

Experience Required

It's the new mantra of strategy and marketing: If you want to keep your customers' attention, you've got to deliver a compelling experience. Bob Rogers and his colleagues are designing those experiences.

BY SCOTT KIRSNER

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Bob Rogers and Charlie Otte are busy orchestrating the assassination of Abraham Lincoln. Standing over a floor plan for the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library — which will open in 2003 in Springfield, Illinois, with a design owing as much to the wonderful world of Disney as to the hallowed halls of the Smithsonian — they take turns laying a sheet of tracing paper on top of the plan and jotting down scenarios for how library visitors will experience the shooting at Ford's Theatre.

The problem is when to actually shoot Lincoln. The assassination will replay over and over throughout the day. But Rogers and Otte can't control when visitors enter the room, or what will be playing when they enter. What if visitors miss the crucial moment?

Otte, 44, muses about not using a gunshot at all. "In the previous room, the [Civil] War has just ended, so there's a lot of cheering and fireworks," he says. "The audience's mood is lifted. Everyone's having a good time. In the box are Abe and Mary. We all know that Lincoln gets shot. We just don't know when. It's very foreboding."

But Rogers, 50, thinks that the climax is essential. He pulls out a marker and sketches a different version on a piece of trace. He draws a seating chart for the president's box and narrates what happened: "Booth talks his way past the guard, lingers a moment, shoots the president, catches his spur in some bunting as he jumps to the stage, and breaks his leg. If he hadn't broken his leg, he might never have been caught."

The historical moment is too dramatic just to suggest impending tragedy. It seems as though Rogers, founder and chairman of BRC Imagination Arts Inc., will win this particular debate. Besides, as team member David Bradstreet, 36, observes, "One of our biggest constituencies is kids on field trips. And kids want action."

BRC Imagination Arts is at the epicenter of a trend that's shaking the foundations of museums, libraries, science centers, shopping malls, cultural centers — and virtually every aspect of the business world. Customers have more choices than ever, higher expectations than ever, and more marketers competing for their attention than ever. So how do you break through all

of the clutter and capture the attention of customers suffering from sensory overload? By creating experiences that are so distinctive, so compelling, that they stand out in a crowded landscape. These days, companies and organizations want to embrace the power of Disneyland and create their own "brandlands" — destinations (both real and virtual) that deliver a memorable message by telling a compelling story. Says Rogers: "The world doesn't have enough magic and wonder."

Two consultants — James H. Gilmore and B. Joseph Pine II — popularized that idea in their widely read book, *The Experience Economy* (Harvard Business School Press, 1999). Bob Rogers and his colleagues have been designing memorable experiences for nearly 19 years. BRC may have earned its reputation designing exhibits for Epcot and for various world's fairs, but the Burbank, California-based creative shop is now applying theme-park-style technology, special effects, and storytelling techniques to projects like the Lincoln library; a Volkswagen factory in Dresden, Germany; a cultural center for the Sapmi people in Karasjok, Norway; the Texas State History Museum, in Austin; the venerable Franklin Institute Science Museum, in Philadelphia; and the National Cowgirl Museum & Hall of Fame, in Fort Worth, Texas. On hold is a project for the Los Angeles Police Department called "Behind the Badge: The LAPD Experience." Disney had Adventureland, Fantasyland, and Tomorrowland; the projects that BRC now works on are corporate brandlands, cultural discoverylands, and learninglands.

One of the main causes of the experience explosion — BRC expects a 300% growth in revenue this year — is, surprise, the Internet. "Have you been inside a museum lately?" asks Brian Edwards, 49, president of the Themed Entertainment Association, a coalition of nearly 700 companies (including BRC) involved in crafting experiences. "The experience is very blah. You can do research — see pictures, read text, even look at videos — on the Net. People are asking us to design rich, meaningful experiences that can't be duplicated online. They know that the paradigm of how you manifest your institution or your brand in 3-D space is changing because of the Internet."

So instead of simply staring at important historical documents

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like the Gettysburg Address (which is part of the Lincoln library's archive), library visitors will relive the life of Abraham Lincoln in an intense way that's simply not duplicable online. They'll enter a plaza containing large-scale reproductions of the log cabin where Lincoln was born, as well as the facade of the White House. They'll watch as apparitions of Lincoln and Civil War-era soldiers appear and disappear in the library stacks, explaining how researchers use the collection at the library to make history come to life. They'll visit young Abe's law office, stand in the crowd at the Lincoln-Douglas debates, and shuffle solemnly up to a coffin where a Lincoln doppelganger lies in state.

"If we thought that a roller coaster would help us tell the story of Lincoln's life, we'd build one," says Rogers, who has a round, rubbery face, close-cut salt-and-pepper hair, slate-blue eyes, and the smooth voice of a classical-radio announcer. To indicate that he's in charge — but in a casual, southern California kind of way — he often wears a sweater draped over his shoulders, with the arms tied across his chest.

"The invasion of theme-park technologies and techniques into the rest of the world is based on the notion that people have new ways of acquiring and digesting information," Rogers continues. "You either get with the program, or you plan not to reach those people."

All Business Is Show Business

Bob Rogers began his career creating and selling illusions. As a teenager, one of his first employers was Merlin's Magic Shop at Disneyland. Rogers has a great collection of well-burnished tales about his life and work, several of which involve this first job in the theme-park industry. "I'd perform a trick for the customers: That was the show," he says. "Then I'd drag them over to the cash register to sell them the trick: That was the business part. Show . . . business. It has made us a very results-oriented company."

Rogers proudly explains that he has been fired three times from Disney. Even people in the industry who do not know him well know his story. Rogers was first fired as a teenager, for what he himself describes as "deviant behavior." He was so curious about the theme park that he occasionally accepted assignments — like working on the park's railroad — for which he hadn't been trained. "I was totally fascinated by Disneyland," he says. "It was like a huge toy train set at 1:1 scale. I wanted to know what made the pirates move, where the parade went at night, where all of the cash went. I should have been put in management training, but instead I was fired and told not to bother trying to get a job there ever again."

Four years later, after attending Stanford University and the

California Institute of the Arts, Rogers got another job at Disney — as a screenwriter. Again he was fired, this time for not turning out the kinds of scripts that Disney wanted. He spent several years directing television commercials and short educational films ("I can tell you everything you need to know about longitude versus latitude") before landing a third job with Disney in the late 1970s, working with the legendary Imagineering group. At Imagineering, he helped develop film concepts for Epcot, which at the time was still in the planning stages.

After Rogers finished production on "Impressions de France," a film for the French pavilion at Epcot, Disney Imagineering chief Marty Sklar offered him the opportunity to go freelance. General Motors needed someone to develop two shows for its "World of Motion" attraction at Epcot, and Disney didn't have enough internal resources to "guarantee the result," Rogers explains. Rogers agreed to leave Disney (he concedes that he wasn't actually fired this time; "fired from Disney three times" just makes for a better story, he says) and start an independent firm to do the GM work. One project was "The Bird and the Robot" — a humorous show about assembly-line automation that paired an industrial robot with a wisecracking "animatronic" toucan. The other project, "The Water Engine," was a rather derisive animated film about alternatives to the internal-combustion engine.

BRC, which started out in Rogers's garage, grew rapidly, doing work mostly for theme parks, expos, and world's fairs. For World Expo '86, in Vancouver, BRC designed three different attractions. One of them, a large-format film called "Rainbow War," was nominated for an Academy Award. Another, "Spirit Lodge," served as a test bed for a set of techniques that BRC trademarked as Holavision. Essentially an enhanced version of a 19th-century magic trick called Pepper's Ghost, Holavision uses projections against a sheet of glass to produce the illusion that humans onstage are interacting with spectral images. In "Spirit Lodge," an elderly Native American storyteller coaxes smoky pictures of people and animals out of a campfire. At the Lincoln library, Holavision will give visitors the impression that Lincoln is coming back from beyond through a portrait.

In the late 1980s, BRC began work on a new \$70 million visitor's center for the Johnson Space Center, in Houston — a project that would get other science centers, museums, and various nonprofit institutions interested in BRC's technology-rich, high-glitzy, narrative-centric presentation style. At the center, a giant 870-millimeter film, narrated by real astronauts, describes what it takes to join the corps at NASA and to survive the rigorous training process. Interactive stations let visitors practice landing a shuttle at Kennedy Space Center, and a live show gives a sample of zero-gravity life in a space station. NASA approached BRC again when it needed a design for the

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Apollo/Saturn V Center, which opened in Florida in 1996. The center re-creates an Apollo-era launch and the Apollo 11 moon landing, including a full-sized lunar module that descends from a starry sky to the crater-scarred surface of the moon.

Today, while BRC still does work for theme parks — it is designing a new Universal Studios outpost being built in Japan and a park called Discovery World being planned for Taiwan — much of the crew's creative energy is concentrated on projects in less-conventional contexts. While theme-park-style design has stumbled a bit in the restaurant arena (most notably with the bankruptcies of both Steven Spielberg's Dive! and Planet Hollywood), it's only just gaining momentum with corporate brandlands, which can present a lengthy, uninterrupted ad to a captive audience, as well as with nonprofit institutions, which can charge higher ticket prices and, perhaps, have more of an impact on visitors.

"We call them content-based experiences," says Rogers, who emphatically describes BRC as a band of storytellers — not technologists. "The audience walks in the front door and then walks out the back door several hours later. If people are the same when they walk out, that means that we've failed."

On the spacious second floor of BRC, digital countdown clocks inform project teams how many days, minutes, and seconds they have left until the curtain goes up on their show. Concept drawings, postcards, and panoramic photos of building sites cover almost every inch of wall space, and architectural models in various states of construction and deconstruction rest on nearly every table and desk. The atmosphere of the place is similar to that of a junior-high-school study hall just before a science fair.

Project manager Tony Mitchell, 46, a compact and energetic former ballet dancer from west Texas, is preparing to install an attraction called the "Sapmi Magic Theater" in northern Norway. The sets and props have already been built, and they're being shipped to Oslo. From there, they'll be trucked to Karasjok. Mitchell and his art director, Peter Hyde, 29, will spend some three months in Karasjok getting the attraction up and running.

The show asks a question that's very relevant to the indigenous Sapmi people, a nation of reindeer herders who live in several Scandinavian countries. As Mitchell puts it, "Is the outside world going to overwhelm the Sapmi culture?" Instead of relying exclusively on objects in glass cases and on text that's silk-screened on the wall to get visitors to consider that question, Hyde and Mitchell have created an effects-laden show that brings the audience temporarily into the world of the Sapmi people. Using digital projections on traditional Sapmi drums

and on a fog screen — artificial fog sandwiched by two currents of air — Hyde and Mitchell will retell a Sapmi legend about the mythical white reindeer. They will then turn the theater into an outdoor environment on a winter's night, with fiber-optic stars twinkling overhead and a brief appearance by auro-*ra borealis*. The desired result is that visitors — most of whom come from urban areas throughout Europe — will be imbued with respect and reverence for a culture that is very different from their own.

Mike Chisman and Suzy Vanderbeek are starting to select vendors and cast actors for "Spirit of Texas," an attraction at the Texas State History Museum that will recap Texas history three times an hour. They've got diagrams and lists that detail every prop and scenic element that will be used for the fully automated show. The lists contain entries like "31 — Galveston Wreckage with Little Girl three dimension set — Stage Left Upper." Downstairs, Chisman shows me one of the theater seats for another show at the museum. The seats will make audience members feel as if they are experiencing a rattlesnake bite on their butts, the rumble of an approaching hurricane, and a swarm of locusts in their hair. It hardly sounds like an appealing travelogue for the state, but Chisman is sure that the seats, with their air bladders and transducers, will give visitors a thrill.

The team working on a brandland for Volkswagen's new Glaserne Manufaktur — the assembly plant that will produce VW's forthcoming D Model luxury car — is still trying to figure out which technologies will be ready for prime time when the place opens to the public next spring. The brandland will be targeted at visitors to Dresden, auto enthusiasts, and car buyers who have come to pick up their new D Model at its birthplace. There will be driving simulators — actual D Models mounted on a moving platform that will make the cars seem to swerve, dip, and rumble. Visitors will be able to use one of the world's largest touch-screen displays to configure the D Model of their dreams and to see half-sized 3-D models of the car's interior and exterior. As a souvenir, visitors will get a picture of themselves sitting inside a D Model, superimposed into the city of their choice.

An "augmented reality scope" will allow visitors to direct cameras to focus on particular areas of the manufacturing floor, to hear what's going on, and to read captions that provide details about the process. Webcams will provide a view of what's going on at other locations, such as the facility where the D Model engine is made.

Trying out new technologies in pursuit of education, cultural awareness, brand building, or just plain fun is what lends BRC an atmosphere of permanent brainstorming and pervasive creativity. Inside the main conference room at BRC headquarters

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is a table covered in white butcher paper, and every wall of the room is a tack-ready surface — ready to accommodate an off-the-cuff sketch or a flowchart. The 80 full-time employees exist in a perpetual dream state, conjuring up environments that will tell stories, resuscitate history, and, as if by happenstance, teach.

From Theme Parks to Brandlands

The vast majority of the 29,399 attendees at the 81st Annual Convention and Trade Show of the International Association of Amusement Parks and Attractions (IAAPA) are, unsurprisingly, people who operate amusement parks, miniature-golf courses, video arcades, haunted houses, and water parks. But in recent years, representatives of zoos, science museums, cultural centers, aquariums, and historical sites have been showing up in greater numbers.

“We’ve been seeing a quiet evolution of the themed-entertainment industry,” says Roberta Perry, vice president of themed entertainment at 20th Century Fox. Perry has been to the IAAPA show every year since 1985. “Since 1990, we’ve started seeing McDonald’s and all of the other restaurant groups coming in, followed by real-estate developers, shopping-mall developers, casino developers, cruise lines, zoos, and so on. Those are the new markets that many of the A-list vendors are already working in.”

At the 1999 IAAPA show, Perry says, the buzz among attendees was evenly divided between two new projects: the Universal Studios Islands of Adventure park, in Orlando, and a \$125 million science center for the Center of Science and Industry (commonly known as COSI), in Columbus, Ohio — a project that incorporates animatronics, motion simulators, and 3-D movies into its seven “Learning Worlds.”

The trade show, traditionally held the week before Thanksgiving, fills the entire Georgia World Congress Center, in Atlanta, as well as the adjacent Georgia Dome — a total of 515,321 square feet of exhibit space. The show floor is like a carnival midway, only carpeted and slightly less aromatic. It’s bright, loud, and thoroughly overstimulating. In the Georgia Dome, exhibitors set up full-sized “spin and barf” rides. In the World Congress Center, aisle after aisle is filled with things like automatic minidoughnut machines; an animatronic ghoul named Dr. Baktylife singing “I’m Too Sexy”; acrobatics troupes for hire; firms that specialize in making fake rocks and trees; parachute-jump simulators; mascot costumes; roller-coaster cars; scent cannons; player pianos; gigantic pumps for wave pools and water slides; mist and fog machines; and an emaciated, bare-chested rubber man in an electric chair, whose head smokes and whose body convulses when the juice is turned on.

Over-the-top pageantry galore, the show is itself an experience.

In the introductory session, IAAPA then-chairman John Roberts appears at the podium in a puff of smoke, wearing what looks like an authentic space suit. With him is Bud, a 2200-pound Clydesdale. To break up the boring, quotidian talk of animatronic dinosaurs, coasters launched by linear-induction motors, and interconnected water rides that cut down on queues, Brazilian dancers in skimpy costumes gyrate down the aisles of the auditorium.

On the trade-show floor, BRC has a large booth in the area devoted to “Amusement and Entertainment Technologies.” At IAAPA, the word “technology” is used loosely; BRC is just across the aisle from a company called Kiddie Rides USA and not far from Cutting Edge Creations Inc., a company that makes inflatable products such as interactive games and giant mascots.

“IAAPA reminds us that we’re really just in the high end of the carnival business,” says a bemused Rogers, who serves on IAAPA’s Board of Manufacturer and Supplier Directors. Out of the 30,000 attendees, he estimates that only about 50 are potential BRC clients. Still, the event gives him a chance to renew old contacts and to move new business forward, and he spends the week schmoozing. At the 1999 show, he met a group of developers who were planning to build a mythology-based theme park outside Athens, which resulted in a massive new assignment for BRC called Mythos.

Right now, the only major theme park under construction in the United States is California Adventure, which is being built next to Disneyland, in Anaheim. So vendors at IAAPA were angling for theme-park projects outside the United States, as well as for projects at unconventional domestic venues.

Before the show, I had spoken on the phone with Bob Crean, vice president of operations at Advanced Animations Inc., an animatronics maker in Stockbridge, Vermont. Advanced Animations has a reputation for developing incredibly high-end figures; it built the impressive and intimidating robots for Universal’s “Terminator 2, 3-D: Battle Across Time” show. Crean was marketing “Grossology,” a show about “gross stuff,” to malls and science museums. After the IAAPA show, he informed me that Advanced Animations had sold an animatronic dragon to the developers of a hotel being built in Korea who wanted a Vegas-style show in its front yard.

Just across the floor from Advanced Animations, show attendees in suits were strapping into parachute harnesses and donning virtual-reality goggles. A crowd had gathered. Peter Beale, 56, chairman and CEO of Illusion Inc., the company that makes this \$45,000 parachute-jump simulator, said that he envisions simulators like this one someday being used in schools “to teach kids math by letting them drive the space shuttle, launch a satellite, and gather data. In the evening, they

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could use the same vehicle to fight aliens.”

On the second of my three days at IAAPA, I stopped by the Iwerks Entertainment booth to see a demo of its turn-key 3-D/4-D FX Theatre. Iwerks was founded in 1986 by Don Iwerks, who is the son of the late Ub Iwerks, Walt Disney’s original collaborator. Iwerks was at the show selling a more compact, more affordable version of the 3-D/4-D experience — an idea that marries a 3-D film with various in-theater effects, such as water dripping from the ceiling and air blasting in your face.

The demo film, which featured Leslie Nielsen as a pirate, was riddled with glitches. Part of the sound track was missing, and the 3-D image was out of registration. “This is making me dizzy,” groaned Chuck Goldwater, Iwerks’s then-president and CEO, who was sitting next to me. He got up to see what had gone wrong. A power surge had rattled Iwerks’s high-definition digital projector. Goldwater restarted the movie, and we watched it again.

Afterward, standing in the projection room amid scattered cardboard boxes and racks of computer equipment, Goldwater explained that Iwerks saw some of its biggest opportunities in “museums, malls, and science centers. Our mission is to take the best theme-park attractions and put them where the people are. Cultural institutions and retailers have to be able to compete with home shopping and with home learning. They have to give their customers something compelling.”

“There are only about 100 theme-park operators who [at a cost of \$2 million to \$3 million] could afford this kind of an attraction,” Goldwater continued. “But there are lots of new prospects outside that universe. Expanding beyond theme parks is our optimism for the future.”

Themed Entertainment Association president Brian Edwards — who is also president of Edwards Technologies, a company that designs and installs audio, video, and show-control systems — is even more emphatic about the potential for themers to colonize the rest of the world. Sitting at a roundtable in his booth, Edwards argues that any business that feels as if it’s on the verge of being disintermediated by the Internet should be thinking about turning itself into a purveyor of experience.

“Think about travel agents,” Edwards says. “They’re almost hosed. You can do your own research on the Internet. What’s the purpose of a retail outlet? You know more about the destination that you’re interested in than the travel agent does. On the Web, you can watch a video of the Taj Mahal. The best that a travel agent can do is give you a brochure.

“But what if travel agents could give you 3-D films and 360-degree films about various destinations?” Edwards continues.

“What if they could offer an interactive, immersive experience that would help you select your destination? They have to get into the experience, the storytelling. They have to be more engaging if they want to survive in the future.”

Inside an Experience

We’re driving south on I-5 in Bob Rogers’s navy-blue GMC Yukon, toward Knott’s Berry Farm, in Orange County. Rogers wants to show me the “Mystery Lodge” — an attraction based on the “Spirit Lodge,” which he developed for Expo ‘86, in Vancouver.

If there is such a thing as a scholar of the theme-park genre, Rogers is one. He’s in an effusive mood, and, for the duration of the 45-minute trip from Burbank to Buena Park, he talks about the physiological changes in the human brain that cause adults to lose their appreciation for roller coasters, how crowds move through various theme parks, and the history of Knott’s.

Just as car makers and museum curators today are sliding into the experience economy, farmer Walter Knott made the transition starting in the 1930s. To supplement revenues from selling jams and jellies, Knott and his wife, Cordelia, began serving chicken dinners to customers.

“The chicken dinners got so popular,” Rogers says, “that Walter Knott started buying buildings in deserted towns throughout the West and bringing them to the farm, just so people would have something to look at while they waited in line.” Over the next several decades, Knott added a mine ride, a log flume, and, for educational value, an exact replica of Philadelphia’s Independence Hall. Before long, the Knotts found that they weren’t cultivating berries anymore — they were running America’s first theme park.

Rogers is visibly proud of the enduring wow value of the “Mystery Lodge,” which debuted at Knott’s in 1994. Knott’s press materials call it “the park’s most technically advanced project ever.” In the show, an ancient storyteller (played by a human actor) materializes from behind a bonfire and essentially tells the story of his life, with an emphasis on the importance of passing on knowledge and traditions to future generations before he dies. “The show deals with the notion of death,” Rogers says. “Inevitably, we all die. Churches deal with death, but theme parks don’t.” The storyteller interacts with phantom owls, ravens, and, in an arresting image, salmon swimming upstream to spawn. At the end of the show, the old man disappears — though his walking stick is left behind, still standing. After a second, it falls.

Rogers smiles as the audience, which is still trying to suss out how the tricks are done, exits. We visit the actor (who is actu-

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ally a twenty-something woman) backstage and then watch the show again from a catwalk above the theater, where props and projection screens make it easy to see how the illusions are achieved.

After the second show, we follow Harold Johnson, 30, who is in charge of “Mystery Lodge,” to the control room. Surrounded by the cannonlike projector and racks of show-control technology, Johnson tells Rogers how much he enjoys listening to audience members “try to figure it out in the exit tunnel. They think it’s a robot, or a hologram. They ask me if there’s a trap door, or if we hoist the actor up. I just say, ‘Good guesses.’”

Over lunch in an Old West saloon at Knott’s, Rogers says, “A project like this turns everyone who works on it into a magician. Harold sounded just like Harry Blackstone IV, letting the guesses go with a smile. That’s exactly what a magician would do.”

“Story Is What Changes Lives”

Back at BRC, the second floor is humming with activity. A team is just back from Greece with several panoramic photos of possible sites for Mythos. Illustrations have just been FedExed to the Franklin Institute, in Philadelphia, where BRC is trying to create a show that will bring the museum’s Baldwin 60,000 steam engine to life.

The group working on the special-effects theater for the Texas State History Museum is in neutral; after submitting three successive concepts, it is trying to interpret the latest round of client feedback. The Lincoln crew is conferring on the phone with an oil painter in Montana who is helping to flesh out the design of the central plaza. One problem: In the most recent sketch, it looks as if Lincoln is hoisting a martini glass (he’s supposed to be giving the Gettysburg Address).

BRC is ready and able, it seems, to theme the world, wrapping everything up in a cohesive narrative, engaging visuals, and a soaring musical score. On the way back from Knott’s, Rogers toyed with the idea of theming a hospital. “We’ve proven that you can build a hospital that makes people feel worse,” he said. “What if you could design one that helps people feel better?”

The day before, Rogers had showed me a book of concept drawings for “Behind the Badge: The LAPD Experience.” Maybe I’ve been steeping too long in the fantastic world of brick-and-mortar virtual reality, but it actually seems to me that inviting visitors to go through the same shoot — don’t shoot training that police officers go through might in some small way increase their understanding of just how tough an officer’s job is. Scott Ault, 34, BRC’s vice president of creative development, argues that the project could “help bridge the gap between the LAPD and the public” that recent department

scandals have created. If nothing else, flying over the city in a chopper simulator with infrared vision sounds like fun.

Still, I can’t help asking Rogers whether he thinks that there’s a danger of overtheming our cultural landscape. Could there come a time when we wish for the somber quiet of the Petersen House, where Lincoln actually died, rather than the sound-and-light show of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library? Judging from Rogers’s response, it seems as though he has confronted this issue before.

“The 20th century was a century of machines — the airplane and the telephone and the computer and the satellite,” he begins. “Those things got us going faster than ever before. So in the 21st century, we’re faster and we’re bigger and we’re smaller and we’re taller. The question is, Why?”

“The 21st century will be a search for meaning,” he continues. “We’re going to find meaning in stories that tell us who we are. Story was the principal tool of Jesus Christ, the Bible, the Torah, Abe Lincoln, Franklin Roosevelt. Story is what touches people. Story is what changes lives. And that’s what we do here.”

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THE ANTE HAS BEEN UPPED! IN MANY MARKET SEGMENTS

it is no longer good enough to just provide a quality product at a fair price. Today, you have got to deliver a compelling experience. Businesses of all kinds – from museums, libraries, science centers, and cultural centers to shopping malls and ballparks – are feeling the pressure to send their customers away with an experience they can't get anywhere else.

In tracing the work of the BRC Imagination Arts, you will see how the internet is affecting many firms' branding in the real world.

Is your industry next?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. For what kinds of businesses would themed experiences be useful?
2. Why are "brandlands" so attractive to consumers?
3. "Story is what changes people's lives." Think of companies such as Ben & Jerry's that have a story to connect its customers to its product. As a leader, what is your story? What can you talk about that would get people to join you, to be excited about what you are trying to accomplish?
4. Which of the "creative secrets of the SEALS" are likely to be universal? Do they apply to advertising agencies? Software development teams? Product development groups? Others?
5. Developing themed experiences sets high expectations. What are the dangers of not living up to these expectations in the customer's eyes? How does this translate to any product or service?
6. Are the days of themed experiences limited to the survival of the hot market and the increase in corporate and individual wealth, or are they a trend of the future?
7. What are your thoughts on the possibility of "overtthemeing" the landscape? Is this possible?

ACTION ITEM:

Classroom Curriculum:

1. Choose one of your favorite companies. Develop a "brandland" for its products and services.

Corporate Curriculum:

1. Look at the creative process that the SEALS go through when developing a new product or service. Does your company follow these same steps? With your team analyze your creative development process and design an improved step-by-step process to creatively develop product ideas and services.
2. Develop a "brandland" for your company's product or service.

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