

Community service

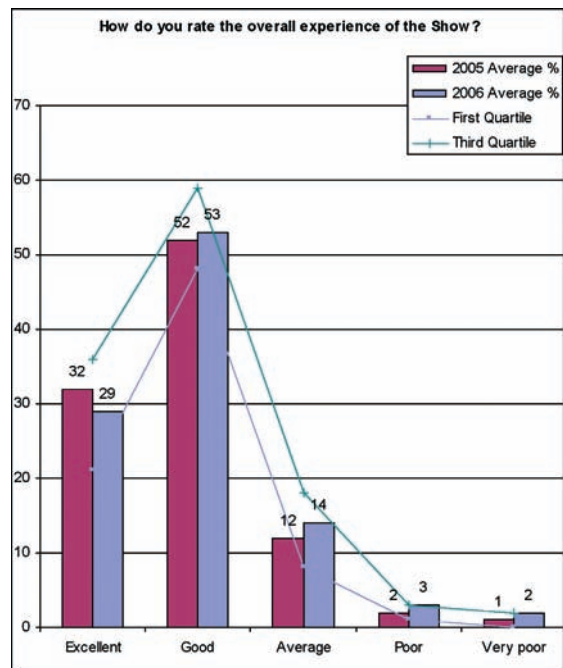
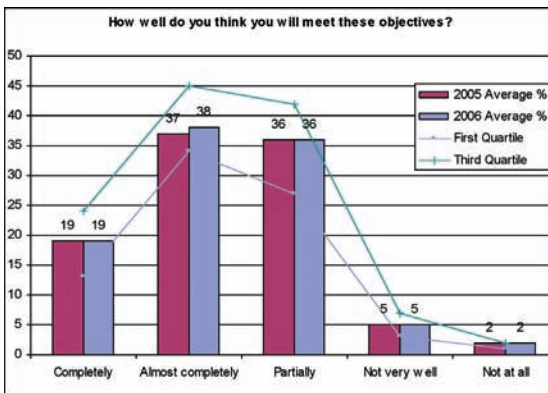
Event organiser or audience access company? asks Vivid Interface's Geoffrey Dixon.

TRADE SHOWS AND CONSUMER exhibitions are such wonderfully dynamic environments it is no great surprise to me that they enable communities to both get together and have a good time, and to generate business.

I have said many times that on balance trade and consumer events provide a successful marketplace. I know it and I can prove it, because I measure the success of events frequently and I present this success to the organisers most weeks of the year.

There is, of course, no such thing as an event that cannot be improved as an experience for both visitors and exhibitors. Or marketing which cannot be developed to attract more visitors, be more targeted and attract more of the visitors, exhibitors and other stakeholders want to see. These things are obvious.

If we look at the shows we have researched over the last 12 months, we can see that visitors rate the shows highly.



Visitor Trade Index[©]
Consumer Visitor Index[©]

However, even though events work well on average in delivering to their exhibitor and visitor, I believe many organisers do not fully recognise the revenue opportunities open to them. They are not taking full advantage of the brand they own.

Feature

This takes me to the big question in this article: are AEO members organisers of events, or are they audience access companies? And of course, what should they be?

My belief is a simple one. Brand owners in the event markets should consider themselves to be audience access companies, and not organisers. This is nothing new. Those who have worked with Vivid know that this has been a mantra for some time. The difference is, I now have a simple name for what I see should be the ultimate target for event organisers. I believe they should consider themselves to be audience access companies.

What is an audience access company, and how does this differ from an event organiser?

The first and most important distinction is that of operating philosophy. For an event organiser, the end is a show that opens when it should, closes without mishap, and has the right numbers through the gate. And, in doing this, hopefully makes a profit.

For an audience access company, the door never closes. An event should be only one way in which the audience access company services its communities.

Community is an important word here. If we think of our markets as communities of buyers and sellers, and that each of our communities is made up of smaller communities all with their own needs and wants, then we are moving in the right direction.

Event organisers, or as they should think of themselves, brand owners, provide a dynamic service to business communities and to consumer communities.

So the question is: can they develop from a purely face-to-face medium, to providing access to customers as their markets require?

For me, the only thing that will stop event organisers becoming audience access companies, is their ability to recognise the value they have vested in their brand, and their will to move into un-chartered waters.

Now, of course, many organisers already have magazines associated with them, but how many look upon this as an integrated resource? In some cases the magazines and the events do not even talk to each other. Sometimes there is a fear that a combined approach to audience access will inevitably lead to lower revenues, as marketing managers play one off against the other.

Let's look at some recent work we have done for organisers.

When we conduct event research we always try to encourage organisers to examine new product opportunities.

One area of investigation can be whether the market would

like the show brand to produce market information reports.

So far we have never had a negative reaction to this question for any of the trade show organisers we have done this for. The research can easily go further, and we have investigated subject matter and pricing, and even who the communities think can, or should, be associated with reports providing even greater credibility. This can be individual, or it can be companies or representative bodies such as trade associations.



Dixon: markets are communities of buyers and sellers

As we know what we are researching, we can segment the responses down to the smaller community level. This allows organisers to, firstly, identify segmented market needs, and so provide information, products and services in a targeted way. This does not mean organisers have to become researchers and journalists. If there is a market need, there are research and publishing partners who will be willing to work with organisers, as access to market is

the key marketing issue.

Information is one way of developing a brand as an audience access company, deriving even stronger brand values as a result. Information works here because it enables the organiser to have a new market positioning, and occupy a different space in the communities in which they serve.

Developing this theory, being an information brand enables that brand to develop a strong web presence, and this is the conduit to increasing the access opportunities to our audiences, and getting our audiences to come to our brand more than once

a year.

The web is the secret to maximising brand values for event brand owners seeking to develop a stronger position in their communities. The web is a communication enabler

facilitating two-way communication – outbound and inbound, push and pull.

There are probably still some organisers who see the web as leading to the downfall of live events. But hopefully they are few today. The web should be seen as the future of media communities operating under the umbrella of face-to-face brands – for now. The combination of web and face-to-face communities will give the smart organiser market synergies and the ability to address the needs to buyers in communities, and the sellers who want to reach and interact with those communities.

The media world is changing. Organisers can take advantage of this change by using their dynamic brand power to great effect; to control the future rather than having to react to it.

“For an audience access company, the door never closes. An event should be only one way in which the audience access company services its communities.”