

The Influence of  
High Touch Event  
Communication on  
Donor Support  
Building an Emotional Connection

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*and*

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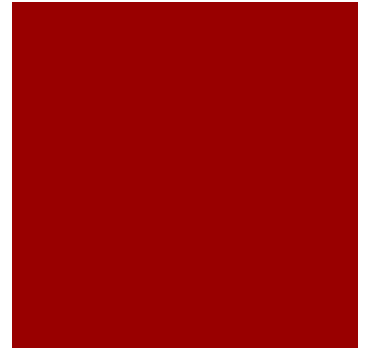
**Stewart & Hooker (Event Strategists)**



I can't raise a billion  
dollars with balloons

-Stephen B. Sample  
10<sup>th</sup> President of USC

How do I convince my  
president or advancement  
officer that events are worth  
the investment?



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# The facts

- 1.5 million non-profits in the U.S.
- Private and Public universities require donor support to build research programs, to develop capital construction projects and to increase their endowment
- In the last 30 years experiential marketing has risen dramatically in both non-profit and in academia
- Events have become a vital component in connecting with donors
- More effort is being placed on transformational gifts than ever in year's past



# The questions

- What are the common drivers that push donors to donate and recipients to market in particular ways?
- Do donors respond more positively to emotional influences and do experiential events influence their gift-making decision?

if so...

- Do recipients and advancement personnel use event marketing to cultivate donors?
- Are events an effective way to build an emotional relationship between a donor and an organization?

Are events worth the cost?



# The process

- What is an event?
- Quantitative vs. Qualitative
- Research and supporting theories
  - High touch communication
  - The rise of experiential marketing
  - Emotions
- Case study
- Findings and analysis



What is an event?

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Events are...



societal and emotional celebrations that have existed since man first lifted a pointed stick into the air and danced around the fire reliving the day's hunt for fellow tribesmen

**MESSAGE DELIVERY SYSTEMS!!**

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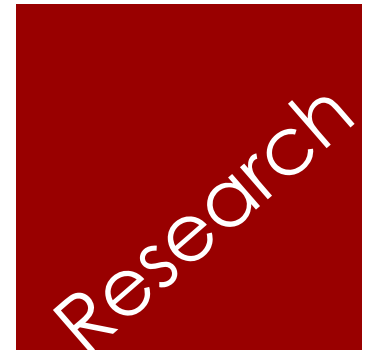


# Events are unique communication tools



- Mini-societies where people of like-mind gather to celebrate, share and experience life together
- Controlled environment with a controlled execution
- Touches all 5 of our senses
- Create a visceral reaction – EMOTION!





# Quantitative vs. Qualitative

- Quantitative
  - Surveys
  - Numerically measurable
  - Measures *how much*?
  
- Qualitative
  - Interviews
  - Assesses reasoning
  - Measures *why*?

## Used qualitative research

- This methodology allowed for the exploration of the drivers that influenced the donor decision-making process

# Marketing research and supporting theories



- High touch communication
  - The most personal form of communication
  
- The rise of experiential marketing
  - Event Marketing vs. Event Sponsorship
    - Self staged as opposed to as to staged by 3rd party
    - Pepsi Challenge – 1975
  
- A shift from traditional marketing communication
  - Gen X & Y
  - Media fragmentation (noise/clutter)
  - Social networking (Facebook, Twitter) – word of mouth

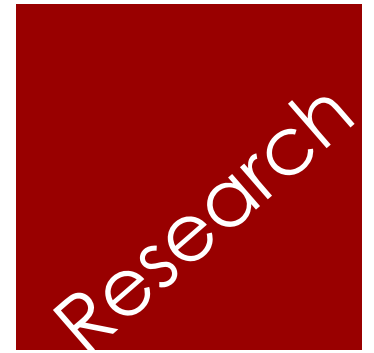


# What is high-touch communication?



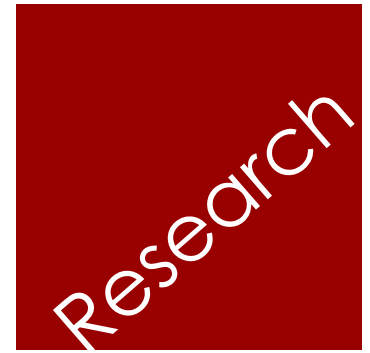
- A hierarchy of communication
  - Events are one of the highest levels of high-touch communication because...
    - Personal - emotional
    - Face-to-face interaction with a donor or prospect
    - Immediate {an even exchange of information}
  - Why is it most effective way to communicate?
    - Donor is singled out for special treatment
    - High expectation, high deliverable
    - Targeted message designed to evoke an emotional response
-

# Purpose of Event Marketing



To create a positive mood and a positive environment where it can deliver a message that results in positive recall

# Marketing research and supporting theories



## ■ Theories

- Mood Theory - positive experience elicits positive recall
  - Creates “states of mind” (Cooper & Schindler, 2006; Bagozzi, Gopinath & Nyer, 1999)
  
- Sensory Theory– sight, sound, touch, taste, smell
  - Creates emotional response (Broweus, Hulten, & Van Dijk, 2009)
  
- Social Validation Theory – the more people who are in favor of an idea, the more likely we are to follow – Mark Zuckerberg gift (Cialdini, 2001)

# Building brand loyalty through emotional response



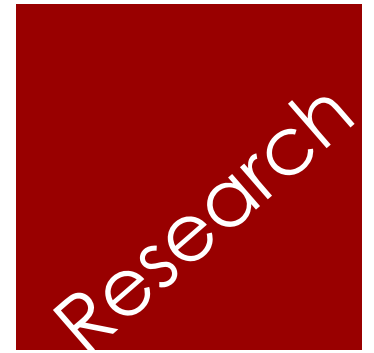
What you communicate  
market place

customers  
people your  
products

The value you commit  
to deliver to customer

Delivery of your brand  
promise through every  
interaction your  
have with your  
processes and

# The goal of experiential marketing



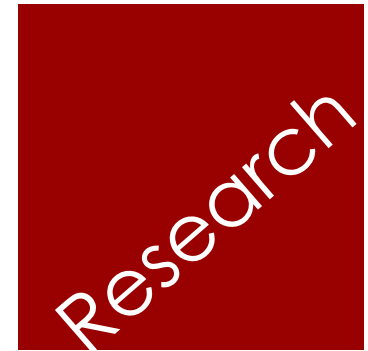
## Delight (Goodman, 2009)

- highly positive experiences generate highly positive word of mouth as well as increased loyalty
- such customers want your organization do more business and succeed. They recognize the value of doing business with you - identity

**DONORS**

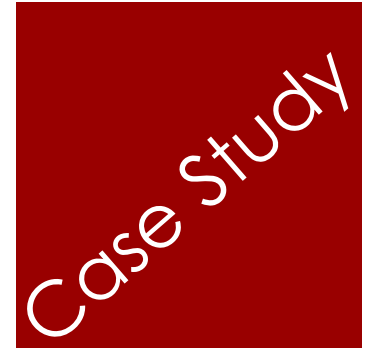


# The identity cycle



*Figure 2. The system of interaction between an event and company's (product's) image*  
Adapted from "Efficiency of Event Usage for the Increase in Competitiveness of Companies," by V. Navickas, and & A. Malakauskaitė, 2007, *Engineering Economics*, 2, p. 93.

# Case Study

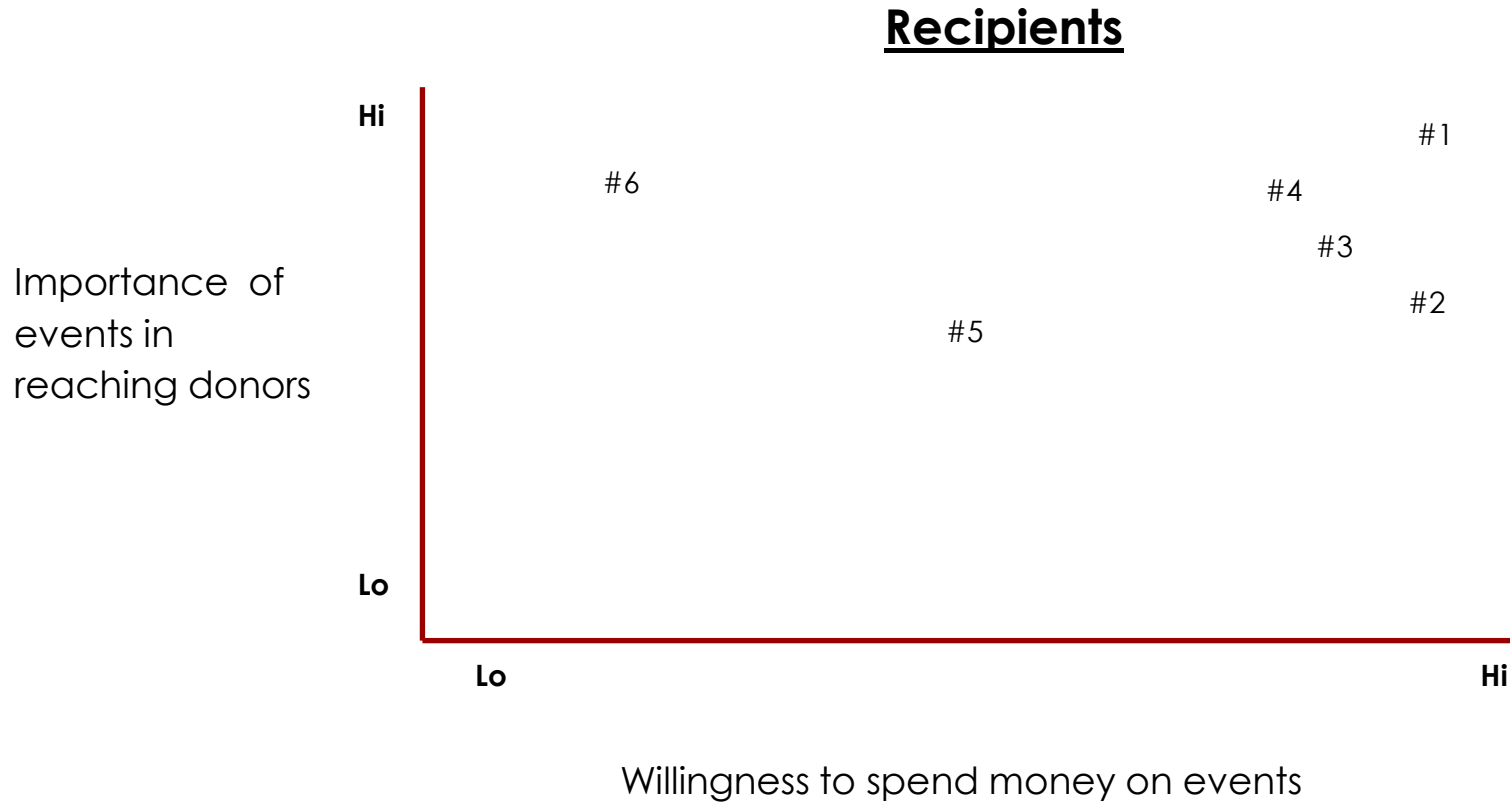


- Private Institution
  - Donors (5)
    - \$10 million + capacity
    - Previous benefactors
    - Approx. 25 questions
    - Driving influence in making a contribution
      - Emotional drivers
      - Influence of event interaction
    - All alumni
    - 4 had made substantial contributions
  - Recipients (6)
    - Cultivate donors
    - Senior administration, advancement, academic
    - Approx. 25 questions
    - Marketing strategy to influence donors
      - Use of emotional marketing
      - Willingness to use events
-

# Findings and analysis

- Cultivation and/or Stewardship
- Recipient Findings
  - Event importance versus cost
- Donor Findings
  - The Leadership Factor
  - Cost and inspiration

# Recipient findings



# Donor findings

## Donors



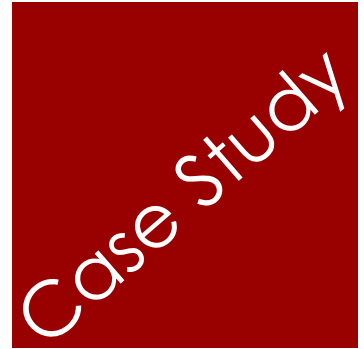
## “Inspiration Gap”

Donors seek engagement where recipients seek a return on investment

### Cause:

The unwillingness of an institution to put financial resources behind the event experience, no matter how small the investment. Fear of small amount of quantitative data.

# Quantitative data from MIT Campaign



- MIT invited donors to a 2-day campus visit hosted by senior staff and culminating in a dinner at the president's home
- 14% of individual campaign donors attended those visits
- Attendees gave an average gift of \$1.74M vs. \$830K from non-attendees
- 47.7% increase in donor support

# Misconceptions

- The way it has always been done is acceptable
- Donors see events as a blatant waste of money
  - A personal investment
- It's too expensive
  - Quality vs. Quantity
    - Clear message with inspirational program
    - Proper environment
    - Basic lighting
    - Good audio
    - Excellent guest experience





# Conclusion

- Donors *MUST* have an emotional relationship with an organization before making a transformational gift
- High touch event communication (not one-on-one meetings) are the primary tool in building an emotional and personal relationship with donors
- Donors see a personal relationship with an organization as an vital component in their willingness to support that organization
- Donors equate the quality of an event experience to the quality of leadership at an institution – their gift is an investment
- Every event must be excellent – events should be able to serve as both a cultivation and a stewardship mechanism
- If you don't have the internal talent to deliver an properly scaled event with appropriate messaging, then hire a professional event strategist who does – it is worth every penny!

# Conclusion



I don't know of anything more powerful than an institution or charity can do other than an event to solidify its position and to get people focused on that organization. You could mail to them, put ads on television, whatever it is – but an event is the one that sets it. That's why I think it's important to do it correctly. I don't know how else you can go and really solidify a donor's commitment other than through a series of events and keeping them connected. The more they're connected, the more they'll want to continue to be a part of it. I never thought about it before you brought it to me, that connection - when you really sit back and think about it, that's the glue.

(Donor #2, 2011, personal communication)

Thank you!

Questions?

