

## **Festivals as strategic tools: Exploring Dubai Lynx International Festival of Creativity**

Festivals within the business-to-business sector are becoming increasingly popular as a means to engage with audiences and provide an opportunity for organisations to activate their brands within the business community. As well as the advantages afforded to brands, festivals can provide opportunities for the host city to build their destination image and many countries have encouraged festivals in order to enhance their own reputation. Country or city hosts are able to benefit from association with the festival values and hence festivals can be seen as strategically important for many countries.

In particular, hosting festivals connected to the creative industries provides an opportunity for the host nation to build associations with creativity which is particularly valuable for emerging economies [1]. One city that has been keen to align itself with the creative industries and position itself as a creative hub has been Dubai in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The city hosts a number of festivals associated with creative industries, including the Dubai International Film Festival which aims to showcase Arab filmmakers and film production in the country and the Dubai Lynx International Festival of Creativity, which will be explored further in this paper.

These festivals position Dubai as a leader in creativity and is aligned to the UAE Vision 2021 National Agenda which, “strives to instill an entrepreneurial culture in schools and universities to foster generations endowed with leadership, creativity, responsibility and ambition. This will allow the UAE to be among the best in the world in ease of doing business, innovation, entrepreneurship and R&D indicators” (Vision 2020) [2].

This paper examines the content of the most recent Dubai Lynx International Festival of Creativity held in Dubai in 2016 and provides insight into how such festivals engage audiences with creativity.

### **10<sup>th</sup> Annual Dubai Lynx**

This three-day festival held in Dubai from 6-8<sup>th</sup> March 2016 brought together opinion leaders from across the creative industry to share insights and best practice from around the globe. The aptly named, ‘Inspiration Stage’ in the main arena hosted over 30 presentations from different agency, media and brand owners. In addition to the main arena, the event also featured a Festival Village which included a data, innovation and tech stage, a networking lounge and stage, and a regional stage. Over the three-days more than 100 speakers shared their knowledge with other industry professionals, academics, students and media.

Festivals are becoming increasingly attractive to business audiences and similar to consumer festivals provided an opportunity for brand activations. Dubai Lynx provided many such opportunities and the various stages and events taking place provided a vibrant atmosphere and engaged visitors.

This review is not intended to provide a summary of the whole three-day event, but rather share a few of the highlights from the festival. Three presentations have been chosen for review and two of the developmental programmes discussed. While these provide only a brief insight into the festival, they reflect the quality of speakers and the unique opportunities for professional development offered at this annual Dubai event.

## **Twitter as a Creative Canvas**

Twitter's Senior Director, Global Brand Strategy, Ross Hoffman shared with the audience three key trends in social media campaigns using examples from Twitter and Periscope:

- Let consumers shape your story
- Build innovative formats
- Data driven storytelling

Using examples from recent campaigns on social media platforms he gave insight into the way brands are engaging viewers with custom content and storytelling. The first example demonstrated how Cheetos had partnered with Twitter to engage audiences in real time with content, and having tested the engagement, then used storyboards, polling and voting to allow users to shape the story. Additionally, a brief case study of how Orange used Twitter and Periscope to extend the life of a TV campaign was shared. Using polling cards and a live Periscope stream engaged consumers in the storyline.

A number of other short case studies were presented which demonstrated how successfully brands had worked with Twitter to build innovative formats. One example was the development of a Taco emoji and 600 individual pieces of content for Taco Bell. Such custom content is seen to be a powerful creative tool in engaging viewers. In addition to creating content, the cases demonstrated the importance of using data to make sure that the content reaches the audiences.

## **Brave: Biometrics & Emotion: De-Risking Creative Bravery**

Brave's Creative Director, Oli Geal presented the agency's new biometric tool, 'The Bravery Index'. The new tool which combines techniques of Galvanic Skin Response, Facial Coding and Eye Tracking is used in combination to predict audiences' biometric responses to advertising. This provides a measurement of how audiences respond to TV ads and delivers a measurement of emotional and stimulation.

As well as sharing examples of the index in action, Oli shared some key insights into what types of appeals and message framing techniques had been found to deliver the best results. He highlighted the importance of music choice in advertising and the influence of humour on emotional appeals. Furthermore, the testing had shown

that clarity in advertising messages was vital and that the 'peak end rule' was important, with audiences preferring to end on a high note.

### **Stink : The Idea and The Execution: A New Model for Creativity**

Daniel Bergmann, founder of Stink, highlighted how the industry landscape is changing and in particular how the role of the production company was being re-defined. He gave examples of how traditional models of creating branded communication had been replaced by new forms of collaboration between client, agency and production company.

He presented a number of examples of work that had been produced, including the 'Inside Abbey Road' project for Google which included interactive content to engage audiences with Abbey Road and experience what it's like to be inside the recording studio for themselves. Such work reflected the high demand for content for use on digital and social media platforms and demonstrated how entertainment and commercial production were merging.

Daniel highlighted how there is likely to be increasing demand for entertaining content and longer pieces of branded entertainment. He also suggested that entertainment and advertising were merging and that the importance of TV ads is diminishing.

### **Leo Burnett Lynx Academy**

The Lynx Academy programme delivered in partnership with Leo Burnett provided an opportunity for students from a number of Middle East universities to take part in tutorials and workshops led by senior industry figures. The programme offered a unique learning experience for students who were able to gain some valuable insights into the industry and benefit from the knowledge and experience of leading practitioners. It was encouraging to see so many students from around the Middle East attend and it is commendable that the festival is committed to developing talent in the region.

### **Future Leaders of Marketing**

The Future Leaders of Marketing Course provided marketers aged 30 years or under with in-depth training on a range of challenges currently facing the industry. Among the topics on the agenda were client-agency relationships, which, considering the increasingly reported rifts between agencies and clients, was a topical issue to discuss. Developing talent in the Middle East was a central theme of the Festival and opportunities like this to engage with experienced industry leaders provided a unique opportunity for younger talent.

### **Summary**

Dubai Lynx lived up to its festival name and offered attendees the opportunity to experience many forms of creativity. In an era when creativity is so highly valued because of its ability to break through the media clutter and engage audiences, the festival provided rich insights into how global brands are leveraging creativity in their marketing communications. From Twitter's use of storytelling to Stink's new creative model, the event allowed visitors to share experiences and be inspired.

Furthermore, Dubai Lynx provides a good example of how festivals can be used to strategically position a city as a creative hub. Drawing speakers and audiences from around the globe to engage with creativity provides an association with the destination of Dubai as a capital of creativity.

1. <http://creativecities.eiu.com/>
2. <https://www.vision2021.ae/en/national-priority-areas/competitive-knowledge-economy>