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From The Field Of

Activating a suite: Contemporary view of a traditional product

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Once again, when trying to figure out how to operate in this restrictive economy, we need to look at everything we have been doing and determine whether to continue, abandon or modify.

For example, some may view suites as an extravagance and others may see them as ostentatious or fiscally irresponsible. The truth is, a suite, if presented and sold as a more aggressive, brand-activation platform, can completely differentiate your product.

It can provide you a method to tell your story as well as afford opportunities for return on investment, return on objective and return on experience, combining to create a competitive advantage.

■ Suite deals

When you think about it, a suite represents a time period of three to five hours (including the pregame, game and postgame events) when the sales team has private access and the focused attention of the prospect, in a venue where all of the amenities to enhance the experience are provided and delivered.

That is not easily replicated anywhere else, so why limit the function to just entertainment? Why not combine the entertainment with the business needs to more fully capitalize on a business opportunity?

According to "The Entertainment Economy," by Michael J. Wolf, "Given the pervasive impact of entertainment in our economy today, companies must exceed the efforts of their competitors to amuse, arouse and inform customers. In other words, companies need to provide entertainment experiences that engage consumers."

Thus a suite should be a business solution that tells your story in an interactive and entertaining way. Whenever possible it should permit the prospect to interact with the product.

A Harley-Davidson suite should have a Harley-Davidson bike and a display of Harley-Davidson history and memorabilia. Perhaps visitors to the suite are given coupons for a free weekend rental of a Harley-Davidson so that they can truly experience the brand.

A suite owned by a video-game manufacturer should have a complete video-game area where visitors can interact with the product.

A suite owned by an ice cream company should serve ice cream, possibly to the entire suite level and possibly testing new flavors. This suite could be the focus of a seasonlong promotion to win the ultimate birthday party. It could be supplemented with a Web site, in-game scoreboard messages, pictures and possibly live-feed video.

It might then also follow that a suite owned by Best Buy might contain a Magnolia home theater so



An ice cream company's suite could test new flavors, while a motorcycle display is a natural for a Harley-Davidson suite.

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Baseball Hall of Fame member

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SUITE CONCEPTS AND DESIGNS BY TOM ABRAMSON / VISIONWORKS

that visitors could compare watching the game live to watching the game on a state-of-the-art plasma HD TV complete with the most up-to-date sound system.

By the same token, why couldn't a Cadillac suite be outfitted as a Cadillac Escalade would be?

Why wouldn't a convention or vacation destination have a suite promoting its destinations with real examples of the benefits of that destination?

■ Serving a purpose

These activation platforms serve two interrelated purposes.

First, they differentiate that suite from any other suite in the venue. It looks different, feels different and in some cases, depending upon the product(s) of its owner, will smell and/or taste different.

Second, such suites become more than suites and more than marketing platforms. They become must-see destinations for the curious. Places people talk about.

They become places with a story, and a story that can be retold not only by the owner but also by everyone who has been to this new "in" place.

Of course, there are some limitations and issues that must be considered by the team and the venue. Obviously to make these types of cosmetic construction changes there would need to be funding set aside, which could be stipulated in the lease payments.

A team/venue might wish to offer this type of opportunity only to a seven- or 10-year leaseholder. Then again, perhaps this is the type of opportunity that might get a potential leaseholder to consider a longer term.

Concessionaires might have issues with food sampling or distribution from a suite. Again, this is something that would have to be negotiated, managed and controlled.

But in these economic times, it would seem that we will all have to make concessions and get along much better than we have in the past.

In closing, a suite is much more than a piece of real estate. It can be an engaging, interactive, living, breathing embodiment of your products and all that you are as a company.

Use your suite to tell your story and differentiate yourself from everyone else. In the case of suites, not fitting in might be the very best for your business.

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Suite spots

Suites have traditionally been used as:

- a place to entertain clients
- an inducement to attract prospects
- a reward for employees and clients
- a place to socialize with friends and families
- a private intimate space to share and watch sporting or entertainment events

While all of those uses are valid and should remain part of the mix, they are all primarily entertainment based and thus one-dimensional. A more contemporary use of suites, and one that can be tied into ROI or ROO and ROE, would add the following elements:

- a place to bring your brand to life
- an extension of your office/showroom
- an exciting location for a business meeting
- an interactive marketing platform
- a demonstration, research and sampling opportunity
- a place to showcase new product models or innovations
- a great setting to tell your story with experiential elements

Reader Comments

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