brands in the world, but any brand can learn from the tech juggernaut’s “One Night on iPhone 7” campaign. To promote the latest iPhone’s new camera functionality, Apple hired photographers from all over the world to capture photos of unique environments. These pictures were then used to illustrate the new low-light image capturing capabilities of the newest iPhone. Activation campaigns are about a brand and its audience, but they can also draw attention to products in a more creative, less sales-y fashion. The best way to generate excitement for a product is to put it into action. Show your audience what they can accomplish with the product’s new features, as Apple did so expertly in their “One Night on iPhone 7” campaign. 2. Lipton Iced Tea Imagine you’re walking to work on an unspectacular Friday morning. Except today, you encounter a massive yellow water slide on your morning commute. You’re startled yet amused and you join the growing crowd of onlookers to see what all the fuss is about. This isn’t a fictitious scenario; it’s exactly what Lipton Iced Tea did when they set up a giant water slide in the middle of downtown London. As crowds gathered, the Lipton team handed out free samples to promote a new campaign, complete with messaging that tied their brand to fun summer activities. We won’t go over all the do’s and don’ts of setting up a water slide in a busy city center. But, any brand can learn from Lipton’s fun and unique brand activation. Above all else, aim to capture attention and offer your audience a welcome surprise as they go about their day. The most memorable experiences are often the most unexpected — so find ways to surprise and delight your target audience, without forcing them to participate or making them feel uncomfortable. 3. Vitaminwater As is the case with many brand activations, Vitaminwater leveraged a large event as an opportunity to draw attention to their brand. At the WayHome Music Festival, Vitaminwater created a branded “misting station” where concert-goers could cool off from the summer heat as they moved through the festival grounds. Vitaminwater’s brand activation worked so well because it was both fun and practical. The biggest drawback to outdoor summer events is the relentless heat. So, the misting station was the perfect way to draw an audience of appreciative festival attendees. If you want to activate your brand at an event, mold your activation campaign to fit the event’s environment. Put yourself in the shoes of an attendee and think about what would catch their eye and make them stop at a certain station or booth. 4. Contours The baby stroller company Contours faced a unique and humorous problem: the people who “use” their products (i.e. babies) can’t exactly give articulate customer feedback. So, Contours built adult-sized baby strollers to simulate a child’s experience for adult customers and collect feedback on the product. On the surface, Contours’ giant strollers seem like a lighthearted attention grab. But, the wacky concept actually served a number of valuable purposes. The audience had the opportunity to test out a product in a way they’d never expect. The brand had the opportunity to collect honest feedback that would otherwise be impossible. This campaign shows what brands can accomplish when they think outside-the-box and present their products in unique forms. Contours didn’t create adult baby strollers just to be unconventional — the creative idea aligned with real business goals related to customer experience and feedback. Final Thoughts On Brand Activation Building a strong brand is a gradual, multifaceted process. Don’t expect one campaign or event to turn your brand into an overnight phenomenon or instantly double your audience. But, in tandem with your ongoing branding initiatives, brand activations can provide the added boost you’re looking for. They help increase exposure, endear your audience to your brand, and reshape the way your customers perceive your company and products. In a time where perception and personal connection is so integral to business success, brand activations should be an essential element to your branding strategy. For more help building your B2B brand, contact ZoomInfo today. We’re a leading B2B contact database and we have the tools you need to scale your marketing efforts and grow your business.

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