

A trade without a voice?

One year after the demise of the Live Brand Experience Association, Lorraine Franciso talks to founding members about how the industry has moved on and asks if a dedicated trade body still has any relevance



Despite the demise of dedicated trade body the Live Brand Experience Association (LBEA) more than a year ago, the experiential sector has continued to grow and is developing an integral role in the broader marketing mix.

In fact it is more buoyant than ever, according to former LBEA board members. ID chief executive Paul Ephremson says: "Spending in the sector has risen significantly, and brands are investing in experiential regardless of it having its own dedicated association."

Marketing magazine's field marketing league table in August found that many agencies have recorded a doubling in turnover since 2005 and that clients' budgets have risen by as much as 20%.

Because Experiential Marketing's managing director, Sharon Richey, says some people in the sector go as far as describing experiential as 'brand evangelism'. "Pampers is an amazing example," she says. "If you give a consumer, such as a new mother, enough social currency to talk about a product, she will speak the gospel for you."

Sense managing director Nick Adams is encouraged by the the Marketing Communications Consultants Association (MCCA) and Institute of Sales Promotion's (ISP) recognition of experiential. This proves it "is not a flash-in-the-pan technique but something people are buying into on a long-term basis", he says.



Ephremson



Richey



Adams

Sense's campaign for Müller Rice (above) and Because's promotion for energy supplier E.on

ID's Ephremson says the MCCA is planning to launch a project to try to centralise the sector's ROI information. He adds that the ISP is hoping to set up a training programme to ensure promotional staff standards are kept high. "There's a lot of people wanting to collaborate but it is not being channelled into one well-resourced body or central association."

The Direct Marketing Association (DMA) set a Brand Experience Strategy Group in motion last July. It officially launched in January and was renamed the Council Experiential Marketing Committee, or XMC.

Its chair Wendy Hooper, managing director of Carbon Marketing, says: "We're trying to offer a uniform initiative as experiential agencies are currently working to different ROI models. This will ensure the industry is taken seriously. We can now look to the DMA for a budget. Being a part of the DMA can also benefit the sector as it can offer advice on training."

Some believe the DMA's direct marketing roots prevent it from representing the experiential sector adequately. Because's Richey says: "I think wherever an experiential association sits, it has to be obvious why it is there. It shouldn't sit under the direct marketing banner as experiential is not direct marketing."

Comms Unit managing partner Barnaby Wynter agrees. "It should have helped

the LBEA from the start to establish a strong association," he says.

Hugh Robertson, managing partner at RPM, says his agency was not part of the original LBEA board as the association didn't have a single group of interest or one objective and represented media owners, media buyers and agencies. He says: "Experiential is another marketing tool – it is difficult to isolate it as it's such a broad medium. We are on the board of the MCCA as it stands as an organisation that looks at experiential as part of the marketing mix and celebrates brand execution."

The LBEA's former chairman, Space and People managing director Matthew Bending, says the industry is too diverse and there are too many people pulling in many directions. He attributes the association's downfall to lack of funding and says: "When we joined the LBEA we were young companies, still growing. We chipped in a lot of enthusiasm and maybe £2,000 each into the pot. You need bigger budgets to achieve something."

Many former board members believe one association could be a unifying force. The Ingram Partnership's Andy Tilley says: "The industry is still fragmented and it is still struggling to be seen as a powerful medium. It needs an association to allow people to see how effective the sector is."

Yet the experiential sector seems to be gaining recognition among its marketing peers in any case, as its innovative, insightful and unusual projects provide an unrivalled form of self-promotion.

Many firms still feel the repercussions of losing a dedicated representative body. It remains to be seen, however, if anyone can successfully step up to the mantle. ■

