

# Developing Brand Experiences for Contemporary Corporate Communication

by Alexander Bresinsky

Comprehensive site-based presentations and long-term brand productions are becoming increasingly important internationally as a new form of corporate communication. Modern corporate and brand concepts, such as visitor centers, provide an emotional and entertaining way of enabling visitors to establish a closer relationship with a company, its products and services.

From a planning and design perspective, projects such as these represent a special challenge, because they must entertain and inform visitors in a way that is attractive and enduring, in the context of an advertising environment. The history and stories of the company, its customers and its products are used to establish the foundation and the link to the everyday lives of the visitors. The good news is that even seemingly dry and abstract products and stories can be made exciting for visitors. This is because behind every company and product there are people; people with special skills, unusual ideas and experiences – the raw materials of good stories. The attraction designer can develop what is fascinating about a particular subject and, using the right materials, pass on this fascination to the visitors in an appropriate format for the visitors center.

## Visitor motivation vs. company motivation

Visitor centers stand in direct competition to other leisure activities such as exhibitions, museums and theme parks, for the attention of the public. In order to remain competitive in the market, it is important that they pay attention to such things as service level and hours of operation. When it comes to corporate and brand event concepts, the customer becomes the guest.

In an ideal situation, the visitor is transformed into a kind of 'company messenger.' This means that the main visitor-center planning focus should be on establishing a dialogue with visitors and enhancing the company's image and prestige, rather than on advertising and sales. The goal is to establish a close link between the company's products and its personality, and the visitor's own background and story. Establishing that emotional link is one of the most important success factors. This means making sure that all of the visitors' senses are activated, that curiosity and attention levels are raised, that

they experience an 'aha' moment of discovery, and that they have fun. Visitor centers should not shy away from providing a varied and playful hands-on experience. The incorporation of bold, unusual and entertaining elements is often more effective at conveying the identity and spirit of a brand than the standard three-dimensional corporate-identity-based brand presentation. From a visitor's perspective, the latter can quickly become tiring and off-putting.

Depending on the positioning and internal organization of a company, corporations will get more ultimate satisfaction from the investment if they take care not to let the budget get out of proportion to expected visitor numbers – unless the intended display is mainly an object of prestige. While planning the layout of the area and determining the budget, it is also important to take into account the need for future changes and updates.

## The importance of location and exhibit authenticity

A display that is located at the source – where the brands and products

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An interactive media table lets people take a self-guided virtual tour of a corporate site.



originate – will tend to make the most intense impression. Locating at the source, i.e. the tour of the factory, laboratory or headquarters, makes it possible to provide visitors with a behind-the-scenes insight into the company. Indeed, seeing the real thing and being there are essential elements in helping to establish the emotional links that companies want to achieve and build with visitor centers.

'The real thing' starts with the aura of the exhibits and products and expands out into a high-quality spatial setting and architectural design. In a visitor center it is the company's employees and products that are the actors on the exhibition stage: they tell stories and enable the site to be experienced emotionally. Staging an excellent presentation enables the objects of the show and the location itself to become more attractive. Thus the sense of experience can be strengthened and the way in which target groups are addressed will be optimized.

**The importance of knowledge transfer and emotional learning**

During the planning stage, a great deal of importance is attached to knowledge transfer. Much of the focus is concentrated on translating specialized knowledge into lay-accessible words and images, while continually making the connection back to everyday life. Highly complex and multilayered information has to be transferred clearly and vividly. The real challenge lies in bringing abstract subjects closer to both lay and specialist visitors and enabling them to learn something new.

A presentation style that is rich in experience is closely connected with emotional learning. Depending on the subject, the brand and the product involved, different methods can be used and different target groups addressed. While going into extensive detail may not be possible, simply increasing visitors' interest and curiosity levels for the subject is the real achievement. Indeed, the goals and objectives in this regard are similar to those of science centers. The excitement generated by having understood a limited demonstration will frequently suffice to motivate visitors to pursue the subject on their own following the visit. As far as products and brands are concerned, companies would be very hard pressed to achieve the same level of success through traditional advertising.

**The importance of technology and type of presentation**

Determining the best means for achieving the goal is always more important than implementing the latest technological advances. Some subjects can certainly be presented more clearly using certain technologies. Large-scale film presentations, for instance, are well-suited to emotional subjects. When subject matter is varied and complex, modern interactive media tends to be the best choice in that it encourages independent discovery.

When it comes to demonstrating certain principles, sometimes the simplest objects used intelligently can have the greatest impact. In our company's most recent project for BASF we wanted to represent the term 'sustainability' in the Raw Materials Room. Sustainability in this instance

was interpreted to mean establishing a balance between the ecology, the economy and society. No form of media technology was poised to represent 'balance' so well as a genuine set of scales, and so we built a custom set of scales having three arms. Inviting visitors to fill the scales demonstrated vividly how difficult it is to keep three things in balance.

The best method will always be the one that establishes a direct emotional experience at a personal level. These kinds of experiences foster long-term interest and successful long-term learning. Nothing helps in this regard more than adhering to the basics of good design – which apply just as strongly to successful brand and experience concepts. ■■■

Alexander Bresinsky is Managing Director of flying saucer GmbH & Co.KG. flying saucer provides design and consultation services for location-based entertainment. Engineers and attraction designers work closely together on developing ideas from concept to realization. Cooperatively, they work on developing attractions for leisure parks, visitor centers, theme parks and brand parks for the European market. flying saucer was involved in the following visitor centers and corporate attractions: BASF AG, Schloss Wackerbarth Wine-growing Estate, Meissen Porcelain Manufacture, VW AG's "Gläserne Manufaktur Dresden", VW AG's Autostadt Wolfsburg, Sony Center Berlin, Ravensburger Spieleland. Visit [www.flyingsaucer.de](http://www.flyingsaucer.de).



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