

LEVERAGING STRATEGIC EBCs

AN INDUSTRY WHITE PAPER DISCUSSING THE USE AND IMPACT OF EXECUTIVE BRIEFING CENTERS

CUSTOMER-FACING EVOLVES

■ Marketers leverage Executive Briefing Centers to engage customers and prospects in more intimate environments

Customer-facing, the critical component of converting prospects, is getting an upgrade as Corporate America continues to embrace Executive Briefing Centers as a strategic part of their companies' overall face-to-face mix.

EBCs have been leveraged for years, but never by so many companies and never at this level: The latest crop are high-tech, engagement-based environments that literally stamp an indelible brand on visitors and immerse guests in the total corporate experience. "The EBC is the bull's-eye of the brand experience," says Dave Piper, managing director-experiences at Philadelphia-based EBC solution provider Sparks. "It creates a highly personal interaction between a host company and decision-makers from key accounts."

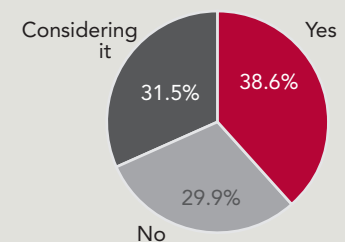
As prospects have less time to attend traditional trade shows and customer summits, and as brands press on to create quality time with prospects away from the eyes of competitors, EBCs fill the void. "If you have the most state-of-the-art products in the world, how you represent yourself has to be done with state-of-the-art marketing techniques," says Rob Pollack, Boeing's vp-branding.

- **They're Intimate.** From IBM and Sun Microsystems to HP and 3M, EBCs are being used by companies as 360-degree environments that wrap attendees in a brand or product. EBC visitors are more "guests" than "attendees." And they come for a reason—less to browse and more to learn and understand. It's a private stage on which to tell the story.
- **They're Customized.** An engaging EBC combines interactive design—allowing attendees to explore a brand and its solutions in the ways that impact them directly—and highly-specific presentations prepared with each visitor and decision-maker in mind. When prospects visit an EBC, they meet with a variety of people in addition to sales reps—from representation at the executive level to subject matter experts who can discuss the nitty-gritty details of how and why a host company's product can provide the ultimate business solution. It's as personal as an experience can get, and it can move the dial in a way that no other element in your marketing portfolio can.
- **They're Experiences.** High-tech experience design techniques are turning EBCs into Broadway-caliber showcases for products and services, using everything from theaters and product demo centers to digital executive speeches and timelines of corporate cultures and histories. Cisco's Telepresence EBC, for example, provides a literal taste of the product from the moment guests walk in via a "virtual receptionist" that welcomes them.
- **They Pay Back.** Talk to longtime users of EBCs and they'll point to booked business, solidified relationships and quality time with prospects that all lead to converting guests into buyers. EBCs are providing ROI across the country and the trend is continuing to heat up as they're used as parts of face-to-face toolboxes.

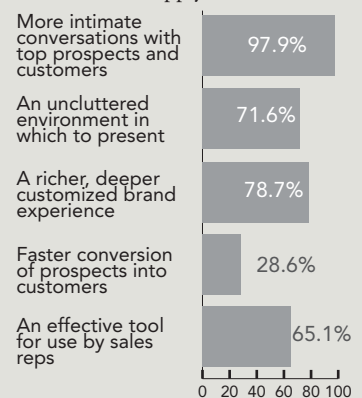
"Marketers needing more intimate, face-to-face engagement with customers and prospects are more aggressively integrating EBCs into their live marketing mix."

THE GROWING POWER OF LEVERAGING EBCs

Has your company leveraged Executive Briefing Centers as a tool for connecting with customers?



If yes, what were the top 5 benefits (select all that apply)?



Source: Survey of brand marketers by Event Marketer magazine.

“If {customers} go to a conference—and they do—they’re just going to sit in a room with 500 other people. Some consider that an inefficient use of their time, because they’re just getting a general information update. EBCs are much more personalized.”

-TREVOR WESTOBY,
SUN MICROSYSTEMS

BUILDING BLOCKS

■ Seven keys to creating best-in-class EBCs

In addition to being a significant investment that requires a great deal of internal support, both the initial design and execution of the EBC and the ongoing support of the center can require a greater allocation of time and money than many other marketing initiatives. Here are seven key things to keep in mind when creating and executing a strategic EBC platform:

1 Seek the voice of the customer. Survey customers in advance of creating the EBC to get a feel for what they’re looking for in an executive-level interaction. “Determine how clearly your message would align with a visit and what benefit would be gained from that,” says Dave Piper, managing director-experiences at Sparks.

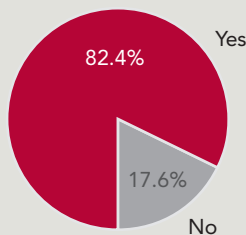
2 Think total experience. While the primary focus is usually on the center design and on-site presentation, putting attention into other details can make as much of an impact on the experience as the visit itself. How will you qualify and invite decision-makers, for example? How will you follow-up?

3 Prepare the internal audience. One of the biggest indicators of success will be how you prepare the company for the EBC and how to use the facility. “You have to create a culture that will use best practices, not just in operating the center, but in how it’s used by the internal audience,” Piper says. “If you instill true change management and put that on equal footing with the center itself, you have the highest likelihood of success.”

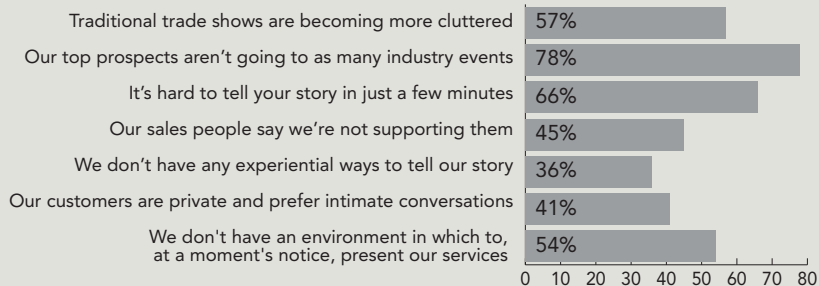
4 Determine availability of the right people. A successful EBC requires a significant time investment from top-level sales reps and experts from your company. Will these people be available—and willing—to invest the time needed to participate in briefings at the center? “You’ve got to be prepared to staff the facility with people who understand the sales process and understand the sales cycles,” says Trevor Westoby, director-global briefing network, Sun Microsystems. “These are not meeting coordinators. Some of the people here are top sales people with large accounts and experience.”

MORE INTIMATE CONNECTIONS

Would a way to create more intimate, one-on-one engagements with customers benefit your ROI?



What challenges would embracing Executive Briefing Centers help solve? (select all that apply)



Source: Survey of brand marketers by Event Marketer magazine.

5 Think of alternate benefits. How else can the center—and the experiences—be used to benefit your company and its clients? “A lot of the centers are turning out to be a real source for gathering insight data,” says Lisa Hanna, manager-executive briefing center at Cadence. “You have someone who can monitor the briefing, take down what the customer is saying and turn that into actionable requirements that you can follow-up and deliver on.”

6 Build in customization time. No matter how glitzy and impressive your facility is, an EBC is only as successful as the interaction with the client. To that end, make sure that resources are allocated so that the internal people assigned to each client have substantial time to prepare and customize each presentation so that it speaks to each client’s business concerns.

“We have what we refer to as a ‘customer visit management process,’” says Candace Mailand, manager-Innovation Center at 3M. “It varies depending upon the needs of the customer. What are their expectations, goals and objectives? Understanding this in preparation for the agenda, is critical for the overall success of the meeting.”

7 Identify the EBC team. “One of the key successes to an Executive Briefing Center is the host team,” Piper says. “You can never understate the value of the host team. You need folks who are intelligent and service-minded who have the ability to make the guest feel welcome.”

MAKING THE CONNECTION

■ On-site tips: what works and why

A successful EBC attendee experience requires a variety of elements coming together to create an experience that impresses the customer and moves the dial on business. Three points to keep in mind when you’re building the strategy for successful EBC visitor interactions:

- **Framework.** Although every presentation at the EBC should be created specifically for the visitor, a template framework for every experience will go a long way toward making sure each visitor’s time is spent effectively. “We follow a certain formula no matter who we’re speaking to,” says Bridgette Rivers, manager-customer engagement at The Gil Hatch Center for Customer Innovation at Xerox. “We hit on three points with each client—the right business model, the right work flow and the right technology.”
- **Customization.** How brands customize the experience within that framework is what will make or break the interaction. There are a variety of tools available to help with the customization process—technology makes it easy to change digital content on the fly, for example, allowing brands the opportunity to tailor an impressive experience to each client.
- **Facilitation.** One thing that has improved EBC experiences at Sun Microsystems is the introduction of a facilitator, who acts as an impartial host to keep meetings on track. “We put an expert facilitator in the room, and he or she can lead the discussion with the customers’ and the account teams’ agreement. It’s where we can have a solid ‘what do you want to get out of this meeting’ discussion,” says Trevor Westoby, director-global briefing network.

ARE YOU AN EBC CANDIDATE?

■ **More than six YES answers says you are an EBC match**

- 1 Is your product hard to describe using written words or marketing collateral?
- 2 Are your sales teams demanding more customer face time?
- 3 Are fewer customers attending traditional events or shows?
- 4 Would a live presentation resonate heavily with prospects?
- 5 Do you have solid conversion rates for prospects engaged in live settings?
- 6 Is your company cutting your traditional event budgets?
- 7 Is demonstrating technology key to making/closing sales?
- 8 Are you collecting prospect data and leaning on lead-collection?
- 9 Is your company looking for more permanent brand experiences?
- 10 Do you have a story to tell customers?

LEARN THE ABCs OF EBCs

To download a free 45-minute webinar on the power of Executive Briefing Centers, find out what they’re all about, and get some tangible case studies, head to eventmarketer.com/ebc.

Interested in having Event Marketer present an EBC Lunch & Learn at your office? Call 203-899-8446.

EBC ON THE RECORD

BRIEFING BITES

■ Three minutes with three EBC marketers

NAME: Candace Mailand
TITLE: Manager-3M Innovation Center
COMPANY: 3M



You pushed into the realm of EBCs because...

We have a number of customer technical centers throughout the world, but we didn't have one here in the United States. Forty percent of our operations are here, and it didn't make sense that we didn't have a place where we could bring our customers. This gives us an opportunity to showcase the depth and breadth of everything 3M has to offer.

You've been open for a year. The response so far?

We've had more than 1,000 customers visit, which is phenomenal. We're averaging between five and six visits a day.

Who represents 3M during meetings at your EBC?

A variety of disciplines and a number of businesses are almost always represented. One business—like the optical systems division, for example—might be the host for a particular customer, but they're also inviting other 3M businesses to take part in the discussions that are taking place.

NAME: Cynthia Murray
TITLE: Director-Vision Center
COMPANY: McKesson



What are the primary benefits of having an EBC?

It brings our company to life for customers. We are such a large company that our customers tend to know us based on the businesses that they deal with, but they might not be aware of the full breadth of products and services that we offer. Many times, people say, "I didn't know you did that," and it leads to further conversations and cross-selling opportunities.

Who comes to visit your EBC?

It's really a wide mix of folks. Our primary audience, of course, is customers and prospects, but we also host investors and analysts, media, prospective board members and different associations. We also have a number of politicians who come through, and it's really a great way to show what's happening within healthcare to legislators.

What was the biggest focus in pre-EBC planning meetings?

For us, it was really, "How do we tell a story and have it make sense to every customer segment?" That story has morphed over time as we've acquired new businesses.

NAME: Trevor Westoby
TITLE: Director-Global Briefing Network
COMPANY: Sun Microsystems



Who generally visits your EBC?

During a typical meeting, we would expect to see four to six folks from a corporation, typically one of which would be at the cxo level. We would expect to see decision-makers and their advisers coming to meet with our subject matter experts.

What kind of preparation goes into each visit?

We spend a lot of time working with the account teams and then the customers before the visit. We typically have a four- to six-week lead time. We custom build agendas to meet the specific needs of the accounts.

Why do you think the EBC is the most effective way to connect with decision-makers?

If customers go to a conference—and they do—they're just going to sit in a room with 500 other people. Some consider that an inefficient use of their time, because they're just getting a general information update. EBCs are much more personalized.

INTERNAL AFFAIRS

■ How to get company executives and employees to sign on for the EBC

The true power of the Executive Briefing Center as a marketing and sales platform lies in the fact that it often brings together representation from multiple internal groups to provide the customer the most in-depth, informed presentation possible.

Although the marketing team might be the department most involved with getting the EBC up and running, the center will be nothing but an empty, ill-used space without a sign-on from internal constituents. To get employees and executives motivated, the big step is to get all involved parties together to both determine and answer the big question: How will the space be used?

"I think it's very important to do a full internal stakeholder analysis," says Trevor Westoby, director-global briefing network at Sun Microsystems. "You have to hold a meeting and get together the executive representation, the subject matter experts and the account teams and ask, 'What do we want to do here? What are the take-aways of these briefings?'"

Such collaboration sessions will go a long way toward getting internal stakeholders both informed and excited about the possibilities for the EBC. "Find out how customer visits are being conducted, and then develop a wish list from an internal perspective," advises Candace Mailand, manager-Innovation Center at 3M.

A targeted communication plan will also be beneficial as a way of answering concerns as quickly as they arise. "We did have a few skeptics at first," Mailand says. "When we were building the facility, there were a lot of questions about whether it would be used and how we would ensure that it wouldn't just be static."

To answer those questions, the team behind the EBC held a series of regular internal "open houses" during which 3M employees could come see what the center was about. The team also developed communication packages for the sales organization so they could get the word out to customers.

"Through some of these very simple things, we generated a lot of excitement and enthusiasm for what we were intending to do here," says Mailand.

"{EBCs} bring our company to life for customers.

We are such a large company that our customers tend to know us based on the businesses that they might be dealing with, but they might not be aware of the full breadth of products and services that we offer. Many times, people say 'I didn't know you did that,' and it leads to further conversations and cross-selling opportunities."

-CYNTHIA MURRAY,
MCKESSON

SHOW STOPPER

■ 3M pushes the experiential lever with its World of Innovation

Succinctly and effectively communicating the depth and breadth of a \$20+ billion company that offers 50,000 products, while educating and enlightening visitors to 3M's people, business processes and technologies was no easy task, but 3M's strategic team came up with the perfect solution.

The World of 3M Innovation is a business-based environment that takes guests down a path of discovery, experimentation, and business processes. Through it all, science, technology and branding come together in a way that is relevant, educational and functional (all elements throughout the space were created to be customizable and updatable on the fly). Inside, an interactive video wall brings to life the people of 3M, including past and present innovators. This wall serves as a relevant introduction to a Timeless Timeline of Customer Success, a three-dimensional interactive theater featuring video testimonials from customers who have capitalized on their partnerships with 3M (Designer and builder: Sparks, Philadelphia.)

Continued on next page



From there, visitors head to the Vision Dome Theater, credited as the first permanent installation of a 360-degree, 3-D domed theater leveraging 3M's own office projectors. A total of 17 separate experience paths present guests with customizable ways to learn more. Guests are invited to choose the most relevant paths, which lead to the most targeted products and information. The point: Each journey is customized according to the visiting customer's interests. "We have a number of customer technical centers throughout the world, but we didn't have one here in the United States. Forty percent of our operations are here, and it didn't make sense that we didn't have a place where we could bring our customers," says Candace Mailand, manager-Innovation Center. "This gives us an opportunity to showcase the depth and breadth of everything 3M has to offer."

In all, two interactive Innovation Stations, 21 applied technology stations (boasting 84 interactive hands-on demonstrations) and 10 product benefit walls give visitors the opportunity to connect with 3M's processes and products in a way that is engaging, enlightening and easy to understand. Wherever possible, 3M materials were used in the fabrication of the experience. "3M has several internal technologies that we were able to implement—including the 3M digital signage package. With the software that supports that package, any time a guest is scheduled to enter, you can have customized digital welcomes, signage, and interactives specifically for that guest, and those touchpoints can follow the guest throughout the experience," says Dave Piper, managing director-experiences at Sparks.



LANDING GEAR

■ Boeing uses a 30,000-square-foot Customer Experience Center to bring prospects even closer to its brand and products

Face-to-face engagement is getting big play across the entire marketing mix at Boeing these days, and it's paying off. The old-school sales approach of inviting prospects to watch presentations and look at mock-ups has literally been thrown away, replaced by a high-tech, all-touch Customer Experience Center that goes leaps and bounds beyond traditional sales demos.

Upon entering the 30,000-square-foot space, customers tour interiors of four airplanes. Conference and research rooms provide space for in-depth meetings between Boeing executives and customers, beneath a domed ceiling featuring lit cities on a circular map. Curved walls and ceilings reflect the arcing lines of the livery displayed on the much-buzzed-about Dreamliner 787 aircraft.

"It's a unique environment in which to talk to customers about overall solutions and services," says Diana Klug, director-marketing, brand promotion and creative services. "It was designed to spark conversations, to promote conversation, to facilitate conversation."

From there comes the experiential anchor of the EBC, the Customer Solutions Studio. A completely customizable answer to the challenge of illustrating Boeing's not-so-tangible services, which include retrofitting aircraft interiors to handling supply chain management, the Studio lets customers see, touch, feel and taste the new Boeing. A main room features a series of screens offering digital video that gives each visitor a full immersion into the services that Boeing offers throughout an aircraft's lifecycle.

The Studio is entirely RFID-enabled, which allows Boeing to seamlessly tailor every single tour based on who the visitors are. On another wall, the client can view video of the interior of a Boeing aircraft. But with another quick RFID swipe, the system customizes the virtual space to reflect the customer's branding, corporate colors and messaging. To ensure the RFID technology created the desired ah-ha effect, Boeing installed three card readers. One reader technically would have been enough to power the entire room, but with three units—and three distinct points for Boeing reps to activate personalization—the customer can witness the customization of each area as they approach it.

EXPERIENCE DESIGN

■ Tips for creating an influential and visual EBC environment

First impressions mean everything, and EBCs are no exception. The environment that you design for briefings is representative of the company—its message, its values and what it can do for its key clients.

While it might seem like the perfect place to put your company on display, the design process of an EBC is the time when it's necessary to look deeper. Each touchpoint in the experience is another conduit to a connection with the customer, and it's important to create an environment as engaging as the content.

"It's all too easy to equate an EBC to creating a showroom, but that's not what an EBC should be," says Dave Piper, managing director-experiences at Sparks. "The biggest differentiator in a showroom and a true brand experience is the storytelling aspect of it. You have to find a way to make it engaging, make it intuitive, to build the retention and make it memorable."

Critical to it all? Linking the messaging to the attending EBC guests in a meaningful way.

"One way to get that storytelling effect is to approach the design process as if you were literally reading a book," Piper says. "We use the word 'chapter' to define one section of the story from the next. You're building chapter on chapter and layer on layer to create the total experience."

Another key to effective design: interactivity. The more that the customer can get hands-on during an experience, the more likely they will feel that they are participating in a two-way interaction. "We look to engage as many senses as possible," Piper says. "We want people to develop sense memory, for example, so we always like to involve tactile interactives to engage them and get them to learn the story on their own. What they handle and do will set an emotional context to the experience."



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