

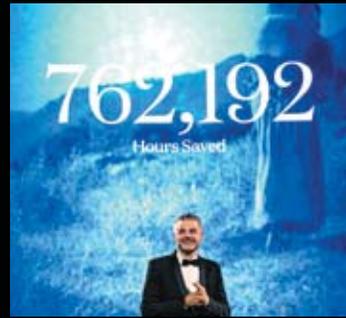
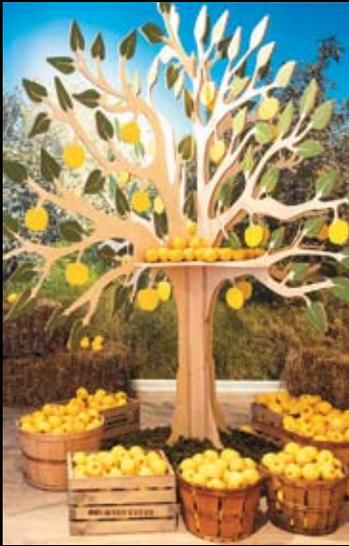
2019 CORPORATE EVENT AWARDS

Honoring Excellence in Event-Marketing Strategy and Execution

“There are risks and costs to action. But they are far less than the long-range risks of comfortable inaction.” While John F. Kennedy surely wasn’t talking about the world of corporate events, his words could very well be the mantra of this year’s Corporate Event Award winners. Certainly, when you go out on a limb by experimenting with fresh yet untested marketing tactics, both your job and your program are at risk. That’s one reason many marketers take the safe route, and as a result, most programs stagnate to one degree or another. However, the 2019 Corporate Event Award winners forged ahead despite the risks — and generated remarkable dividends in the process.

Consider the project for BMW AG. To launch its new concept car to the media, the automaker eschewed traditional venues for a Boeing 777F. Circumnavigating the world in five days with four stopovers on three continents, the aircraft turned the traditional media event on its head. Rather than luring the global press to a stationary event, BMW brought the event to media reps via an unforgettable encounter and ultimately scored almost 42 million social-media impressions.

So please join us in congratulating the 2019 Corporate Event Award winners. Hailed by our panel of judges as “bold,” “plucky,” and “definitely daring,” they prove that sometimes the newest and most experimental ideas are also the most successful — not to mention award-worthy.



2019 JUDGES

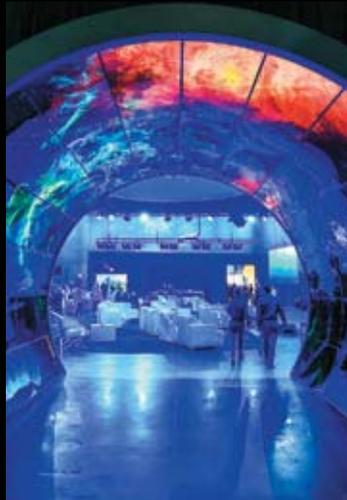
Stephanie Arone,
president and general
manager, Activity Planners Inc.,
Las Vegas

Marc Crosier,
trade show manager,
Heidelberg Engineering Inc.,
Franklin, MA



Scott Cullather,
CEO, Invnt,
New York

Marcia Deem,
CTSM, events marketing
manager, Relias Inc.,
Cary, NC



Michelle Hernandez,
global event strategist,
Cisco Systems Inc.,
San Jose, CA



Rob Stout,
vice president of production,
Encore Event Technologies,
Las Vegas

Victor Torregraza,
brand experiences program
manager, global event marketing,
Intel Corp., Santa Clara, CA





The Seven Seas are becoming a crowded place, one in which maritime companies must constantly innovate or risk being left in the wake of more seaworthy competitors. This is particularly true for the cruise-line industry, whose consumers are expecting more technology, more personalized experiences, and more jaw-dropping entertainment.

Royal Caribbean Cruises Ltd. (RCL), the second largest cruise corporation in the world, has worked hard to position itself as the cruise experience innovator, laying claim to many “first at seas” offerings onboard its ships, including a rock-climbing wall, an ice-skating rink, and a robotic bartender. However, in 2017, rival Carnival Corp. made waves at the International Consumer Electronics Show by unveiling its Ocean Medallion, a new technology platform that it promised would offer unprecedented customization of passengers’ cruise experiences. RCL decided to answer Carnival’s splash in the pond with a tsunami of its own that would clearly reestablish it as the indisputable thought leader of the cruise-line industry.

“The pace of change is relentless — and so are we,” says Richard Fain, RCL’s chairman and CEO. “We are harnessing a range of technologies to enhance every face of our business, every minute of our guests’ vacations, and every inch of the ships we build.” RCL just needed to find

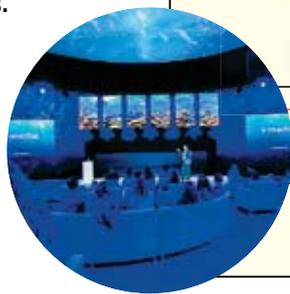
CRUISE CONTROL

To anchor its reputation as the innovative whale of the industry, Royal Caribbean Cruises Ltd. produces a tech-rich media extravaganza that nets more than 530 million print, online, and social-media impressions and achieves an engagement rate six times higher than the industry benchmark. *By Ben Barclay*

THE ROYAL TREATMENT

Royal Caribbean Cruises Ltd. transformed the Duggal Greenhouse at the Brooklyn Navy Yard into an immersive showcase of the cutting-edge technologies it offers passengers.

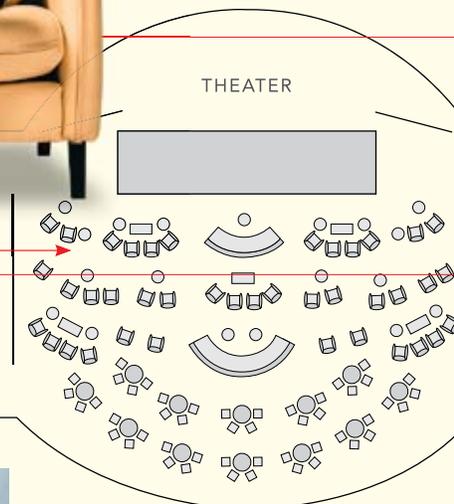
After arriving at the Brooklyn Navy Yard, guests were transported to the venue in a driverless shuttle.



The circular theater hosted keynotes and a dazzling multimedia show using six 100-inch monitors mounted to articulated robotic arms.



Eventgoers donned virtual-reality headsets and experienced VR previews of three shore excursions.



Attendees exited the theater via a 270-degree OLED tunnel boasting undersea and outer-space imagery.

a foghorn loud enough to broadcast that message to its tech-enthused consumers who may have been distracted by Carnival's shiny trinket. So the cruise line set out to create another industry first: a media extravaganza that would convert a boatload of tech influencers, personalities, and media reps into a teeming school of brand enthusiasts who would amplify the company's high-tech innovations and offerings by publishing articles and pushing videos and social-media content out to their audiences.

RCL knew from the outset that a traditional press event featuring a fleet of C-suite executives preaching its attributes would not energize this already seasick group of cynics that tends to treat every "next big thing" with a healthy dose of skepticism. Instead, the cruising company sought to pull off a spectacle that would make "Titanic" seem like

MEDIA EVENT

Company: Royal Caribbean Cruises Ltd.

Event: Sea Beyond

Objective: Solidify RCL's position as an innovator and visionary in the competitive cruise-line industry.

Strategy: Host a tech-infused media event that garners substantial press coverage and social-media mentions.

Tactics: Create the three-day Sea Beyond experience at the Brooklyn Navy Yard's Duggal Greenhouse. Offer tech influencers and media reps a comprehensive and engaging look at how RCL uses cutting-edge technologies to enhance passengers' experiences.

Results: Attracted more than 600 attendees and immersed them in the brand for a full hour and a half, generating more than 1,000 media posts and 58 placements in print and online publications. Achieved 538.3 million media impressions and an engagement rate of more than 10 percent, six times the industry average.

Creative/Production Agency: Jack Morton Worldwide Inc., www.jackmorton.com

Budget: \$5 million or more

an indie film. And to ensure the media event didn't hit any icebergs, RCL reached out to Jack Morton Worldwide Inc. to helm the affair. "The Royal team came to Jack Morton with one major request: bring all of its technology to life in an environment that makes the guests feel like they are on an actual cruise ship," says Jim Cavanaugh, senior vice president and managing director at Jack Morton. "Plus, we had to make the experience authentic, even though some of Royal's in-

novations were still in the development phase."

Together, the two firms dreamed up a tech-centric experience to introduce attendees to "the new, the next, and the never before" RCL technologies at a media event aptly named Sea Beyond. "Every year, millions of guests are entrusting us with something very precious: their vacation time," Fain says. "To merit that trust, we work to

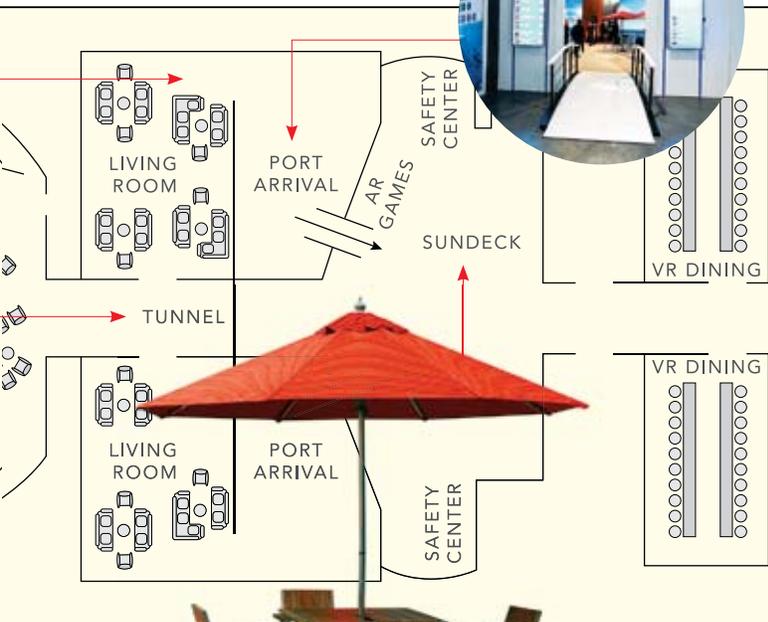
A mock gangway flanked by video monitors with facial-recognition software confirmed attendees' identities as they "boarded."



VR headsets were used again for a not-of-this-world dining experience.



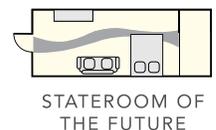
Before departing, guests took in a demo of the hydrogen fuel cells that helped power the event and are currently used on some of RCL's ships.



Guests could relax in the sundeck area and order refreshments through the event app.



The Stateroom of the Future featured a ceiling and balcony augmented with LCD panels capable of creating vistas ranging from bright ocean views to star-filled, moonlit skies.



surpass guests' expectations at every opportunity, from planning their trips to boarding our ships, whether on sea days or shore excursions, and in every dining, recreation, and entertainment venue. Sea Beyond was a preview of how we are bringing those aspirations to life in a stem-to-stern transformation of our entire company."

Recognizing that taking hundreds of media members on a full-blown cruise was probably a bit overboard, RCL and Jack Morton decided the best way forward was to create a cruise-like experience that never left dry land — except for a planned activity to transport attendees to and from the event. But selecting the optimal shore-bound venue was no easy task. "We needed a venue in which we had pretty much full control," Cavanaugh says. "The space needed to be large enough to house all the tech experiences we would be offering, and the ceilings needed to be high enough and strong enough for some large structures that would be built inside." The site also needed to be in proximity of the ocean, the company's natural habitat, as well as easily accessible to a high volume of tech media and influencers. In the end, RCL and Jack Morton settled on the Duggal Greenhouse in New York's Brooklyn Navy Yard. With 35,000 square feet of uninterrupted space and a ceiling that could handle a 12-ton load, the site could accommodate RCL's oceanic vision.

In the ensuing months, RCL and Jack Morton developed a plan that would both introduce attendees to the range of RCL's offerings and immerse them in a story-doing event that mimicked a passenger experience on one of its ships of the future, with a particular focus on how its technologies deliver an unparalleled personalized vacation. The final schedule was a three-day, eight-event affair that

would run an average of 75 influencers and members of the media at a time through the Sea Beyond experience. While the attendees would primarily be tech media reps, influencers, and pop-culture personalities, RCL's ultimate target was future passengers. In order to gauge the event's success, RCL set out to surpass the influencer industry's social, print, and online viewer engagement benchmark of 1.84 percent, which is calculated by the total number of likes, shares, comments, views, etc.

Sea-zing the Opportunity

Once RCL felt it had a seaworthy event ready to roll out, it needed to ensure its skeptical audience was willing to come aboard. The company decided a traditional phone and email blitz wouldn't likely start attendees off on the right foot for the tech-heavy experience RCL had prepared. Instead, a couple weeks prior to the event, the company baited its hook with a direct-mail video invite that was nearly impossible to ignore. Opening the 8-by-5-inch card launched a brief video on an embedded LCD screen in which Fain lauded the by-invitation-only event. Key influencers received personalized videos, ensuring they understood just how much the company valued their presence. The invite prompted recipients to download RCL's proprietary Sea Beyond app that allowed them to register for the event. Once registered, users were prompted to upload a selfie that would identify them upon arrival.

To guarantee the event shone like a lighthouse through the dense tech fog, RCL recruited three well-known, paid tech influencers (Jessica Naziri, founder of the lifestyle-tech digital magazine TechSesh; Astute Attire blogger Mustafa Kacar; and YouTube personality Linus Sebastian of Linus Tech Tips). Three tech-savvy celebrities were



Royal Caribbean Cruises Ltd. wanted to immerse attendees in a story-doing event that mimicked a passenger experience on one of its ships of the future.

also contracted to make an appearance: actress Ashley Benson, musician Kevin Jonas of the Jonas Brothers, and professional football player Victor Cruz.

Uncharted Waters

While some guests opted to drive themselves to Sea Beyond or use a provided car service, many earned their sea legs by boarding water taxis — rented high-end yachts that collected registered attendees at Midtown and downtown Manhattan locales. The water taxis transported them across the East River to the Brooklyn Navy Yard where a driverless shuttle waited to transport up to 10 guests at a time to the venue. The autonomous vehicle was the first tech-flavored taste of what passengers could soon expect from RCL. Built by Navya SA, the shuttle is expected to be RCL's delivery vehicle of the future that will convey passengers and their luggage directly to their waiting ships.

After the brief ride, attendees arrived at the Duggal Greenhouse, which glowed with RCL's corporate blue and sported its white crest. Then the fun really began. As they approached the entrance, beacon technology contained in their downloaded RCL app automatically signed guests in. The tech triggered welcome graphics that greeted guests by name on a fog wall they passed through as they entered the greenhouse.

Guests then stepped into a large circular theater, much like the ones that provide RCL's seafaring passengers daily entertainment, topped by a massive 360-degree LED screen. Comfortable white chairs and couches arranged in a scallop-shell formation faced a stage where executives delivered multimedia keynotes highlighting the company's latest and soon-to-be-seen technologies aboard its 48-ship fleet. During one portion of the presentation, the circular LED screen provided a fish's-eye-view of RCL's advanced micro-bubble air lubrication system that allows its newest ships to ride on a blanket of tiny bubbles, reducing drag and improving energy efficiency by more than 5 percent.

The presentation segment avoided the mundane, however, as the true stars of the theater — six 100-inch monitors mounted on robotic arms — quite literally swung into action. The articulated screens rotated, pivoted, and merged in a memorable bit of robotic choreography as they delivered two high-energy multimedia shows the company already performs aboard one of its ships.

Following the 30-minute theater stay, guests moved deeper into the venue by passing through a 13-foot-long, 270-degree tunnel comprising 42 curved OLED monitors displaying stunning depictions of underwater scenery, as well a cosmic journey through outer space, thereby representing both parts of the Sea Beyond moniker. The next stage of the experience brought attendees to an area arranged like a living room in prospective passengers' homes. Here eventgoers tested out the company's virtual-reality shore excursions by donning Oculus Rift VR headsets that transported them to any of three excursions offered by RCL cruises: riding in a Venetian gondola, soaring in a hot-air balloon over Alaska, and splashing



through the waterfalls of Haiti. When they returned to reality, attendees clearly understood how RCL conveniently allows passengers to take a dry run of its offerings in their own homes before deciding whether to open their wallets.

Welcome Aboard

Next, it was time to board the ship. Guests left the confines of the living room and headed for the gangway to experience RCL’s new frictionless boarding process that allows passengers to avoid tiresome check-in lines. Attendees watched themselves approach a faux gangway via a video monitor loaded with facial-recognition software that framed their faces, matched them with their check-in selfies, and tagged their names. Once the software confirmed their identities, the monitor welcomed them aboard as they passed through to the sundeck.

Jack Morton designed this next space to resemble a real-life cruise deck. The brightly lit area featured vinyl flooring printed to mimic a wooden deck, wall graphics that appeared to be looking past a ship’s railings to the open sea, and suspended cumulus clouds made of cotton. Staffers invited “passengers” to visit the safety center for demonstrations of crew-facing technologies, such as the ships’ safety sensors and VR navigation technology that ensures safe passage through even the dankest fogs.

Following the demos, some guests tried out VR games utilizing the Sea Beyond app, while others relaxed on deck chairs and enjoyed complimentary beverages. Using the event app, attendees ordered cocktails from an assortment of alcoholic and nonalcoholic offerings with a couple taps of their fingers. And quicker than Gilligan could upset Skipper, crew members received the orders on their own devices and delivered the drinks by using the app’s beacon

“This event was on brand and on point, but also disruptive. They blew the doors off what a cruise can be and appealed directly to the next generation of passengers.”

technology to pinpoint guests’ locations. A quick peek at the provided selfie on a server’s device ensured accurate deliveries. Attendees loved the hassle-free service, which was available throughout the event, and were impressed to learn that it’s one RCL already offers on its ships.

Once attendees were done lounging on the sundeck, staffers ushered them into one of two dining rooms for a not-of-this-world VR dining experience. The spaces were fashioned as Japanese tearooms, each with a pair of matte black tables where visitors grabbed a seat. Staffers helped guests don HTC Vive headsets with forward-facing cameras that monitored users’ hand movements, then provided diners with three bite-sized morsels that included a crispy tuna tartare and a chocolate truffle coated with Pop Rocks. Each devoured food item triggered a video reaction in their virtual worlds. For instance, when guests ate the tartare, the virtual tearoom walls exploded into a flock of origami cranes. A bite of the truffle elicited a nightscape with flickering fireflies that complemented the bursting sensations in guests’ mouths. “The dining experience became a story of its own where the senses were able to interact — from what guests were tasting and feeling in their mouths to what they were experiencing in the virtual world,” says Lisa Slama, a producer at Jack Morton.



Next, small groups of guests were guided out the rear of the Duggal Greenhouse to where the Stateroom of the Future was set up. The regal cabin featured a full LCD ceiling and a faux balcony with an ocean view provided by an LCD wall. Staffers demonstrated how future guests would be able to adjust the cabin's temperature and ambience using either in-room voice commands or the cruising app from anywhere on the ship. Additionally, the ceiling and balcony views could be altered to suit occupants' moods. For instance, guests could sleep beneath a starry sky with a full moon seemingly right outside their "window." And instead of a blaring alarm, they could wake up to a beautiful, albeit virtual, sunrise over the ocean. The interactive cabin turned out to be one of the eventgoers' highlights, according to Slama. "People loved how the technology could bring passengers in interior cabins even closer to the water," she says.

Once attendees were about ready to shove off, the autonomous shuttle waited to whisk them back to the front of the venue, where they could view and learn about RCL's emission-free hydrogen fuel cell system that was powering all of the event's video screens. It's the same system the cruise line is testing on some ships and hopes to roll out more fully by 2022. Finally, guests departed for home the same way they arrived while pondering their newfound knowledge of how RCL is redefining the personalized cruise experience with its high-sea technologies.

Full Speed Ahead

RCL's deep-dive tech extravaganza left Corporate Event Awards judges amazed — so much so they accorded it the competition's top honor, the Judges' Choice Award. "This event was on brand and on point, but also disruptive. They

blew the doors off what a cruise can be and appealed directly to the next generation of passengers," one judge raved. Another loved how the event "made every attendee feel like a VIP from start to finish."

Given the results the Sea Beyond media event achieved, it's no wonder RCL felt like it had just won the America's Cup. The immersive event ran eight times across three days and attracted more than 600 tech personalities, influencers, and media members. Plus, each event ensured the captive audience spent a full 90 minutes soaking up RCL's messaging. And based on the amount of reporting on the event, the cruise line managed to convert the jaded masses into advocates.

In the month following Sea Beyond, RCL tracked more than 1,000 social-media posts using #RCLSeaBeyond, as well as 58 placements via print and online media — 39 of which came from personalities RCL identified as key tech influencers, including the paid influencers and celebrities that pumped out event content to their ardent followers. And with 538.3 million total impressions in the form of views, likes, shares, etc., prospective cruisegoers were getting the message loud and clear. Most impressively, RCL blew its 1.8-percent media interaction target rate out of the water and achieved an engagement rate of more than 10 percent — six times the industry benchmark.

The results set a new high-water mark for media events and demonstrated RCL's relentless pursuit of innovation. In the process, Sea Beyond reestablished, or perhaps further established, RCL as the leviathan of high-seas tech and left the competition listing in its wake. **E**

Ben Barclay, staff writer; bbarclay@exhibitormagazine.com



Opal Apples' Fruitful Endeavor



To boost awareness of its Opal apple brand, FirstFruits Marketing LLC stages a three-day, Instagram-centric activation in New York that lures scores of passersby, attracts the eye of the press, and harvests more than 44 million media and social impressions. *By Brian Dukerschein*

Raising and maintaining consumer awareness of their companies' names, logos, and products is a top concern for most marketers — a challenge made even more difficult when they operate in an industry in which their goods are viewed more as generic commodities than belonging to a readily identifiable brand. Take the fresh produce department of a typical grocery store, where branding opportunities are scarce and busy shoppers tend to be more concerned with price, appearance, country of origin, and seasonality than the dime-size branded sticker on a piece of fruit. Such is the business landscape of FirstFruits Marketing LLC, a group of orchards growing multiple varieties of apples, pears, and cherries on more than 6,000 picturesque acres in southern Washington.

In addition to offering common apple varieties such as Granny Smith and Red Delicious, FirstFruits is the exclusive U.S. grower and shipper of Opals, a nongenetically modified hybrid of the Golden Delicious and the Topaz. Featuring a honey-yellow skin, generous size, and crisp, sweet flavor, the Opal is especially prized for its ability to resist oxidation, i.e., it retains its whiteness even hours after it's been sliced. As such, Opals are marketed to parents as an ideal source of apple slices for snack times and school lunches.

Historically, FirstFruits has gone about conveying Opals' attributes to consumers via product-sampling

NONTRADITIONAL EVENT

Company: FirstFruits Marketing LLC

Event: Opal Orchard NYC

Objective: Increase awareness of the Opal brand of apples via media attention and face-to-face engagement with consumers.

Strategy: Open a temporary space in New York capable of attracting passersby and garnering press coverage from a large number of local and national media outlets.

Tactics: Convert a two-level art gallery into an "Instagram museum" with multiple photo activations and product-sampling opportunities. Conduct a pre-event public-relations campaign to court the interest of local influencers and media reps.

Results: Attracted more than 1,600 participants, earned 54 media placements, conducted 10 face-to-face press interviews, and netted a total of more than 44 million social and media impressions.

Creative/Production Agencies: Department Zero Inc., www.departmentzero.com; Sets and Effects LLC, www.setsandeffects.com

Creative Agency: Golden Sun Marketing Inc., www.goldensunmarketing.com

Budget: \$100,000 – \$199,000

activations at community festivals, charity run/walk fundraisers, and other family-friendly events. Coming into the 2018 picking season, however, the company was bracing for a bumper crop that prompted it to broaden its brand-building horizons. "We first started growing Opals in the early 2000s," says Joe Vargas, marketing manager at FirstFruits. "Trees that were in their adolescent stage just a few years ago are maturing and bearing more fruit, so the 2018 Opal harvest was going to be the largest we'd ever seen." Facing this historic

spike in supply, FirstFruits and its marketing agency, Golden Sun Marketing Inc., felt the time was right to stoke demand with a similarly scaled campaign to plant the Opal name in as many consumers' minds as possible.

Seeding the Soil

From the onset, FirstFruits and Golden Sun envisioned a two-prong approach to their awareness-building endeavor. First, they wanted to stage a consumer-facing activation in a heavily populated locale that allowed ample opportunities for product sampling and learning about Opal apples' unique properties. It was also important that this engagement inspire participants to share their experiences on social media. Second, by holding the event on Oct. 21 and leveraging the timeliness of National Apple Day, they planned to incentivize media outlets into giving Opals bushels of news coverage.

Based on these objectives, FirstFruits needed a location that offered both a large population and a concentration of print, online, and TV media. Nearby cities such as Seattle and San Francisco were plausible options, but seeing as how FirstFruits' public-relations firm, Carolyn Izzo Integrated Communications (CIIC), is located just outside New York, the company fittingly set its sights on the Big Apple. After all, New York boasts not only a high population density but also countless media operations, many that were already familiar with CIIC and therefore would be open to hearing a pitch on Opal's behalf.

With the destination city set, FirstFruits and Golden Sun brought in Kansas City, MO-based experiential-marketing agency Department Zero Inc., which had assisted with previous Opal-brand events, to help brainstorm concepts for the activation. One initial idea was to construct a large apple tree in a busy outdoor venue, but Matt Jenkins, managing director of Department Zero, and his team suspected that FirstFruits' objectives could be better achieved by capitalizing on a burgeoning trend in experiential marketing, especially in New York: the Instagram pop-up.

Popularly known as "Instagram museums," these temporary engagements trace their roots to Maryellis Bunn, a former executive at Time Inc., who opened the Museum of Ice Cream in Greenwich Village in 2016. Filled with playful props — think supersized ice cream cones and gummy bears — and engaging vignettes (e.g., a small swimming pool filled with candy-colored sprinkles that attendees were free to dive into), the activation was an instant experiential blockbuster tailor-made for the Instagram era. Bunn's brainchild, which she expected to remain open for a couple of weeks, drew lines of hashtag-happy ticketholders for three months before moving on to successful runs in Miami, Los Angeles, and San Francisco. A slew of food- and beverage-inspired imitators soon followed, including Candytopia, Rosé Mansion, and the Museum of Pizza.

Jenkins believed that a similar experience would draw the consumer and media attention FirstFruits desired. "By 2018, these engagements had been around long enough that the idea was easily understood by most New Yorkers but not so long that the concept felt tired," he says. His team pitched the idea of staging a

multiday, Instagram-centric pop-up that would bring the wholesome, American-as-apple-pie experience of strolling through an Opal orchard into the heart of Manhattan. FirstFruits approved the proposal but specified that the activation must include an apple tree and space for an Opal expert to interact with and educate the masses.

Low-Hanging Fruit

Now it was up to Midwest-based Department Zero to find a suitable East-Coast venue for a company in the Pacific Northwest. And while apples may grow on trees, money certainly doesn't. "We had a budget

The countrified setting inspired arriving visitors to whip out their smartphones and start taking selfies.

of less than \$200,000 for this project, so we had to set a strict maximum for the site's rental cost and square footage," Jenkins says. "We didn't want to end up with a huge space that we couldn't afford to properly build out." During a site visit to New York, Jenkins discovered a 1,450-square-foot art gallery on the bustling Lower East Side with a street-level storefront and a finished basement. "The walls were already painted white, it had a ton of great lighting — a big consideration for a photo-centric activation — and it was the ideal size and layout," Jenkins says. "We couldn't have asked for anything better." It must have been kismet, as the venue's address was none other than 156 Orchard St.

Jenkins and his team immediately got to work with Sets and Effects LLC,

a Brooklyn-based design-and-build firm specializing in events and studio sets, on ways to furnish the Orchard Street space without upsetting FirstFruits' budgetary apple cart. As plans for the venue came together, CIIC's PR reps got to work drumming up media interest via outreach to their established contacts at local event listings, online and print publications, popular parenting blogs, and TV stations. Select outlets received a six-pack of Opals, and press reps were invited to a sneak peek of the pop-up before it opened to the public.

CIIC's biggest coup, however, was securing a segment on a Saturday-morning broadcast of Fox News' "Fox & Friends" on Oct. 20, midway through the pop-up's run and the day before National Apple Day. Per the agreement with the show's producers, FirstFruits would be able to stage an apple-themed festival on the plaza outside Fox News' headquarters in the center of Midtown, engage in cooking demos with the "Fox & Friends" hosts, and bring its marketing messages about Opal apples to a viewership that averages roughly 1.7 million.

In addition to CIIC's efforts, brand ambassadors walked the streets of the Lower East Side and distributed flyers announcing the arrival of Opal Orchard NYC to local businesses and posted them around the neighborhood. The signage proclaimed that "An Orchard is Growing in the City!," touted the pop-up's free admission and photo ops, and listed the event's days and operating hours of 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. The stage was set, and it was time to see if an Opal-themed Instagram museum would bear the kind of brand-awareness fruit the marketers desired, namely no fewer than 1,000 attendees during the three-day run and 10 million media and social impressions.

Wholesome to the Core

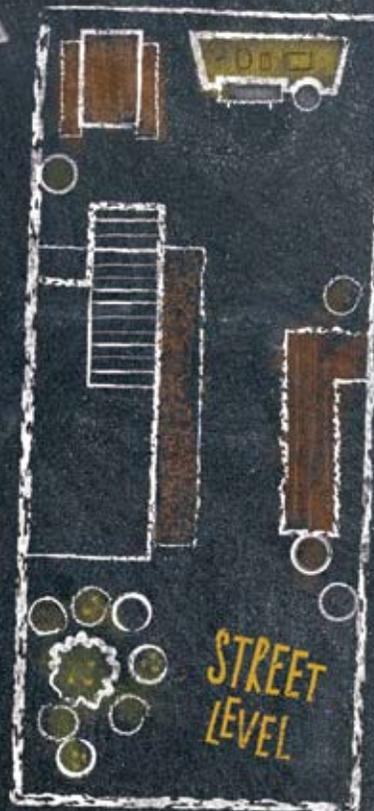
FirstFruits Marketing LLC's Opal Orchard NYC pop-up offered two floors of Instagram-ready photo ops, apple-centric activities, product-sampling opportunities, and bushels of charming and whimsical elements.



The rear of the pop-up boasted a craft table for apple stamping and a playful group photo op.



On the lower level, visitors could pose with an umbrella that sheltered them from a storm of Opals.



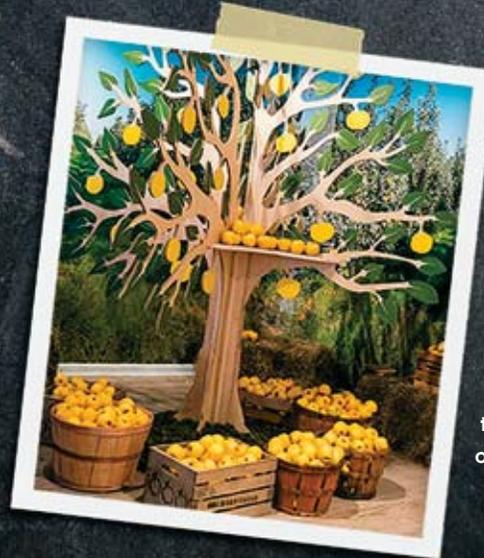
An Opal expert doled out apple slices and recipes from a barn-wood-clad counter.



The most dynamic photo op involved a rope swing hung amid a flurry of suspended apple slicers.



As luck would have it, the venue for the pop-up was located on Orchard Street.



After stepping past a farm stand brimming with Opal apples, visitors were transported to an orchard setting.

EVENT AWARDS

The Apple of New York's Eye

Pedestrians walking past 156 Orchard St. first encountered a wooden farm stand positioned along the storefront that tempted passersby with crates full of golden Opal apples. Upon stepping into the pop-up, New Yorkers were immediately transported to FirstFruits' pastoral acreages thanks to a 22-foot-long, floor-to-ceiling, vinyl-printed panorama of its apple orchards that lined two perpendicular walls at the front left of the 19-by-44-foot space. Here stood FirstFruits' requisite apple tree, a roughly 8-foot-tall, 3-D construct fabricated from laser-cut plywood and dotted with hand-painted leaves and apples. Hay bales and weathered crates and bushel baskets teeming with apples perfumed the air. A smattering of gourds, rustic metal pails, and other agrarian accouterments enhanced the countrified setting and inspired arriving visitors to immediately whip out their smartphones and snap selfies with the arboreal element. "Apple picking is a fall tradition for a lot of people across the country, but we felt many New Yorkers don't have easy access to it. So we wanted to draw heavily on the look, feel, and overall experience you get when visiting an apple orchard," Jenkins says.

An L-shaped counter near the entrance served as a product-demo space. Opal expert Paul Esvelt manned this station and imparted his knowledge of the produce, handed out apple slices, and shared his favorite recipes. A custom chalkboard mounted to the wall behind him featured copy extolling Opals' selling points and introduced the pop-up's hashtag, #OpalOrchardNYC.

After passing a wall covered with multicolored wooden tiles laser-etched with apple-themed text and iconography, visitors moved to the

How Do You "Like" Them Apples?

Opal Orchard NYC's four Instagram-ready photo ops generated a bumper crop of social-media activity. Visitors who shared pics with the event hashtag could win a year's supply of Opal apples.



back of the space and encountered their next photo op: an approximately 8-foot-wide freestanding wall decorated like a country-modern living room, complete with quirky wallpaper, framed apple prints, a white bench, and a side table topped with a kitschy apple-shaped lamp. Three of the frames were actually cutouts, and visitors could either pose for selfies on the bench or have a group photo taken in which some participants stood behind the structure to make it seem as if their portraits were hanging on the wall. A number of brand ambassadors, dressed in white T-shirts printed with the iconic "I Love NY" logo but with the familiar heart emblem replaced by an Opal apple, were on hand to help take photos and remind visitors that tagging their pictures with the event's hashtag would automatically enter them in a contest for a year's supply of Opals.

The back of the first-floor space also featured two additional engagements positioned at opposite ends of the technology spectrum. A wooden picnic table functioned as a crafting area where children could create their own apple-stamping artworks. Pint-sized participants were welcome to take their projects home or add them to a clothesline-like display for all to see. And to give visitors a high-tech look at its operation, FirstFruits offered a pair of Samsung Gear VR headsets loaded with 360-degree videos of its orchards and sorting facilities.

Descending the stairs to the lower level, visitors discovered the remaining pair of photo ops. The first involved another orchard backdrop, this time augmented with a "rainstorm" of more than two dozen Opals hung from the ceiling with filament and a similarly rigged umbrella that participants could pose with. The final vignette was the most dynamic and

included an element Jenkins encountered time and again when researching Instagram pop-ups: a rope swing. This version was sturdily mounted to the ceiling and positioned amid a flurry of suspended apple slicers. The lower level also featured a dedicated staffer who offered to take visitors' pictures using a tablet. Guests then entered their email addresses and received their photos augmented with an Opal-branded overlay. Before exiting the pop-up orchard, New Yorkers were invited to revisit the 3-D Opal tree and "pick" an edible souvenir from a small shelf built into its trunk.

In between talking up Opals' attributes at the demo counter, Esvelt

"This pop-up made a very traditional industry look cool. Who knew apples could be so fun?"

engaged with members of the media who had scheduled appointments. And in the wee hours of Saturday, Oct. 20, he made his way to Fox News headquarters, where Department Zero and Sets and Effects transformed the building's plaza into an extension of the pop-up. The result was a made-for-TV fall festival rife with bales of hay, potted mums, picnic tables, and product-sampling opportunities for members of the outside audience. Esvelt appeared in two three-minute segments, during which he led the "Fox & Friends" hosts through cooking and cider-pressing demos, all the while working in multiple mentions of the Opal name and the apple's key selling points in an effort to sow the

seeds of brand awareness among the show's considerable viewership.

Bearing Fruit

FirstFruits set out to replicate the lure of the Instagram museums that inspired its event, and it's clear the Opal Orchard NYC pop-up didn't fall far from the proverbial tree. The three-day pop-up attracted more than 1,600 visitors, exceeding the company's goal by 60 percent. Those photogenic apple fans snapped thousands of photos, and judging from the smiling faces found in an Instagram search for #OpalOrchard-NYC, FirstFruits was indeed successful at appealing to its target audience of parents with young children.

If the pop-up's goal-shattering traffic was a slice of warm apple pie, then the media attention it generated was the scoop of ice cream on top. CIIC was able to score 10 on-site press interviews with journalists from the likes of Health and Better Homes & Gardens magazines, and the PR blitz ultimately resulted in 54 media placements in city guides, news websites, influential blogs, and more. Factor in the "Fox & Friends" spot and pop-up visitors' social-media posts, and FirstFruits reaped more than 44 million media and social impressions with an ad value of almost \$2.5 million.

Corporate Event Awards judges were duly impressed with how FirstFruits courted the press, and were even more taken with the activation's charming design and high level of engagement. "This pop-up made a very traditional industry look cool. Who knew apples could be so fun?" said one judge. "The space was friendly, inviting, authentic, educational, and not overproduced." In other words, judges felt that Opal Orchard NYC succeeded because the event was much like the apple itself: wholesome and natural to the core. **E**



IBM's New Way of Thinking

IBM Corp. launches a new flagship conference to inspire and earn loyalty from many distinct audiences, garnering a positive response in the form of 80 percent of attendees clamoring to return in 2019. *By Kelli Billstein*

Humankind's development of and now dependency on technology solutions seemed to happen overnight, like a digital dream. The companies that bring these technologies to market operate on the bleeding edge of the digital frontier. Their job is to capture lightning in a bottle, then develop, simplify, and distribute it to the world. While this frontier is a thrilling and powerful place to be, it's not enough for tech giants to function like genius scientists in a lab concocting new technology tools from dawn to dusk. They must also be digital stewards in the

technology space, connecting with their customers on a human level and showing them how the advancements they develop can be applied in the real world.

Enter IBM Corp., one of the 800-pound gorillas in the global technology jungle that brings countless solutions to market, from hardware to software, artificial intelligence (AI) to cloud, products to services. And in order to sustain its position as an industry heavyweight, "Big Blue" must maintain expert status in all things tech.

Around 2014, however, a fly appeared in the ointment, the tickle of a notion that could upset IBM's stronghold. Experts at the company forecast that the tides were beginning to turn in ways that emphasized delicate confluences of technological ideas, services, and tools. Big data was starting to overlap with the cloud; the Internet of Things (IoT) was intersecting with cybersecurity. The initial ripples of these integrations represented a threat for IBM because, at the time, many of the company's product and service offerings were operating in silos. In terms of events, these silos played out in the form of seven unique conferences, most serving users of IBM's key software brands.

It's true that IBM is many things to many different people, but the company had to confront the fact that standalone events would not be a viable solution to feed distinct customers' loyalties forever. Unless IBM read the



writing on the wall and started identifying synergies in its solutions, unifying its offerings under one end-to-end umbrella, and merging its events, it ran the risk of being seen as a technology laggard instead of a tech leader.

All of this implied a go-big-or-go-home undertaking for IBM. And you better believe Big Blue was going big. Therefore, this yet-to-be-determined event had to be about more than just bringing IBM's diverse customers together in one central place to efficiently cultivate a following. It had to be a clarion call that would resonate with attendees on an emotional level and offer tangible ways for them to see, touch, and connect with every flavor of the world's latest, most complex technologies.

"We wanted to create efficiencies across IBM, telling one consistent story to our customers," says Dee Hall, program director of IBM conferences and events. "Our goal was for attendees to understand from a high level how IBM was harnessing technology to shape and change the world, and to realize that they could use IBM's products and services to shape and change the world, too."

Uploading an Idea

To begin tackling these challenges, IBM united with its longtime experiential-marketing agency, George P. Johnson (GPJ). In Marie Kondo fashion, IBM decluttered its stable of events over the course of four years. Conferences

PRIVATE TRADE SHOW

Company: IBM Corp.

Event: IBM Think

Objectives: Connect with a diverse array of IBM customers, show synergies in today's technology solutions, and reveal IBM as a technology thought leader.

Strategy: Consolidate IBM's user conferences into one and curate experiences that illuminate what's possible when man and machine work together.

Tactics: Launch IBM's first Think conference and bring abstract

IBM technology solutions to life through tangible storytelling and interactive experiences across four campuses.

Results: Drew 30,000 attendees to the debut Think event, enticed 90 percent of attendees to visit all four campuses showcasing IBM solutions, and moved 80 percent of attendees to indicate they would attend Think again.

Creative/Production Agency: George P. Johnson, www.gpj.com
Budget: \$5 million or more

were combined where it made sense, and GPJ ensured that the experiences on the show floors at these freshly conjoined events delivered a recognizable experience among discrete audiences. In this way, IBM tidied up its event inventory and took strides to ease loyal customers and users in a slightly different direction.

"Meanwhile, we were having lots of conversations around the IBM brand, asking what was at the heart of the brand and what it stood for. We were focused on teasing out how we could architect the experience to create not

just another tech conference but something that conveyed the essence of the brand and had the power to become a cultural event,” says Chris Goveia, vice president and executive creative director at GPJ.

The glue that would bind IBM’s new conference together was actually a single word that had been ingrained in the company culture for more than a century. Back in 1914, the seminal CEO of IBM, Thomas J. Watson, left a cultural legacy through his popularized slogan, “Think,” claiming that the best chance any individual had for success was to exercise that organ inside the human cranium. “Think,” then, was the ideal event name and brand touchstone.

“It all came together with ‘think.’ The word and the concept carried the spirit of IBM,” says Robin Kleban, vice president and account director in support of IBM Conferences at GPJ. “Mobilizing around the core principle of ‘think,’ IBM’s solutions are elevated to a different level of understanding — and overall feeling — in the market.”

Big Blue went one step further as it thought about how the brand would translate at the event, since it was crucial that IBM be seen as both a digital steward and technology leader. Therefore, the theme of man and machine working together to shape and change the world was adopted, and storytelling tactics were employed to bring abstract technology solutions into sharp relief for IBM’s multiple clans of customers and partners.

Thinking Out Loud

On March 19, 2018, Mandalay Bay Convention Center in Las Vegas was clad in shades of signature blue to herald IBM’s inaugural Think event. Thousands of attendees swarmed the venue, eager to learn what this new, high-profile conference had in store for them.

Think was organized to focus on four main areas (cloud and data, business and AI, security and resiliency, and modern infrastructure), each spanning a more than 30,000-square-foot campus. The campus moniker and organizational structure was a nod to IBM’s commitment to education and has since become a best practice for Think conferences. But before attendees could explore each of these educational quads, they first flowed through the dramatic Welcome Experience.

Passing five glowing, 9-foot-tall LED lightbox letters that spelled out “think,” attendees triggered sequenced media that appeared on a 9-by-39-foot screen and continued through a 25-foot-long, 15-foot-wide tunnel comprising flush LED panels. All the screens wove together visuals to display vivid previews of IBM client stories.

To further explore IBM’s service offerings, attendees were invited up a flight of stairs flanking the Welcome



Cloud and Data

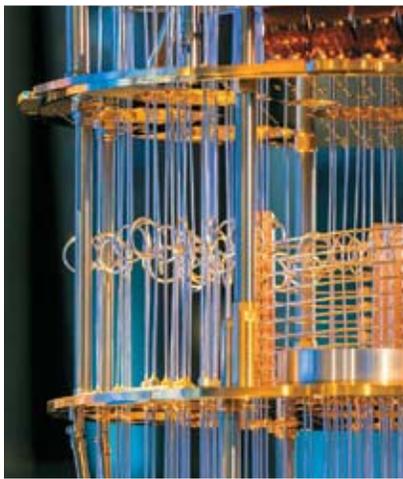
IBM Corp.’s Think event was organized into four distinct campuses. A central element in the Cloud and Data area was a pair of 18-foot-tall airplane fins, a real-world reference to how American Airlines Inc. uses IBM’s cloud technology to store massive amounts of data.





Modern Infrastructure

In this campus, IBM's new Q server shimmered like a gold chandelier and became a popular photo op. Another draw was the Red Bull Formula 1 race car. Nearby touchscreens explained how IBM storage technology streamlines data analysis for F1 racing.



Experience — an ascent that revealed a second level perched on top of the polychromatic tunnel. Here, the Progress Bar awaited. Taking its cues from a modern Japanese sushi bar, a conveyor belt of goodies circulated around a 20-by-6-foot table, and attendees seated at the bar helped themselves to branded cold-press coffee, popcorn, and 3-D-printed objects that represented clients' experiences with the company's technology offerings. Attendees could learn more about a story by tapping through a self-guided digital narrative on any of six touchscreens embedded in the Progress Bar itself. One 3-D-printed object, for example, was in the shape of an athletic cleat and told the story of how the Mercedes Benz Stadium utilized IBM services to leverage mobile app development and network innovation.

Back on the show floor, the campus quadrants served as home bases to certain groups of attendees, though they naturally explored outside their areas of expertise as well. Synergies abounded among the different technologies that were on tap at Think. For example, discussion of AI flowed seamlessly into a conversation about cybersecurity, just as banter about data evolved into chatter about AI. As such, traffic flowed effortlessly from one display to the next, and from one campus to another.

"Guiding and building bonds with attendees was central to our planning, and we thought about the attendee journey from the moment guests arrived," Goveia says. "To ensure there was a sense of brand consistency, the campuses needed to feel unified yet have their own unique expression."

The Cloud and Data campus was certainly provocative, and stood out on the show floor thanks to an 18-foot-tall sculptural airplane tail fin embedded with lights that glimmered to suggest air currents during flight. Drawn as if by magnetic force to the sculpture, attendees immersed themselves in the client story that it represented: American Airlines Inc.'s use of IBM's cloud technology to store massive amounts of data so that, in the scenario of a flight delay or cancellation, passengers could access self-service tools via an app and navigate an alternate solution on their mobile devices. The story was told through touchscreens that were built into a wrap-around counter surrounding the tail fin. Attendees interested in learning more about how IBM data and cloud technology could work for their businesses could visit The Garage, a set of two meeting rooms staffed with consultants who were happy to discuss cloud-related ideas and solutions.

In essence, each campus was designed with an attendee journey in mind. Pulled into an activity or display that told an emotional technology story, attendees were then invited

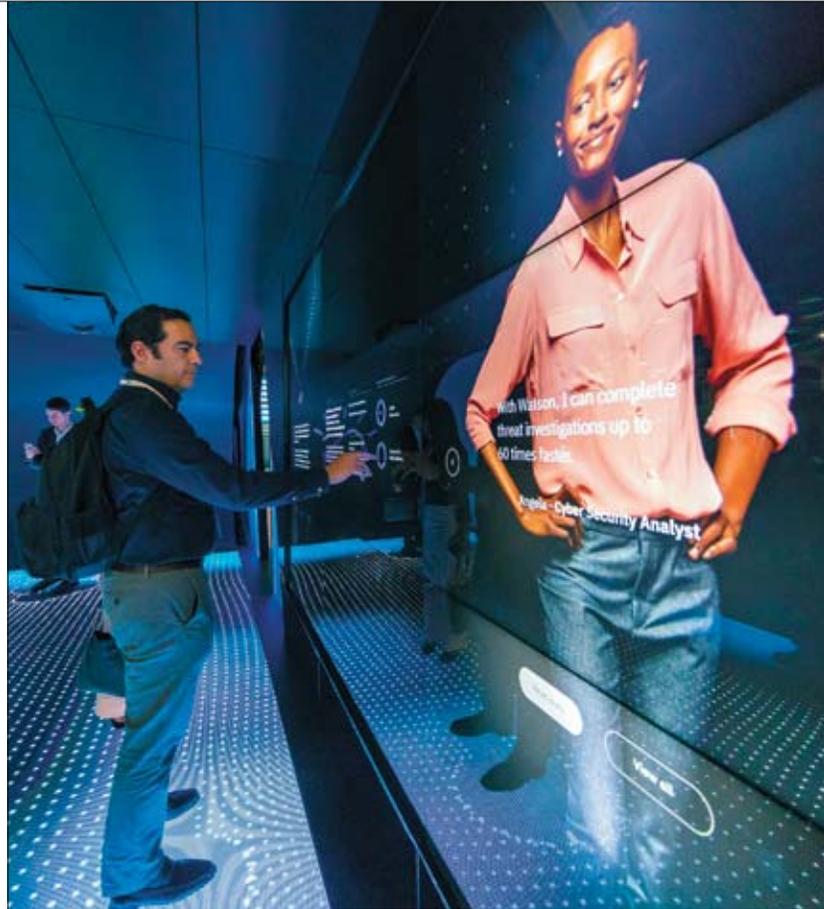
to proceed into a theater area within each campus to listen as keynote speakers elaborated on how that particular technology was disrupting and changing the world. The wheels in attendees' brains were hopefully then greased enough to migrate to one of the "think tank" spaces within each campus — quiet areas where guests could engage in roundtable conversation with IBM experts about how the product or service available on that particular campus could come to life for them.

The Modern Infrastructure campus delighted the server geeks among the attendees. The new Q server, shimmering like an elaborate gold chandelier, was on full display, and attendees lined up to bask in its copper glow or to snap selfies with it. Supplemental information about how IBM's refrigerator-sized Q or Z server could upgrade a business's infrastructure flanked the display platforms, and staffers were ready to field questions. To bring a client story into the mix, IBM displayed a snazzy Red Bull Formula 1 race car accompanied by touchscreens that elaborated on how IBM storage technology streamlined data analysis, allowing real-time insights for F1 racing.

"We wanted to include displays like the Red Bull race car to attract and satisfy different types of attendees," Kleban says. "Whether or not you're involved in infrastructure, you can experience this and relate to it because it's a high-level enough story. That's the beauty of having a variety of activations for an audience of 30,000 — it helps to address many different customer profiles."

Even more diverse activations abounded on the Business and AI campus, where attendees encountered the most future-forward of IBM's offerings: AI. Emblazoned on a wall inside this campus were the words "Welcome to a new partnership between man and machine." Showcasing IBM's Watson Primer (its answer to AI technology), the campus wowed visitors with engagements such as a peek at the advancements in AI-enabled robotic manufacturing and autonomous driving. These examples illuminated how IBM was leading the way on a journey in which man and machine were partners, improving the world one technology solution at a time. "It wasn't a man or machine narrative; it was man *and* machine," Hall says.

Finally, attendees could experience the Security and Resiliency campus, which highlighted the fortitude that companies could enjoy in the face of cyber threats thanks to IBM's Security Solutions combining AI, cloud, and collaboration tools. Inspired by real-life security operations centers, IBM's Disruption Dome activation offered a simulation of cybersecurity crises. Taking the form of a semi-open arena, the activation's pièce de résistance was



Security and Resiliency

IBM's Security Solutions took center stage in the Security and Resiliency campus. A gaming activation under an 18-foot-diameter canopy put attendees in an immersive scenario in which they learned how IBM's AI, cloud, and collaboration tools combat cybersecurity threats.



Business and AI

The Business and AI campus highlighted IBM's latest advancements in artificial intelligence. Activations related to robotic manufacturing and automated driving centered on the message that man and machine are partners in the quest to improve the world.



an 18-foot canopy upon which an immersive, game-like activity played out. Attendees were put in the shoes of one of six security personas dealing with a crisis. Content guiding the scenario flashed across the overhead canvas as attendees learned how IBM's security solutions spring into action when triggered by suspicious network activity.

Beyond the four campuses, Think attendees could further indulge their curiosity about all things IBM by visiting the Think Academy and DevZone spaces. Here, attendees feasted on a veritable buffet of educational offerings. More than a thousand labs and 300 different certifications were in full force, providing a year's worth of professional education in just four days at the conference.

As if the multilayered experiences on the four campuses were not enough, Think also offered ample networking opportunities in IBM's Business Partner Zone and the Executive Center. These were places where attendees could recharge, trade business cards, and brush shoulders with other technophiles in similar industries. And at the end of the day, entertainment included classic tunes from Train, Barenaked Ladies, and The Chainsmokers.

Downloading the Results

The event-consolidation strategy could've been a gamble, but IBM went into its debut Think conference with the confidence of a card shark, knowing it had a story to tell to every attendee that would excite them and motivate their thinking about IBM's products and services. Of IBM's approach to Think, one Corporate Event Awards judge said, "This event is a best-practice example that should be recognized by every industry. Rather than silo its offerings, IBM showed attendees the future and how various technologies come together to create true innovations."

A whopping 30,000 attendees from 101 countries filled the convention hall. But IBM knew that sheer attendance figures were not enough to gauge the event's success. Post-event surveys were sent to attendees to discover if Think had truly hit home in the big way IBM had hoped. Responses came back highly positive, with 80 percent of attendees indicating that they were thrilled about their first Think conference and fully intended to return for Think 2019. What's more, IBM saw the crossflow of techie intrigue that it had anticipated, as more than 90 percent of attendees visited all four campuses.

"The results IBM achieved are incredible, especially given the fact this was a first-year event," raved one judge. Just as its historic visionary Thomas J. Watson would have advised, IBM did some serious thinking to pull off its first-ever, end-to-end event, and it yielded an award-winning strategy for continued success. **E**



BMW Takes Off

BMW AG soars with a media event that's as high-flying as its new concept car is high-tech — and lands an online audience of 42 million. *By Charles Pappas*

BMW AG was in danger of stalling out. When the 103-year-old company began planning a media event to debut its Vision iNext concept electric crossover vehicle to the

manufacturer believed whatever kind of media extravaganza it produced had to be on par in its own way with the car's mind-boggling technology: The autonomous Vision iNext's

"Bohemian Rhapsody" or turn down "Bolero" on the car speakers by drawing a circle on your seat with a finger. "An important part of the briefing from BMW was 'Visionary products like this deserve visionary presentations,'" says Colja Dams, CEO of Vok Dams Events. "That was our challenge, and it was a big one."

It wasn't as if the automaker was a stranger to ingenious press events that cause the media's collective jaw to hit the pavement. In 2010, for its "Joy 3D" campaign, BMW simultaneously projection-mapped the exteriors of two large adjacent office buildings in Suntec City, Singapore. But that media event, like all its others, shared what BMW believed was an intrinsic drawback: It was isolated to a single location, with only local or regional media likely to attend. Yet in that very shortcoming, BMW saw fortune beckoning. "We asked, 'Why don't we turn it around 180 degrees?'" says Ingo Wirth,

BMW's project lead for the event. "Instead of asking the media to come to us, we'll bring the car to them."

Off to a Flying Start

But what specifically would the ambitious, if ambiguous, idea of bringing the car to the media look like? The company quickly defined it as connecting with the press in several worldwide settings virtually all at once, and not over a long stretch of time, since that would diffuse the media's short-lived attention span. That is, a drawn-out, sequential event starting in Europe might harvest attention at first, but by the time it reached the United States or China weeks later, the initial thunder of media interest would weaken to a barely discernible whisper. Starting there, BMW rapidly distilled and detailed the idea even more. To obtain the maximum media exposure globally and yet avoid prolonging the event, BMW concluded that targeting four cities on three continents in five days would strike an effective balance. "Doing it so

NONTRADITIONAL EVENT

Company: BMW AG

Event: BMW Vision iNext World Flight

Objectives: Generate coverage of its new Vision iNext concept car in multiple publications and expose 20 million social-media users to the vehicle through those media outlets' channels. Compile 20,000 interactions on its own social-media platforms.

Strategy: Swerve around the typical automotive launch by bringing the Vision iNext to the media rather than the other way around. Construct an immersive setting that reflects the car's distinctiveness.

Tactics: Build a lavish, audiovisual-heavy event inside a cargo plane that takes the concept car to 300 influencers and media reps in four cities on three continents over a five-day period.

Results: Produced coverage in media outlets such as Car and Driver, Forbes, and Design Milk. Achieved a social-media audience of almost 42 million. Realized more than 60,000 interactions on BMW's own social-media channels.

Creative/Production Agency: Vok Dams Events GmbH, www.vokdams.de

Budget: \$2 million – \$4.9 million

world in 2018, it wanted a way of showcasing the advanced car that would set it as far apart from other alternatively powered automobiles as the Autobahn is from a country road.

Working with Vok Dams Events GmbH, the auto

exterior gradually morphs from warm copper to dark rose when in the shade; an "Intelligent-Beam" technology creates an interactive projection screen on a given surface inside the car; and touch-sensitive upholstery allows you to crank up

PHOTOS: ENES KUČEVIĆ



BMW AG used a customized Boeing 777F plane from Lufthansa Cargo AG to fly its Vision iNext concept car to three continents in five days.

quickly wouldn't give the media a chance to ignore us like yesterday's news," Dams says.

The individual venues BMW chose were based mostly on their alternative-fuel-friendly environments (Munich, New York, San Francisco, and Beijing), a degree of insightful event planning on par with the company's renowned engineering prowess. Munich was perhaps an obvious choice, given that it's BMW's headquarters and thus a suitable launch pad for the events. New York was fertile ground because by 2025, 20 percent of newly registered cars in the Empire State will have to be electrically powered. San Francisco represented a similarly receptive audience, with new buildings there now mandated to offer charging stations for electric cars in their parking lots. But Beijing arguably stood to be the most susceptible to the Vision iNext's environment-saving charms, given the fact that China's electric-car sales catapulted by nearly 62

percent in 2018, according to the country's Association of Automobile Manufacturers. And that growth spurt is poised to continue unabated, as the same organization forecasts electric vehicle sales in China will surge another 23 percent in 2019.

To measure the success of this massive media campaign, BMW set a handful of objectives it felt would prove an accurate odometer of just how far the multinational event reached. It aimed for extensive coverage in multiple high-circulation car-centric and other publications. Additionally, BMW hoped to expose the Vision iNext to 20 million people via those publications' social-media platforms, along with an additional 20,000 through its own social outlets.

Stakes on a Plane

The logistics of delivering the event to these cities under time-starved conditions weren't just imposing; they were downright intimidating. One problem in particular was a very practical consideration: there was only one concept

car to go around, as the Vision iNext wasn't scheduled to go into production until 2021. "We weren't able to beam that one car around like the guys from 'Star Trek,'" Dams says, "so we decided to go with the fastest mode of transportation we had available and use an airplane."

As far as anyone at BMW could tell, using a plane as an automotive launch platform would be an industry first, a kind of promotional frontier. But the thing about frontiers is they're uncharted and therefore dangerous because of the inherent unknowns that lie there. BMW would need a plane capable of ferrying the car and what would essentially be a dazzling exhibit with vast amounts of multimedia equipment that must be both set up and broken down in the relative blink of an eye. To shuttle the iNext from continent to continent, BMW chose Lufthansa Cargo AG airlines. The wholly owned subsidiary of Deutsche Lufthansa AG offered several advantages

that made it the carrier of choice. First, besides being headquartered in Germany, BMW felt Lufthansa was a high-flying version of its own brand attributes of excellence and distinction. Additionally, Lufthansa Cargo employed Boeing Co.'s 777F long-range, wide-body twin-engine, which was more than capable of meeting BMW's extensive geographic needs for the media events. Named the Worldliner by Boeing for its ability to fly nonstop between almost any two airports on the planet without refueling, the 777F bragged a range of 8,555 nautical miles, nearly one-third the circumference of the Earth.

Second, to craft the audiovisual spectacle it wanted inside the airplane, BMW would have to outfit the interior as if it were an elaborate multimedia showroom — think of it as creating an intricate, even sumptuous, exhibit with wings. BMW planned to build a floor that split the plane's fuselage at its



After checking in at a nearby hotel, media reps were bused to the airplane for their encounter with the Vision iNext.

widest point (i.e., a 20-foot, 4-inch span) to accommodate a rotating, glossy black carousel. Rounding out the interior renovation would be a meet-and-greet area and two lounges placed at opposite ends of the 209-foot-long airplane. Its audiovisual elements would border on Las-Vegas-level lavish, with nearly a dozen 13,000-ANSI lumen projectors, 78,000 LEDs contained in 165 video modules, and an additional 4.7 miles of wiring.

But with only about two months between the finalization of the plan in midsummer and the September launch of the event — which the company christened the Vision iNext World Flight — BMW had to ensure it could squeeze its sizable setup inside the plane. Bringing in a crew of more than 120 specialists in exhibition-stand construction, BMW first created a partial mockup of the 777F fuselage and portions of the interior design at full scale to ensure everything from the screens to the carousel would conform to

the plane's dimensions. If it didn't, the event would be stuck on the ground with no more hope of taking off than a puddle jumper during a blizzard. But when all the many components fit into the facsimile as snugly as a seat in economy class, the armada of workers began building out the real 777F for the event.

Of course, while the Vision iNext may be capable of running by itself, the media event still demanded considerable human intervention. Each stop required up to 20 staffers, including speakers, caterers, and BMW car designers, with many drawn from local resources. A setup crew of four — who flew in separately to the designated stops — practiced preparing the plane in the mocked-up version until they could ready it in a few hours with near-military precision. (Most worrying was the enormous but fragile lighting systems, which had to be perfectly secured without fail to withstand the shocks and vibrations of multiple takeoffs and

landings.) Yet no amount of preparation could alter a timeline that was as tight as a noose: On average, the company estimated that at each stop it would have all of 10 hours to park the plane, clear customs, prepare the stage, position the car, arrange the guest lounge, and rehearse presentations with Flash-like speed to meet the schedule of four cities on three continents in five days.

Cleared for Takeoff

The pre-event promotion started in early August via general and vague teasers on the company's Facebook page and YouTube accounts, followed by snail mail and email invitations sent to 400 automotive, technology, and business journalists, plus social-media influencers. In return for their getting an introduction to the avant-garde car before BMW revealed it to the world at large, media members would not be permitted to carry their mobile phones or take pictures during the launch. Rather, they would receive a media package from the company with selected visuals to publish following the event.

About three weeks after BMW had prepped the targeted media, the outfitted and branded 777F began its journey, speeding at 550 miles per hour to the four far-ranging cities and roughly 300 of the 400 media reps it invited. When the plane hit the tarmac at the respective airports, it taxied to the designated spot where the event itself would actually take place. In Munich, San Francisco, and Beijing, that meant a hangar or cargo area, while at New York's John F. Kennedy International Airport, its destination was a de-icing tent. For the next few hours, the staff furiously prepped and set up the interior. In the meantime, journalists gathered in what BMW called the "Pre-Boarding Area," which was simply a nearby hotel. There, airport security cleared the guests while BMW registered them and took the opportunity to temporarily relieve them of their phones until after the event. Thus shorn of their devices, attendees were shepherded onto a bus and transported to the plane a few minutes away. Arriving

The interior of the Boeing 777F was outfitted with 165 video LED modules that immersed attendees in a dazzling multi-media presentation.



usually around noon, the guests were guided through the plane's massive cargo door that served as the event's entrance. Greeting them were BMW staffers and board of management member Dr. Klaus Fröhlich.

Once they entered the reception area, media reps received a quick welcome speech, then watched a

and imagery that made the plane seem like a kind of transparent submarine slinking through the thickest forest or cruising along the deepest sea. The lustrous black carousel supporting the Vision iNext spun while the concept car, remote-controlled by

the shadows stimulates the exterior paint to morph its color to match the lowered light level. Other marvels included its Alexa-like personal assistant and the seat's interactive jacquard cloth that can operate the car's music speakers like digital controls made of textiles. Smaller informational exhibits in the second lounge toward the back offered more detail on each of these technologies.

Smooth Landing

Like an automotive Brigadoon, the event was brief, concluding in a mere hour. But its impact was as potent as it was fleeting. "There is so much 'been there, done that' with car launches, but this was completely original," said one Corporate Event Awards judge. "They got rid of all the tired clichés and produced a truly innovative and unexpected experience, which clearly took an incredible amount of foresight and precision."

An "incredible amount" could also describe the

quantity of media coverage generated by the BMW Vision iNext World Flight. The event was reported in an extensive assortment of publications and websites, such as Forbes.com, Jalopnik.com, Car and Driver, Spiegel.de, Bild am Sonntag, and Cnet.com, whose reach encompassed about 24 million readers. Aiming for a potential audience of 20 million social-media users through those outlets' digital channels, (e.g., Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, etc.), BMW racked up almost 42 million, besting its objective by more than 100 percent. Finally, the company hoped for 20,000 interactions on its own social-media platforms, but ended up with almost 61,000, thereby tripling its goal. "No bird soars too high, if he soars with his own wings," poet William Blake once wrote. BMW ascended on wings of its own and devised an event that reached so high, it might never come back to earth. **E**

"There is so much 'been there, done that' with car launches," said one judge. "They got rid of all the tired clichés and produced a truly innovative and unexpected experience."

roughly 2-minute-long movie on the first half-circle screen spinning the tale behind the new concept car. When the video wrapped up, the screen — which until that moment blocked out the rest of the cabin from visitors' view — descended into the floor, triggering a flashing light show and a sound system that blared heart-pounding, techno-style beats. The LED-encrusted floor and screens running much of the length of both sides, as well as a second half-circle screen behind the car, burned with lights

a staffer, inched forward, effecting an illusion of it driving much further than it actually was.

What the attendees saw of the Vision iNext was itself a kind of vision. The exaggerated grill suggested some genetically engineered beast, and its rims gave the impression of a giant ninja's throwing stars. Visitors could pepper the car designers and other staffers with questions on its technological wonders, such as how unlocking the vehicle prompts its blue accents on the outside to light up, or how parking it in

A Giving Legend

To drum up donations for a new water-drilling rig and four years of operating costs, Charity Global Inc. (dba Charity Water) marries emotional storytelling with technological wizardry. Featuring a 276-foot-diameter circular LED display and integrated donation app, the one-night extravaganza prompts 520 attendees to ante up \$7 million. *By Linda Armstrong*



As a general rule, successful charities have mastered two core deliverables. One, they've demonstrated a high level of transparency and accountability to conjure confidence and public trust. And two, they've established significant empathy from donors for recipients, all in an effort to provoke initial donations and sustained giving over time.

From its inception in 2006, Charity Global Inc., the 501(c)(3) nonprofit better known as Charity Water, pretty much nailed the accountability objective. Founded by Scott Harrison, Charity Water strives to provide drinking water to people in developing nations. Unlike most nonprofits, though, it operates using a one-off model that employs two separate financial accounts — and therein lies the trust-building transparency.

The first account, the Well, relies on private donors and brand partners to fund all operating expenses. Meanwhile, the other account, Water, is backed by public donations with 100 percent of the funding going directly to clean water projects. Along with the organization's other



transparency efforts (e.g., remote sensors to measure the flow of clean water in the field, easy-to-find online financial reports, audits and surveys by leading charity-rating organizations, etc.), this separation of church and state has helped bring in more than \$333 million in 12 years, ultimately funding roughly 38,000 water projects and delivering clean water to nearly 9.6 million people.

Clearly, then, Charity Water is all aces when it comes to accountability. But what of empathy, that second critical objective? While the nonprofit's website is certainly filled with heartwarming, in-their-shoes photos and stories of happy beneficiaries, the organization usually relies on its annual fundraising event, the Charity Ball, to conjure empathy as well as a sense of community among core donors. Typically, Charity Water uses storytelling techniques peppered with a dash of cutting-edge technology to elicit the intended emotional — and financial — response.

In the past, the event's storytelling tactics have included everything from a virtual-reality film depicting a girl drinking clean water for the first time to a video-matching

C-LEVEL/VIP EVENT

Company: Charity Global Inc. (dba Charity Water)

Event: Charity Ball

Objective: Bring clean water to the Tigray region of Ethiopia by generating enough donations to fund a drilling rig and four years of operating costs.

Strategy: Host a one-night fundraising event in San Francisco for VIP donors, complete with storytelling tactics to stir strong emotions, visually transport guests to Tigray, and generate empathy for villagers.

Tactics: Construct a one-of-a-kind experience featuring a circular, 40,000-pound

overhead "Halo" of LED screens. Fill the Halo with a mix of poignant images and fundraising data points. Arm attendees with customized iPads integrated with the screen to generate real-time on-screen giving moments.

Results: Attracted a record 520 VIP donors, generated \$7 million (enough to buy the rig and fund six years of operations), and cut 10.5 million hours of water-gathering time for Tigray villagers.

Creative/Production Agency: Trademark Event Productions Inc.,
www.trademarkevents.com

Budget: \$750,000 – \$999,000



experience that connected gala attendees with people from a village without clean water. Going into the 2018 event, however, Charity Water upped the ante and tacked on several additional goals. While the event needed to generate the same level of compassion that had fueled previous donors, the nonprofit also wanted to marry this emotion with hard-core data about how the contributions would be used — preferably delivered live as contributions were coming in. What’s more, for the first time the organization opted to not only switch venues but also swap coasts.

A Watershed Moment

After hosting the event in New York for 11 years at venues such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Harrison and his team decided to move Charity Ball to San Francisco in 2018. The decision hinged on two factors. First, New York venues tended to have timing or capacity restrictions that had constrained the event in the past. For instance, setup at The Met had to be truncated by normal museum operating hours. Second, while Charity Water is based in New York, a large number of key Well donors reside in the Bay Area. Most of these benefactors had traveled to New York for the annual events, but the organization thought it was time to bring the gala to their backyard for a change.

Switching coasts obviously meant finding a new venue. Early in the planning process, Charity Water settled on The Armory, a cavernous multipurpose event space in the heart of San Francisco. “Harrison and his team are always designing a new story to bring people into the experience,” says Elle Chan, co-founder and executive producer at Trademark Event Productions Inc., the agency charged with creative and production responsibilities for the event. “The San Francisco Armory, which was a massive space with fewer restrictions than most New York environs, provided us with a blank slate. Our job was to fill it with a memorable and impactful experience.”

But along with this blank slate came fresh expectations. Given the new locale, attendees would no doubt anticipate

a stellar experience that would blow the New York events out of the water. On the flip side, Charity Water hoped to offer a full-course meal during the festivities, meet some hard-core monetary goals, and attach a time-based theme.

“Prior to contacting Trademark, Charity Water determined that the 2018 event would be centered around the concept of time,” says Wendy Cook, head of production at Trademark. “In developing nations, women and children are often saddled with the responsibility of finding and securing clean drinking water for their families. This requires literally hours of work every day and an enormous amount of physical energy. So these women and children are unable to go to work or school full time, which means they can’t contribute to their communities or further their own endeavors because of the time spent securing

water. That’s why the nonprofit wanted to highlight the time and opportunities gained as a result of having clean water.”

Using the time theme as a backdrop, Harrison and his team also hoped to generate enough donations to completely fund a new drilling rig for the Tigray region of Ethiopia. This equipment alone would cost approximately \$720,000, but they also needed enough cash to oper-

ate the rig for a minimum of four years. Thus, the donation goal for the 2018 event was set at a whopping \$5 million.

Event Headwaters

With the goals and venue established, Chan and Harrison convened to breathe life into this yet-to-be-determined event. “Initially, Harrison talked about the highly emotional experience of a village getting fresh water,” Chan says. “He explained how villagers expectantly circle around the well, singing and dancing, as clean water arrives for the first time. His vision for Charity Ball was to create an experience that would literally surround attendees and offer the same kind of passionate connection.”

While Harrison, a gifted communicator and motivator, and a philanthropic hero of sorts among donors, would emcee the event, it was up to Chan and her partners to



Filled with several screens offering dramatic images of Ethiopia’s Tigray region, the reception area set the emotional tone for the upcoming fundraising event.

PHOTOS: CLAUDINE GOSSETT PHOTOGRAPHY

design the rest. Luckily, a bit of serendipity intervened to provide inspiration. "Just a few days before we met at The Armory, I'd been to a screening of a 360 movie directed by Drew Lightfoot," Chan says. "So when we started talking about circling attendees with an emotional story, my thoughts turned to a 360-degree movie as a way to literally surround attendees with the experience."

Under direction of Lightfoot and with production services from Bodega Studios, the resulting film would offer a slice of life of a woman from the Tigray region, Abrehet Gebreyohannes. It would depict the many hours she walks each day to obtain water, illustrating her struggle and emphasizing the amount of time spent on the endeavor.

Not surprisingly, Lightfoot and his crew didn't come cheap, nor did any of the countless services necessary to pull off an immersive event that included a custom screen, catering, myriad audiovisual components, and more. Thankfully, Chan's prior work at motion-picture visual-effects company Industrial Light and Magic, along with the slew of affiliations and partnerships she made during that time and beyond, helped her work a little budgetary magic of her own. In effect, she called up her contacts (and no doubt called in a few favors), ultimately convincing them to offer discounted, wholesale, or downright cuthroat pricing to execute this cutting-edge philanthropic event.

Ducks to Water

While Lightfoot and Bodega Studios set about crafting the film, Charity Water reps focused on the guests. Roughly four months before the Dec. 1 event, the marketing team started sending invitations. "Everyone on our predetermined guest list received either a digital invite or a mailed invitation," says Lauren Letta, chief operating officer for Charity Water. However, they made a special effort with regard to VIP Well donors. "Scott contacted Well donors via personal email," Letta says, "but we also sent them printed invitations complete with beautifully packaged 3-D hourglasses to emphasize the time theme." Well donors

received complimentary tickets to the event, and all other invited parties could purchase tickets priced at \$2,500 for individual seats and \$25,000 to \$50,000 for entire tables. "Charity Ball sold out almost immediately," Letta says, "validating our decision to move the event to San Francisco."

On the night of the event, guests began arriving at around 6:30. Initially, they checked in at a registration desk, where they received their seating assignments for dinner. Behind the scenes, registration software pushed the name of each guest to a custom iPad located at his or her seat. Later, during the funding portion of the event, attendees would use the tablets to pledge donations.

After registering, guests mingled and imbibed cocktails amid the reception area, which set the tone for the upcoming experience. Throughout the space, which was separated

from the dinner and donation area by heavy curtains, Trademark positioned several screens offering breathtaking videos of the Ethiopian landscape, as well as Tigray-area villagers who spoke about what their lives are like without water and how they expect their lives to change when water comes to their villages.

Event designers also added a photo-op area featuring a unique blend of neon lighting and real, rustic-yellow



As guests entered the Halo experience, live musical performers filled the environs with moving music befitting the imagery on the screen.

jerrycans. Originally designed by the Germany military, jerrycans, which can weigh more than 40 pounds, are often repurposed to carry and store water in developing countries. "With the jerrycans and the sights and sounds of Ethiopia, the reception space set the scene for what was to come," Cook says. "It was a transformative link to the clean-water story that awaited guests in the main event space."

A Flood of Emotion

Despite this visual link, though, visitors were completely unprepared for the technological wonderland that awaited them. At approximately 7:45 p.m., staff escorted guests past the thick curtains and into the dining and donation space, where a live musical score from LiveFootage (with sound design provided by Grayson Matthews) set the tone. Normally, visitors would have been drawn to the beautifully

decorated round tables set for the event's 520 dinner guests. But here, the overhead space immediately drew attendees' eyes and plucked at their heartstrings.

A 276-foot-diameter circular screen — coined the Halo — dangled from the ceiling. Comprising 840 LED panels, the 20-foot-tall ring weighed 40,000 pounds. (Trademark enlisted two partners, Global Trend Pro and Immersive Pro, to wrangle the audiovisual rigors of this assembly, which among other things, included producing custom L-shaped brackets to replace traditional supports and significantly lighten the load.) Although the mere sight of the never-before-seen Halo was impressive in itself, the video imagery it displayed throughout the evening was absolutely mesmerizing. As guests entered the dinner area, images of the expansive Ethiopian landscape — which while dry and barren is also awe-inspiring and exquisite — filled the screen for roughly 25 minutes. This gave guests plenty of time to take in the room, locate their seats, get accustomed to their iPads, and relax under and within the Halo.

At 8:10 p.m., Harrison took the stage, a 10-foot-diameter elevated platform in the center of the Halo. He then spent roughly 15 minutes relaying statistics to support the need for clean water and explaining Charity Water's solution. Meanwhile, the Halo showed still shots (e.g., jerrycan images, text illustrating key data figures, organization logos, maps, etc.) to accompany his content. At the end of his presentation, Harrison introduced the Lightfoot film and its star, Abrehet Gebreyohannes. As the film rolled on the Halo, Harrison encouraged guests to observe this one woman's journey for water, which, unbeknownst to them at that time, would continue on-screen for more than an hour — as they sat in a comfortable room, eating a lovely meal, and drinking fresh, uncontaminated water.

After dinner and just as the film featuring Gebreyohannes' walk was concluding, Harrison took the stage again to point out what attendees had no doubt realized: While they ate, the woman walked. In fact, as he pointed

out, she walks hours every day to secure dirty water, not the clean, safe drinking water that Charity Water hoped to provide to her and her community. Harrison went on to clarify that Gebreyohannes was just one of many women and children walking for water in this one community among hundreds or thousands. As he spoke, the screen filled with images and voices (with lower-screen text translations) of other women who walk, sometimes for hours each day, to collect water. "With all of the women's faces on-screen and their voices filling the room, guests couldn't help but feel empathy," Cook says.

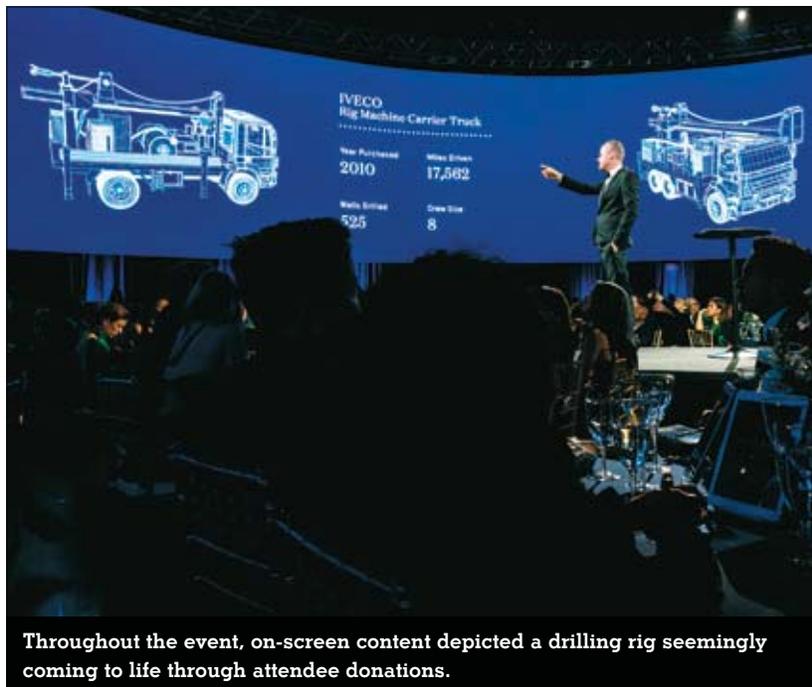
Supported by screen-based imagery and animations, Harrison explained that the goal of the evening was to buy a new drilling rig and to fund its in-field operational costs for three years. He indicated that if guests could

raise enough money for three years, an anonymous donor would cover the fourth. Meanwhile, the Halo showed an exploded view of a drilling rig so that all of the parts and pieces appeared almost like the blueprint of a truck that had yet to be assembled. As Harrison pointed out that ticket sales from the evening would go toward funding the rig, one of the animated components connect-

ed itself to the body of the vehicle — symbolizing that with this donation and others to come, the rig was coming to life.

Next, Harrison turned his attention to the custom giving app, designed by All of It Now LLC, that appeared on guests' iPads. At various times throughout the event, guests could pledge a dollar amount of their choosing to fund the rig and its operation. The app then connected to a back-end server that tallied the donations in terms of money and villagers' time saved. Images and charts on the Halo showed results in real time. As rig components attached to the vehicle body, figures for the total amount raised and the money still required flashed on screen, and donors' names appeared in a list next to the vehicle.

The donation portion of the evening continued from roughly 9:30 to 10:45, during which time on-screen data



Throughout the event, on-screen content depicted a drilling rig seemingly coming to life through attendee donations.

points, rig animations, and funding totals augmented Harrison's lively and emotional commentary. When donation segments shifted from buying a rig to funding its operation, calendars representing four years appeared on-screen along with data points showing the countless hours of walking the women and children would no longer endure, time that could then be used to better their educations, families, and local communities.

All told, there were 11 separate giving moments when Harrison and attendees' iPads prompted additional pledges. Following each round, celebrations ensued — some complete with champagne toasts and other simply filled with joyful applause — as the Halo displayed results in real time. After the final giving moment, Harrison announced that thanks to guests' donations, countless

villagers would receive fresh water for the first time, and in fact guests would get a little taste of this very same experience. At that moment, the Halo showed a rig sending up a gusher, showering the locals with water. Atomizers attached to several 40-foot overhead booms burst to life, sprinkling guests in a fine mist of water and symbolically transporting them into the life-changing experience along with the Ethiopian villagers.

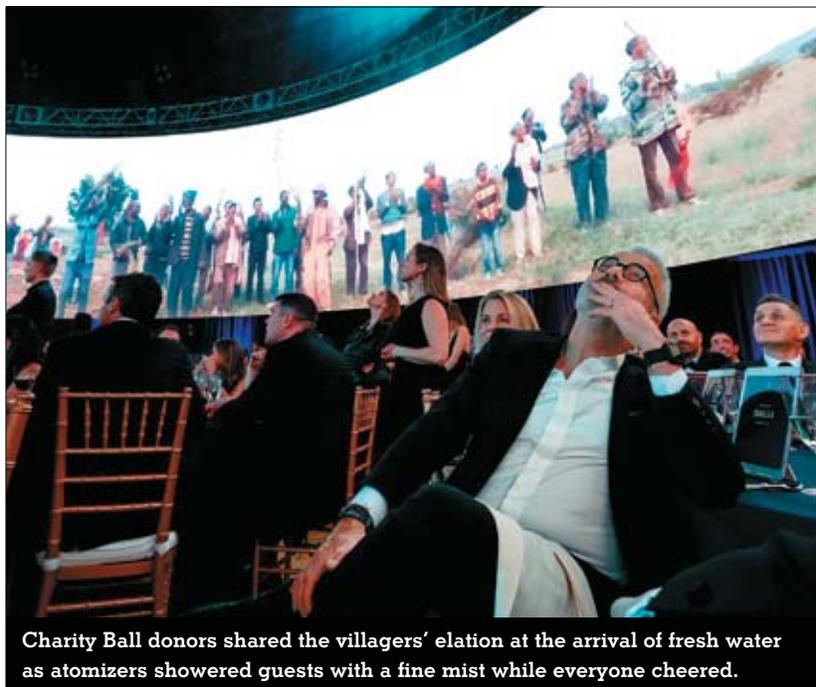
Guests cheered and hugged (and a few even teared up) as the numbers on-screen showed they'd met and exceeded their donation goals. As they reveled in the success and considered what their money would do for Ethiopians, there was a palatable sense that the celebration should continue. But eventually all good things must come to an end. The lights came up, Harrison left the stage, and guests adjourned to an upstairs portion of The Armory for dessert and a nightcap before heading home.

Awash With Success

After an emotional experience like this, any human with half a heart would develop empathy for the villagers who had practically become family in the span of an evening. Needless to say, 520 Charity Ball attendees felt all that and more — and they gave accordingly.

"The 2018 gala was our most successful yet, both from a revenue standpoint and in terms of our innovations in storytelling," Letta says. "We transported guests into the middle of Ethiopia, surrounded them with a 360-degree LED screen the size of a football field, immersed them in stories of life without clean water, and connected them with a community on the other side of the world. It was a powerful evening that enabled us to raise a record-breaking \$7 million for clean water, powering the new drilling rig for the next six years, three weeks, six days, and nine hours. It's an investment that's going to change everything for thousands of families in the Tigray region."

In addition to blowing Charity Water's goals out of the water, the event also scored record attendance, as past New York events typically attracted 400 attendees.



Charity Ball donors shared the villagers' elation at the arrival of fresh water as atomizers showered guests with a fine mist while everyone cheered.

The funding generated by the event also provided the gift of time to communities. While Charity Water hoped to give back 7.5 million hours (in the form of time not spent retrieving water), the Charity Ball actually returned 10.5 million hours to villagers.

Not surprisingly, Corporate Event Awards judges were awash with praise. "Everything about this event was sincere, and it managed to quickly

create emotional connections with attendees," one juror said. Another touted the event's storytelling capabilities. "Organizers clearly focused on storytelling, which is critical for an event like this. I can only imagine how impactful it was to actually experience this in person."

It appears that Charity Water hasn't only mastered the art of transparency and accountability. Pairing storytelling with technological prowess, it devised a best-practice exercise in invoking empathy as well. According to actor Max Carver, "Empathy is the starting point for creating a community and taking action. It's the impetus for creating change." For Charity Water, the power of empathy doesn't only create change; it changes lives. **E**

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