

Attractions

management

VOL 19 Q4 2014

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The experience business is theatre and an attraction is a stage, which needs actors, a dramatic structure and a reveal. Experience economist Joe Pine explains why time is what you design, and how to build up to the all-important moment

THE

When Jim Gilmore and I began writing *The Experience Economy* in the mid-1990s, we needed to determine the unique essence of this newly identified economic offering that we were calling “experiences”.

Initially we used *created*, but that wasn't right. All offerings were created, after all; so what was unique about experiences? What did experiences do for people that no other offering did? The answer came when Gilmore and I hit on the fact that when you're in the experience business, your work is theatre. It isn't a metaphor, work as theatre. No, it's a model: work IS theatre!

Whenever you're in front of your guests, you're acting. Whether you know it or not, whether you do it well or not, you're acting and you must act in a way that engages the audience.

Another way of saying it is that you're on stage. Stage! Yes, that's the economic function for this offering: experiences are staged, the bringing together of disparate elements – backgrounds, sets, stories, scripts, costumes, props and so forth – to engage people in a production, and thereby create a memory. Experiences are therefore inherently personal – no two people can have the same experience, for the actual experience resides inside them as their own reaction to the events that are staged in front of them.



B. Joe Pine II

REVEAL

DEPICTING DURATION

That also means you can't really create an instantaneous experience, for experiences take time to unfold. Whereas commodities are stored in bulk, goods are inventoried after production and services are delivered on demand, experiences are *revealed over a duration of time*. From the customer's standpoint, time is the key differentiator between a service and an experience. If customers don't want to spend time with you, then you're a service probably on its way to being commoditised. But if customers do want to spend time with you, and if they view it as time well spent, then you're in the experience business.

Almost as important from the producer's standpoint is the first word in that phrase: *revealed over a duration of time*. That means experiences, to be truly engaging and memorable, must have dramatic structure. I don't just mean the *reveal* – that big moment at or near the end where guests are surprised, amazed, frightened, shocked, awestruck, thrilled or otherwise astounded. In many attractions – as well as experiences such as movies or the occasional gastronomic event – the reveal is crucial for delighting guests and cementing memories, but it's crucial that any reveal get a suitable set-up and a fitting finish. Otherwise, you'll never achieve the right effect from your reveal. ▶



The BIG Maze

National Building Museum

A pop-up panopticon-inspired maze was erected at the Washington, DC, museum by architects Bjarke Ingels Group this summer. Designed to "reveal itself", the maze and the hall gradually come into view as the visitor navigates towards the middle. "Inside, the walls slowly descend towards the centre, which concludes with a grand reveal – a 360-degree understanding from where you came and where you shall go," Ingels said.

► FATHOMING FREYTAG

The first to explicate dramatic structure was the 19th-century German performance theorist Gustav Freytag. Theatre students still learn Freytag Diagrams and we can learn from him to this day.

From his study of plays, Freytag identified seven stages of dramatic structure:

Exposition: This gives the context of the experience, introducing the world, or situation, where the experience happens, and the characters who inhabit that world.

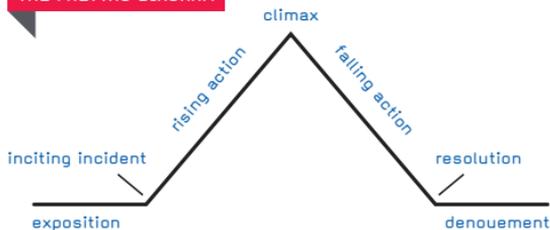
Inciting incident: Here a precipitating event causes the drama to take off.

Rising action: The drama increases in intensity and anticipation as the action takes off. Complications ensue as the characters (in many attractions, this includes the guests) determine to resolve the issues caused by the inciting incident.

Crisis: While in the previous segment the plot thickens, to use a theatre cliché, here the possibilities steadily fall away as the characters overcome (or not) the obstacles before them. Intensity rises at an accelerated pace, yielding suspense and excitement as the audience awaits and anticipates a resolution to the crisis.

Climax: The height of the experience, where of all the things that could happen, only one does – the characters either do or do not achieve the goal they formed at the moment of the inciting incident.

THE FREYTAG DIAGRAM



■ The Freytag Diagram is a visual representation of the seven stages of dramatic structure identified by performance theorist Gustav Freytag

Falling action: The consequences of the climax play out for the characters.

Dénouement: The plot threads resolve themselves while the dramatic action exhausts itself and the characters – not to mention the guests of the experience – return to normalcy, although it's meant to be a new and quite different status quo than when the experience started.

Now, your attraction is not a play, and may operate under different constraints and expectations. Nonetheless, you should note how the drama builds through each stage to the climax, and then comes down again. Too many experiences forget the

build part – they move too quickly to the climax, don't set it up properly, or have too flat a structure. Others think that once you've had the big reveal, it's: "OK, show's over, ride's done, go home!" No, you need to bring your guests back down again and let that climax play out through your attraction and in their minds.

In an example from our own work, Gilmore and I stage an annual event called thinkAbout – it's our chance to practice what we preach. The big reveal is the winner of our Experience Stager of the Year (EXPY) award. Past winners include American Girl, the Geek Squad, Joie de Vivre Hospitality, the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum, Tough Mudder and, in 2014, Santa Park.

To bring drama to it, we go through the top 10 experiences that our participants should take in the following year, with a postcard exercise to apply lessons to each ►

"Experiences are revealed over a duration of time and, to be truly engaging and memorable, must have dramatic structure. It's crucial that any reveal get a suitable set-up"



Visitors to Machu Picchu, Peru, climb for hours before the "big reveal" at the top of the hill



The Great Hall

Warner Bros Studio Tour

The Leavesden, UK, attraction is famous for its grand reveal. Visitors are taken inside a darkened room, where they watch a short film. A screen drops to uncover the enormous doors that, when opened, reveal the Great Hall of Hogwarts



PHOTOS: WARNER BROS STUDIO TOUR

▶ visit. The anticipation builds to our EXPY winner at #1 – especially since at least all alumni (around half the group have been there before) know the winner is a fellow participant. A few figure it out in advance and are very proud of themselves if right (drama in itself). Others are still to guess who it will be, but as they've already got to know the winner during this experiential and participative event, the excitement at this climactic moment is palpable.

The falling action is interviewing the winner, after which we close thinkAbout, leading into the dénouement: everyone reliving the event as they say goodbye.

You don't have to follow the seven stages of the Freytag Diagram religiously. The most important thing is to think of the rising action and crisis as the building of intensity, suspense or anticipation. Don't just spring your reveal on your unsuspecting guest – you may get shock, but never awe. Rather,

Members of the British royal family enter the Great Hall during a tour of the Warner Bros Studio in Leavesden

consider how you can ratchet up the intensity bit by bit. Let guests figure out that something is coming, but they ... don't ... yet ... know ... WHAT! Fuel their expectations. Get them leaning forward with their senses alert, anticipating what is to come, expectant, hopeful, worried,

wide-eyed, and almost ready, ready, ready, for the big reveal.

SIMPLIFYING THE STRUCTURE

If seven stages of drama are too many, a five-stage model was popularised by Doblin, a Chicago-based group of innovation consultants:

- **Enticing**
- **Entering**
- **Experiencing**
- **Exiting**
- **Extending**

► This model helps you focus on the fact that your experience does not begin when guests enter your attraction nor end when they exit. Think about how you entice them in advance – including online before they ever arrive. Think of your website, as experience designer Peter Chernack once suggested to us, as a pre-show that entices people to visit you and begins the process of anticipation for the live experience. Use the web or mobile technology to extend your experiences, encouraging guests to relive the reveal.

My favourite example is the Walt Disney PhotoPass system, where professional photographers take photos of guests at key moments in the theme park. At home, guests relive the experience. First, they go online and enter their PhotoPass number to see the photos. They can also access stock photos, upload their own and place them in numerous styles of photo albums. They order their customised book – for close to \$100 (£61, €78) – and the receipt of it in the mail greatly extends the experience and provides tangible memorabilia to show friends. The chances they (and their friends) will go back increases with this extending activity.

If five stages are still too much, recognize that your attraction tells a story and, therefore, it must at least have these three simple stages: beginning, middle, and end. Always keep the end in mind, but understand how much better an end is when you build it up from the beginning.

We can also encapsulate dramatic structure into the one-stage model of the signature moment. It's the reveal itself: the moment people remember and talk about afterwards, the moment they anticipate before. At EXPY-award winner the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum, for instance, the Ghosts of the Library show has a live host who discusses the Civil War while photograph-like images bring the story to life. At the very end the host reveals that he was there himself, disappearing into smoke as if a ghost! That's its signature moment.

Whatever your such moment, never forget that guests will remember it longer, talk about it more and anticipate it more highly if, and only if, you build to it properly – it's how you reveal the reveal.●

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Author B. Joseph Pine II co-founded Strategic Horizons, a thinking studio that helps businesses add value to their economic offerings

The EXPY Award winners

The Experience Stager of the Year creates a new kind of experience, redefines an existing experience or stands above its industry in exemplifying the principles of the experience economy. Some EXPY winners do all three



2014 SANTA PARK

At our 2014 thinkAbout event in Cincinnati, Ohio, for only the second time, we gave our Experience Stager of the Year award to a European company, SantaPark of Rovaniemi, Finland. Managing director Ilkka Länkinen accepted the award.

I first met Ilkka, now one of our Certified Experience Economy Experts, over a decade ago through his high-end Joulukka experience in Rovaniemi, a town right on the Arctic Circle whose tourism is based on being the Official Home of Santa Claus. He and his wife Katja then bought SantaPark, hoping to turn the theme park around – and turn it



around they have!

With the theme of "Christmas Every Day", the joys of Christmas, including meeting Santa, are available year-round. It's the only place in the world you can walk underneath the Arctic Circle. No one leaves without a smile on their face.

SantaPark welcomes visitors from over 40 countries. It recently announced that it's bringing its expertise for authentic Christmas experiences to China, with the first SantaPark concept-based theme park opening in Floroland, Chengdu, in May 2016.

2013 TOUGH MUDDER

Tough Mudder stages a more experiential event than any race on earth – except it's not really a race; it's a personal challenge across a 20km (12-mile) course that tests every participant's strength, stamina and determination. It redefines the obstacle course by encouraging an unprecedented level of collaboration and camaraderie, with almost everybody, unworried about their own personal time, stopping to assist those behind them so that everyone makes it to the end. The result is a new kind of experience,



which the company says is "probably the toughest event on the planet".

Outside the military, there's no "probably" about it. Participants sign a "death waiver" – not an idle occasion, for once

in its history someone did die during the event. Despite that unfortunate occurrence, the company continues to grow, and that's because of its experience – well worthy of our EXPY award.



2012 **826 NATIONAL**: The San Francisco group built a network of innovative tutoring centres to help children learn to write



2011 **TECHSHOP**: TechShop workshops provide their members with the tools and knowhow to build and construct things



2010 **BUILD-A-BEAR WORKSHOP**: This global retailer offers an interactive experience to make a personalised product



2009 **US ARMY**: The army adopted a pioneering approach to recruitment through its American Army website and centre



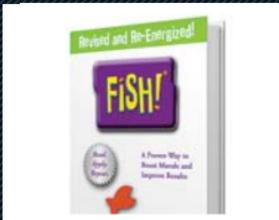
2008 **ABRAHAM LINCOLN MUSEUM**: A history-based experience invigorated by the introduction of cutting-edge technology



2007 **TNT INC**: The community design firm transformed its offices for an engaging, performance-driven B2B experience



2005 **HOK SPORT (NOW POPULOUS)**: Recognised for placemaking, specifically combining the natural with the artificial



2004 **CHARHOUSE LEARNING**: Its line of Fish! products and Fish! philosophy are designed to help businesses train staff



2003 **CERRITOS LIBRARY**: Strikes the right chord on exterior and interior design, theming, technology and human contact



2002 **LEGO GROUP**: Denmark's toy-making powerhouse meets all 10 levels of Strategic Horizons' Placemaking Portfolio



2001 **JOIE DE VIVRE HOSPITALITY**: The hotel group's approach to theming helps to create a unique guest experience



1999 **AMERICAN GIRL PLACE**: The doll retailer offers a day out that includes a visit to dolls' salon and a photo session

PHOTOS: TOUGH MUDDER; AMERICAN ARMY 2014; CITY OF CERRITOS/CERRITOS LIBRARY 2014; THE LEGO GROUP