

COURSE GUIDE



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Brand Experience & Event Design

Institute for Marketing & Commerce
Hogeschool Utrecht, University of Applied Sciences

- Minor code: MC-BREXED-22
- Academic year: 2024 – 2025
- Variant: Fulltime
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- Date: August 2024

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Minor Brand Experience & Event Design

Background

Today's consumer is looking for entertainment and (meaningful) experiences. Just advertising (saying who you are and what you do) no longer suffices for brands, brands need to make people experience what it is that they are about. Therefore, brands need to create brand experiences, and eye-catching and entertaining brand activations. There is a high demand for brand experts with knowledge and expertise in this area. The minor aims to educate students in the translation of brand strategy into meaningful experiences fitting the brand's essence and positioning, rather than the operational aspects of event organization and/or management.

The minor has been designed in accordance with the modern design principles of Utrecht university of applied sciences. Starting point is programmatic assessment where student produces evidence of having mastered the established learning outcomes at an adequate level. This requires a high level of independence and personal responsibility from the student with regard to self-starting skills and self-discipline. Student manages his/her own learning process, continuously and actively collecting feedback, feed forward and feed up. Students will have the opportunity to work on actual business cases within a reputable creative agency and field experts are involved in coaching and formative assessment.

This minor is suitable for highly motivated and internationally oriented students pursuing a future in branding or brand management, who want to learn how to emotionally engage people with a brand and ultimately make them fall in love with the brand.



Introduction

Welcome to the Minor in Brand Experience & Event Design! This minor is designed to immerse students in the world of brand experiences, where creativity, strategy, and customer-centric thinking come together to create memorable and impactful brand interactions. Throughout this minor, students will develop the skills necessary to design brand experiences that align with brand values and resonate with target audiences.

Students will work closely with lecturers who have extensive practical experience, collaborate with senior field experts, and engage with leading creative agencies. Additionally, they will have the opportunity to work on real assignments for actual clients, allowing students to apply their learning in a professional context and gain invaluable hands-on experience.

Description of minor

Branding and brand communication has shifted from transaction-oriented marketing to customer relationship marketing. The power and value of a brand are in the minds and hearts of the customers! Today's consumers are looking more and more for authenticity and above all want to experience. People often forget what a brand says or does, but they remember how a brand makes them feel. Brands need to engage with their customers to form unique connections and to secure their affections.

Experience marketing adds emotional value to a brand, touching the heart of the target group and encouraging them to take action. Empathizing with your (target) customers and putting the customer needs at the heart of your design, is key to creating meaningful experiences. On the other hand, brand marketers should really understand the core identity of their brand. They need to search for the soul in their brand, their brand essence or brand DNA. It is this intangible concept that makes customers relate to your brand and that sets your brand apart from the competitors.

In this minor students will learn how to design brand experiences and events that not only allow (future) customers to experience what the brand is about but encourage those customers to engage with the brand and ultimately fall in love with this brand. Students will become an expert at creating brand ambassadors and brand fans, driving brand awareness and long-term brand performance through a customer-centric strategy. The focus in this minor is on the use of brand experience and brand events as a strategic marketing tool for the building of brand equity.

Key words: experience marketing, experiential marketing, customer experience management, marketing communications, brand strategy (brand positioning, brand personality, brand attachment, brand love, brand community), brand design, brand events, customer-centric strategy.

Minor Objectives

By the end of this minor, students will be able to:

1. Create unique, brand-appropriate, customer-centric experiential marketing strategies.
2. Demonstrate creative thinking in project approach, interaction, and collaboration.
3. Apply design thinking methods and tools to manage projects effectively.
4. Exhibit persuasive communication skills to convince and engage stakeholders.
5. Reflect on personal and team performance to continuously improve the design process.

Programme Overview

Duration

This minor spans a full semester and is offered both in the fall and spring semesters, providing flexibility for students to choose the timing that best fits their academic plan.

Credits

The minor is worth a total of 30 European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) credits.

Structure

The minor is divided into three main phases known as "arches":

- **Arch 1 'Cover the basics'**: Introduction to the fundamentals of brand experience design, focusing on building a theoretical framework and applying this theory in challenging assignments, both individual and group-based. Students will engage in in-class activities and workshops, with a focus on customer-centric approaches, brand alignment, and initial creative exercises.
- **Arch 2 'Test-drive your design skills & build on your basics'**: A deeper dive into experiential design principles, strategic thinking, and creative teamwork, with an emphasis on refining and expanding initial concepts. Students will test-drive the acquired knowledge and skills on real-life business cases under the guidance and coaching from senior field coaches in leading creative agencies.
- **Arch 3 'The Real Deal'**: Development of a brand experience concept for a real client, where students collaborate in teams to apply all their learnings into a creative solution based on the client's brief. This phase focuses on all learning outcomes, with an emphasis on project management, creativity, strategic thinking, and persuasive communication. The process culminates in a professional pitch presented to the client.

Key Components

- **Lectures & Workshops**: Weekly sessions to cover theoretical concepts, practical applications, and hands-on workshops to apply learning in real-world scenarios.
- **Group Projects**: Students collaborate in teams to design and present comprehensive brand experiences, incorporating all aspects of the learning outcomes.

- **Individual Assignments:** Tasks assigned throughout the minor to assess individual understanding and application of course content.
- **Practical Fieldwork:** Engaging in real-life business cases under the guidance of a senior creative professional at a leading agency in Arch 2, providing an opportunity to test-drive acquired knowledge and skills in a professional context.
- **Weekly Coaching Sessions:** Small group sessions with lecturers to monitor individual learning progress, providing personalized guidance and support to ensure students are on track with their learning objectives.
- **Portfolio Development:** A continuous process where students compile their work, reflections, and feedback throughout the minor to demonstrate their learning journey.

Study Burden

The Minor Brand Experience & Event Design is designed to be a comprehensive and immersive learning experience, with a total study load of 840 hours. This includes:

Contact Time: 158 hours dedicated to lectures, workshops, group projects, and weekly coaching sessions with lecturers.

Field work: 40 hours dedicated to working at and with a leading creative agency.

Self-Study: 630 hours allocated for independent study, project work, and portfolio development, allowing students to deeply engage with course material and refine their skills.

Examination: 12 hours reserved for assessments, including presentations, portfolio evaluations, and final examinations.

Learning outcomes and their assessment criteria

1	Designing brand experiences	Student creates unique, brand-appropriate, customer-centric experiential marketing strategies for any brand, in order to achieve short-term activation and/or long-term engagement and loyalty;
1.1	Customer Centric Approach	Student demonstrates ability to place the customer at the center of the experiential marketing strategy. Student shows an in-depth understanding of the target audience's needs, preferences, and behaviors. The proposed strategy or concept creates meaningful and memorable experiences for customers, addressing their pain points, desires, and aspirations.
1.2	Brand Alignment	Student demonstrates ability to understand and align the marketing strategy with the brand's values, identity, and target audience. Student shows a deep understanding of the brand's positioning, personality, and unique selling propositions. Student effectively communicates how the proposed strategy reflects and enhances the brand's image and resonates with its customers.
1.3	Application of experiential design principles	Student applies the XP design principles to enhance the overall impact and effectiveness of the brand experience. The experience is designed to create a cohesive and harmonious environment, to eliminate negative associations, to leave a lasting impression through memorabilia, and to engage the audience on a sensory level.
1.4	Creativity & Innovation	Student demonstrates ability to generate fresh and inventive ideas in developing experiential marketing strategies. The proposed concepts, tactics, or activations are unique and imaginative that go beyond conventional approaches and include innovative ways to engage customers, create emotional connections, and differentiate the brand from competitors.
1.5	10 Characteristics of meaningful experiences	Student demonstrates ability to design brand experiences that incorporate the characteristics of a meaningful experience that allow the brand to create immersive, impactful, and memorable interactions with their audience.

1.6	Strategic Thinking	Student demonstrates a strategic mindset in designing the marketing strategy with clear goals, objectives, and a well-defined plan of action. Key performance indicators (KPIs) and measurable tactics to achieve short-term activation or long-term engagement and loyalty have been identified. Student demonstrates ability to consider the broader marketing ecosystem and potential synergies with other channels or initiatives.
1.7	Feasibility & Viability	Student demonstrates ability to consider the practicality and resource requirements of the proposed experiential marketing strategy. Student proposes a realistic and achievable approach within the given constraints. Factors such as budget, timeline, and available resources when designing the strategy have been taken into consideration. Potential challenges or risks have been evaluated and appropriate measures and/or alternatives are part of the concept.
2	Creative Thinking skills	Student demonstrates creative thinking in project approach, interaction, collaboration, and elaboration of the final solution and/or brand experience;
2.1	Project Approach & Research	Student demonstrates ability to thoroughly research and explore to gather relevant information, data, and insights related to the project, encompassing diverse sources to ensure a well-rounded understanding of the topic, leading to meaningful insights informing the creative approach. Alternative approaches and multiple solutions and alternatives are being explored and considered before setting on a specific approach and student demonstrates willingness to adjust the approach based on new information or insights.
2.2	Creative Teamwork	Student demonstrates ability to work effectively with others and contribute to collaborative processes, participate actively, communicate effectively and engage constructively in group discussions or team projects, and student demonstrates the ability to build upon and enhance the ideas of others through collaborative interactions.
2.3	Elaboration & Refinement	Student demonstrates attention to detail, precision, and a commitment to delivering a polished outcome through detailed elaboration, thoughtful expansion, and iterative improvements to the final solution.
2.4	Visual & Verbal Communication	Student demonstrates ability to effectively communicate their ideas, concepts, and solutions visually and verbally. Appropriate use of compelling visual representations, such as sketches, prototypes, or multimedia presentations. Verbal communication is clear, coherent, and persuasive and student demonstrates the ability to articulate the rationale behind their creative choices.
2.5	Originality & Innovation	Student demonstrates ability to generate unique and imaginative ideas, concepts, or approaches to the project that show original thinking, divergent thinking, novel solutions, and creative problem-solving.
3	Project Management Skills	Student applies Design Thinking methods & tools, demonstrates self-starting skills, and individual accountability;
3.1	Design Thinking	Student demonstrates correct and effective use of Design Thinking methods & tools. Final presented solutions show a deep understanding of the user's needs and pain points through research and empathy-building activities and provide well-defined and articulated problem statements that are based on user insights. The ideation and creativity phases have provided diverse ranges of ideas and possible solutions. Selected ideas have been translated into tangible prototypes for testing and finally users have been engaged to gather feedback on prototypes and iteratively improve the designs based on that feedback.
3.2	Self starting & Discipline	Student demonstrates initiative and proactive behavior in taking charge of tasks, effective time management resulting in consistently meeting deadlines and delivering milestones, and the adaptability to handle unexpected challenges in project requirements.
3.3	Accountability	Student demonstrates responsibility in taking ownership of assigned tasks and responsibilities, a consistent honoring of commitments, and the ability to address setbacks and find solutions to obstacles encountered during the project.
3.4	Effective Collaboration	Student demonstrates ability to communicate ideas, updates, and concerns with the team, that feedback from team members has been actively sought and incorporated into his/her work. Furthermore, student shows that he/she can make an effective contribution to resolving conflicts, disagreements or misunderstandings within the team and contributes positively to the team's overall dynamic and productivity.
3.5	Participation	Student demonstrates active engagement and participation in team discussions, meetings and collaborative activities, to contribute meaningful insights, ideas and solutions to the project and shows initiative to learn from peers and the project experience.

4	Persuasive Communication	Student exhibits the necessary persuasive communication skills and successfully convinces, persuades and enthuses and involves stakeholders;
4.1	Story Telling	Student demonstrates ability to effectively convey a clear and engaging story or message, following a logical structure – including a clear introduction, body, and conclusion, to guide the audience through the communication-, and to captivate the audience’s attention and maintain their interest through use of anecdotes, examples, or relatable scenarios.
4.2	Body Language	Student demonstrates confidence through his/her body language, such as maintaining good posture and making appropriate eye contact. Student uses gestures appropriately to emphasize key points and maintain audience engagement, without becoming distracting or repetitive, and uses facial expressions and body movements to convey enthusiasm, conviction, and emotion that align with their message.
4.3	Tone of Voice	Student demonstrates clarity and the ability to appropriately use tone alignment and modulation ensuring effective and persuasive communication of a message. Clarity stands for a clear and intelligible voice, tone alignment to match the content and intent of the communication (tone is appropriately serious, enthusiastic, or empathetic corresponding with the message), and modulation; the variation of pitch, pace, and volume to maintain audience interest and emphasize important points.
4.4	Audience appropriate	Student demonstrates ability to tailor the communication to the specific needs, interests, and background of the intended audience and to adapt language to make it accessible to the audience, avoiding unnecessary jargon or technical terms that might alienate or confuse listeners
4.5	Response to criticism	Student demonstrates openness to feedback, showing a willingness to receive and acknowledge criticism or questions from the audience and an ability to respond respectfully and to address concerns in a thoughtful and constructive manner
4.6	Use of means	Student demonstrates ability to effectively choose and use visual aids(e.g., PowerPoint, story boards, etc.) to enhance the communication without overwhelming or distracting from the message. The chosen tools directly support the content being communicated.
5	Reflective Practioner	The student demonstrates the necessary reflective skills to facilitate the iterative and incremental design process;
5.1	Self Awareness	Student reflects on own thoughts, actions, and decision-making throughout the design process and shows an understanding of how his/her own perspectives and experiences influence the design choices he/she makes. Furthermore, student shows critical self-evaluation and awareness of personal strengths, weaknesses, and biases.
5.2	Fearless Feedback	Student actively seeks and values feedback from peers, instructors, or stakeholders and demonstrates a willingness to learn from mistakes and use feedback as a tool for improvement. Student incorporates feedback into the design iterations and implements changes based on the feedback received.
5.3	Iterative Approach	Student embraces an iterative and incremental design process. Multiple design iterations are evident, with each iteration building upon the previous one. Student demonstrates the ability to refine and evolve the design ideas based on insights gained from previous iterations. Evidence of a systematic approach to design iteration, including the use of prototyping, testing, and feedback loops has been provided.
5.4	Critical Thinking	Student demonstrates thoughtful analysis, evaluation, and justification of design decisions. Student also demonstrates the ability to consider alternative perspectives, weigh trade-offs, and make informed design choices based on a clear rationale.
5.5	Documentation & Reflection	Student’s documentation and reflection show well-documented design iterations, including sketches, prototypes, annotations, and design rationale. The reflections demonstrate student's ability to articulate his/her thoughts, insights, and lessons learned.

Assessment

The Minor Brand Experience & Event Design uses a programmatic assessment approach, where students' individual progress is continuously monitored throughout the minor. All assignments, challenges, and projects are carefully designed to help students acquire the required skills and knowledge necessary to master the learning outcomes.

A key component of this assessment process is the portfolio, which students submit at the end of the minor and serves as the primary tool for evaluating their performance. The portfolio must provide clear evidence that the student has mastered all learning outcomes at a sufficient level. To demonstrate this mastery, students collect proof from various data points throughout the learning process, including assignments, partial assignments, challenges, and feedback from peers, lecturers, instructors, field coaches, and clients. The portfolio showcases how students apply theoretical knowledge, creative thinking, and project management skills in real-world contexts, and how they have integrated these competencies across various projects and challenges.

This approach ensures that assessment is holistic, focusing not only on the final outputs but also on the student's ongoing development and ability to apply their learning effectively in different scenarios. By the end of the minor, the portfolio reflects the student's journey and growth, demonstrating their readiness to apply their skills in professional environments.

Entry requirements

To enter this programme, a foundation of introductory course(s) in Marketing Management and fluency in English writing and speaking (English language skills at CEFR level B2) is required.

Course materials

All material used will be provided on the Canvas course site.

Additional costs

Travel costs for excursions & field work: maximum € 250.

General Expectations

Students are expected to actively participate in all course activities, collaborate effectively in teams, and demonstrate a commitment to continuous improvement. Regular attendance, timely submission of assignments, and constructive engagement with feedback are crucial for success in this minor.