THE NEW ERA OF EVENT MARKETING

Becoming VIP: The Event Marketing Superstar's Guide to Design at Scale

And How It Can Eliminate Brand Destruction — For Good

Contents

Introduction

Here's a riddle for you: What thrives on consistency, can be louder than words, and has the ability to make your organization either build long-lasting customer relationships or crash and burn?

If you thought "brand," you're right.

As a marketer, you know that your organization's brand is more than just a logo and color scheme. It's everything from your values to how others experience your offerings to how you treat others, and everything in between that helps customers build trust in you.

This is why it's so important to maintain brand integrity — it's the difference between winning and losing in your market, and it impacts every prospect and customer, no matter where they are in their journey with you.

And although your brand is more than just your visual identity, that piece is still so important, because it's literally how others identify you.

Let's say your organization has put some serious dollars behind marketing. The team built a new website full of information and content that beautifully and intelligently shows off your value prop and visual brand, among other things.
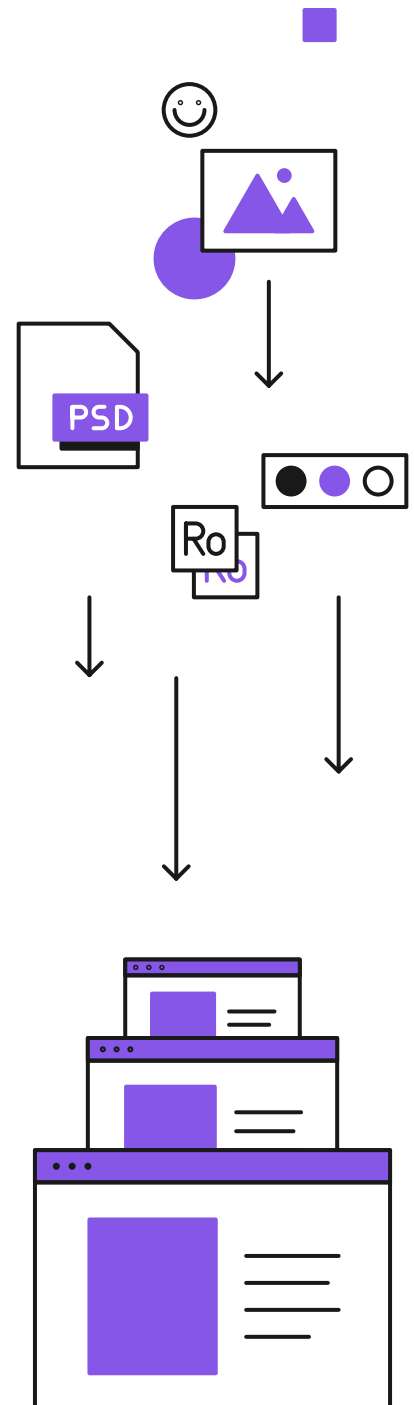
After multiple website visits and content downloads, your hottest, most lucrative prospect has requested a first-time appointment with the sales team... and they go with a presentation deck looking straight out of the 90s. While the 90s were pretty fly, it doesn't match your visual brand. Because of these inconsistencies, your prospect is now confused about who you are.

Now imagine this: You spent the last 12 months developing the best event marketing strategy your organization has ever seen.

The only problem? It involves dozens of monthly field events, which — no matter the size of your team — isn't sustainable to support fully.

Your solution is to let your sales team handle the overflow, so you create a few email templates they can use (read: modify in any way their hearts desire) and give them a crash course on hosting events. The next day, you're BCCd on an invitation for a networking and happy hour mixer complete with cowboys and lassos illustrating the event's wild west theme.

Because of your role in event marketing programs, we'd bet this second scenario didn't require much imagination for you. It may have even conjured up some emotions — ones you've fought tooth and nail to suppress from the workplace.

(By the way, these kinds of situations impact your design team, too. Just like you spent time delivering an amazing event marketing strategy, they spent time delivering an amazing visual brand, only to see it botched.)

If you cried a little (or a lot) remembering what it felt like the moment you saw a similar invitation go out from your organization, don't feel bad. We've all been in your shoes.

That's the fortunate (or unfortunate, perhaps) part. This syndrome, which we at Splash call the Cowboy Event Problem, is all too common in the event marketing world.

Programs that are meant to empower other teams to build relationships and drive business through events actually have the potential to derail everything you've built — not only in your event marketing strategy, but also in your broader visual brand.

Now, the million-dollar question: How do you fix this problem? We can think of a few options:

1. Promptly stop all of your event marketing activities and forbid your internal teams from hosting any events.

2. Give in to your internal teams and offer to handle every single event yourself.

3. Throw your hands in the air (like you just don't care).

Or, you could do something as simple as adopt **a "design at scale" mindset** for your event marketing programs.

In this guide, we'll dig into what design at scale means and why it matters in your event marketing.

Plus, we give you six easy steps to start designing at scale for your event programs and share how one of the world's leading online travel platforms completely transformed their event marketing programs after adopting a "design at scale" mindset.
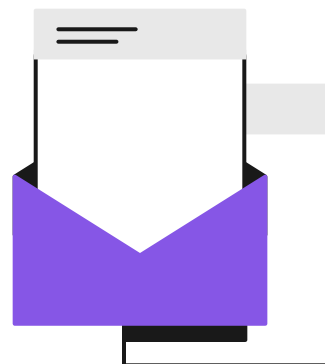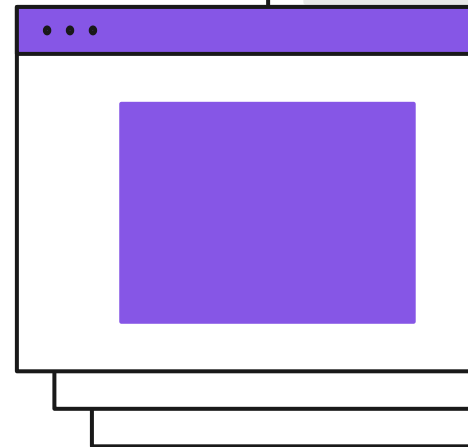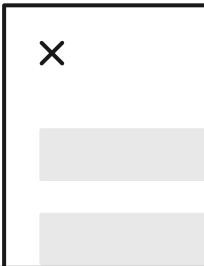
Design at Scale Means "Set It and Forget It"

Okay, maybe not forget it entirely, but you get the gist.

Design at scale means setting the look and feel once for all your digital touchpoints (so someone isn't trying to adapt a mobile-view email for a desktop-view email, for instance), then getting to use it as many times as you want, for as many events as you want.

To show you how this works, let's first define some of the key digital touchpoints for event marketing programs that require design work.
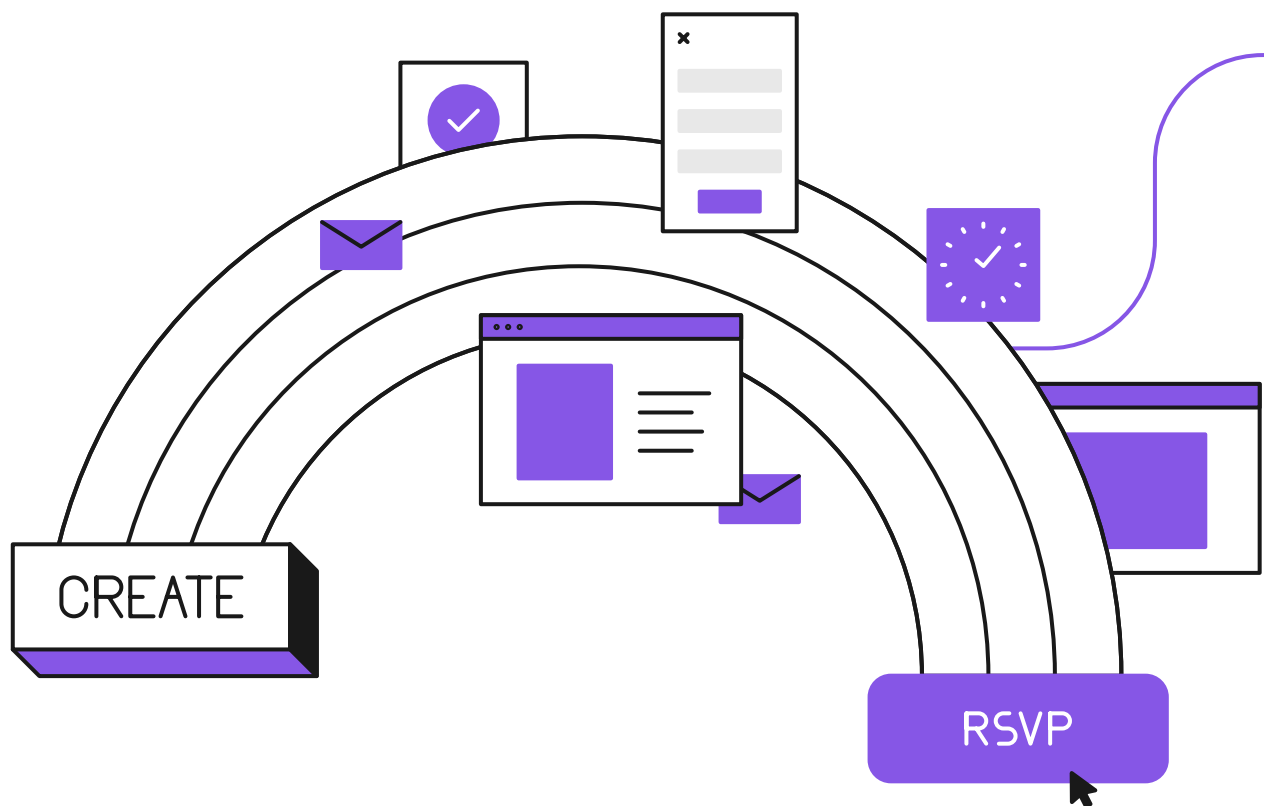
Your Digital Touchpoints, Defined

Digitally speaking, your event starts with the big, bad **event page**. It's the single place that houses all of your event details, like event date, location, agenda, speakers, and more. It's typically the go-to spot for your guests to get event information, so it's important that you build an on-brand event page that sets the theme for all of your other digital touchpoints.

Located within the event page is your **event registration form**. When it comes to event design, this one flies under the radar for many event marketers — but it shouldn't. Although your attendees have likely already made the decision to attend before reaching this form, it's where they actually take action. You'll want to ensure it complements your event page.

One popular way organizations get guests to their event page is through social media, and the visual you need here is a **social share card**. This card automatically populates when you share your event URL on social media (or text it to a friend).
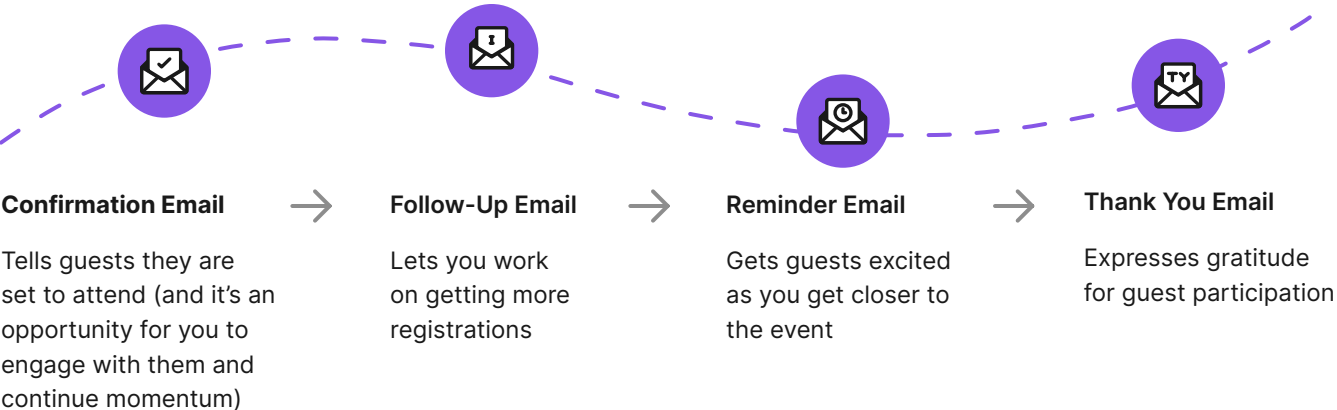
You likely also use an initial **email invitation** to drive your audience to the event page, so having a cohesive theme is crucial to tie these pieces together. Other emails you'll want to brand are the:

> **SPLASH PRO TIP:**
>
> Use your thank you email as an opportunity to promote photos and other multimedia from your event, as well as an upcoming event your guests would be interested in attending.

> **SPLASH PRO TIP:**
>
> Move your check-in line even faster (and reduce the number of staff members you need at check-in!) by using an app with a kiosk mode. Essentially, this means the check-in process is self-serve, allowing your guests to check themselves in.

Confirmation Email →

Tells guests they are set to attend (and it's an opportunity for you to engage with them and continue momentum)

Follow-Up Email →

Lets you work on getting more registrations

Reminder Email →

Gets guests excited as you get closer to the event

Thank You Email

Expresses gratitude for guest participation

The opportunities for digital touchpoints don't end before the event. Once on-site, you have a few chances to connect with your guests digitally — the first being the **check-in experience**. This is your guests' first impression at the event, so make it a good one. By using a branded check-in app, you ensure the line moves swiftly and your guests are still immersed in a cohesive, branded experience.

After you've hosted the most spectacular (and amazingly on-brand) event, showcasing your brand still doesn't stop there. Gathering event feedback through a **digital survey** lets you track event data, analyze how the event performed, and translate that information into making your next event even better.

And finally, remember your event page? (It's hard to forget.) It's always a good idea to convert your event page to a **post-event page**, where you can include things like a thank you message, a photo gallery of snapshots from the event, links to recorded video or presentation content, and promos for your next event.

We know… it's a lot to think about, and that's not even the most comprehensive list we have. But that's why design at scale is so effective. Design your theme once, then use it as often as you want, for as long as you want. And when it comes time for a new theme, you won't necessarily have to start from scratch (unless you want to).

P.S. If you do want the most comprehensive list we have of digital touchpoints, download it here.

DOWNLOAD OUR APP

splash
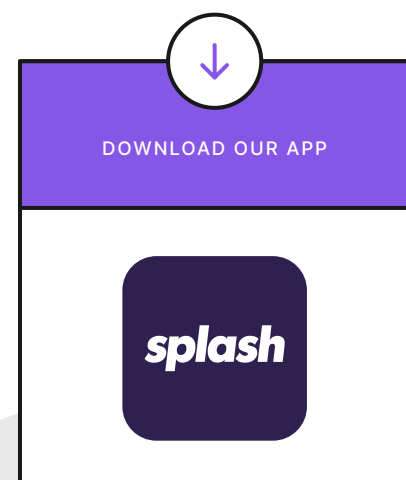
Design at Scale & The Gift of Time

Is it becoming clear yet why design at scale is the bee's knees? When it comes to designing your event programs, there are so many elements you need to consider. By adopting this "design at scale" mindset, you'll both ensure consistent branding across all those touchpoints and have one happy design team.

Event marketing is notorious for one very toxic combination: what seems like a million events a year and extremely short lead times. Design at scale matters because it removes this destructive combo.

Reflect on this. Think about all the events you actually host each year. If you're personally planning all these events, how many design requests do you send to your design team for each event? And how many days (or hours... or minutes) do they get to complete those requests?

If other teams within your organization host their own events, ask yourself the same questions. In this case, other teams may need too many assets, too fast, resulting in the "I'll just do it myself" thought process, and thus, the off-brand assets. Or, they simply don't involve the design team at all.

Crazy thought: What if your designers created a library of beautiful, on-brand event themes that were available for anyone at your organization to use — and all your other teams had to do was swap out event details, like date, time, and location?
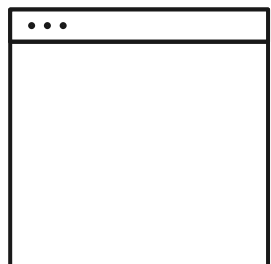
Would that ultimately save your designers time, not having to design every single touchpoint for every single event? Sure would.
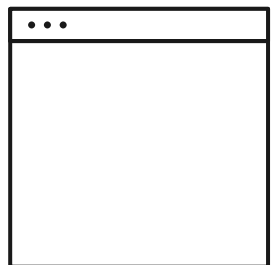
THEME
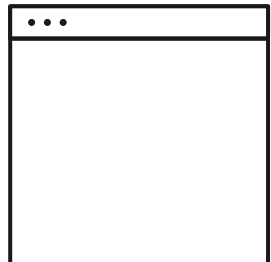
THEME

THEME

THEME

THEME

Would that ultimately save you time (and energy), not having to review, revise, and approve every single touchpoint for every single event? You bet.

We don't want to tell you what to do with this extra time and energy of yours, but we'll tell you what we'd do: focus on the important stuff, like event strategy. And maybe sneak in an extra yoga class or two.

Embracing Event Democratization

To make design at scale work, it needs to do more than ensure brand consistency and free up your time to focus on event strategy (although we certainly don't want to dilute the importance of those). It also needs to empower your internal teams to truly own all the pieces of their events.

This is, at the core, event democratization.

To give it an actual definition though, event democratization is the act of making event marketing tools accessible to a trusted group of individuals — typically non-marketers — for use in building and hosting their own events.

We know this sounds scary, but it doesn't have to be (more on that soon).

The key to feeling comfortable with event democratization is design governance, or maintaining a level of control over your brand elements and event designs. When you have final say over what branded themes are available for your internal teams to use, you can be confident those teams will represent your organization in the best way.
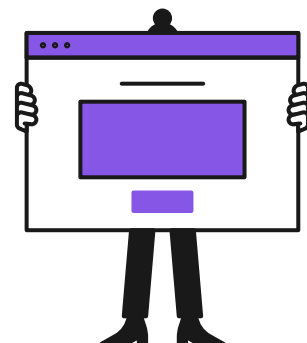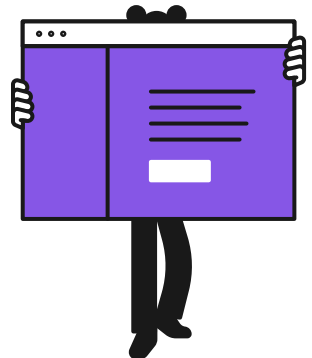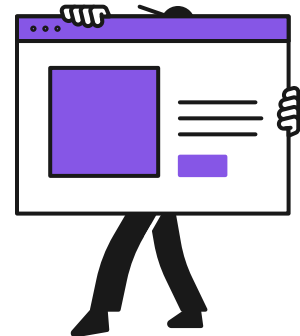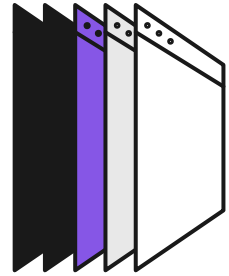
We've thrown a lot of big words and definitions your way, so we'll cut to the chase.

> **At the end of the day, design at scale means growing your event marketing programs without having to add more design resources — all while staying on-brand.**

Let's get real: Who doesn't want that?
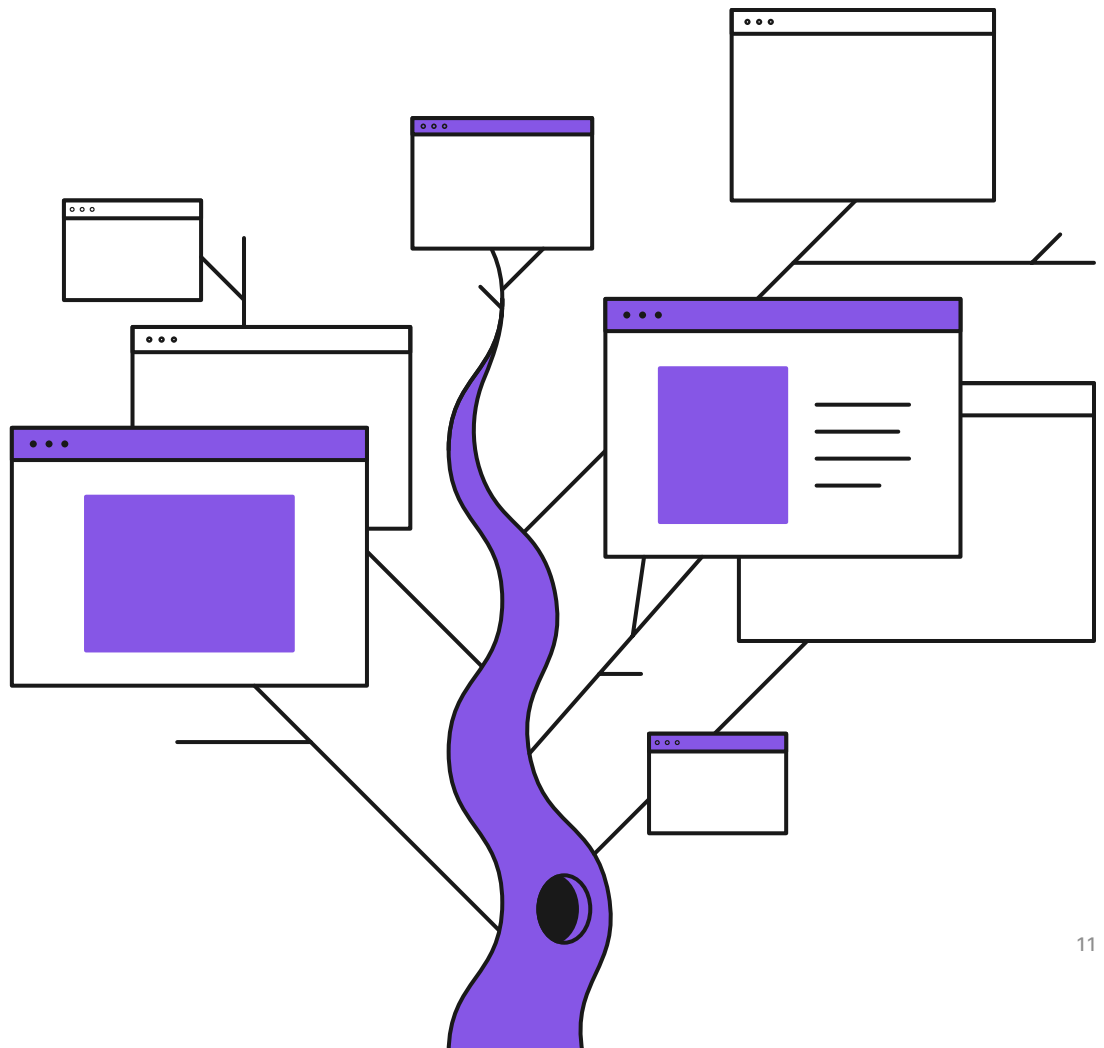
# The Fear of Event Democratization is Real

For as long as the practice of marketing has been around, marketers have struggled with other teams creating presentations, emails, and sales slicks (to name a few — the list could go on) that may use the wrong colors, off-brand messaging, or even a logo that was supposed to be retired seven years ago.

We know we're preaching to the choir, but let's say it in solidarity now: The. Struggle. Is. Real.

This leads to something else very real — the fear of democratizing marketing. Democratization (including event democratization) should make your life easier, not more stressful. But when those teams are sending invitations to cowboy-themed networking events or happy hours, it's easy to see why event marketers are hesitant to hand over any kind of control.

Like we just defined, event democratization isn't about relinquishing control. It's about empowering other teams to host their own events in a controlled way with the proper technologies and processes.

It just so happens we have a story to share — one that will show you how one of the world's leading online travel platforms experienced a complete transformation in their event marketing after adopting a scaled events mindset.

expedia group
lodging partner services
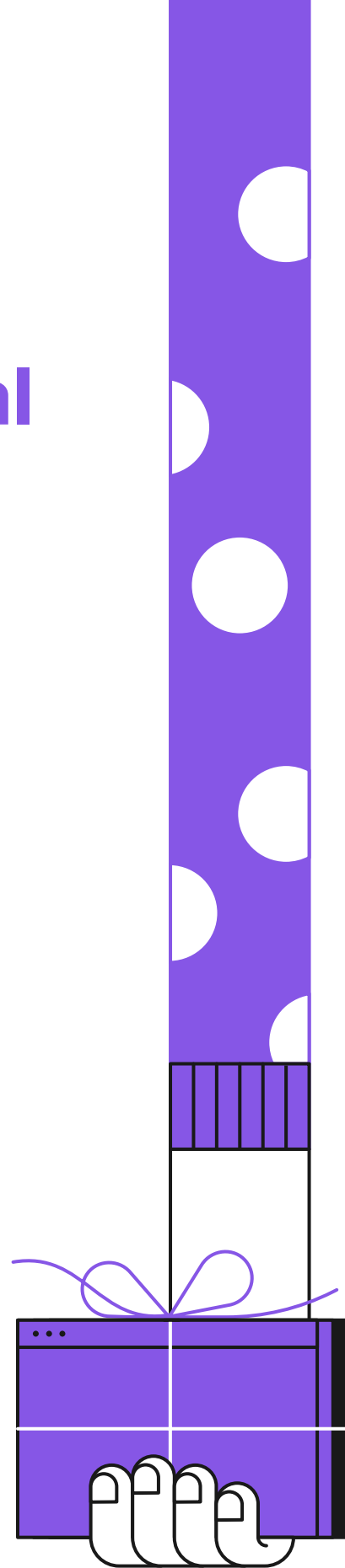
How Expedia Group Scaled Global B2B Events without Compromising Brand, Data, or Experience

You may remember Expedia Group as the travel booking site with the little yellow airplane and catchy jingle, but today, it's a whole family of travel brands connecting buyers with all kinds of travel experiences, including air travel, car rentals, vacation homes, and more.

In addition to driving consumers to their travel sites, Expedia Group's marketing team invests significantly on recruiting travel experience suppliers — and one of the top ways they do that is through events.

But with more than 20 brands, thousands of team members, and only eight marketers supporting events, they got — in the words of Spencer Darrington, Expedia Group's Senior Director of Field Marketing and Operations — "absolute madness." Chaos and confusion ensued, and there was zero visibility into what was actually happening with events — not to mention no way to measure their efforts.

They realized they would need to implement a single event marketing technology to manage their event program and empower their internal teams to build and host their own events.

Enter Splash.

Expedia Group segments their events into three tiers, with Tier 3 being purely a self-service model for internal teams. And with an event marketing technology in place that offers a single platform their marketing team can govern, they no longer have to worry about branding or event nightmares.

> "
>
> You can imagine when you're supported with eight marketers, most of the invites and reminders are actually being done by the 3,500-person sales organization, and that results in Baskin-Robbins kind of flavors of invites.
>
> **SPENCER DARRINGTON, SENIOR DIRECTOR OF FIELD MARKETING AND OPERATIONS AT EXPEDIA GROUP**
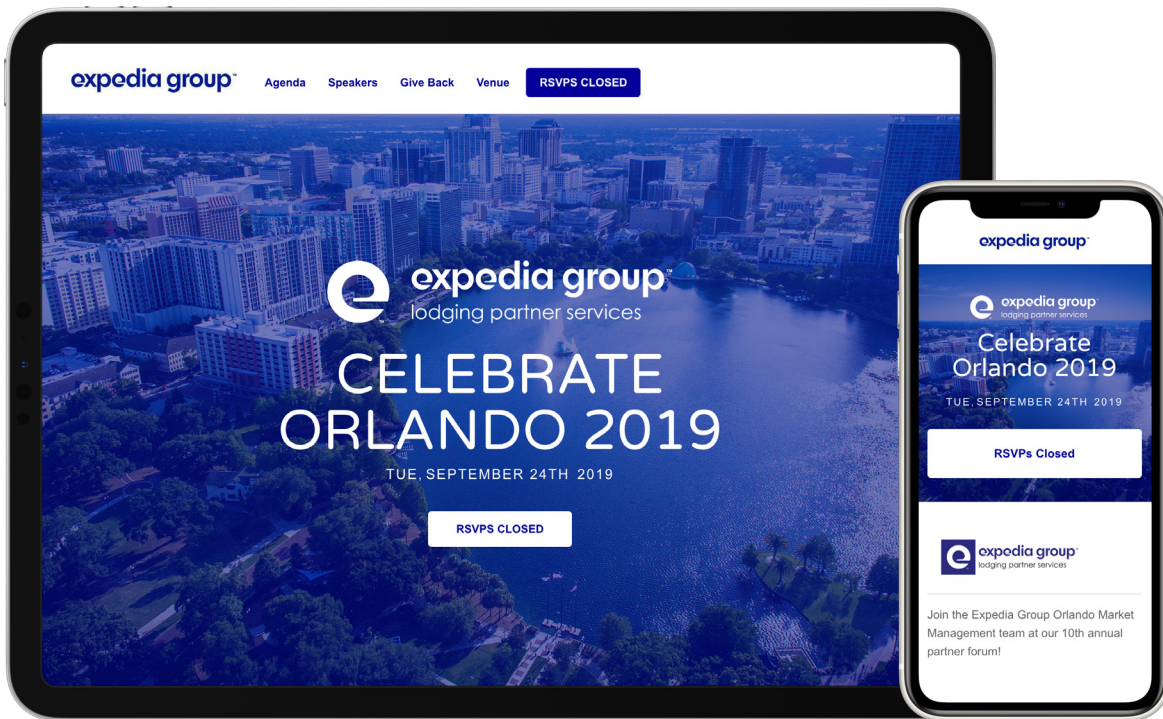
At the 2019 SiriusDecisions Summit, Darrington shared a behind-the-scenes look at their incredibly successful event program — and we're talking scaled events to the max. In their first 12 months with Splash, their internal teams built and hosted 567 events with minimal help from marketing.

More awesome numbers: Expedia Group's new event program has also saved up to 60 hours per event and freed up 11 people to focus on other strategic priorities. Talk about efficiency!

Now, Expedia Group is able to create consistent brand experiences for every single digital touchpoint, leading to a better customer experience throughout the entire event lifecycle, from the initial invitation and registration experience to post-event follow-ups and surveys — and everything in between.

How Design at Scale Drives Business Results

Achieving results like Expedia Group's may sound close to impossible, but it's really not. As long as you have the support for scaled event marketing design, it's not only possible — it's incredibly easy.

So, if you're interested in hosting more events (that are on-brand and require less support from marketing), boosting efficiency, and improving the audience experience, you're in the right spot. Design at scale can result in all of these.

It can also result in — drumroll, please — more qualified leads and increased conversions.

Scaling event marketing design means you can host more events, boost efficiency, improve the audience experience, and ultimately, generate more qualified leads and conversions.

Let's break down how this works.

We've already identified that design at scale helps maintain brand integrity, gives you time to focus more on the big picture, and empowers your other internal teams to successfully host their own events. Each of these have a path to increased conversions.
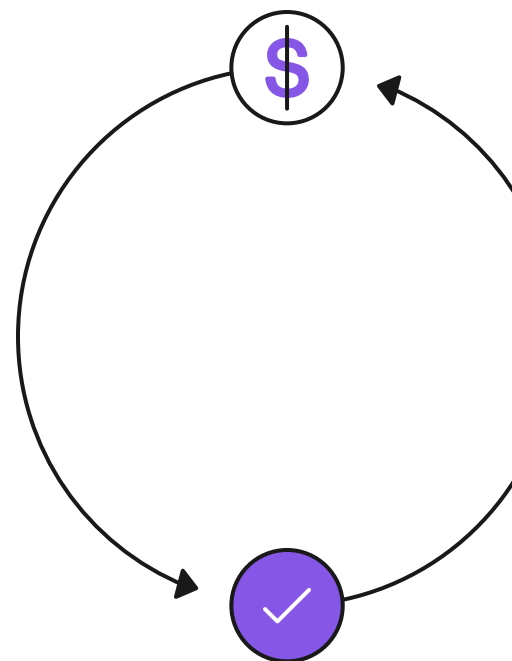
When you have the best technologies and processes in place to design at scale, you can expect the following outcomes:

Maintain Brand Integrity

Your prospects have consistent experiences with your visual brand.

↓

This helps build an identifiable brand for your organization.

↓

Prospects understand what they can expect from you and begin trusting you.

↓

When prospects trust you, they want more from you and are more likely to engage with your marketing, including at events.

↓

The more they trust you and engage with you, the more likely these prospects are to become your customers.

Focus on the Big Picture

You no longer have to revise, review, and approve everything, giving you precious time back.

↓

You get more time to work on event marketing strategy and high-priority events.

↓

When you're able to give more attention to these efforts, you will inevitably host better events.

↓

When you host better events, more targeted prospects will want to attend.

↓

The more your targeted prospects attend events (as long as you keep giving them engaging experiences), the more likely these prospects are to become your customers.

Empower Internal Teams

Less marketing support is required to host prospect-facing events.

↓

This means you'll give internal teams a "self-serve" way to host on-brand events.

↓

With other teams creating their own events, you can host way more events than ever before — and for targeted prospects.

↓

When you host more events and they're customized, more prospects will want to attend.

↓

The more your prospects attend these events, the more likely they are to convert and become your customers.

For business leaders and event marketers alike, nothing is more important than the power of human connection. That's why events are such an important piece of marketing strategy — they continue driving business results year after year.

And by scaling your event marketing design, you can more easily and quickly influence the results your company achieves.
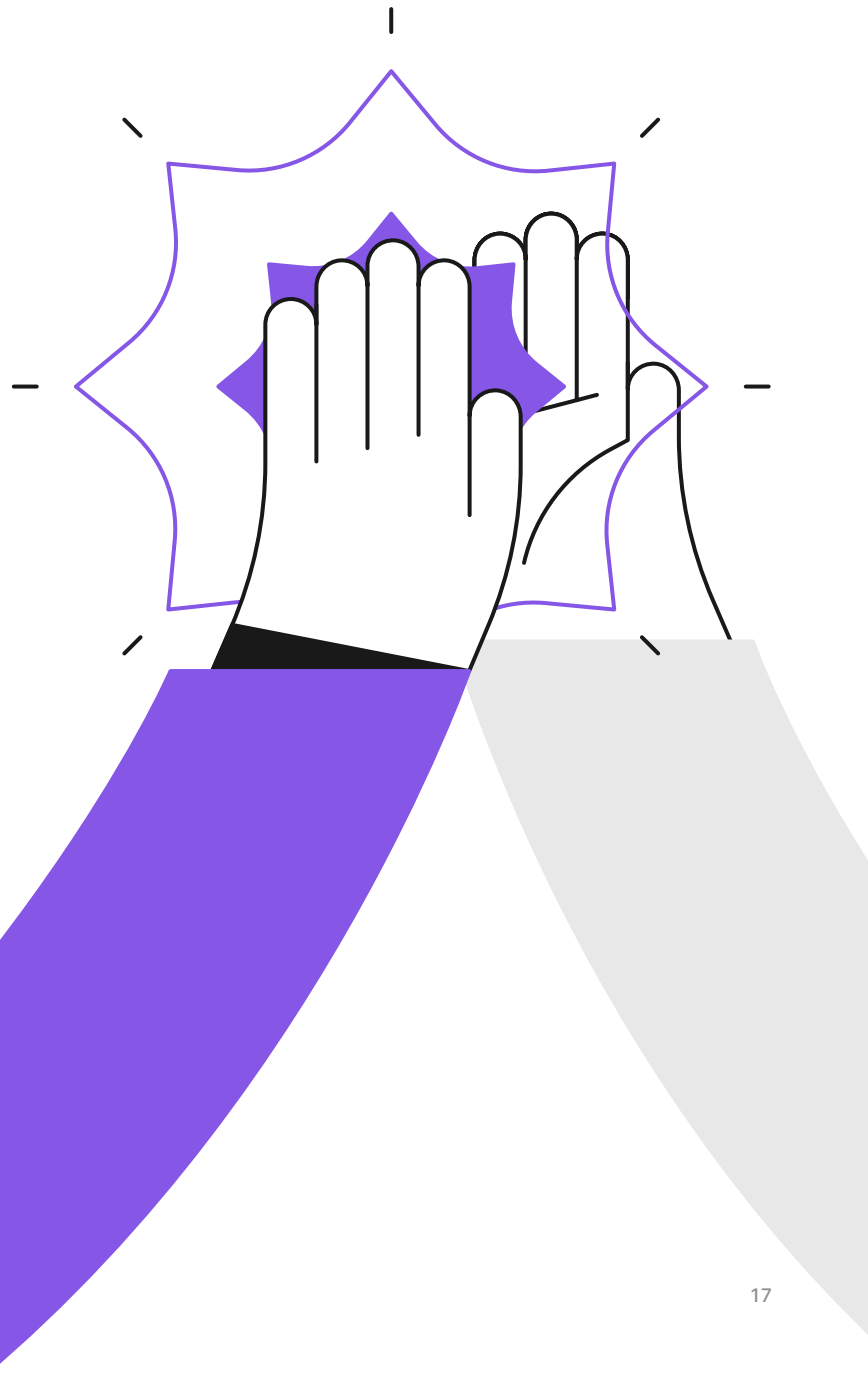
6 Simple Steps to Start Designing at Scale

By now, you understand what design at scale is and why it matters in your event marketing (aka the amazing benefits), and perhaps you're even — dare we say it? — getting over your fear of event democratization.

But more than all that, you've taken the first step: You've admitted that your event marketing programs may need some help and recognized that scaling your event design may be one of the smartest things you'll do this year.

We want to pause here for just one second and recognize this moment. Congrats on making what will be a very beneficial decision!

Okay, back to business.

This breakthrough is great, but without knowing the steps you have to take, it's also somewhat intimidating. Luckily, we're here to help. Here are the six steps we recommend taking to start designing at scale for your event marketing programs.
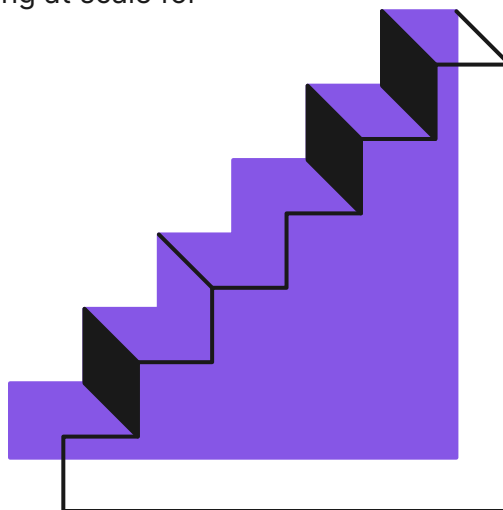
Conduct an Event Audit & Asset Inventory

Scaling your event design is hard to do without first knowing what you need. You can likely rattle off a list of your events and the design elements generally required, but we recommend you write this down, getting as specific as you can. For each event you document, ask yourself questions like:

- Is this event public or private?
- Does this event have an exclusive audience or open to a general audience?
- Is this event ticketed (cost to attend) or RSVP (complimentary)?
- What kind of event is this (happy hour, VIP dinner, networking mixer, product launch, etc.)?
- What promotions will this event require?
- What emails will this event require?

Conducting an event audit and asset inventory helps because, as an event marketer, you know that no two events are ever the same. Your audit will help define what design assets you need to consider for each.

Invest in an Event Marketing Tool

Here's a little nugget to think about: Even though there are four more steps after this one, investing in an event marketing tool will significantly — and quickly! — help you get through those steps.

An event marketing tool acts as a single repository to house everything needed for your events.

Event locations. Session details. Speaker bios. Registrations. Attendee information. Check-ins and no-shows. Event data. Templates galore: event pages, emails, social share cards, registration forms.

To design at scale most effectively, access to these templates is everything. Your design team creates beautiful, on-brand event marketing assets that are cohesive across all assets, then you get to govern these assets by controlling who has access, eliminating the fear of others creating off-brand elements.

Reduce, Reuse & Recycle

Scaling is all about growing your marketing without adding resources, meaning the last thing you should do is create hundreds of custom anything.

Whether or not you invest in an event marketing tool, "reduce, reuse, and recycle" should be your new mantra. And either way, your next step is to create the assets your team can repurpose.

Our general rule of thumb is that you should build assets with double- or triple-duty potential whenever possible. These event marketing assets should be able to cover at least 80 percent of your event use cases.

Share Your Event Assets

Event marketing tool or not, sharing your newly created, approved event assets is so crucial to scaling. After all, if you kept all of these assets to yourself, you'd just be reverting to the original problem (the Cowboy Event Problem, that is).

If you invest in an event marketing tool, the right one should make it easy for you to upload assets, completing the pieces you need to develop comprehensive branded themes. The right tool will also make asset organization a no-brainer.
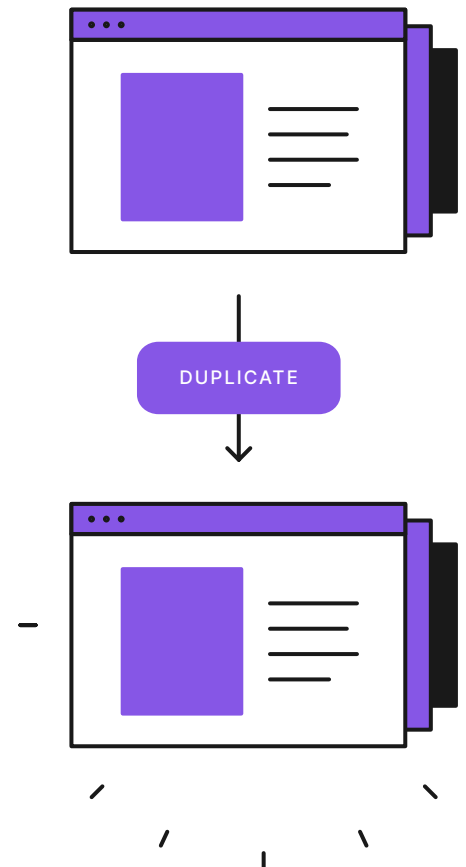
If you don't invest in an event marketing tool, use a shared system that everyone can access. To keep things even easier for your teams, make sure all the assets are organized well. Then make sure everyone uses them.

Put Clear QA Rules in Place

When something doesn't work, event-related or not, it won't scale — and that's just a fact. That's why setting quality assurance rules are so important to design at scale.

Each digital touchpoint must be on-brand. What's more, each touchpoint should deliver the same experience on desktop, mobile, and tablet.

Again, if you invest in an event marketing tool, it should make this super easy for you. The right one will offer you approval workflows and the ability to control access points, which means quality assurance will take you no time at all.

If you don't have an event marketing tool, this becomes more cumbersome, and the time it takes for reviews and approvals may set your aspirations to scale back a bit.

Let It Go

This isn't really a step in scaling your event design, but we thought it was important to call out one more time.

Event democratization should be exciting, not scary. Let go of this fear and empower your teams to host their own events, without you having to lift a finger.

Ready to Start Designing at Scale?

Now that you know what design at scale is, the incredible benefits you can get from it, and how to do it, you only have one thing left to do: implement!

Before we wrap, let's recap a few of the most important things we discussed here. (Hint: These could be your key points when recommending this to your leaders and team.)
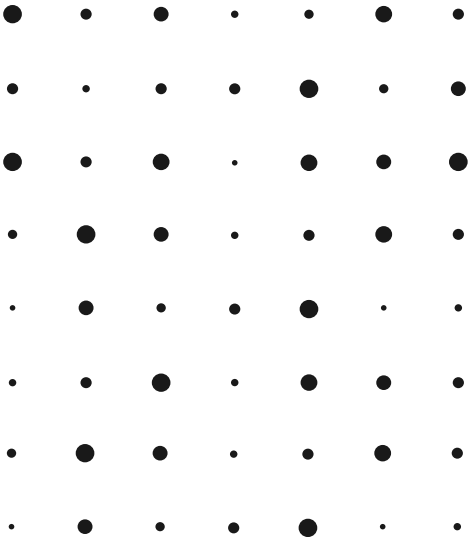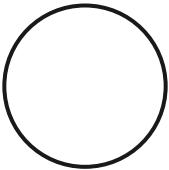
Design at scale helps you:

Create a consistent experience for your audience. We don't have to remind you of the event invitations featuring cowboys and lassos, right? Design at scale eliminates these instances of brand destruction in your event marketing. At the same time, design at scale empowers your internal teams to host their own events using consistent, on-brand design assets created by your designers and governed by you. It's a win-win!

Focus on the big picture. By designing at scale, you end up getting one of the best gifts of all time: your time. Without having to review and approve dozens of design assets for hundreds of events each year, you can imagine how many hours you get back. And you can spend all that time focused on way more strategic efforts — efforts that will truly make an impact.

Grow your event marketing without adding resources. Raise your hand if you don't want to grow your event marketing. Bueller? Bueller? That's what we thought. Design at scale means you get to host more on-brand, measurable, and compliant events without investing in additional designers or event marketers.

Build positive results for the business. When you have consistently on-brand event marketing, you inevitably get more registrations because your guests know who you are and what they can expect from you. And often, more registrations result in improved event attendance, which can lead to increased event ROI. Boom!

Inspired by the thought of design at scale and what it could mean for your broader event marketing strategy?
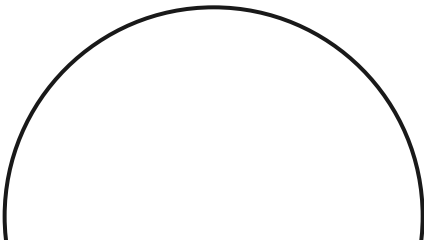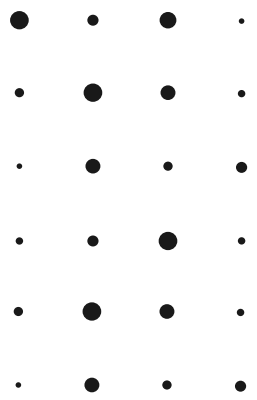
splash

Let us know we can help! Grab a Splash
demo to learn how our event marketing platform
helps organizations like yours scale event
marketing and maximize ROI.

Learn more at **splashthat.com**