

# Digital Brands + Live Experiences

CONNECTING WITH YOUR AUDIENCE IRL

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**publicis**  
EXPERIENCES



## **When done well, experiential marketing — or more specifically, live experiences — delivers opportunities for consumers to interact with brands in uniquely meaningful ways.**

For brands with a real-world footprint, live engagement is a no-brainer. But for brands that exist solely in the realm of zeros and ones, connecting with users in real life can seem like a big leap — one digital brands must take if they want to build lasting consumer relationships.



Why is now such a critical time for digital brands to add live experiences to their marketing mix? With a fresh awareness of the consequences of ultra-personalized news feed “bubbles,” consumers are grappling with their digital media and product choices. Consumers have a renewed commitment to improving their digital health — and a sense that they’re overdue for a check-up.



**Perhaps inevitably, this increasing wariness of digital information is affecting our perception of brands we only interact with through our digital devices.**

The result is an environment where the pull of human, flesh-and-blood experiences is becoming stronger — and digital brands are increasingly seeking opportunities to hybridize their relationships with consumers.

### **In this paper, we’ll outline and explore:**

- The cultural landscape digitally native brands inhabit
- Consumer, tech and marketing trends
- The benefits digital brands can gain through meeting their audiences offline
- How digital brands can make meaningful real-life connections

## THE LAND OF ECHO CHAMBERS & CHATTY BOTS

Over the last decade, consumer demand for increasingly personalized products has pushed brands and media channels to serve up meticulously curated experiences. On the one hand, personalization is a must for brands that want to show their customers that they truly understand their needs and wants – and it works.

On the other hand, you have the “echo chamber” – a digital bubble where information sources don’t challenge, but only reflect personal viewpoints. This phenomenon has recently led to an unprecedented backlash against digital media sources (and our Facebook friends) for enabling and producing narrowly targeted user experiences.

We have to wonder – is the familiarity that digital brands have worked so hard to cultivate for their audiences actually starting to breed distrust?

### Relationship Issues: Why Consumers Swipe Left

Digitally native brands – those whose services are accessed via devices instead of physical stores – are able to connect with consumers whenever they fire up an app or log in to a service.

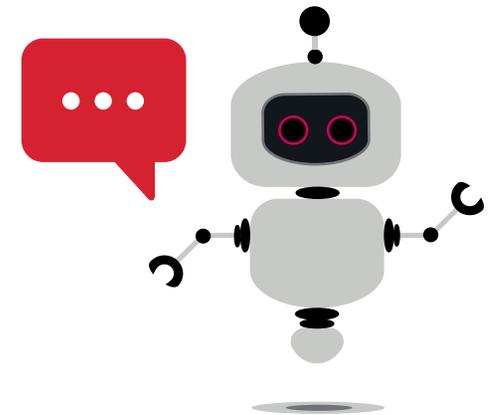
Through artificial intelligence, algorithms and predictive interfaces, these brands can deliver the level of immediate, always-on customer service that today’s consumers expect and demand. And with data collected through users’ ongoing interactions, digital brands have a unique advantage in getting to know their audiences – as far as 1-to-1, device-dependent experiences allow, anyway.

### Have you hugged your chatbot lately?

The rise of artificially intelligent chatbots and speech-controlled Internet of Things (IoT) assistants such as Amazon Echo’s Alexa or Google Home signals a shift in the fundamental ways people expect to interact with and receive services from a brand.

But even as 2016 saw Facebook Messenger introducing more than 30,000 chatbots and Google scanning romance novels to make its AI more conversational, data still has limits – especially when it comes to evoking human emotion.

The friendliest of chatbots or app alerts can be ignored or silenced, or not ask the right questions, leading to a frustrating or dead-end user experience – and perhaps triggering Clippy flashbacks for older generations. Researchers are making advances in machine learning every day, but for now, it still takes a human touch to really get at what consumers are thinking and feeling, and to deliver what they want.



## Humans: The Missing Link

In this climate of fact-check fatigue, Millennial marketing cynicism, a fragmented and oversaturated media landscape, and short attention spans, it's critical that digital brands get some face time with their audiences in order to build trust and create meaningful relationships.

This means offering experiences that put a living, breathing human face on your brand, or finding positive ways to connect your brand to everyday human activities.

Live experiences – from pop-up stores to music festival activations – have the power to build trust and convey authenticity, the Holy Grail of B2C engagement. They can also break through the noise and clutter of competing apps and online services, as well as consumers' algorithm-controlled information and marketing feeds.

According to the Mintel North America 2017 Consumer Trends forecast, “Brand disruption is paramount in getting inside of consumers' echo chambers and making connections with them. Human interaction could prove effective because advice from real people has the benefit of being more trustworthy.”

**“Artificial intelligence isn't equipped to deal with more complex or more nuanced situations that customers face on a daily basis. So although it's perfectly fine to get excited about bots, it's also critical to remember that the main reason people love messaging is because of the human being on the other end.”**

(Source: Information Age)



## Perhaps that's one reason why digital juggernaut Amazon, somewhat ironically, opened brick-and-mortar bookstores in Seattle, San Diego and Portland, OR.

Amazon Books merchandises online bestsellers in a physical store staffed with human booksellers. Although customers can get the same products and weigh user reviews online, here they get real-time human recommendations, plus the chance to not just preview, but flip through an entire book's pages, before buying. The ability to see and touch the books and devices – and talk to experts – in person offers stronger validation of shoppers' purchasing decisions.

Meanwhile, Amazon Go takes a different tack, proving that emotional connections aren't just about human interaction, but the promise of instant gratification in a real-world, tech-enabled retail environment.

The store's beta experience, currently located near Amazon's Seattle HQ, uses so-called "Just Walk Out" technology to allow shoppers to grab what they want from the store's shelves and then leave without passing through check-out lines. The Amazon Go app tracks user selections and handles transaction charges.

While they don't employ humans, these "driverless" stores are live experiences that put the power of the entire transaction in shoppers' hands (literally) and still create a positive connection between the consumer and the digital brand.

### Empathetic Tech FTW

In a counterpoint to the automation revolution, French grocery chain Monoprix responded to the launch of Amazon Go with their own promo video that parodies the Amazon spot and introduces their own new service.

Like Amazon Go shoppers, Monoprix customers can walk out without paying – but they can't take their groceries with them.

Monoprix still employs the services of a checker, who'll tally your tab after you leave, and then dispatch your groceries for delivery within one hour. So while shoppers don't have to lug their groceries home, it's not exactly grab-and-go instant gratification.

Nice try, humans. We have to give this point to technology because, as in the case of Amazon Go, it's hard to argue that automation isn't pro-human and capable of empathy, despite its impact on human-occupied jobs.



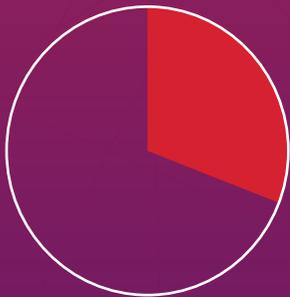
# THE MEDIA ECHO CHAMBER: THREE FACTORS

By the end of 2016, three factors had surfaced as the main architects of consumers' media bubbles.

## Algorithmic Bias

Human bias is something we as individuals can control, but algorithmic bias – as experienced on Facebook and Instagram – is much harder to opt out of.

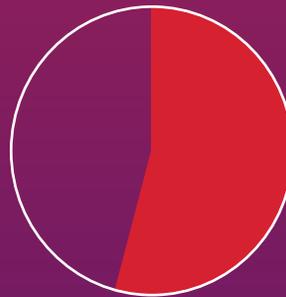
**31% of U.S. consumers** say they use algorithm-driven social media platforms as a news source.<sup>1</sup>



## Fake News (aka Propaganda)

It's every consumer's responsibility to verify information sources, but deceptive digital media sites are getting smarter about how they fabricate and peddle fake news.

**54% of U.S. consumers** admit they aren't always sure if online information is true.<sup>1</sup>



## Post-Truthiness

It's been 10 years since "truthiness" (beliefs based on gut feelings) was named Merriam-Webster's Word of the Year. Thanks to the 2016 election cycle, its close cousin, "post-truth," earned the same designation from Oxford Dictionaries.

**Post-truth (adj.):**  
Relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Mintel North America 2017 Consumer Trends

<sup>2</sup> Oxford Dictionaries

## FOUR BENEFITS OF LIVE EXPERIENCES

Taking your digital brand out into the real world to meet your users has obvious advantages – for one, people crave and enjoy human interaction. But how do live experiences create additional value for your digital business? We've identified four key benefits.

### Following through with always-on expectations.

Consumers expect immediate service and results – and as technological advances continue to provide greater convenience, expectations only get higher. Good service is no longer limited to one-off transactions, but extends to ongoing interaction.

**In the summer of 2014, PBJS helped Microsoft's Bing in the Classroom safe-search program be there for teachers.** We sent the Back-to-School Crew, teams of Microsoft employee volunteers, to 10 schools nationwide to give tech training and troubleshooting presentations to more than 200 teachers. Talks at each school were built around teachers' top technology needs.

The goal of this program was to help teachers and administrators get ready for the new school year while driving brand affinity and adoption. What were the results of Microsoft Bing following through on their brand promise? A much higher grade. Favorability of Bing jumped from 33 to 100 percent among teachers surveyed before and after their involvement in the Back-to-School Crew program.



**“Moving forward, the approaches most prized by consumers will be hybrid ones that pair the convenience of robots with unsurpassable humanity.”**

— Mintel



## Transforming the digital into the tangible.

Turn users into loyal fans through hands-on live experiences. By giving consumers opportunities to explore and create through the lens of your brand, you not only create rewarding moments, but also show your audience that your brand is not afraid to be open and inclusive. You know: human. The result of tangible and transparent engagement is more powerful – and memorable – than any digital marketing campaign.

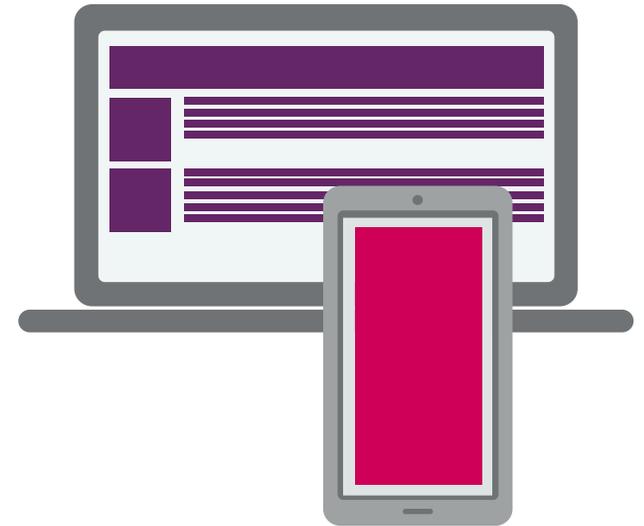
## Learning in the real world.

In digital-only transactions, there's a constant exchange of data between the user and brand, whose actions inform and guide future actions. A PwC study on creating post-transaction customer value defines this as "consumption data," which may take the form of "statistics on consumption, relevant social alerts and social connections." This is all very helpful to the user and the brand, of course, and increases the digital product's value.

Live experiences provide similar opportunities to generate and learn from real-world, or post-transaction, consumption data that goes beyond online comments and reviews. It's a win-win for consumers and digital brands. Being empowered to share in-person customer feedback naturally changes how people feel about a brand, and can help a brand shape future transactions and product innovations.

**"[L]ive events are completing the circle in the marketing journey created around the modern consumer, from the initial brand engagement, all the way to the desired action by the end user."**

(Source: Forbes)



## Expanding 1-to-1 into 1-to-many reach.

Live experiences also have the benefit of transforming solely 1-to-1 digital B2C relationships, where the user is only interacting with the brand via her personal device, into 1-to-many social amplification opportunities that include potential new users.

Attendee bonus: live experiences provide social sharing opportunities for attendees that will amplify a brand's message, potentially recruiting new users. According to the Event Marketer 2016 Event Track report, 98 percent of consumers create digital content at branded content at events – and 100 percent share it with their social networks.

# 72%

of consumers say they positively view brands that provide quality event content opportunities and experiences.

# 74%

say engaging with branded event marketing experiences makes them more likely to buy the products being promoted.

(Source: Event Marketer)



## FOUR WAYS DIGITAL BRANDS CAN MAKE LASTING IMPRESSIONS IRL

These four tactics can be applied by any brand. However, they're especially important for digital brands attempting to create an authentic and memorable real-world presence that connects with their audience – even if it's just for a moment.

### Listen and be present.

# 01

As in any good relationship, it's important to take the time to listen. For digital brands, listening is easy. But turning user habits and feedback into meaningful two-way conversations is more of a challenge when you're only interacting via digital channels. As with any online romance, you're eventually going to want to meet your brand's paramours in real life.

**On-demand online mattress retailer Casper understands that live experiences are an essential step in the brand relationship.** One Casper activation, the Snooze Bar, put pop-up showrooms in several cities to let customers test the merchandise while sipping cocktails and having artists draw interpretations of their dreams. Their mobile Nap Tour took the brand's quirky personality further, parking a "napmobile" on city streets and inviting passersby inside for some impromptu shut-eye.

Each of these experiences used what Casper had already learned about their target customers through digital data to create in-person engagements that continued the brand conversation in authentic ways.

(Image Source: Casper)



**“Experiential marketing in general is really important to Casper because we’re interested in picking up where our digital conversations leave off and connecting with consumers, blurring the lines between our social media following and our actual communities on the ground.”**

— Monica Brouwer, Director of Experiential Marketing, Casper

(Source: Event Marketer)



## Be true to your brand.

Remember, authenticity is mandatory. Brands can't be shy about transparency – consumers have an uncanny knack for sensing when there's something off-brand about a live experience.

Avoid gimmicks and stunts that may confuse users about what the activation has to do with your brand, or worse, eclipse your brand identity, with the stunt becoming more memorable than your brand. In other words, if you want to achieve greater intimacy with your audience, don't forget to do you.

**PayPal takes the essence of its cashless payment service – helpfulness – and successfully carries that through to its live experiences.** Since 2012, PBJs has partnered with PayPal at the Outside Lands music festival to alleviate common pain points for festival fans. Activations authentic to the PayPal brand have enhanced the festival experience in helpful ways, including onsite locker rentals, a convenience store that benefits charity, games in which everyone's a winner, and integration of PayPal POS and mobile sale technology into festival vending.

Year after year, festivalgoers have responded by making the PayPal footprint a mandatory OSL destination. In 2014, the PayPal activation garnered 57.5M+ total social impressions, up 500 percent from 2013, and tent attendance saw a 20 percent lift from the previous year.



## Leverage brand-enhancing partnerships.

You don't have to go it alone in the real world. Buddy up with an established and complementary digital or analog organization to extend your reach through their positive brand vibes and built-in audience. Just make sure that you partner with a brand that enhances, rather than overshadows, your own. The goal is to buoy your brand by association, not confuse consumers with an odd-couple pairing.

Whether listing a Halloween night stay in a Romanian castle (complete with a coffin as sleeping accommodations), or Publicis Groupe founder Maurice Lévy's former office, Airbnb loves to collaborate to create unique experiences for its users.

Airbnb partnered with the Art Institute of Chicago – with help from Publicis Groupe's Leo Burnett agency – to create Van Gogh BnB, a to-the-brush-stroke and move-in ready replica of the artist's "The Bedroom" painting.

During the exhibit featuring all three versions of Van Gogh's "The Bedroom" together for the first time, lucky Airbnb users could immerse themselves in the experience by renting the life-sized copy from "Vincent" for just \$10 a night. By teaming up with the museum, Airbnb got an award-winning campaign that painted its service in a positive light, while the Art Institute got a lift in attendance – its highest in 15 years, according to Leo Burnett.

(Image Source: Creative Commons | Airbnb | AP Images for Ad Age)



## Offer transformative moments.

Go big or go home, as they say. Getting your brand out there takes bravery, but elevating a live experience to a transformative level requires an unwavering commitment to giving customers substantive takeaways.

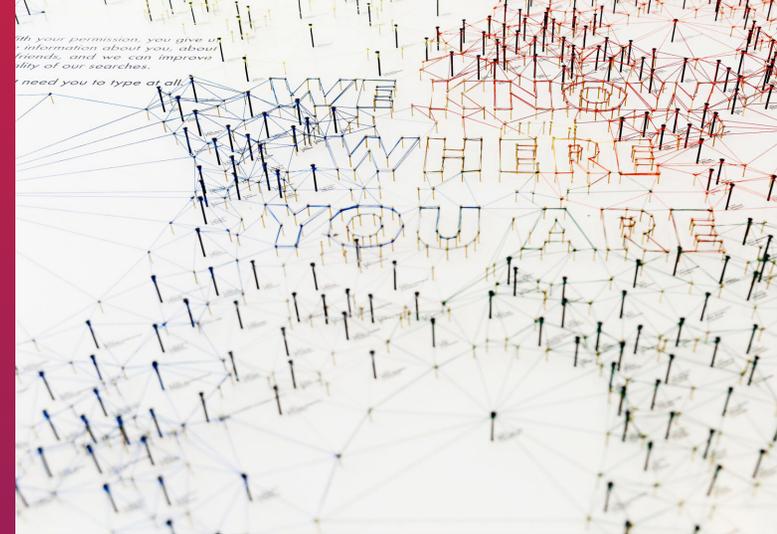
Beyond taking your digital brand offline and into unexpected territory, think of what your live experience can offer your audience that results in truly transformative moments. What can you help customers learn about the world or themselves while they're interacting with your brand?

**Consider the recent Mozilla-Tactical Tech Collective collaboration in New York City.** The brand behind the Firefox web browser partnered with the arts organization to open a pop-up tech store, The Glass Room, on Cyber Monday 2016. Only it wasn't really a store – it was a digital-literacy happening.

The slick, minimalist retail space was set up to seem familiar to unsuspecting visitors, but then offered darkly educational twists on traditional tech merchandising. The room featured more than 50 art projects with a mix of mock and real technology. For example, the “Unfitbit,” by artists Surya Mattu and Tega Brain, is a Fitbit attached to a metronome that demonstrates how easy it is to fake user data. Meanwhile, at the “Detox Bar,” Genius-Bar-style experts showed people how to disconnect from digital services that track their data.

For open-source advocate Mozilla, this is all very in line with their brand, which strives to educate consumers about their digital choices.

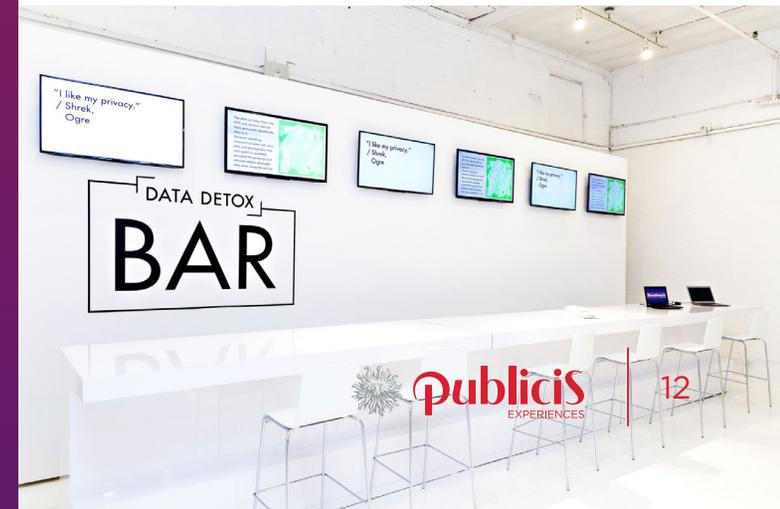
(Image Source: The Glass Room)



**“[T]here’s an increasing need, as the internet grows and we move into the world of the Internet of Things ... that people are more conscious of the choices they’re making.”**

— Mark Surman, Executive Director,  
Mozilla Foundation

(Source: FastCoDesign)



# LET'S CHAT

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