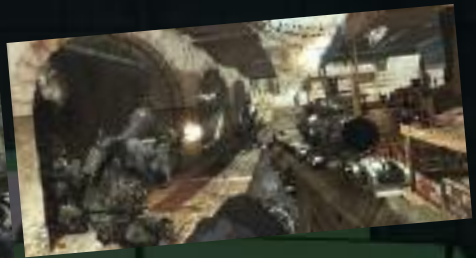
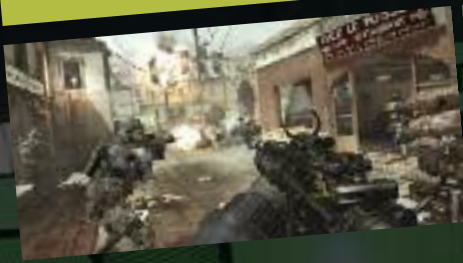


GRAND EX AWARD



CALL OF DUTY: XP

ACTIVISION AND NCOMPASS INTERNATIONAL BREAK EVERY RECORD IN THE BOOK WITH CALL OF DUTY: XP

INDEED, IT WAS THE YEAR'S GREATEST CASE STUDY. An amalgam of every hot trend, activated by every new event marketing strategy—all with the power to drive \$1 billion in sales (and that's just for starters).

It will go down as the event that showed the industry how to combine dozens of trends into a singular campaign. It will go down as the event that showed marketers how to simultaneously drive live and digital connections. It will go down as the event that showed the community how to use one event for b-to-c and b-to-b elements. And yes, it showed us all that a digital experience can be amplified on the ground—and not always the other way around.

It was Call of Duty: XP, a marketing event that proved once and for all that Experiential Marketing + Social Media = Mass Media—on steroids. Call of Duty: XP immersed fans in Modern Warfare 3, the latest game in the popular Activision Call of Duty series. The result was epic in scope and authentic in execution as it literally brought the game to life. It set a new bar for experiential fan-based events and, on top of all that, delivered blockbuster sales and brand results to the tune of \$775 million—in just its first five days—eventually becoming the first entertainment launch in history to reach \$1 billion. And as if that weren't enough, the program generated 2.4 billion impressions and \$21.5 million in earned media coverage, again proving that a single event can tackle both industry and consumer goals in one fell swoop. These unprecedented results, along

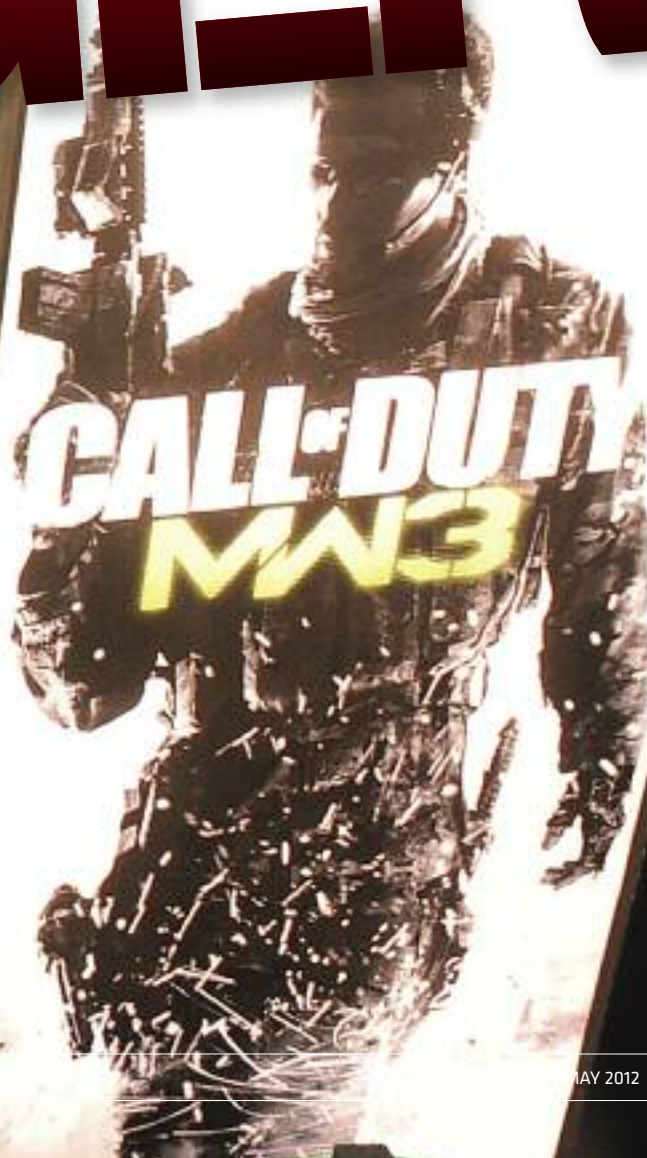
with a bold strategy and fresh thinking, propelled Call of Duty: XP straight to the top of the Ex Awards as a winner in multiple categories, and the ultimate winner of the prestigious 2012 Grand Ex.

The two-day, open-air, on the ground, down and dirty experience pit attendees against each other in real-life contests and electronic gameplay. These hardy souls fought their way through an obstacle course, pelted one another in paintball fights, whizzed above the action on military-style zip lines, battling it out to become king of the hill. Was it warfare? Kinda. Was it fun? You bet. What was it? The most successful entertainment launch event ever.

The challenge for Los Angeles-based experiential agency NCompass International was to exceed the results of Call of Duty's previous product launch, Call of Duty: Black Ops, which had already shattered all sales records and surpassed launch sales of the previous leader, the blockbuster movie "Avatar." NCompass put up its dukes, flexed its creative muscle and faced the challenge head-on.

More than 6,000 fans paid to attend the live event, which took place on a 16-acre compound in the urban confines of Los Angeles over Labor Day weekend and recreated the iconic game franchise. Along with the press, celebrities, marketing partners and military veterans, they participated first-hand in the world premiere of Modern Warfare 3, three months before it hit retail shelves in November. They got hands-on gameplay with the multiplayer and the new Special Ops Cooperative Survival Mode. And they also got to see for

MANAGER





themselves the full feature functionality of Call of Duty Elite, the new online service that supports the game.

A series of real-world Call of Duty action experiences and gaming competitions supported the epic reveal of the new game, along with a \$1 million Call of Duty tournament offered by Activision and the event's lead sponsor, Microsoft Xbox 360—the largest prize purse in gaming history. Fans qualified for the tournament prior to the event in regional promotions and competitions. Others qualified on-site.

All this came at a price of \$150 for tickets, which Activision donated to the Call of Duty Endowment, a nonprofit corporation that helps veterans transition to civilian life, find work and establish careers.

For that, fans got to support a worthy cause and take a deep dive into the action in and around the Hughes Cargo Building in Playa Vista, CA, the site where Howard Hughes built his “Spruce Goose” plane in 1947. Besides the life-sized game-play areas from the Black Ops edition, the experience included a driving course designed by brand partner Jeep, an overhead zip line, and re-creations of Burger Town and Juggernaut Sumo (both from the game), not to mention the 7,600 Xbox gaming stations provided by Microsoft. Keynote

speeches, press conferences, discussion panels and Q&A sessions with Call of Duty developers offered a behind-the-scenes look at the development process and the people responsible for creating the game and the franchise. Musical artist Kanye West launched his newest tour there, with his full show set and dancers in tow.

Inside a giant airplane hangar, a Call of Duty armory displayed military weapons and combat gear, Call of Duty concept art and research and recounted the history of one of the most celebrated franchises in gaming. A merchandise shop sold custom t-shirts and other goods. Roving game avatars and photo ops for social network sharing added to the fun.

GOING ROGUE

At a time when marketers are focused on pushing live events online, Activision did just the opposite. With an inherently all-digital product, a pre-built virtual environment on Microsoft's Xbox Live, Activision *could* have created an all-digital event. The tech-friendly fans of the game probably wouldn't have minded. But instead it executed an experience that transported its digital audience into a physical rendition of the game, one that matched its size, scale and sophistication on all fronts. People are still talking about it.



A solid online component with social media, constant updates, interviews and photos offered fans around the world a fair approximation of the live event. A constant live stream linked fans to the action, as well as status updates from the event via Facebook and Twitter. Microsoft actively connected with its community via exclusive videos and coverage. The result was an event that reached far beyond those 6,000 attendees and touched millions.

Video game marketers are constantly challenged with selling new products to the savvy gamer audience often without their having seen the game. Because sales rely on pre-orders and support by early adopters in the gaming community, Activision knew it had to bring *Modern Warfare 3* to a new level.

Activision also realized early on that with the changing media landscape, consumers have become just as powerful as traditional media when it comes to promoting a new product. So, with the help of NCompass, it transformed what had previously been a media-only event into one that would involve consumers and harness the power of their influence.

"We wanted to do something that had never been done before," says Byron Beede, senior director of marketing for *Call of Duty* at Activision. "We wanted to treat our fans, take the multiplayer reveal and make it a fan experience, not just a gaming experience. Then it grew into a passion project."

Its target audience was primarily current fans of the *Call of Duty* franchise, a devoted but discerning community of 30 million-plus. Other entertainment, games and sports enthusiasts not presently engaged with the brand comprised a secondary target, followed by fans and consumers of competitive gaming titles. The brand also set its sites on a broad spectrum of global press, including current events, financial, lifestyle, gaming, sports, technology

and entertainment writers, along with mainstream and niche social media influencers.

The result was an epic, authentic, blockbuster brand experience that for three days literally brought the game to life in a 270,000 raw square foot space that included two massive airplane hangars and exuded the feeling of a military installation. The place looked and felt as though the government had come in and set up a field base of forward operations, especially from the outside. Inside, the traditional military imagery gave some room up to the idealized video game look, but kept the COD feel. "For *Call of Duty*, it's always about trying to do something awe inspiring," says Beede.

INSIDE THE HANGARS

The first day was an exclusive VIP press preview followed by two days of consumer and press brand immersion. The event kicked off as thousands gathered in a darkened theater with the intense sounds of helicopters overhead, followed by huge explosions and a light show as the *Modern Warfare 3* commercial played. Gameplay was demoed on a 100-foot wide LED screen as sound shook the room. Then Activision ceo Eric Hirshberg dropped the real bomb—attendees would get to play the game three months before it hit retail shelves.

And so, the 130,000-square-foot *Modern Warfare 3*-themed gaming area became a high point of the experience. Attendees played on more than 1,000 networked Xbox 360s, going head-to-head in both *Modern Warfare 3* and *Black Ops*, while others played qualification rounds on-site for the big tournament. Because every fan has his or her own favorite mode, there were also stations for the mini games like *King of the Hill*, a new *Modern Warfare 3* Special Ops Cooperative Survival Mode and *Black Ops* zombie mode,



a survival game where the goal is to kill as many zombies as possible before getting eaten.

In the Elite gaming area, attendees could check out the features and benefits of joining the new Call of Duty Elite, an advanced membership that costs \$50 per year and gives Xbox Live multiplayer gamers a chance at exclusive gaming, prizes and tournaments. Activision gave each attendee a free trial membership for coming to XP with the hope that they would continue with the paid service, so the brand made it easy to love with lots of in-game equipment and gameplay bonuses.

Then there were the product gameplay activities that took parts of the game out of the virtual realm into real life. One of the favorites was a paintball-style remake of the Scrapyard, a much-beloved arena from COD: Black Ops and one of the most heavily played in the online multiplayer game. But no one had ever played it live, until now. In this full-scale replica of the Scrapyard, 20-man squads with paintball guns let loose on each other in 10-minute long matches. The teams were given a backstory to add some character fun to the role-playing and immerse them in the capture-the-flag style challenge.

XP also recreated the Pit, the infamous obstacle course from Modern Warfare 2 encountered by first-time players each time they pick up a controller and load up COD. To give them a slightly better chance and to refresh anyone who hadn't played in a while, there were game stations nearby for trial runs, but eventually attendees had to put up their stuff and paintball speed-run the training course for real.

Both activities offered up prizes and swag for top finishers, but the real prize was the bragging rights for the winners. Other activities included Juggernaut Sumo, in which attendees wrestled in oversized sumo suits. And for time out, there was the Burger Town snack bar, which came straight out of the game, too.

THE POWER OF PARTNERSHIP

The Jeep Ops experience, an action-adventure ride-and-drive from Jeep, took the XP idea off-road and into a recreated combat zone. Jeep, which designs custom vehicles for the in-game world and

COD-themed real-life Jeep special editions, supplied 10 specially outfitted COD editions that sent three-member squads and a professional driver on mind-blowing missions through enemy territory inspired by the in-game map, complete with sounds of gunfire, explosions and smoke bombs. First they passed through a short on-road portion pushing the Jeep up to a quick sprint on the way to the first checkpoint, where the squad got its mission: take out an insurgent force two clicks up the road and make it back to base. One lucky attendee rode away in a MW3 Jeep by winning an on-site promotion.

In other partner activations, Mountain Dew set up a Dew Bunker where attendees could chill out and recharge, power up portable devices at free charging stations and get their faces painted military-style. The Bunker also offered tastes of new Dew flavors and event-branded collector cans. Xbox Live streamed the action as well as global announcements from Activision and game developers' on-site discussions with attendees.

XP culminated with the championship game, when the two squads who had clawed and fragged their way to the top of the pile played for their share of the million dollar prize. Activision set up a live broadcast of the finals through LiveStream so people all over the world could witness first-hand the new gameplay through the eyes of the best players in the world. And that they did. The online event was the second largest in LiveStream's history, with more than a million live unique viewers, exceeded only by the royal wedding of Prince William and Kate Middleton.

And then, the closing ceremony, with Kanye West, blew everything else away, except perhaps the results of this head-spinning experience. XP triggered \$775 million in MW3 sales in its first five days and became the first entertainment launch to reach \$1 billion. It achieved a 44 percent sales increase versus a pre-event two-week period. XP garnered an epic 2.4 billion impressions and \$21.5 million in earned media coverage. Its live stream of the championship final dominated online and social networking and is the second highest viewed live stream event ever, beating out President Obama's speech on Facebook. For real. **EM**

—Sandra O'Loughlin