

Trend Report: 6 Marketing Best Practices for In-Person Impact

**Bringing your brand's story to life across
in-person experiences, from trade shows and
events to retail spaces and corporate offices**



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Today's In-Person Marketing Landscape

Experiential marketing and face-to-face engagement are among the most powerful levers that companies can use to increase brand visibility and impact. Through in-person interactions, brands reach customers and prospects, tell their stories, and build trust in a more authentic way. Truly meaningful connections can happen through a sales interaction in a retail store, during a meeting in a branded corporate office, or as part of conversation on the trade show floor.

Although there has been a trend toward aggressive investment in digital channels for the past several years. Companies are expanding their customer experience and marketing campaigns to a hybrid model — moving both digital and physical back into the limelight.

Organizations are heading back in droves to trade shows and live events to meet prospects and expand their reach. They're going bigger and bolder with branded custom booth designs, and creating deeper engagement through creative experiences.

Corporate interiors are getting a new look as companies look at bringing workers back to the office, at least on a hybrid basis. There's an increasing focus on offices as settings for collaboration and communication that's hard to foster digitally, as well as a platform for critical conversations with investors, partners, and prospects.

Within retail, new experiential spaces are emerging as buyers seek opportunities to connect with experts to help them choose the right software, design their dream house, or taste the latest roasts in a coffee concept store.



But they're facing a resource crunch. Budgets are tightening as costs continue to rise amidst inflation, higher interest rates, and supply chain expense increases. Many staff resources are recent hires who may not have significant hands-on experience running live events or working across diverse channels.



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At the same time, organizations need to find ways to stand out in crowded fields. Trade shows are packed, so the execution must be as flawless as the branding is on-point. Clients, prospective hires, partners, and investors are having more brand touchpoints, so office interiors, retail settings, and a brand's presence at live events are under a microscope.

Above all, there's more pressure than ever to generate bottom-line results, reflect sustainability and inclusivity as values in live events, and get it all done while managing a complex web of partners where a single misstep in one of dozens of workstreams has the potential to bring the entire operation to a grinding halt.

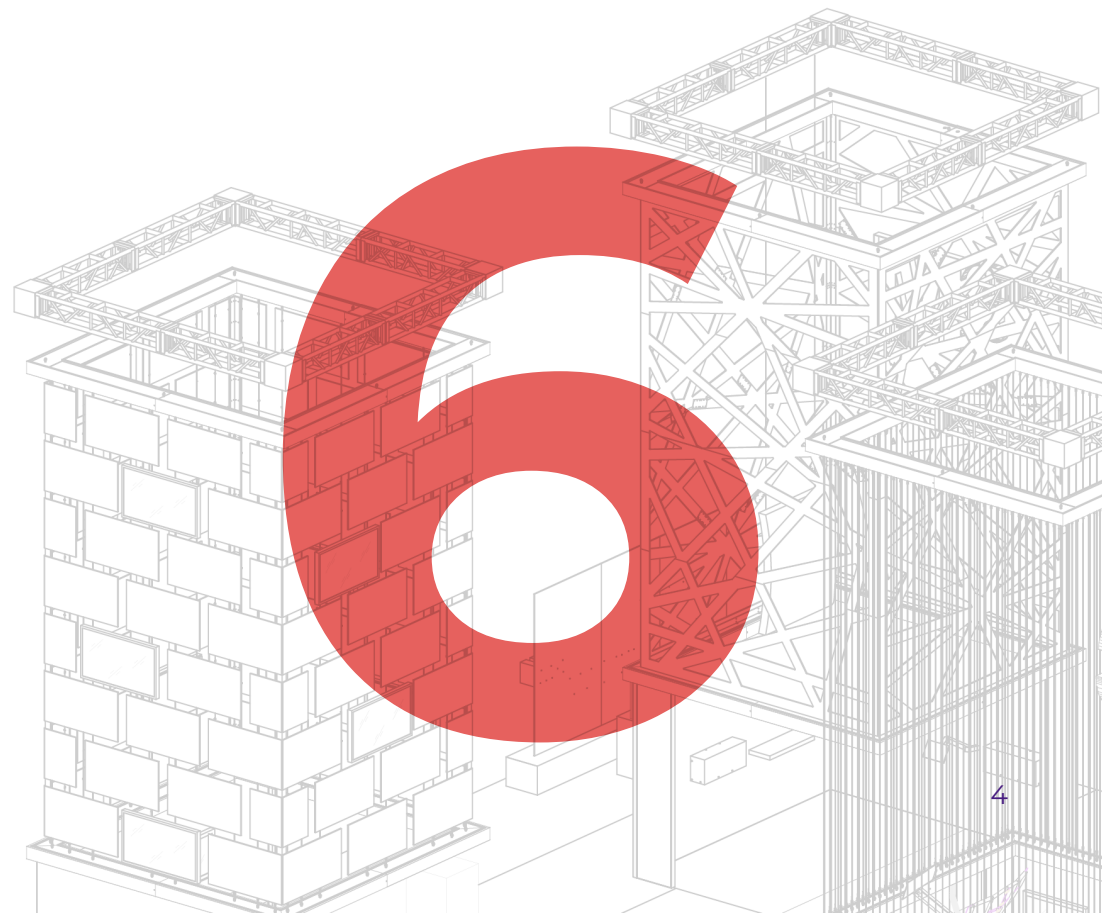
For brand leaders, one question emerges at the forefront:

How can we use these in-person opportunities to bring our brand to life in a way that moves our key stakeholders to action while maximizing resources?

There are **six critical trends** in experiential marketing today that highlight what's working across in-person channels. The key to success is understanding these trends and how to them to your brand's full line-up of live, in-person experiences for maximum impact. A cohesive, integrated approach across touchpoints

– live events, retail and corporate – that blends these best practices and trends is key to delivering an unforgettable experiential marketing campaign.

Read on to get a closer look at how winning companies are standing out in person.





Reaching Customers through Better Experiences



No matter the touchpoint, today's audiences expect what they want, when and where they want it. Effectively connecting with in-person audiences is demanding greater innovation and investment in the customer experience. Brands are under significant pressure to deliver tailored, unforgettable experiences that they can replicate in person and online. Some key trends that are driving experiential design include:

Creating consultative spaces: Customers are interested in having greater access to experts, whether they're at a retail location or a trade show booth. Think about on-demand tech support at Best Buy or Apple, or on-site design experts at Home Depot or Crate and Barrel. Access to expert consultants, the ability to explore products, and customized demonstrations and software where potential buyers can see the end result before spending a dollar are all hot commodities in the current market.

Leveraging technology-driven experiences: Technology is helping brands to cost-effectively deliver next-level experiences at trade shows and other live events. Digital demonstrations, AI-powered chatbots, virtual reality/augmented reality storytelling,

and integrated games and contests can bring your products and services to life. Incorporating technology helps a lean staff focus on engaging with high priority prospects, while anyone passing through your booth can sample products, get to know the brand, or leave their information for later follow-up.



Marrying branding and immersive storytelling: How well do the customers you serve know the story behind your brand? Thematic design that marries branding and immersive storytelling can help deliver your company's story to both current and prospective customers. Consider the case study of a coffee company that built discovery stations into every store so customers can sample different blends and learn about their origins, as well as an immersive video, sound, and scent-driven environment that brings the growing and roasting process behind their company to life. From the trade show floor to on-site tours to retail environments, brands are using their stories and values to forge lasting emotional connections with engaged buyers.



Infusing the Brand Experience with Sustainable Values



Brands and companies are including eco-consciousness in their core values. For marketing and event teams, there's a demand for greater accountability and incorporating sustainability into the brand experience. This is being felt particularly in the trade show space, which is often one of largest contributors to a company's largest environmental footprint. Marketing leaders are finding innovative ways to infuse sustainability and environmental values into campaigns by:



Making brand builds sustainable: Trade show and live event booths, corporate interiors, retail interiors, pop-ups, and other aspects of a company's physical presence are under increasing pressure to be sustainable. Organizations are seeking recycled or reused materials, sustainably sourced components, and partners with expertise in sustainable builds. These values are also translating into the more popular design styles, with the over-the-top booths of a few years ago giving way to minimalistic booths that focus on engaging experiences, centering product and staff, and fostering visitor wellness.

Moving toward energy efficiency: Within the office and on the trade show floor, an organization's energy footprint is one aspect of how their environmental values are represented in their brand image. Several trends related to this concern are taking hold. To reduce printing waste, brands are moving toward digital signage and creative, or websites accessed via an event QR code. Traditional lighting is being replaced with long-lasting, energy-efficient LED bulbs that also offer greater control for event lighting. Companies are also selecting energy-efficient appliances, such as those with the ENERGY STAR® certification, to ensure that the screens, computers, and other devices they're using are leaving as light a footprint as possible.

Mastering sustainability best practices: Brand leaders who feel that the need for sustainable marketing and event strategies is a new demand are not alone. Today, a number of certifications such as The Event Industry Council's Sustainable Event Professional Certificate Program are demystifying best practices and making it easier for organizations to invest in upskilling their staff to meet this critical new need. Event certifications and partner certifications for those with experience delivering sustainable builds and services are also becoming a crucial aspect of deciding where and how to do business.

Upgrading Corporate Environments

3.

With in-person experiences on the rise, brands are reconsidering the design and experiential aspects of their corporate locations. The shift away from remote work is casting a spotlight on the office as a location to engage workers. Many brands are also turning their offices into key meeting and event locations. Emerging corporate design trends include:

Designing offices that bring workers back: While hybrid schedules give organizations tremendous flexibility, there's a trend toward getting workers back into the office. However, today's offices look significantly different than they did just a few years ago. Rows of cubicles are giving way to hotdesking space. Collaborative, purpose-filled spaces that are empowered by technology foster deeper conversations and face-to-face teamwork sessions that lead to a culture of creativity and innovation.

Creating client-facing office spaces: Investors, customers, and prospects are coming back to the office for meetings as well. Sales processes that had largely moved online are becoming hybrid, with customers wanting to take tours, see in-depth product demonstrations, and meet in person with

executives. As a result, the office environment is evolving to ensure that it's ready for prime time. Bold, persuasive, and experiential choices are transforming lobbies. Companies are creating executive-ready meeting spaces that foster the right environment to close a deal. Dedicated spaces are being built within offices to facilitate product tours and 360-degree digital demonstrations.



Developing multi-functional branded spaces: The role of the office is evolving, from employee productivity hub to flexible event venue. On a daily basis, corporate offices provide the platform for engagement and collaboration among employees, partners, and vendors. Increasingly, companies are using offices as flexible, cost-effective, and branded event locations. An office may be used to host investor and analyst events, customer success days, or a press coverage event for a new launch. Flexible, modular designs that allow companies to use their space creatively and meet fast-changing needs is driving the popularity of multi-functional branded spaces.



Embracing New Approaches to Retail

4.

Brands that have a retail component are choosing to rethink their footprint and engage customers in more hands-on ways. New store formats, integrated technology, and deeper experiential design are all taking root. Retail design trends leading the way include:

Shifting to smaller stores: Some retailers are moving away from large-format stores and developing innovative designs for store-within-a-store partnerships, pop-up events, or small-format alternatives. Embracing greater flexibility in a brand's retail environment can help laser focus the product selection, staff support, and even store décor to speak directly to the local population that a brand serves in specific locations.

Adapting to new technology and service models: Within larger stores, there's a move toward modular and flexible designs that integrate technology and can adapt to a variety of promotions and seasonal needs. Retailers may be moving away from large banks of registers, and instead incorporating decentralized technologies such as self-service kiosks, click-and-collect stations, digital signage with product information, and AI-powered chatbots that can answer questions when staff are busy. Innovative approaches to technology

integration and emerging service models are reshaping familiar retail environments.



Inviting inspiration, innovation and exploration: The idea of a retail location as simply a point of sales is changing. Instead, some retail locations are conceptualizing and designing spaces where brands inspire customers, let them explore products in a hands-on way before they buy, and even get expert guidance. Retail space is being dedicated to give customers the opportunity to consult experts, trial products, and discover a brand's story. Updated retail formats are offering new opportunities for innovative experiential design.

Exploring Outside Support and Full-Service Brand Partnerships

5.

Brands are being asked to deliver tailored, flawless experiences across a greater number of touchpoints. However, there's also pressure to do more with less. Costs are up, yet budgets are down. For lean teams, there's less time for travel, event set up, and troubleshooting issues that come up during live shows. Exploring full-service brand and experiential marketing design partnerships can be transformative. Trends concerning this approach include:



Partnering with outside help to deliver speed: There's a greater need for speed than ever before, and with many robust show schedules throughout the year, teams are overburdened. Successfully delivering a tight show schedule across a national or international calendar is challenging. Creative conceptualization, on-site support, post-show fulfillment, and after-hours event planning demand significant bandwidth.

Partnering strategically with outside help to design, build, and sometimes deliver in-person experiences can help eliminate stress and support your team in meeting their KPIs. It's possible to identify and partner with speedy solutions across all dimensions, from the quick setup and breakdown of pop-up concepts to efficient virtual event integrations, ensuring timely execution.

Bringing in more live event support: Overseeing a brand's participation in a live event or trade show is stressful. From the brand's physical presence to the fast-changing creative, there can be a thousand individual workstreams to monitor at any point. Many organizations are working with partners through solutions such as booth rentals or pre- and post-event support.

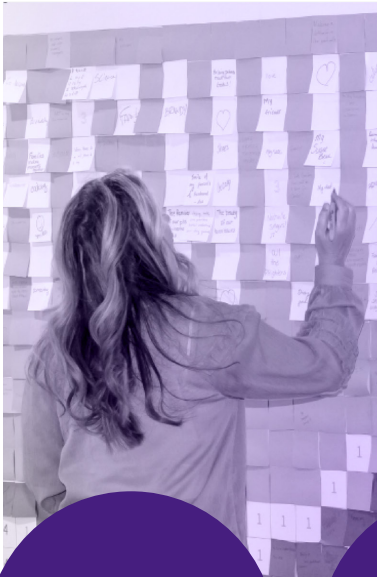
Take, for example, a shipping delay that occurs due to severe weather in a particular area. It's likely unanticipated, and it could dramatically impact a brand's participation in an event. With a full-service partner, event teams are tracking shipping to proactively identify delays, working with other partners to find solutions, and even sourcing replacement equipment if needed to ensure that live events go smoothly.



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Choosing a full-service design partner: For some firms, getting on-site support at major events is enough. For others, there's a greater need for an integrative partner that can meet a variety of needs across the organization. When you have complex needs such as live event design, pop-up experience conceptualization, corporate interior design

work, and retail design work, cohesiveness and coherence across the portfolio becomes critical. A well-rounded partner with experience in all these areas can unify the visuals, storytelling, technology, and messaging across channels to deliver a powerful, consistent experience through diverse customer touchpoints.



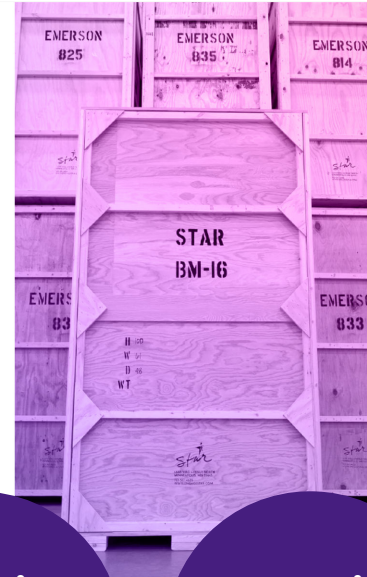
**Strategy
&
Planning**



**Creative
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Design**



**Engineer
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Build**



**Logistics
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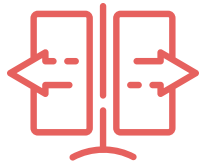


**Results
&
Optimization**

Reinventing Trade Show and Live Event Strategies

6.

Trade shows and live events are on the rise, and for many companies, there's a desire to modernize the way those events fit into the overall marketing portfolio. As brands move out of an era of heavy digital investment, rethinking the trade show experience from physical branding to operational models is at the top of many CMO and event team agendas. Trends that are shaping trade show participation include:



Investing in custom trade show booth design: Modernizing booth design is often a key consideration as companies return to physical events. There's a strong desire to break out of the sea of similar booths and really stand out to maximize show participation ROI. There's a shift toward strategic investments in custom trade show booth design. Stepping away from cookie cutter booths and intentionally designing the trade show experience from top to bottom offers brands the opportunity to tell their story, cultivate awareness, and expand their reach.

Diversifying the trade show booth portfolio: Historically, companies had one or two trade show booths that they shipped around the country. Increasingly, organizations are looking for greater flexibility in their trade show booth portfolio and operational strategies. Custom booths, rentals, and modular builds that can flexibly adapt to different venues, event setups, and even target audiences are reshaping the way brands approach their physical event presence. Event teams and company leadership are diversifying their trade show booth portfolio to meet their needs more effectively on an event-by-event basis.

Participating in a wider range of event formats: For organizations that have historically only attended major trade shows, there's a trend toward expanding the range of live events they're taking part in. Companies are increasingly hosting educational events that showcase their brand stories, customer success days that highlight wins and share best practices, and putting together intimate gatherings with experts and executives for high-value potential buyers. Engaging in a wider range of events gives brands a broader platform to tell their story, and opens up new opportunities for storytelling and engagement with diverse audiences.



Next Steps

In-person experiences are driving core brand engagement, after years of digital channels being in the driver's seat. For brands ready to innovate and capture the high potential impact of in-person events, this is the year to make bold moves.

No matter what your goals – from increasing overall brand awareness to connecting with specific customer segments to enhancing the emotional impact of your brand story – experiential marketing and design can help.

Across events, retail settings, and corporate environments, in-person experiences offer the chance to deliver next-level results. Strategic brands are taking an integrated approach to applying trends and best practices across their in-person event portfolios.

Retail environments, corporate settings, trade show and other live events all provide the opportunity to reach critical audiences. Employees, customers, and other stakeholders are responding to environments that are intentionally and thoughtfully designed to deliver the best possible experience. Every aspect of your brand's physical presence has the potential to work as part of a larger experiential marketing

initiative designed with your most important objectives in mind. And the results can be transformative. Major B2B deals begin on the trade show floor. Employees work harder for brands that truly engage them. Customers confidently make purchases in retail environments customized to their needs.

Each in-person touchpoint can reflect some of the most powerful trends shaping the industry today: engaging experiences, corporate environments designed with employees and customers in mind, bolder branding, reimagined retail environments, sustainability as a core value, and a refreshed approach to trade shows and live events.

For brands, now is the time to make the design, marketing, and strategic choices that position you for greater visibility and engagement. If you're feeling the pressure, but you're not sure where to begin, you don't have to navigate this challenge alone. An experienced, full-service partner like Star Group can help transform your in-person experiences including retail stores, corporate interiors, and trade show and live events for maximum impact.



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About STAR Group

STAR is an all-in-one experiential marketing agency that builds captivating spaces for exhibits, events, corporate interiors, and retail stores. From powerful strategy to head-turning creative to flawless execution, we move companies from branded experience to business results.

Learn more about in-person marketing trends and how to bring your brand to life through events, trade shows, retail settings and corporate spaces at engagestar.com/services.

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