

Brands and destination story telling

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The Brand Benefits of Places Like the Guinness Storehouse

Marketers have long known that stories capture consumers' attention and they commonly weave [storytelling](#) into their **marketing** messages. But as consumer interactions become ever more **digital** – perhaps *because* of this — consumers are seeking out real-world interactions with **brands** and their stories. In response, a growing number of experience **design** agencies (mine among them) are creating “experiential **brand** homes” like the [Guinness Storehouse](#) in Dublin — physical destinations (think of them as theme parks for the **brand**) that engage customers and build loyalty.

Like theme parks, they frequently rank among the top tourist draws in cities around world, including in [Amsterdam](#), [Atlanta](#), [Detroit](#), [Dublin](#), [London](#), [Nashville](#) and [Wolfsburg](#). Since its refurbishment in 2008, for example, [The Heineken Experience](#) in Amsterdam has become one of the city's top attractions. In fact, while the total tourism market in Amsterdam grew 19 percent from 2009 to 2014, the **Heineken** Experience grew 143 percent. In 2014, more than 740,000 visitors toured the historic brewery. This popularity has enabled **Heineken** to raise admission prices by more than 60 percent since 2009 and increase retail sales per capita by 100 percent from 2009 to 2014.

The **Coca-Cola** Company has seen similar success with its [World of Coca-Cola](#) in Atlanta. It consistently performs at the top of its category on attendance, guest satisfaction, retail sales per square foot and per capita, and yield on admission. A majority of guests have a more favorable opinion of **Coca-Cola** after they visit the **brand** home and 94 percent say they would recommend the experience to a friend.

Likewise, the [Guinness Storehouse](#) has been a big success for Diageo, and was recently named by World Travel Awards judges as [the best tourist attraction in all of Europe](#), beating out the **Eiffel Tower**, the **Roman Colosseum** and **Buckingham Palace**. Since a major update in 2011, Guinness Storehouse attendance has increased 35 percent, retail sales per capita have gone up 26 percent, food and beverage spend has increased 47 percent, and overall net profit has increased 240 percent. Most importantly, more than 80 percent of visitors express a greater closeness to the Guinness **brand** after they visit.

There are three reasons **brand** homes often deliver such strong returns on investment.

1. **They engage consumers longer.** Compared to television commercials (30 seconds) and **social** media (three minutes), **brand** homes involve consumers for a relative eternity — two or more hours, on average.
2. **Consumers opt in.** Unlike interruptive **marketing**, people choose to visit and pay to experience a **brand**. These guests are primed to receive the **brand**'s message.
3. **They are inherently social.** Families and groups of friends often participate in these experiences together, which significantly improves word of mouth potential. Many companies also use their **brand** homes throughout the year for corporate events and community programs.

We find that **brand** homes are most effective in combination with other communication and content platforms as part of a holistic **marketing** strategy. They complement a **brand**'s investment in mass media, **digital** and direct **marketing** by providing a longer and lasting emotional experience.

Several recent studies suggest why consumers, particularly Millennials, want to engage with **brands** through these kinds of shared experiences. For instance, one [study](#) found that more than eight in 10 Millennials (82%) attended or participated in a variety of live experiences in the past year and that nearly three-quarters of them (72%) say they would like to increase their spending on experiences rather than physical things. And a recent report in [Fast Company](#) offered a scientific rationale for why “shared experiences connect us more to other people than shared consumption.”

People crave the kinds of meaningful moments, shared experiences and emotional bonds — or what I call “emotional souvenirs” — that **brand** homes can provide. In fact, the quality time consumers spend within a **brand** experience can [increase ROI and develop true engagement](#), leading to greater **brand** advocacy and actions over time.

The principles of destination storytelling

While there isn't a one-size-fits-all recipe for creating a **brand** home, the most successful ones, in our experience and observing others', adhere to these seven principles.

- **Know your destination.** The goal of a **brand** home is to inspire a change in the visitor. Therefore, it is important to define the key performance indicators at the outset and build measurement touch points into the guest journey. Measurement can take many forms, including **brand** perception, purchase intent, **brand** preference and loyalty, or word of mouth.
- **Start in the heart.** Emotionally engaging **brand** storytelling taps into the universal emotions and shared experiences that connect visitors to the **brand**. These emotional drivers inform the underlying narrative thread; the media and technologies that bring the story to life; the interior schematics; and the overall physical space. For example, a short film called “Moments of Happiness,” set to the Imagine Dragons song “On Top of the World,” kicks off the World of **Coca-Cola**. It connects the **brand** to universal feelings of

joy — such as the thrill of a first kiss, reuniting with a loved one, or the triumph of facing your fears.

- **One unifying theme.**In his book [In Search of the Obvious](#), Jack Trout argued that **brands** should strive to own one concept in the consumer's mind; otherwise, "the more things you try to make [a **brand**] stand for, the more the mind loses focus on what it is." Rather than push every message possible, **brand** homes should narrowly focus on one central theme. For instance, the central theme of Story Garden by AMOREPACIFIC, the **brand** home of the Korean skincare giant, is the notion that "beauty is a gift that can transform the world."
- **Take guests on a journey.**Every good story has a narrative arc that carries the audience on a journey from start to finish. To leave a lasting impression, **brand** homes should take guests on a carefully choreographed emotional journey. The **Heineken** Experience tells the story of how the beer was "born in Amsterdam and raised by the world." Guests journey through a carefully scripted experience through which they learn the story of the beverage's history, where the ingredients come from, the brewing process, and how to drink a **Heineken** properly for maximum enjoyment. Everything leads to a communal moment at the end of the tour when guests are invited to enjoy a **Heineken**.
- **Engage all five senses.****Brand** homes are one of the only forms of **marketing** that can fully engage all five senses. Choreographed soundscapes, product sampling, strategically placed aromas, and hands-on experiences can complement visual media and help audiences completely immerse themselves in the **brand**. Right from the start of the Guinness Storehouse tour, the aromas of fresh hops, Irish barley and malt ignite guests' senses and draw them into the **brand**
- **Quality and delivery matter.**A quote attributed to [Carl W. Buehner](#) captures the power of experience: "They may forget what you said, but they will never forget how you made them feel." Consumers live in an HD world. **Brand** homes must sweat every detail of the story narrative and physical space to create a sense of magic. In the Manufacturing **Innovation** Theater at the Ford Rouge Factory Tour in Dearborn, Michigan, synchronized robots straight from the factory floor are combined with projection mapping, lasers and other visual effects to give guests the experience of watching a new F-150 truck being born right before their eyes.
- **Be alive.** **Brand** homes should be treated as a piece of living theater, not a static building. They can permanently or temporarily showcase **marketing** campaigns and product **innovation** As physical assets, they can be used to host events and community programming throughout the year. Many companies have experimented with variations on corporate museums and have achieved mediocre results. The common trap is to treat these experiences as a walk-through corporate magazine with little attempt to connect to visitors emotionally or help them appreciate why they should care.

In my view, good **brand** homes celebrate the corporation. Better **brand** homes celebrate the product. The best **brand** homes do both of these, while focusing equal attention on the audience itself.

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