

GMR

2024

**GMR BRAND
EXPERIENCE
INDEX.®**

2024

GMR BRAND EXPERIENCE INDEX[®]

At GMR we have invested years studying the power, effects, and triggers of memory-making. We have developed the String of Lights Effect, defining how brands can embed themselves into a person's story by creating unforgettable experiences – those experiences that become lights on a consumer's timeline and light up when they have to decide about a product, service, or company. Our extensive research on this subject has revealed that when someone has a highly immersive, sensorially engaging, and contextually relevant experience with a brand or product, they are 6 times more likely to choose that brand or product when making a purchase decision (a decision at a future date when you won't be there to help influence their choice!).

Now, after 5+ years and thousands of brand experiences reviewed, analyzed, and ranked, with a scientifically valid formula to know what works to deliver measurable results for your brand, we are able to analyze brand experience activations across the globe, to determine which brands get it and are making lasting connections, and which brands are wasting their (and their consumers) time.

This report features the most memorable brands of the past year, based upon their live experiences, as measured by GMR's proprietary experience design analysis & approach called SOLE Science™

OUR METHODOLOGY

OUR METHODOLOGY

GMR has developed research instruments to measure live brand experiences and created a data collection infrastructure to conduct ongoing measurements across the experience marketing landscape. This methodology was developed by a team of data scientists in partnership with strategists, behavioral psychologists, and external consultancy.

THE QUALITATIVE

Qualitative data was mined and aggregated through facilitated debrief sessions held immediately following event attendance. During these sessions, GMR researchers explored concepts around events and brands in greater detail—validating and driving exploration around trends. Then analysis was performed to identify insights, patterns, and map live experiences to need states.

THE QUANTITATIVE

In 2018, GMR began a series of laboratory experiments informed by behavioral psychology and cognitive neuroscience frameworks where memory functions, as they relate to recall, were tested under various conditions. As a result of these experiments, a set of factors was identified that reliably predict the formation of brand-embedded memories: the GMR Three Factor Model.

SENSORY IMMERSION

The number and intensity of senses engaged within the experience.

LEVEL OF ENGAGEMENT

The number of touchpoints a person is invited to interact with.

RELEVANCE TO CONTEXT

The degree to which the brand and the experience align with the event and/or deliver against the audience's passions and interests.

As these factors increase, experience participants are more likely to form the kind of brand-embedded autobiographical memories that impact downstream consumer behavior. Related in-market research conducted as part of our GMR Experience EQ work revealed that experiences can be interpreted or felt in systematically different ways based on individual or contextual differences. Our extensive research included investigations into how the effectiveness of tactics aimed at influencing memory are conditioned by environmental and human factors.

BRANDS BY GBEI® SCORE AS MEASURED BY SOLE SCIENCE™


























GMR data collectors attended more than 840 individual brand experiences across 101 live events, gathering comprehensive data from activations involving 573 distinct brands.

Events were selected across four categories: sports, music, culture, and conference/expos. Thousands of events were considered, with the final sample shaped by stratification based on size, admission costs, sponsor involvement, industry, category, location (and more) to ensure variation.

CREATING THE INDEX

GMR actively measures brands everywhere they offer experiences in the marketplace. Measurements allow us to construct estimates of how memorable each experience is likely to be. At the same time, measurements of consumer reactions are collected. This experience/event/consumer data is blended, yielding our GMR Brand Experience Index®.

The Top 25 Brands According to our Experts

- | | | |
|---|--|---|
|  1. JERSEY MIKE'S SUBS
QSR/Casual Dining/
Restaurants |  9. U.S. AIR FORCE
Government |  18. RED BULL
Food & Beverage |
|  2. LEGO
Entertainment |  10. BLUE DIAMOND ALMONDS
Food & Beverage |  19. SMIRNOFF
Beer, Wine, & Spirits |
|  3. FRITO-LAY
Food & Beverage |  11. CADILLAC
Automotive |  20. UBER EATS
Food Delivery |
|  4. FUJIFILM INSTAX
Retail & Wholesale |  12. LIQUID DEATH
Food & Beverage |  21. NISSAN
Automotive |
|  5. HUMANA
Healthcare (Insurance/
Hospital Services) |  13. PINTEREST
Technology |  22. COCA-COLA
Food & Beverage |
|  6. HEALTHFIRST
Healthcare (Insurance/
Hospital Services) |  14. HOWDY BEER
Beer, Wine, & Spirits |  23. AMERICAN FAMILY INSURANCE
Insurance
(Non-Healthcare) |
|  7. SUBARU
Automotive |  15. U.S. ARMY
Government |  24. DELTA AIRLINES
Airline |
|  8. DYSON
Health & Beauty |  16. INDEED
Employment Service |  25. TASTE FRANCE
Agri-food |
| |  17. TOYOTA
Automotive | |

 [CLICK HERE FOR THE FULL GBEI® REPORT](#)

EXPERT INSIGHTS ON THE BEST BRAND EXPERIENCE



MAX LENDERMAN
CHIEF EXPERIENCE OFFICER

Max helps to guide brands to look beyond traditional communication channels and use innovative experiences for business growth and brand meaning.

“*Jersey Mike’s at Country Jam – Tour from the Shore seamlessly blended country music with their East Coast roots, an unexpected yet brilliant move. The setup was well-executed, with surprise performances and a cool lounge area. With lots of interactive elements and (importantly!) generous freebies for app users, they turned a simple activation into a surprising but highly-relevant experience.*”



THEME: EXPECTATION VS REALITY



JESSIE GIORDANO
CHIEF PARTNERSHIP OFFICER

Jessie oversees GMR’s global client portfolio and strategic consulting initiatives.

“*Liquid Death nailed it with a breakthrough experience delivering unexpected, fun, and share-worthy moments. The country club setup at Shaky Knees, complete with catchy signage, an orchestra, and quirky touches like temporary tattoos, sparked conversations that really stood out. For Gen Z—who are all about crafting their own narratives—the kind of creepy yet inviting environment struck the perfect balance, serving as an unforgettable entry into a membership unlike any other.*”



THEME: EMPOWERING ORGANIC MOMENTS VS BRANDED CONTENT



DENNIS JENDERS
EXECUTIVE STRATEGY DIRECTOR

With 20+ years of experience, Dennis harnesses imagination and curiosity to drive innovation, strengthening relationships between humans and brands.

“*From local events to the Super Bowl, Lay’s has been thrilling fans and tastebuds by going beyond sampling programs to offer bespoke menus and experiences. Whether it’s savoring themed dishes or having Chester Cheetah officiate their wedding, fans can’t get enough. Their creativity challenges us to rethink how we connect with the snacks we love, proving that understanding fandom is key to lasting engagement.*”



THEME: BEING BOLD VS STATUS QUO



GERARD LITTLEJOHN
SR. DIRECTOR, PARTNERSHIPS + SOCIAL IMPACT

Gerard is a marketing and social impact veteran with nearly 15 years of professional experience.

“*The U.S. Air Force impressed at the PBR Stockyards Showcase with their immersive games and knowledgeable brand ambassadors. It felt like more than just an activation—it was an adventure. They created a captivating environment that really drew you in.*”



THEME: INTERACTION VS TRANSACTION



TRACEY MUTOMBO
EXECUTIVE CREATIVE DIRECTOR

Tracey is an Executive Creative Director with an extensive background in both traditional advertising and multicultural audiences.

“*Lego nailed the nostalgia factor at Comic-Con, delivering a captivating concept that resonated with everyone. Life-size LEGO characters like Sonic and Captain America provided fantastic photo opps, and access to newly-released video games kept both IRL and digital activities entertaining. This event beautifully bridged generations, bringing back childhood memories and creating new ones to share. It’s proof that when brands like Lego embrace nostalgia with such diverse activities, they evoke powerful emotions and create connections that span across ages.*”



THEME: MINDSET VS MYOPIC

TOP INSIGHTS TO MAKE YOUR BRAND UNFORGETTABLE

1. YOUR NEEDS, OUR MISSION – BECAUSE WE’RE BETTER AT LISTENING THAN YOUR EX

Brands invest in experiences to earn people’s affection and build lasting memories with their audiences. But when they don’t anticipate people’s needs, they fail to get them in the right state of mind to hear their message, thus sabotaging their potential for meaningful connections.

Addressing human needs during live experiences ensures relevance and resonance. It shows that the brand understands and empathizes with its audience, leading to a more personalized and meaningful engagement. This could be anything from delivering a sense of belonging, offering a moment of release, or contributing to one’s identity or sense of enrichment. When a brand connects these needs with cultural shifts they can create experiences that hit different across modern audiences, which are more focused on personal and societal expectations.

Moreover, live experiences that meet human needs are often more impactful. They create positive, emotionally-charged experiences that stick in consumers’ minds, making them more likely to recall and choose the brand in

the future. Needs can range from utilitarian concepts endemic to the event to higher order, unique opportunities to express the brand. This phenomenon can be described as the String of Lights Effect (SOLE), where each positive brand moment creates a vibrant, enduring memory in the consumer’s mind. Get this wrong and your brand too, will soon be an ex.

2. EXPERIENCES THAT FIT YOUR CONSUMERS LIFE, NOT JUST THEIR WEEKEND

We see it all the time, brands that work hard to connect to their audience through a shared passion, the big game, or an epic music festival. It makes good sense, but don’t sleep on the other aspects of your consumers lives where your brand should play a central role. At RuPaul’s DragCon, most brands that showed up were endemic to Drag culture, but frankly, that could have been perceived as too “on the nose” and not all that memorable.

To breakthrough in the context of DragCon, it’s important to remember these queens have lives outside of Drag. Think about how your brand can cater to the diverse needs of your consumers by integrating into their lifestyle beyond that moment in time. It would have been really

cool to see some self-care/wellness brands there to address some of the unique challenges faced by LGBTQ+ individuals, thus demonstrating authentic understanding and support for the community. We are all complex creatures; brands that connect through deeper concepts like shared values demonstrate that the brand reflects consumers’ full identity, which in turn can lead to increased brand loyalty. It also fosters a sense of partnership and trust, which can also drive long-term brand embedded memory creation.

3. THERE’S A LOT TO LEARN FROM TAYLOR SWIFT

Many brand marketers are fully bought in on the power of experience and its impact on consumers. There is a lot of focus on ensuring the experience itself is perfect before the curtain comes up, but its key to remember that it may actually begin months before. Swifties, for example, when deciding to attend the Eras Tour, go through a host of pre-event planning and rituals – from making friendship bracelets, preparing their fit, and writing “13” on their hands (Taylor’s favorite number, duh).

Rituals ramp up anticipation and psychologically prime your audience for what’s to come. Think of them as the appetizer to the main course.

From a marketing strategy perspective, pre-event rituals tap into various Experience EQ combinations. They can create connectedness through shared anticipation and communal excitement if people are engaging in a countdown or sharing their prep on social media. They foster identity as attendees flaunt their participation and involvement, feeding their desire for recognition. This enriches their experience even before they scan their ticket to enter the actual event. This aspect of the experience presents a massive white space opportunity to show up differently than your competitors, delivering a happy dose of dopamine along the way.

4. BEING UNHINGED CAN BREAK NORMS AND CAPTURE THE ZEITGEIST

Disruptive or Unhinged brands have a unique way of embedding themselves in our memories, often more effectively than run-of-the-mill interactions. When you introduce bold, unexpected elements into live experience, you captivate and engage audiences in a highly resonant way because of the unique impact on memory making. This type of strategy is highly effective for younger audiences in particular.

Diving headfirst into the weird, the odd, the dark, the unusual can make many brand marketers break out in a cold sweat. Disruptive experiences generate heightened attention by breaking the monotony and maintaining a state of alertness. Introduce elements that increase excitement, deliver surprise or even discomfort to better tap supercharged emotions as well as powerful memory anchors. Disruption often invites consumers to engage actively rather than passively, creating a sense of co-creation. Additionally, our brains are wired to remember novel and surprising events more vividly, and when you combine that with strong storytelling, your brand will stick in the minds of your consumers, especially when you challenge the status quo. These are the brand experience ingredients that drive high levels of engagement, viral levels of social sharing and scream cultural fluency, and who doesn't want that. The question is....are you ready to take your brand to the edge?

5. BRANDS, GET YOUR CONSUMERS TO SWIPE RIGHT

Brands that foster connection among consumers understand that it is vital because it drives loyalty and increases spending. Now more than ever, there is inherent trust in a brand when like-minded people share perceptions and experiences with brands. In the context of live events, this often presents missed opportunities for brands to develop community with its participants in favor of more one-to-one targeted interactions.

A sense of connection drives emotional bonds and enhances feelings of unity. Activities that encourage communal engagement (such as chanting for your favorite team) in a peer-to-peer environment synchronizes brain activity and releases neurochemicals like oxytocin. Additionally, these types of activities create harmony and reduce conflict, allowing for all to feel secure and supported. Not to mention it delivers joy. Experience tactics that can tap into joy, such as gamification, have an unparalleled ability to spark happiness, and let all revel in pure, unfiltered emotion. But brands can take this a step further by creating pop-up community spaces or social impact initiatives that uncover a new sense of meaning for participants and tighten bonds to the brand and one another. Creatively embedding your brand into those moments will ensure your experience creates a kind of magic that makes the experience unforgettable and your brand the "right" choice.

To get more of these brand memorability tips every couple of weeks, click below to listen and subscribe to The Voice of Experience podcast, hosted by experience industry veteran leaders Elke Jones and Max Lenderman.



CLICK HERE FOR THE
VOICE OF EXPERIENCE PODCAST

A MESSAGE FROM GMR'S PRESIDENT AND CEO TYSON WEBBER



I've been in the experience business for a long time, and there's too many reasons to list here for why this work still excites me every day. Instead, I'll share a line I once heard from a Chief Creative Officer I worked with that has stuck with me forever: "In one year, we'll have as many dinner stories as most people have in a lifetime."

That's the power of experience, and our GMR Brand Experience Index celebrates the best of the best of this type of human connection, which we know delivers a differentiated power for brands unlike any other type of marketing.

GMR has invested thousands of hours of our StoryMaker's time, energy and expertise in to building a data science practice that redefines how our industry measures memorability. I'm endlessly proud of how that investment shows up on these pages and in the work we do for our clients. I'm also thankful that every brand we observed in 2023 and 2024 allowed us to engage with and analyze their activations, because it's leading to what we know are groundbreaking advances in brand-driven memory making.

We're already looking forward to bringing you the third edition of the GMR Brand Experience Index in 2025. Thanks for taking this ride with us."

Chat with our SOLE Science™ Leaders

We'd love to show you how SOLE Science™ can help make your experience unforgettable and embed your brand into the hearts and minds of your audience forever.

Click below to schedule an introductory call about SOLE Science™ and the GMR Brand Experience Index or for more information on the rankings, our methodology, or our expertise.

ELKE JONES, CHIEF STRATEGY OFFICER



CHRIS HOYLER, VICE PRESIDENT OF MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS

