



Group role play case: Designing a multiple sting, digitally focussed, marketing communications campaign plan for Cirque du Soleil's next London show.

Justin O'Brien^A

A *Executive Director for Postgraduate Programmes, Surrey Business School, University of Surrey, UK*

Anastasios Siampos^B

B *Executive Director for Undergraduate Programmes, Surrey Business School, University of Surrey, UK*

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.37074/jalt.2021.4.1.11>

Abstract

Drawing on the magic of Cirque du Soleil, this armchair case study invites you to make an imaginary step into the world of digital advertising agencies. Flexing your communication skills and applying your marketing knowledge, this real world, hands-on activity challenges you to collaborate together to create a digitally focussed campaign that addresses the author-developed client brief. This case is designed for use in digital marketing and marketing communications (marcoms) modules on both undergraduate and postgraduate programmes.

Learning outcomes

By the end on this case study, you should be able to:

- (1) Create a range of typical customer personas;
- (2) Develop an engaging, headline email marketing sequence;
- (3) Formulate a content marketing plan using the digital funnel concept;
- (4) Collaborate in a team to create a high-level advertising agency campaign plan.

Key words

Advertising agency brief campaign planning, Cirque du Soleil, digital funnel, digital marketing communications, events marketing, marcoms, role play.

Introduction

In this experiential seminar activity, you are invited to role play digital marketing specialists in an advertising agency

and your team are challenged to develop a digitally focussed marketing campaign for Cirque du Soleil's upcoming winter tour series in London.

Cirque du Soleil (www.cirquedusoleil.com) is a Canadian headquartered, experience events company that offers a range of static (notably in multi-show Las Vegas) and often tent-based touring shows that were born out of the French-Canadian circus tradition. The theatrical experiences move through the major cities in the three primary markets of North America (where the founders' spiritual home is, in Montreal), Europe and Asia, with less frequent visits to the other continents. Each year a new Cirque du Soleil show usually transfers from touring in North America or Asia to London, as part of a wider European tour.

In preparation, you need to create 'typical customer' personas to help understand the well-heeled (medium-high income) customer base, using residents/visitors and new/existing customer segmentation dimensions. You will then create an outline of an email communications campaign and use the digital funnel concept to optimise the deployment of your content marketing assets. Having familiarised yourselves with the client brief, you are then invited to role play a group of advertising specialists (perhaps from leading agencies such as: Rocket Mill, Red Hot Penny or Adam & Eve) to develop a digitally focussed campaign. The key objective is to draft together, on a single screen page, an integrated marcoms plan for the next upcoming Cirque du Soleil show series, planned for a circa 8-12 week run between January and March at central London's prestigious Royal Albert Hall.

Advertising agency client campaign brief

The Cirque du Soleil brand summary and mission statement According to Forbes (Carone, 2012) the essence of Cirque du Soleil's secret sauce hails from being able to consistently communicate its brand of creativity and surprise across a myriad of touch points. Using non-star performed acts of

physical ingenuity, fantastical costumes and make-up, and the global language of music, the French-Canadian street performer-inspired rebirthing of the circus tradition has become a truly global, performing arts brand. Cirque du Soleil's mission statement is: "To invoke the imagination, provoke the senses and evoke the emotions of people around the world" (Cirque du Soleil, n.d.), a philosophy that is extended all the way from ticket sales, through its web presence and into social media platforms to its post-experience customer relationship management technology.

Campaign background and objectives

To introduce the Cirque brand experience to new and lapsed customers by promoting the latest show's arrival in town.

To re-engage with Cirque du Soleil's loyal customers and advocates via the electronic CRM (Customer Relationship Management) system to encourage early purchasing intent and stoke positive electronic word of mouth (eWoM) referral through user generated content (UGC).

Challenges that the campaign aims to address

For new customers: Explain the premium priced, no star, no animal, circus inspired theme concept that defines the Cirque experience.

For returning customers: Communicate a distinctive, compelling, storytelling narrative that generates anticipation and excitement to stimulate high volumes of early, online sales.

The campaign needs to appeal to both earlier booking local residents (in greater London/home counties area) and more spontaneous tourists.

The Cirque experience appears to work best live and in-person, although attempts have also been made to develop rich, digital content for streaming and IMAX cinemas. Cirque marketers have found that social media channels have been increasingly successful in generating positive electronic word of mouth and driving engagement.

Target audience

With average ticket prices reaching close to £100 (US\$150) per person, typical target customers have substantial disposable income and comprise couples, wealthy families, and adult groups. VIP packages target the high value corporate entertaining segment by providing augmented options for; intimate box experiences, close-to-stage seating, enhanced hospitality, and behind the scenes pre-show access.

Competition

Premium performance art and cultural events such as opera and West End musicals.

Brand values and market positioning

The Cirque du Soleil Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) strategy report describes its four pillars of engagement as:

- Talent – providing an inspiring, healthy and safe work environment for our employees
- Community – being a responsible agent for change in communities
- Procurement & Partnerships – making responsible choices in procurement and partnership
- Environment – reducing the environmental impact of our activities

Beyond world-renowned shows, the company explains in its website press kit (Cirque du Soleil, n.d.) that it has extended its brand into "multimedia productions, immersive experiences, theme parks and special events".

Desired campaign media channels

Historically, Cirque du Soleil has used the central London out of home (OOH) sites including: buses and bus shelters, impactful wrapped taxis, billboards and prominent digital displays (e.g. Piccadilly Circus). Often its bold, strong use of contrasting, bright colours and clean, empty space enabled it to stand out from other advertisements. More focus and budget have increasingly been put on digital channels, particularly social media platforms both paid and organic. Personal referral and user generated content (UGC) is particularly valued for driving sales conversion, thus community engagement is also a key focus.

Questions/Tasks:

- (1) Create 3-5 'typical customer' named personas and bring them alive using four evocative bullet points.
- (2) Develop six pre-event, one in-event, and two post-event email marketing headlines that would be used to engage existing, known customers.
- (3) Using a content marketing approach, formulate a RACE (Reach, Activate, Convert, Engage) funnel of marcoms touchpoints for new customers.
- (4) Using a single screen timeline, create a visually impactful marcoms campaign summary.

Additional learning resources

Blue ocean strategy applied to Cirque du Soleil. <https://www.blueoceanstrategy.com/bos-moves/cirque-du-soleil/>
The explainer: Blue Ocean Strategy. <https://youtu.be/sYdaa02CS5E>

Campaign proclaimed that advertising agency Publicis had won the European Cirque du Soleil account for advertising, online and customer relationships. <https://www.campaignlive.co.uk/article/week-cirque-du-soleil-hires-publicis-dialog-integrated-brief/969991>

Creating digital, immersive experiences <https://stackla.com/resources/case-studies/cirque-du-soleil-creates-immersive-digital-experiences-with-user-generated-visuals/>

Digital promotion in China. <https://www.shenglidigital.com/result/cirque-du-soleil/>

Event marketing planning overviews. <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/blog/academy/event-marketing-strategy-ds00/> and <https://www.ventureharbour.com/ultimate-guide-marketing-films-tv-shows-online/>

Overview of Cirque du Soleil's email marketing approach. <https://www.marketingsherpa.com/article/case-study/how-cirque-du-soleil-uses>

Pennanen, T. (2012). *Marketing plan for a contemporary circus*. <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/38072978.pdf>

The challenges of marketing Cirque du Soleil. <https://www.linkdex.com/en-gb/inked/cirque-du-soleil-marketing>

References

Carone, C. (2012). Cirque Du Soleil shows big brands how to be remarkable and magical. *Forbes*. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/onmarketing/2012/02/27/cirque-du-soleil-shows-big-brands-how-to-be-remarkable-and-magical/>

Cirque du Soleil. (n.d.). *About Cirque*. <https://www.cirquedusoleil.com/press/kits/corporate/about-cirque>

Cirque du Soleil. (n.d.). *Mission statement*. <https://www.cirquedusoleil.com/press/kits/corporate/about-cirque>

Cirque du Soleil. (2019). *Corporate social responsibility (CSR) strategy*. <https://www.cirquedusoleil.com/-/media/cds/images/citizenship/road-map/roadmap-en.pdf?la=en>