



# WRG: Six trends defining the future

Creative engagement agency WRG, which engages audiences through the creation and delivery of live experiences, strategic communications, video and interactive content, looks to the future



Part of The Creative Engagement Group

**STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE OF EVENTS**  
When the *IPA Bellwether Report*, the barometer of UK marketing spend, reported a record 13th successive rise in event marketing spend, it became evident that live engagement is now firmly established as a strategic part of an overall campaign. “Marketers are prepared to invest more in experiences for deeper and richer levels of audience engagement, both consumer and employee, that simply can’t be achieved in other channels,” says WRG chief execu-

tive Russ Lidstone. “The role of face to face is becoming more and more relevant to brands as the level of engagement with the customer is so much greater.” The global communications agency creates unforgettable experiences for brands across all sectors, including healthcare, technology, retail and fast-moving consumer goods, and was recently engaged in Hong Kong by adidas to create a Sportsbase six-week outdoor sport event. The activation exceeded client expectation for participation rates with more than 65,000 people taking part and almost 22 million online views.

concept store, following customers as they experienced the event and triggering messages relating to the environment, pushing messages to delegates’ apps and assessing in-store hot spots, right down to the detail of how much coffee was consumed. The gathered data was then fed back into the plenary content. Meanwhile, at Europe’s largest cardiology congress, the agency put patients at the heart of the project by placing healthcare professionals in the mindset of a patient, within immersive VR projection pods that recreated the sensation of a heart attack. As new technologies come to the fore complementing immersive experiences, agencies will need to build capability by partnering with the best-in-class suppliers or to form strategic alliances with specialists, such as WRG’s partnership with film, digital content and VR experts, The Moment.

“Marketers are prepared to invest more in experiences for deeper and richer levels of audience engagement that simply can’t be achieved in other channels



**RUSS LIDSTONE**  
CHIEF EXECUTIVE  
WRG

**INTEGRATING IMMERSIVE TECHNOLOGY**  
From iBeacons to augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR) to wearables, technology and event marketing are becoming perfect bedfellows, enabling audiences to be truly immersed in the brand message. Geo-location, virtual platforms, Oculus and instructional design are increasingly being deployed across sectors as diverse as automotive and healthcare to create impactful experiences. WRG used iBeacons at a client leadership event to track activity in a

**UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL**

The greatest engagement in a live environment undoubtedly requires a personal approach and for 2017 events will embrace all the small touches of the luxury and hospitality sectors to create a memorable experience. Be it a handwritten note from the chief executive, your favourite magazines and snacks in a room drop or a dedicated event concierge on hand for special requests, enhancing the guest experience at events will grow to mirror the way brands are increasingly using data to personalise the consumer experience. This focus on customer centricity, the experience arc and understanding the user journey will in turn manifest itself in the crowdsourcing of content, the rise of bespoke agendas and an ability for the audience effectively to curate their own event. “We’re now able to think about our audience as individuals – microcosms of supply and demand – whether it’s for Google or our healthcare clients,” says Mark Jackson, WRG’s head of environments.

**SENSORY EXPERIENCES**

“Digital will become more sensory in the events sector,” says Mr Lidstone, describing the blend of real and augmented reality that engages the senses to impact audience behaviour, evoke emotions and influence choice. It was this approach that WRG deployed when Ricoh required a communications campaign and exhibition stand to demonstrate all the benefits that their digital production printing could bring to customers in 2016. The Open New Worlds campaign needed to demonstrate how Ricoh’s new, digital approaches to printing could change the way things are done to the better. WRG opted for a sensory and relatively low-tech solution to the challenge and, as executive creative director Mark Gass explains, the results were all the more engaging. “A great compelling story is what grabs the attention, not necessarily the screen or device you use to tell it on,” he says. “Don’t be afraid of seeming out of touch if you choose to go low-tech. It can be very refreshing. You won’t overwhelm your visitors, there will be no barriers to engagement and, best of all, they may leave with something they’ll really value – a real human experience. Isn’t that why they came in the first place?”

**VIRTUAL APPROACH**

When virtual events were first mooted a decade ago, the events industry experienced a collective shudder. Yet far from being a threat, the growth in virtual events has actually been a complement to the live industry, spawning in turn hybrid events. A virtual gathering can offer a cost-effective solution for large organisations holding internal events and, as the interest in this surges, the focus for the year ahead has switched to how to make them more engaging, and to ensure audiences feel truly in the moment. Meanwhile, hybrid events help to overcome the isolation that virtual events can experience, with options including broadcasting from a central studio into satellite audiences or using planning tools to enhance audience engagement with the content. Mr Lidstone explains: “Feedback, engagement, measurement are all possible in our virtual approach – it is no longer the poor relation to live.”

**RETURN TO REAL**

With an ambition to provide two million people with free training in digital skills, Google UK came to WRG and asked for a solution that would be easy to install in any public space. The Digital Garage design needed to be affordable and accessible, so the agency combined raw untreated materials with simple, modular construction techniques to give these spaces a utilitarian and functional appeal. This practical, logistical approach underpins the “return to real” ethos that clients are now embracing as they switch back to some of the very basic principles of human behaviour. “We are now investing a lot of thought into creating environments specifically designed to facilitate conversations. The latest science behind lighting, sound and seating becomes critical,” says Mr Lidstone. “There is something very special about live performances and it is becoming increasingly rare for audiences to share a real-time experience. When combined with technology, the experience can be enhanced and amplified to a wider group.”

For more information please visit [www.wrglive.com](http://www.wrglive.com) or e-mail [hello@wrglive.com](mailto:hello@wrglive.com)