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Philips Electronics Uses The World As Its Stage

Companies often approach trade show exhibit design in one of two ways. Most view the exhibit as a shell to house the sales force during the long days of an industry event. However, a small but growing number of corporations recognize that a trade show exhibit can be much more than a space filler. It can embody the spirit and philosophies of a company and its brand by offering a three-dimensional experience that a client or prospect will never forget.

Philips Electronics is such a company. Philips is one of the world's largest electronics companies, with sales of more than \$40 billion and more than 250,000 employees. It's a global leader in the color television, lighting, home telephony and electric shaver markets. While Philips is a recognized technology leader in its markets, the company is focused on building the Philips brand. Having studied the impact of past exhibits, the company realized that its exhibit had little to no brand recognition. With Philips' numerous departments and divisions handling shows individually, the company didn't present a strategic and consistent global trade show image. In addition, the costs to prepare for and attend shows each year were becoming mind-boggling.

Philips set out to consolidate all of its tradeshow marketing efforts in order to bring a consistent brand

message to the show floor, regardless of the show or Philips division in attendance. The catalyst was the need to build exhibits for both COMDEX and CES, two enormous electronics shows. Rather than design two separate, equally costly exhibits, the company took a decidedly worldwide perspective and called on Sparks Exhibits & Environments.

"We went to Sparks for two key reasons," says Morgan Rees, Vice President of Global Brand Management for Philips. "First, their ability to bring theming to a trade show was really important. They deliver the same level of creativity they bring to their theme park clients—such as Universal—to our corporate trade show setting in a strategic and targeted way. Second, they had proven their leadership in understanding global brands by helping companies such as Bell Atlantic and Adidas to consolidate their three-dimensional presentations under single-theme, brand-consistent umbrellas."

Making History

The exhibit that grew out of Philips' consolidation directive was the largest trade show structure in Philips U.S.A.'s history. But more important than the finished size, the exhibit accomplished two amazing things. First, it took Philips' brand recognition to first place in a

ranking of 2,400 exhibits, and it did so at a 30-percent cost savings.

Sparks designed and constructed a floor plan that allowed components from the complete exhibit—measuring 198 feet by 107 feet—to be selected from inventory and used in an exhibit as small as 20 feet by 20 feet.

"Each element within the exhibit was designed to be used in a number of ways—what served to show a workplace product line in one show might showcase a home-products line in another," says Rees. "This provides great versatility and cost savings, especially for Philips product divisions that normally could not afford this level of exhibit. This has allowed our divisions to show a more sophisticated display and pull ahead of the competition at smaller regional trade show events."

Through this approach to strategic planning, Philips delivered a consistent brand message with exhibit properties that were highly functional and adaptable for each division's diverse trade show requirements. "This approach maximized our investment in the exhibit," says Rees. "We literally saved hundreds of thousands of dollars and increased brand awareness by presenting a single face to the customer, and the COMDEX experience and its subsequent showings are responsible for that return."

A Landmark Event

Faced with the challenge of presenting the branding theme, Connecting Your World, Philips and Sparks worked closely from the beginning, holding brainstorming sessions to review concepts. Philips' decision makers in the Netherlands, New York, California and Atlanta simultaneously viewed the extranet to review designs and teleconferenced with the Sparks team. With a corporate U.S. office, a worldwide office in the Netherlands and 12 Philips divisions, the Sparks proprietary extranet was a critical collaboration tool to ring all relevant Philips parties together.

The team agreed that one of Philips' greatest strengths is its worldwide presence, as the company does business in more than 60 countries. Using this premise as a starting point, Rees developed a strategic direction—the idea of using international landmarks. The landmarks would creatively showcase Philips' Connecting Your World theme with the added benefit that the team would select landmarks that are lit by Philips products. Then, in a collaborative effort, Rees and the Sparks team brainstormed and built on the strategy together.

A Show-Stopping Sight

If the concept of using international landmarks was the seed, Sparks' design team made it bloom. With creativity and enthusiasm running at full tilt, what resulted from Sparks' design team was more of a theatrical set than a



trade show exhibit. The final exhibit featured awe-inspiring three-dimensional scale models, hanging and dimensional flats, a 60-foot main stage and even fog.



Scale models of five international landmarks were built to emphasize the Connecting Your World theme, including the Golden Gate Bridge, Eiffel Tower, Taj Mahal, Roman Coliseum and Sydney Opera House. Their inclusion was significant because the actual structures are illuminated with Philips' Lighting products. The team also built a model representing Motown to highlight Philips' sponsorship of "Motown Live!," which airs on Saturday mornings.

Fifteen structural contour flats were created to represent architectural styles, such as a Japanese pagoda, a Dutch-style garden gate and familiar landmarks including the Statue of Liberty—complete with lit torch and crown—Big Ben and the Leaning Tower of Pisa. Completing the scene were 200-foot canvas curtains depicting generic skyline scenes. All were created using traditional scenic painting techniques usually found in theater productions. The effect was completely immersive, giving visitors the feeling they were in a far-off place.

To give visitors an up-close look at Philips' product lines, the exhibit was divided into four areas, emphasizing the use of Philips' products for home, work, away and technology. Each area had its own mini-stage for product-specific presentations. One-on-one

demonstrations were held at each of the 23 product demo units. "Many companies display equipment in the exhibit the way their corporation is organized-by division," says Rees. "Yet customers want to view products the way they are ultimately used by the end-user, in real world lifestyle application environments. We worked hard to bring that realism to the exhibit by putting home products in a living room setting, for example, regardless of what division made the products. We felt it would be a better context for facilitating actual sales, and it was."

A Theatrical Experience

Product displays and demonstration spaces were given top priority during the development of the structure. The main stage—a 60-foot oval structure with seven trap doors—was used to present Philips' global branding message through a Broadway-style production. The stage area was set in the back of the exhibit, strategically drawing people through the exhibit and past all of Philips' product offerings, yet it was highly visible, as it featured a 49-cube Philips video wall as its backdrop, as well as dramatic lighting.



"In addition to trade shows, our firm does quite a bit of business theater work, which is considered by most marketers to be a real specialty," says Clement Smith, senior account executive for Sparks. "We were able to draw from our experiences in this area which made

accomplishing Philips' goals much simpler."

Once visitors were drawn into the Philips Branding theater area, they were treated to a presentation complete with singing, dancing, and a floating presenter on a theatrical



crane and flying dancers on cables. "Our goal was to develop an impactful way to communicate what Philips is all about by illustrating our motto, Let's Make Things Better. We felt that we could use the exhibit and the theatre presentation to show that Philips makes things that better people's day-to-day lives," says Rees. "We don't make technology for the sake of technology; we make things to better our lives. And the exhibit experience both reflects and enhances our marketing.

"At the end of the last day of the show, I walked the show floor and the rest of the hall was like a ghost town. Everyone was in our exhibit catching the last performance, and many were qualified leads," says Rees. "There was no doubt we had captured our audience by providing them with an exceptional experience."

The Bottom Line

Sparks designed and produced the entire theatrical experience in less than six weeks by utilizing five of its U.S. facilities simultaneously. Partnering with Sparks also helped Philips to cut costs in the production of the exhibit and on the show floor. For instance, using a stage that Sparks had in stock in its San Francisco facility saved Philips

approximately \$50,000 over the cost of a custom-built stage. At the COMDEX presentation of the exhibit, the space contained 20 conference rooms rented from Sparks' extensive inventory at a cost of approximately \$160,000. The cost to purchase the same system would have been nearly \$800,000 and the end result wouldn't have been as flexible.

Other strategic factors came into play. During the COMDEX load-in, Sparks arranged to have Philips' products shipped to an off-site storage facility and then delivered to the exhibit en masse. Had Philips brought the products into the hall as they arrived, they would have been assessed a per-piece charge. By bringing the shipments in all at once, Sparks saved Philips tens of thousands of dollars in drayage costs.

The success of Philips' new unified approach is in the numbers. The company had seven independent exhibits and seven inconsistent brand messages at COMDEX. Subsequently, it posted a very low recognition factor. Philips presented one face to its customers and ranked highly in exhibit recognition out of 2,400 exhibitors.

The exhibit attracted media attention as well. The company conducted more than 500 press interviews in the exhibit at COMDEX, up from approximately 100. Just as important, Philips has reduced event expenditures by 30 percent while gaining in name recognition.

By planning each detail and considering the future show schedules of Philips' product divisions, not only were Rees and Sparks able to produce an exhibit that stopped the show at COMDEX '98, but one that lives on in various versatile configurations. For COMDEX, the large stage was utilized for building the Philips brand image, and at CES it was repurposed to communicate Philips' leadership in high-definition televisions.



At COMDEX, Philips Technologies used the Eiffel Tower exhibit to communicate its leadership in speech recognition, flat display systems, semiconductors and CD-ReWritable/DVD components. At CES, the Eiffel Tower served a completely different purpose for Philips Home Cinema Solutions such as HDTV, video projectors, DVD and Flat TV.

Components from the exhibit have been used by numerous Philips divisions at different shows and events.

