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NEW YEAR, NEW YOU

A dozen agency executives talk about 2011, the year that was—and 2012, the year that will be

THE EVENT INDUSTRY seems to already be moving faster in 2012 than it did in 2011. If that's possible.

With strategies set and most budgets finally approved, watch for first-half action across all categories.

We continue our global roundtable series with a stop in New York City, where we convened a dozen top event agency executives for a conversation about what's going on in Event Land. Once again coproduced in conjunction with leading event staffing company Encore Nationwide (encorenationwide.com), we start with a look back at 2011 and a look ahead into the year 2012.

EM: *What changes did you see in 2011, and what are you preparing for in 2012?*

CHARLIE HORSEY, MKTG INC: Our relationships with clients are getting deeper and broader. We're getting new opportunities with clients that historically wouldn't even look at experiential as a core part of their marketing mix. I think the industry as a whole has been validated a lot in the last two or three years, largely because of the



Katie Ingram



Doug Kimmel



Christy Sears

Today's marketing problems are so complex that we found that more and more, having technologists, digital strategists and social strategists is the cost of doing business, and clients have really been pushing us for that.

—Richard Black

RICHARD BLACK, MOMENTUM: When we looked at what our clients were asking us to do, we had to transform not only our business practices but the people we hired. Today's marketing problems are so complex that we found that more and more, having technologists, digital strategists and social strategists is the cost of doing business, and clients have really been

pushing us for that.

integration with digital. And agencies are incorporating digital in ways that we haven't historically.

A big thing for us in 2012 is retail—selling product. We're an official retailer for Nike and we sell product for Dr. Dre. More of our clients are coming to us to close the sale cycle; they're selling direct to consumers through the web, so what's wrong with going direct in a physical location where we can handle that transaction immediately? Whether that's a pop-up store or it's out of a truck on a college campus, closing that loop is becoming more and more prevalent.

Also, the value proposition between brands and consumers is changing. We're helping brands understand they have real opportunities to become more deliberate in their intentions and enable consumers to achieve things—especially Gen-Y and younger consumers. It's a physical opportunity to create and shape behavior toward a brand, good or service.

RAFFI GRIGORIAN, EVENTIVE MARKETING: It was a year when we came out of survival mode and into growth mode, and that felt really good. Clients are starting to loosen up in how they're approaching event marketing. They're feeling the confidence in the industry again, making it a bigger part of the marketing mix versus just a small sliver or an afterthought to traditional media.

Every RFP we've been involved with has had social or digital involved. So the integration of all the aspects of the marketing mix are coming to bear, and we don't expect that to change in 2012.

JOHN CORDERO, GRAND CENTRAL MARKETING: For our company, 2011 was about expanding our current portfolio within our current client base. Digital is a big part of that. We started a new division that specializes in digital and social media, and it has been integrated into a lot of our campaigns.

... it's about expressions even more than impressions, and we are in the business of creating expressions.

—Maneesh Goyal

MANEESH GOYAL, MKG: The past year had a few common threads. One was expansion—just recognizing that with deep relationships comes expanded opportunities—and not only from having opened other offices, but also just in looking at the global marketplace in a much different way than we ever have before.

The industry has absolutely been validated because it's about expressions even more than impressions, and we are in the business of creating expressions. More than ever, we're getting meetings with senior marketers who say, "It's great that I do this media buy, but I want to talk about what I can do from an experience standpoint."

JIM CAVANAUGH, PROSCENIUM: What we've seen is that you need a digital component to live events. But we're also finding more and more that people are doing live meetings. They don't have as many resources as they did before. But they're still finding the need to meet.

DOUG KIMMEL, ION MARKETING: One of the biggest things is the speed at which you have to move. If you aren't able to be nimble and deliver for clients more efficiently, it's very difficult. Also, with technology moving so fast, it's hard to keep pace, to infuse it appropriately and to understand how to do it right. Every client wants it as part of their program but they don't always understand what they want with the analysis and results, and everyone is searching for the ROI from the social media that's integrated into experiential programming.

The other challenge is finding talent. Having the people who, when you're asked to deliver quickly, absolutely know what they're talking about and can deliver it.

KATJA ASARO, HENRY V: We see b-to-b coming back big time. We see budgets coming back big time. We positioned ourselves as a strategic partner and in some instances, we're the lead agency for generating strategy. We have a number of campaigns now that are rooted in experiential and augmented by the traditional marketing vehicles.

We're really seeing the tables turn, and it's caused us to search for different types of talent. Last year, we added a digital strategist who's 100-percent dedicated to

finding cool stuff. Our legacy clients want the new, shiny thing that makes their conferences exciting. And our new clients expect us to know which communication technology is leading the way.

We've also seen our project values increase tremendously. We're now able to bill for services that in the past were just plugged in with the cost of generating sales. How many of us have developed expensive proposals just hoping to get the business? We're billing now for our brain power. We're positioned as a much more strategic partner.

SHERON BATES, SMASH EXPERIENTIAL: We're getting a lot of push from our clients to tie experiential back to sales, and we've put a lot of things in place so we can demonstrate the ROI.

It's so refreshing to be able to tell your client that a program is working not only because it's creating memorable experiences, but also because it's generated a certain amount of leads. As we get more into digital event technologies, that will certainly help us.

LARRY HESS, ENCORE NATIONWIDE: The biggest thing

That conversation can be digital, it can be physical, it could be via sponsorship, it could be via innovation. But we are conversation generators and that's game changing for us.

—Maneesh Goyal

we saw last year was more clients asking how they can get promotional models in-market using social media to amplify the brand or the event prior to the event even opening its doors. That's in every conversation I have.

EM: *Are you pitching your capabilities to clients differently than you used to?*

CORDERO: We still describe ourselves as an experiential marketing promotional agency, but we're highlighting all of the additional services we provide, like digital and social media.

Now, more than ever, clients are challenging us to give them more metrics for measuring ROI. Not just impressions or attendance, but really analyzing the

It is illegal to perform a puppet show in a window.

The most exciting city in the world has some of the most unexciting regulations governing events. The



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Faster is the new fast. The speed at which information travels in the world has become an expectation for all of our clients.

—Richard Black

data we collect at events—even with social media—looking at intent to purchase, or what those 10,000 likes on Facebook mean. With social media there's definitely more of an opportunity to continue the conversation and get that kind of feedback that clients are looking for.

GOYAL: We do describe ourselves differently now, internally. But in five years, I know we're going to be an integrated marketing agency and not an experiential agency because I'm already turning down work clients are asking for.

BLACK: For us, the conversation is definitely different. Digital gave us all the scale on ROI that we were looking for, but now we can put the consumer and how they experience the brands at the center of it. That makes face-to-face engagement that much more valuable, and clients are bringing us in at a different level.

We talk a lot internally about being a consultant first and an agency second. I guess the measure is that it's hard for our clients to say exactly what type of agency we are, which I think is actually a good thing for us. Certainly experiential is our roots, but it's in engagement and conversation-building that we're seeing a lot more of our success with our clients.

EM: *Are clients asking for the same thing that they were asking you for five or 10 years ago, or are their requests changing?*

GOYAL: I don't know that the asks are so different, because the ask is for us to increase their market share. But now they're looking at us as thought leaders. Brands want to have a conversation with the consumer, and we've positioned ourselves as being the perfect conduit to have that conversation. That conversation can be digital, it can be physical, it could be via sponsorship, it could be via innovation. But we are conversation generators and that's game changing for us.

KIMMEL: Both. We have clients that want the same programs, just with a couple of new twists. There are also clients that say, "We've been doing this; blow it up and come back with the big idea." Sometimes you come back with three or four big ideas and you end up going back to where you started, but in the process you've uncovered some good new thinking.

ASARO: For every event, clients want the new look and feel. They want us to invent a new presentation technology that nobody has ever done before. Or to integrate 600 iPads for an audience to use while the presenters are giving the content. Then, we'll look at how to

integrate that throughout everything; taking those iPads and making them a communications tool with the brand moving forward.

Our adidas client has a really amazing, innovative team. Their executives are super innovative and educated, and they'll come to us and say, "I saw this new technology in London in a subway. I want to do that on stage." And we have to figure out how to do it.

That's the b-to-b side, but we also do mobile tours, and the trend there is hyper targeted casting of our brand ambassadors. It's not just enough anymore that they're active on social media. Now, each brand ambassador targets a subgroup of the audience we're looking at. For instance, we're doing a mobile tour for Tillamook cheese, and their audience is everyone from moms to VW enthusiasts to children. Each of our brand ambassador teams has a specialized ambassador who knows that community, blogs in that community and speaks the language, so we're pinpointing the engagement with that consumer.

EM: *Along those lines, we're seeing more brands become highly selective in their event staffing. Is it becoming so hyper-targeted that it's impossible to find the right staff for events?*

HESS: You can definitely boil it down until there is nobody left, especially if you're in remote locations. But most of that comes from our clients. They'll tell us what they want, and we just go out and find the right staffers—either through our database or interviews or casting calls.

We did a Volkswagen program years ago where it wasn't enough for the ambassadors to just be automotive enthusiasts—they had to be Volkswagen enthusiasts. There's a whole subculture who are just Volkswagen people, and we went out and found them.

CAVANAUGH: Clients are looking for more of a partner. You would think that in tough economic times, we'd all be driven by price—that we'd continue to bid out to the lowest bidder. We're finding that some of the smarter, larger clients are actually going in the opposite direction and looking for more of a partner and more of an agency relationship. They're saying, "Here are our strategies for the year. We may have three, four or 10 events. We'd like an agency partner to come in and produce those events strategically, creatively, digitally and executionally."

For us that's great. We're able to staff better, price better, be more efficient and become more fluent in their brand. And, frankly, now clients don't have to put out an RFP for every single event.

EM: *Larry, Encore's clients are agencies. What are they asking for now that they weren't before?*

HESS: We're searching for a brand ambassador who is not only a brand enthusiast but maybe even owns that product. The look, feel, ethnicity, language—it's all hyper-targeted. We're looking for ambassadors with certain numbers across their social networks. For clients, the search now for the perfect brand loyalist has really become much more of a focus than it ever was before. When I started in this business 20 years ago, it was just bodies. Where we've gone from then to now is pretty impressive.

EM: *More than ever, all of you are facing incredibly tight turnaround times. Is it nearly impossible to make things happen in such a compressed window? Is this just the new speed of the industry? How do you deal with it?*

BLACK: Faster is the new fast. The speed at which information travels in the world has become an expectation for all of our clients. And because our clients' organizations are layered, it's difficult for them to move to get approval.

So, whether it's collaboration with other partners or inter-agency teams, you have to find a way to put the thing together. That probably requires you to have a few more senior people on hand who can move at a quicker pace and can navigate the minefields you're going to face.

KIMMEL: It's simply a function of the fact that we all do things a lot quicker than we used to 10 years ago—now, you email somebody, and if you don't get a response in an hour, you think something's wrong. Everyone wants the response in crazy quick time, but the quality can suffer based on that expectation, especially—and I'm speaking from a smaller agency perspective—when you don't have the resources and you have limited staff.

ASARO: I agree with that, but the agency has to be positioned correctly with the client. You can't be sitting there with your hands in your lap until you get the approval. If you're a true strategic partner, you're in that room and you can argue for the strategy that goes in.

Intel would tell you that they didn't start planning their 2012 CES booth two

You just don't get to build and make it awesome with short timelines. If you want something bigger and better, you've got to make time.

—Kim Harland

months before the event; they started the day last year's CES was over. So why isn't the builder in on those meetings up front so that the evolution of that booth isn't coming as a surprise?

KIMMEL: You also have to have the right client. One of our clients a couple of years ago had a p.r. group, an experiential group, a sponsorship group and the traditional agency, and they would never pull all of the groups together to work on a project. Finally, they tore down the walls and we delivered the best program for them. But not all clients are comfortable doing that and making sure that the agencies know exactly what their roles are.

KIM HARLAND, SDI MARKETING: I don't think any time is too short. We've never not hit a timeline, and, frankly, I think my team works better under that kind of pressure. It's terrible to say, but I think we get more work done and we produce really good stuff under those kinds of timelines.

The problem is when you get into a more 360-degree execution with lots of other players. You just don't get to build and make it awesome with short timelines. If you want something bigger and better, you've got to make time.

KATIE INGRAM, ERWIN PENLAND: That's our creatives' biggest complaint. I always laugh at them during the recap meetings, because even when they have more time, they're still working on presentations until 3 in the morning before the client meeting. But I do think that better ideas come when the team has more time.

CHRISTY SEARS, RPA: You have to work together with the client and ask, "This is the time you have left, what are your priorities? What if we include elements A, B and C and put aside D and E for next year?" If your creatives tell you what they would have done if they had

Sometimes we're our own worst enemies because we seem to pull a rabbit out of the hat so often ...

—Sharon Bates

... the first thing I look at now is: Does a client want to work with that person? Can I put that person in front of my client and the client says, "That's the person who elevates the rest of my room"?

—Jim Cavanaugh

the time, well, great. You can parlay that into the activation for next year.

BATES: Sometimes we're our worst enemies because we seem to pull a rabbit out of the hat so often. We turned around an event in four days, and it was such a success. Well, that kind of sets a precedent for the client: "You did it in four days before; why can't you do it again?"

But it's our reputation on the line. Going into a project without adequate time—when you know you won't deliver the results that you would have if you'd had the time—is just a recipe for failure.

It's interesting: The companies we're working with are restructuring and cutting back on personnel, so you aren't always talking to the people who know what we do. The person you're talking to might have been doing print ads or signage last year, and they can't grasp the fact that you can't build a room in a day. It just doesn't happen. Sometimes you have to put your foot down, be respectful but frank, and let the client know the deadline from the get-go. By being that honest, I have found that our clients notice and they give me responses really quickly.

HESS: The reality is, if I feel that we cannot get the job done in a satisfactory manner, I'll push back and say I just don't feel comfortable. It happened before Black Friday. A client we've been trying to get in with for years called me the Friday before—one week out—for a program in 600 stores in remote locations. I've been dying to work with them for years, but it was one week out, and I just had to say no. There was no way I was going into a new relationship with such a high possibility of failure.

GOYAL: It's pretty outlandish but I don't see it changing. I mean, we promote that we can turn it around quickly. The fact of the matter is you can do something in Times Square in 15 days. It's not fun, and it can be done a lot better if you have 45 days, but you can still do a pretty damn good job. I think people probably know that, so it's just the nature of the beast.

But with the longer-term relationships, that doesn't happen as much because we can anticipate things com-

ing up because we're in constant conversations with the client. We know there will be requests for the Super Bowl that we will only find out about in January. But we can anticipate some of those, because it's a major property and we know what they're going to be able to activate.

EM: *Are you finding that clients are a bit less focused on awareness and emotion and slightly more interested in moving the needle on sales?*

HARLAND: Yeah. One of our biggest clients is really pushing us to tie our fee to their business. That's good because if their business goes way up because of our program, we can actually do better than what we had originally budgeted. And it makes us more of a partner. So yes, they're definitely looking to show results that are tied to sales.

Having said that, though, they also want to win awards and they want to be recognized within their organizations or outside of them. Let's face it: That's how brand managers get promoted. They do great work on really cool, exciting programs and it turns into a career move for them.

INGRAM: A few years ago it was, "How many impressions did we have?" Now I hear a lot more of, "How many bounce backs did we get? How many hits did we get on the social media? How are we reaching out to these people when they respond?" Clients want to hear a response from the people that we're touching.

I'm also seeing QR codes as a trend. Consumers can buy using a QR code and they don't have to carry an item around if they're at an event. The product can be delivered to their house the next day, and you're still catching the consumer in the moment.

HESS: It used to be that was taboo at events. You can't sell. You can't take money. Now the transaction is right there, especially with tablets and handheld devices. At the Texas State Fair last summer, we had three programs with on-site selling.

ASARO: Look at the whole pop-up store experience—you walk in and not only do you get the experiential side and the sampling and marketing, but you can also buy right there.

I have two consumer tours now where the goal is to have them self-fund through vending on the tour. That's definitely a trend we're seeing—clients want the program to fund the whole marketing experience. And customers get frustrated if they can't get it right now. They get a sample and they want it now.

EM: *What are your thoughts on digital and social media? How are your clients incorporating technology*

into their events, and where are we headed for 2012 and beyond?

HORSEY: You know, everybody's rushed to digital, but at the end of the day, digital is a tool for aggregation and amplification. If we do a great job, social media is a way for those consumers that we've touched to become advocates. Digital is not a destination—it's a tactic. We're not going to hang our shingle on any one tactic because it's going to change faster than we can build the infrastructure to operate on the scale which we're used to.

ASARO: I think it's the silver bullet. It's game changing for the whole marketing industry. Social media married with live is the way of the future. It has to be created strategically and completely integrated, but I think it will put all the rest of the traditional marketing agencies in the back seat.

For some of our clients' tours, we're launching mobile apps with content that's meaningful and that people want. An example is a dog treat company we're working with. Their marketing angle is go out, be healthy and be active with your pet. So they're launching an app that lets you pinpoint great dog hikes or parks where you can let your dog run around. It's user generated. There's a reason for me to be a part of it. It's a meaningful conversation.

KIMMEL: Social media is an integral part of the mix. It's just a matter of how you balance it out, and it's our job as agencies to provide a balanced solution to clients.

BATES: There has to be a strategy behind it. Some of our clients are saying, "I want a Facebook page," but there's no strategy behind it. So we have to ask them, "What are you trying to accomplish? Is that part of the mix?"

And you need content. You can't just let it lie there. You have to feed the content and you have to have the dialogue with the audience. We've had to educate some of our clients. You don't just do social media for social media's sake.

HARLAND: Also, you have to pay on an ongoing basis to keep the content going. I don't think clients really love that part.

SEARS: It's wonderful for branding in those first steps of getting to know you and staying in touch at a certain level. But it doesn't seem very deep in terms of the kinds of engagements you can get.

GRIGORIAN: A lot of clients haven't formally taken the dive. They're toe-dipping. They're starting to see what digital can mean to their business. But having ongoing

content, and the commitment it takes for a client to create content and have a voice, still needs a little bit of work. I think we're all very good on the front end and the middle. On the back side, we're still trying to figure out what digital is going to mean for an ongoing conversation with our client's consumers.

CORDERO: We're now looked at as the teachers for our clients in that area. They come to us and ask us what's new, what's hot. So I think we're going to see a lot of evolution and new ways to use those tools to help quantify ROI, continue the conversations and use whatever information that we capture in a meaningful way.

Whereas before it was, "How big can we make the event?" Now it's about how impactful we can make it, and how far we can extend the reach.

—Charlie Horsey

EM: *What about the role of technology in b-to-b events?*

CAVANAUGH: The way you gain commitment is through an ongoing relationship and ongoing communication, which is what digital allows you to do. It helps amplify the commitment and it helps extend the conversation and the experience.

The other way technology plays out in b-to-b is that we've developed several apps for clients. So now I can walk in to an event, be handed an iPad and my entire event is on that iPad. There's a live Twitter feed. My agenda, the floor plan, every restaurant in the area is on there. I'm getting constant updates on local transportation. And this app becomes my GPS, if you will, for the entire event. We also have an app that manages all of the client's event content—speeches, graphics, videos, the show book that's 500 pages—for their three- or four-day sales meeting or partner meeting. We've found much more of a demand for that.

EM: *It seems odd in this economy, but we're always hearing from agencies that can't find enough good people to hire. So, aside from your business development slots, who are you looking for?*

HORSEY: We're looking more for strategic, creative people, whether it's for the physical space or the digital space. The confluence of how those two work together is really the area we're focusing on.

GOYAL: For us, it's about expansion to other markets and the various verticals we want to penetrate. So, in sponsorship, I just got a guy from MSG to come over to be our director of sponsorship. I'm looking for best-in-class to come over and run verticals for us, to help us build a broader base.

But you have to come from an integrated background. And brand-side people are becoming more interesting. I had been looking for agency experience, but now I'm looking at brand people and they've added a new layer of interest to the organization.

CAVANAUGH: They have to be bigger-picture thinkers. It's usually the person who sat in the front of the classroom when they were in third grade, or who was the

... customers have X amount of time at an event. So how do you make their time as efficient as possible to make it worth their time to come to that event?

—Jim Cavanaugh

captain of their drama team, or sports team, or whatever they were involved in; the person who, if it weren't for them, their friends wouldn't get together. It's the person who likes to be in front of a room, who is a good communicator, thinks well, is smart.

But the first thing I look at now is: Does a client want to work with that person? Can I put that person in front of my client and the client says, "That's the person who elevates the rest of my room"? I think every person now needs to be considered client facing, even if they're not in a sales role. So, obviously, you need competency, but we've shifted what we've looked for—it's less on the technical side and more being able to be in front of a client.

EM: *When purse strings and deadlines are tight, efficiency matters. What's the formula for an efficient, high-performance event program?*

HORSEY: To me, the perfect program is low cost for physical engagement, and high reach. Using digital and social media as conduits to broadcast whatever we're producing is a perfect recipe. The question was always, "What's the ROI?" And now we can put some pretty substantial numbers to ROI based on how we use social media and digital in conjunction with the physical event. Whereas before it was, "How big can we make the event?" Now it's about how impactful we can make it, and how far we can extend the reach.

GRIGORIAN: Event marketing has always been on the day of, and then it drops off the cliff and your relationship with the consumer is over. Now, we have this jewel of an opportunity to continue that conversation until the next event cycle takes place. Or there doesn't even need to be a next cycle—it can just drive to purchase. And once they're in the purchase cycle, to have them continue a relationship with that product. Our job is just to keep that product on the cutting edge and to reach that consumer over and over again.

So, I think efficiency is not just about running a great event; it's about maximizing reach over the course of time.

BLACK: As marketers we've spent all of our time aggregating audiences and communities. Now that the community's already built, we're spending more time in the conversation with the community, versus building the community, and that has driven efficiency in what we do. All of us have figured out how to do it faster, cheaper and smarter, but that fact coupled with the people we have on staff who can understand the analytics behind it makes us so much smarter up front. So we're getting better briefs with better measures, which has helped us be more efficient.

GOYAL: For us, the most interesting part of it is efficiency via platforms. We're now looking at even one-off events as platforms and trying to understand how it turns into something bigger. So, if it's in the food and wine space, how are we making our stake in food and wine in a way that is efficient, so we can do something else in that space? And unless it's really penetrating in a deeper way, it doesn't make sense.

CAVANAUGH: One element is in the planning up front—rethinking how you put together an event, the strategy around an event, how you put the team together.

Then, on-site, how do you create an efficient event where customers are getting all the information they need, and access... to all the key decision makers and thought leaders? It's a matter of setting up social networks at the event, so they can exchange ideas and information, and setting up VIP areas where they can meet decision leaders. It's understanding that customers have X amount of time at an event. So how do you make their time as efficient as possible to make it worth their time to come to that event?

EM: *Here's your soap box: If your clients asked you for one piece of advice for the new year, what would it be?*

BATES: Step out, take a leap of faith, put the brand in a position to have those conversations with your audience. Sometimes that scares clients—getting out there and then realizing, "What are we doing?" Bring your agency on as a partner, so they can help you fine tune

your strategy and position yourselves to have a memorable experience with your audience.

INGRAM: Don't be so reactionary. A lot of times it's, "We have a problem.... Go!"

Also, be more strategic in the way that you think. With the speed and the timelines now, there is a sense of, "I just want something now," as opposed to, "Wait a second; if you give me six months to think, it can be a lot more of an experience." I'm not saying slow down; but let's think about it and not just do it.

HARLAND: We're asking our clients to come in early in the process and be a part of ideation, which for a lot of agencies is scary—they like to come back to clients with big ideas and present them. We're really trying to shift that thinking because clients know the brand better than anybody. So, my advice is get involved earlier, treat your agency as a partner and work with them on the ideas and concepts. You're just going to create a better product.

SEARS: Supplement sales events with experiential instead of just traditional media. Also, if there's still a property on the roster that is not being leveraged to deliver what you need, why not? Activate it. Get in there and test it.

ASARO: Integrate and collaborate. Be transparent. Get all of your agencies together and clearly identify what each one's role is. That's the responsibility of the client. We all can do stuff outside our immediate scope of capabilities, but once we have roles established with our clients, we can start having deeper collaborations, integrating our planning earlier and coming up with much stronger campaigns.

KIMMEL: Common sense and simplicity. Clients need to think of themselves more as the consumer and consider what they would want to happen to them at that experience. You don't want to give your data. You don't want to be bombarded. You want a simple experience that is truly memorable, and not to be banged over the head with a brand.

Just go back to common-sense marketing and don't overanalyze everything. A simple experience is going to be the most memorable and the best. Consumers are so overwhelmed with everything that when a brand can provide a nice, simple, memorable experience, that's going to stick with them and hopefully lead to some transactions.

HORSEY: Slow down. Be thoughtful and methodical. Understand what you want to get out of an initiative, and be clear in communicating that. Search well and hire well. Hire a good agency. Often there are good ideas, but execution and the right partner are important.

Clients need to think of themselves more as the consumer and consider what they would want to happen to them at that experience.

—Doug Kimmel

GRIGORIAN: Bring agency partners to the table early and give them all a voice in what the solution might be. Help us all develop the vision of a campaign. That's when we've seen the best results—when the agencies are there together and we're able to see both the common threads of a campaign and what it means to us as an experiential agency, what it means to the p.r. agency and what it means to the digital agency. Those are the award-winning programs, and those are the programs that have staying power in the marketplace.

CORDERO: Clearly define goals and objectives from the very beginning. A lot of times we end up with programs that have a vision but not necessarily any goals or objectives. So at the end of the program, everyone's just kind of left asking, "Was this successful?" We can come up with an experience that builds brand awareness or gains a lot of impressions, but if those weren't the goals from the beginning, then it doesn't matter how great the event was—it was a failure.

CAVANAUGH: If there's a singular word, it's "share." Often when we're dealing with a client, there's reticence for whatever reason to share goals or objectives from their previous events—the budget parameters, all of the information that really help us do our best work and put our best thinking together. And we find that the clients who treat us as partners and are willing to share all of that information up front end up getting the best results.

GOYAL: Leverage technology. There's such amazing technology out there right now that's unique and game-changing. A second piece of advice would be take some risks. In 2012, the brands that take risks are going to really stand out. And technology, I guarantee you, is going to be part of that risk taking.

The last piece is that I would engage in competitive research, and understand the competitive landscape for your brand. See what the other players are doing and how you're going to one-up them. Because 2012 is going to be fast and it's going to be crazy.

BLACK: Recognize that we're in an experiential economy. Consumers want experiences with brands. So hire smart, hire right, bring in the agencies that are true collaborative partners, and we will work with you on a shared vision for your brand. That's really what we'd ask of our clients in 2012. **EM**