

Pine & Gilmore's Annual

thinkAbout

at the New York Marriott Marquis overlooking Times Square

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Biting the BIG APPLE:



Day One PM

By Joe Pine & Jim Gilmore

Take a tour of one of the premier experience hubs in the U.S., and thereby learn to apply the principles of the Experience Economy to your business.

Participants tell us that the highlight of thinkAbout each year has been the Learning Excursion^{EM} portion of the experience. By leaving the confines of traditional meeting space and hitting the streets, we've managed to immerse thinkAbout guests in experiences unlike those found in any other multi-company event. Over the years, we've rattled a few folks unaccustomed to such peripatetic learning adventures. It's understandable, for even we have been taken aback how each year participants unearth rich lessons beyond anything we've ever intended. We simply pick the catalyst and the excursions truly take on a life of their own.

In Hollywood (1999), we provided limos to individual tour teams for unique multi-stop trips through the mundane world of services. They visited video stores and book stores, fast

food chains and restaurant equipment distributors, car washes and quick lube stations, travel offices and insurance agents, dry cleaners and Laundromats, hair salons and beauty aid stores, office supply retailers and photocopiers, grocery stores and drug stores, even the post office.

We themed the excursion as an "experiential scavenger hunt" with the names of different everyday items embroidered atop each person's cap. At each stop, those touring responded to the typical query, "May I help you?", by pointing to their lids and saying, "We're here on a scavenger and we need to get what's on our hats!" While these interactions pointed out the ineptitude of most services providers, they also provided insights about the role of iconography (costuming and props), simply by contrasting the engaging performances

of our touring “customers” and that of the unadorned workers. Ask yourself: *How would our enterprise’s work be performed differently if employees were similarly directed to act?*

In Chicago (2000), individual teams again toured. Each visited a pairing of experience venues: the admission-feed vs. the free-entry. American Girl Place vs. FAO Schwartz, ESPNZone vs. Niketown, DisneyQuest vs. Disney Store. Each group also lunched at a different theme restaurant. We capped the day off, as a single group, by taking in the American Girl Place’s seventy-minute musical and then dining in its Cafe.

Call it the Experience Economy vs. Experiential Marketing. Not that all the paid-for experiences were necessarily any better (DisneyQuest in Chicago has since ceased operations), but the contrasting approaches to revenue generation provided a rich basis for discussing how best to create and capture value from experiences. Ask yourself: *How would our enterprise’s offerings be different if we charged admission?*

In Las Vegas (2001), we toured the good and the bad as one large group (fully equipped with communication headgear) from 2 PM until midnight. Ten stops: New York – New York Hotel & Casino’s massage chairs, the Grand Canyon Experience, the World of Coke, Steve Wynn’s Bellagio, The Forum Shops, the pirate show outside Treasure Island, The Canal Shoppes at The Venetian, *Star Trek: The Experience*, a wedding chapel, and, finally, the Fremont Street Experience. Each participant was given a ten-exposure Joycam in order to take just the right photo at each stop. We preached “everything in Vegas is coming to your town.” Ask yourself: *What can our enterprise learn from Las Vegas?*

In Mountain View, California (2002), our thinkAbout U | an intellectual dor-

mitory departed from the usual format, as we turned the whole event into an intellectual dormitory. Instead of going out onto the streets of San Francisco, we toured topics in an intellectual, internal Learning Excursion^{EM}. We themed particular rooms at the Hotel Avante, and simply opened up enough space for participants to talk to each other – and our invited faculty – and thereby explore the Experience Economy. Topics included Building Experience Businesses, Directing Human Performances, and Transforming Individuals & Companies. Ask yourself: *What should you be doing differently to succeed in the Experience Economy?*

This year, we return again to staging a more formal Learning Excursion^{EM}. We’ll visit experience venues on Times Square, 42nd Street, Rockefeller Plaza, Madison Avenue, a few side streets, and even virtual venues in cyberspace. We’ll use New York City to provoke new thinking about experiences as economic offerings and consumers’ desire for authenticity.

There is, of course, too much in New York to possibly take in during a single afternoon. But we’ve picked a unique portfolio of places to visit, each promising to represent a rich and full cross-section of experience and authenticity issues. Not only will some obvious venues be visited, a number of easily overlooked – but keenly insightful – nooks and crannies will also be explored.

We’ll not separate as multiple tour teams this year. Nor will we tour as one large group. Instead, as The Provokers, we will each take half the group on tours of both physical and virtual experiences at each level of the Location Hierarchy Model published in our e-Doc, “The Experience IS the Marketing”. Together, we’ll take a bite out of the Big Apple! Ask yourself: *How could I ever miss this?*