

# Selling passenger aircraft

*Yes, live brand experience can be used to sell Boeing aircraft. Michele Witthaus went along to Farnborough to sample the new 787.*

**S**elling passenger aircraft is a high-level activity: it involves serious money, decision-makers include CEOs and senior government officials and a single purchase can take several years to come to fruition.

Over the last three years, Boeing has invested heavily in creating dedicated brand experiences at the Farnborough and Paris Air Shows. The Boeing Dreamspace Experience reached new technical heights at Farnborough in July with a 42ft walk-in mockup of the new 787 Dreamliner aircraft.

The 787's USP is that it's a relatively small aircraft that flies direct from destination to destination, rather than via huge hubs. This is a completely different concept of air travel from the bigger-is-better philosophy of Airbus (which launched its 800-seater A380 at the show). The Dreamspace is a combined US-UK effort, with strategy and content driven by Boeing in Seattle while the architecture, messaging and three-dimensional space are

provided by London design company PCI Fitch. The fact that Fitch has an office in Seattle that handles other Boeing activity has helped them to bring a deep understanding of Boeing's business to the design, says Matt Hearnden, group account director for PCI Fitch. "What sets us apart is brand identity and brand knowledge, and the high brand design profile of Fitch certainly helps."

The aim with this year's Dreamspace was to move from a straight exhibit to something more experiential, says Hearnden. "We were looking for a balance between entertainment and information and the result is quite different from the other exhibits we have done."

The target market for the Dreamspace is diverse, encompassing key groups such as Boeing's global airline customers and financiers of aircraft without neglecting the flying public, who will benefit from the innovations introduced in the 787. Flexible design that allows people to navigate wherever they want is the key to meeting the needs of all of these groups, says Laura Henderson, brand manager for the Boeing 747. "What we as marketers wanted was for people to be able to walk around without a tour guide and walk away with a knowledge of the benefits. It can also be used more interactively; we give sales directors tools they can use to work the experience."

The design had to meet with very exacting corporate standards, says Steve Haro, brand manager for Boeing Commercial Airplanes. "We are a hi-tech company so if we presented ourselves with low-tech messages, it wouldn't work. Half of our brand communication comes in the quality of finish, which is very high."

The Dreamspace is hosted in a separate, self-contained space, away from the noise and hubbub of the main trade exhibition halls. "Our clients wouldn't typically go into a trade hall," argues Haro, "so several years ago, we started to create an environment that would be attractive to these people. We designed the space for an executive audience, bearing in mind the psyche of people who make decisions on billions of dollars of airplanes."

According to Paul Haverly, creative director on Boeing for PCI Fitch, the Dreamspace has evolved significantly over the three shows to date, each of

which involves a seven-month buildup. "In 2004, there was a great deal of text and information in the Dreamspace. We've now narrowed it down to five simple spaces. The build is museum quality, which makes people feel comfortable. We designed the lighting and we learned from the Paris show last year, where there was lots of light. We decided that less lighting was better."

The individual sections of the Dreamspace blend seamlessly into one another as visitors make their way through the exhibits. Small models of Boeing's main product line greet visitors in the first section. These can also be viewed

from the front through an ingenious hole in a wall that shows the four aircraft taking off one behind the other. "We like the fact that many people take pictures through this space," remarks Haro.

Directly opposite this display is a floor to ceiling projection conveying Boeing's brand values, surrounded by mirrored wall and floor tiles. "Visitors often ask for a CD of this video as it is very relaxing. It offers a change of pace from the busyness of the air show." The next section features a bubbling orange surface promoting the 747-8

Intercontinental Freighter. The



slogan: 'What do you do when fuel is the price of champagne? You sip it' appears in an alcove behind this, and to drive the message home, VIPs are served champagne in this area while they absorb Boeing's fuel efficiency statistics.

The next section features an interactive touch screen that controls a large screen that can be seen from much of the Dreamspace interior. There is deliberately no voice over on the projection, to allow sales directors to point out key features to specific audiences.

On to the next attraction, which is a flight simulator linked to a screen, allowing visitors to attempt an aircraft landing. Boeing has a partnership with Microsoft, who provide the software that allows people to experience Boeing's aircraft in a game form.

The final element of the Dreamspace tour is the mockup of the Dreamliner 787. "It's a beacon in its own right," notes Haro. "The question was how to make it fit the rest of the environment." The outer shell of the aircraft features ingenious projections on the windows, giving the impression of people moving and talking inside the plane.

Visitors enter the mockup as if boarding an aircraft and take their seats for a presentation on the various new features of the 787, which include revolutionary materials that reduce weight, wireless inflight entertainment, and designer LED colour-change lighting.

Outside the mockup, a glass display case shows models of the 787 in the livery of each of the 28 airlines that have already bought it, showing when they were ordered. Finally, visitors are asked to join an opt-in database of users dubbed the 'World Design Team'. An interactive scanner allows people to swipe their business cards to opt in.

All told, an impressive experience, and one that sells the brand most effectively. The only complaint I heard from those who had lingered awhile in the Dreamspace was that their toes and fingers had gone numb from the fierce airconditioning (turned to its lowest to combat the very un-British 38 degree heat outside). But then, most of Boeing's key customers navigate the space in business suits, so the cool air was probably as welcome to them as the fuel-efficiency statistics they imbibed along with their champagne.