

Our Approach



The Elements of Smile

It's not enough to just believe in the value of Smiles.

It's not enough to recognize their brand & business building power.

It's not even enough to have decades of experience doing it.

For our belief to become actionable, we need a playbook. A guide for designing and orchestrating elements of the experience that allow us to consistently and reliably produce smile-inducing programs for our clients.

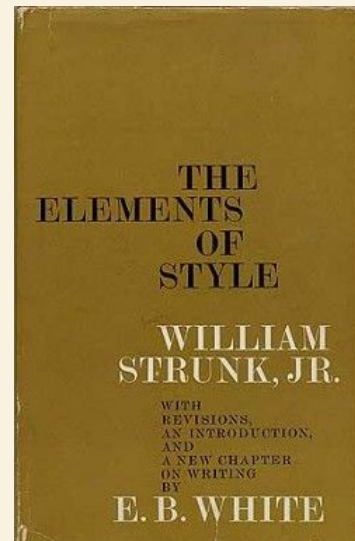


THE ELEMENTS OF SMILE

THE BECORE PLAYBOOK

FOR DESIGNING
BRAND EXPERIENCES
THAT CREATE SMILES
AND GROW BUSINESSES

BE
CORE.



Our Playbook

The Elements of Smile

This trusted guide outlines **the strategic and tactical elements that have proven to elicit a positive emotional response** from participants in the remarkable experiences we design.

This positive emotion embeds lasting memories that have the power to build brands and drive business growth.

It's not just luck. It's not just intuition. It's not hit-or-miss.

It's intentional. It's strategic. And it's repeatable.



The Elements of Smile

Using This Playbook

For our team of experience design experts (which is all of us), this is a reference guide for intentionally orchestrating the different elements of an experience to create valuable smiles.

On the following pages, each of the Elements is outlined and discussed.

Not all of the experiences we produce will include all of these Elements. But understanding and considering each of these Elements when we're designing our experiences is how we'll consistently and reliably create smiles and drive brand and business value for our clients.

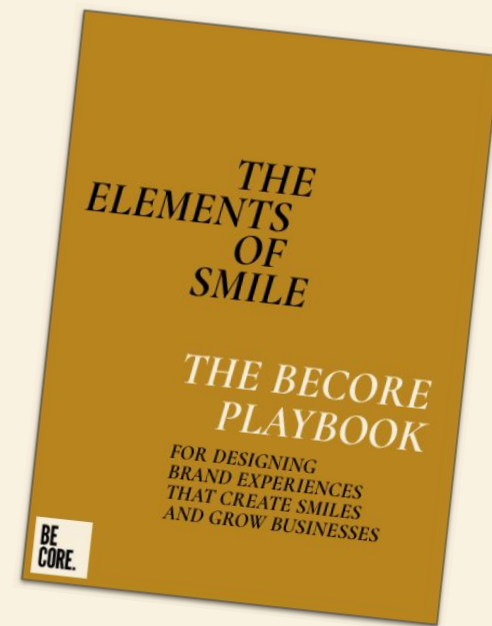
Use this as a jumping off point. A source of inspiration. A loyal companion along the winding road of experience design.

As experience design experts some of these Elements will already feel intuitive and obvious. That's a good thing. By using this playbook, and referring back to it time and again, these Elements should all start to become familiar, internalized, and naturally flow into the remarkable experiences we design and produce.



The Elements of Smile

1. Intention
2. Empathy
3. Narrative
4. Exchange
5. Play
6. Attention
7. Remarkability
8. Resonance
9. Discovery
10. Relevance
11. Sensation
12. Connection
13. Departure
14. Challenge
15. Autonomy
16. Order
17. Fidelity
18. Macro-Experience Design Model
19. Deep Experience Design Model



The Elements of Smile

Intention

Remarkable experiences are designed with intention, not just intuition.

Experiences have three distinct phases: Anticipation, Participation, and Reflection. Thoughtfully orchestrating the “micro experiences” that happen in each phase will ensure the overall experience, or “macro experience”, creates valuable smiles. (see *The Macro Experience Design Model* for details).

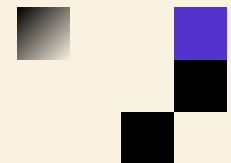
Delivering a cohesive experience with consistent quality requires that all touchpoints receive the same degree of intentionality. One discordant micro experience can often distort the harmony of the whole macro experience. Discussing his experience design philosophy for Disneyland, Walt Disney famously said, “Everything speaks.” For BeCore, “Everything smiles.”

Intentionally orchestrate and rehearse how participants will move through chronological time and physical space. Design touchpoints that provide a path and pace through the experience.

Think simultaneously about the minutiae and the big picture to ensure that all pieces are working harmoniously. A great experience is like a pointillist painting where each touchpoint is executed with the thoughtfulness and intention of an artist. Attention to detail, like the transitions between touchpoints, often makes or breaks experiences.

Comprehensive intentionality requires sustained focus, effort, and dedication but it often marks the difference between forgettable and unforgettable experiences.

Ask: What is the overall picture we’re trying to paint? Are there any experience touchpoints (big and small) that could be more thoughtfully designed to better complete the picture?



The Elements of Smile

Empathy

We think of people who engage in our experiences not as consumers, or a target audience, but as participants.

Participants expect to engage, to influence, and for their presence to matter in the unfolding action of the experience.

Smile-inducing experiences demonstrate an insightful understanding of those participants and are centered on their hopes, expectations, and needs – not the brand's. The brand is of course why we're creating the experience in the first place, but when designing the experience its important to focus on the needs of the participant to ensure the experience becomes something that resonates with them, and creates smiles.

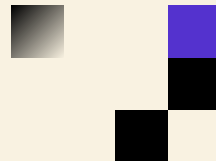
Developing this understanding and empathy requires research and strategic exploration of their mindset so we can design from their perspective rather than ours or our clients.

We actively seek to understand the participants' perspectives and use that understanding as a guiding influence for the whole experience design process.

This understanding is a foundation of smile-inducing experience design and is often called human-centered design: the idea that one can't design anything worthwhile unless one first develops empathy for the participants.

This is what we call Strategy: taking time to develop a deep understanding of the people we are designing for has a dramatic effect on the quality of the experiences we create.

Ask: What do we know about the intended participants? What do they think, feel, and do about the brand in question? What do they need in this moment?



The Elements of Smile



Narrative

Great stories make great experiences. They draw us in, evoking emotion, teaching us about ourselves, and leading us on a journey that helps us see the world in a new way.

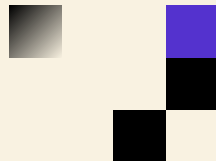
We build experience narratives that make participants the heroes and allow them to play a participatory role in an unfolding story.

Narrative structure provides form: an intriguing beginning, an engaging middle, and a memorable ending.

Compelling narratives define the sequence of events that rise in action, build up to a dramatic climax, and then come back down again as the experience ends. Without drama, that sequence falls flat. But with drama, the experience captivates each participant, creating smiles and lasting memories.

Ask: How can we design the experience with a intentional beginning, middle, and end? What stories do we want our participants to tell about our experiences?

It can't be all climax; slower moments are vital. Climactic touchpoints exhaust participants' limited attention, emotion, and mental energy. Great narratives create time and space for participants to take a beat, reflect upon the drama, and ascribe meaning to what happened.



The Elements of Smile

Exchange

Every experience has a cost. There's a value exchange that occurs. The participant gets something, and gives something in return. Time. Emotion. Mental energy. Money. Experiences that create smiles always give the participant more value than they take.

Treating people as active participants, as co-creators, rather than passive audience members is an important way to deliver value. Experience is from the Latin *experiri*, which means "to try or to attempt". Experience demands participation. The audience must be engaged as participants in the unfolding narrative of the experience rather than simply remaining observers.

What kind of value or reward can we deliver? Is some thoughtfully designed SWAG? Does the value exchange go deeper than that? Whatever it is, experiences with a positive value exchange create more smiles, and drive more value for brands and more growth for businesses.

Ask: what's the actual cost of participation in the experience at each touchpoint? Think mental, emotional, physical, time, even money. How can we provide greater value at each touchpoint to offset those costs? What reward do the participants want?

Value exchange is not about convenience. Convenience means spending less time with participants. We want participants to truly value the time they're spending, and want to spend more of it. Easy and convenient are service characteristics, not experience characteristics.

Experiences are about offering time well spent, not time well saved.

People today continue to prioritize brands that give them memorable experiences and make them feel happy. Happiness today isn't focused on material things and career status; it's about creating memories through meaningful encounters. That's part of the value we're delivering.



The Elements of Smile

Play

Play is an external event that kicks off a complex internal process that often results in transformation and change in the participant.

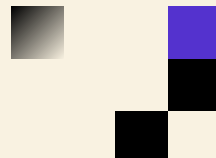
Play releases serotonin, a neurotransmitter known as “the happy chemical”. It has a physiological effect on our bodies. Our brains open up. Our thinking changes. We become braver, more curious, more confident. Serotonin stimulates a “yes, and” mindset.

Play allows us to escape the seriousness of life for a moment, to step out of the high pressure “Big Game” we’re playing and play a lower stakes “Little Game” for a while. Play is purposeless, fun, and pleasurable.

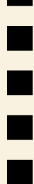
Play sparks imagination, stimulating emotion and new thoughts. Exploring new thoughts helps you discover things about yourself and the world around. When we play just to play, we’re actually playing to learn. This learning creates meaning and leads to behavioral change.

Cortisol is the neurotransmitter released when we’re being serious. It’s the opposite of serotonin. It stimulates an analytical mindset. A “yes, but” mentality. For an experience to stimulate the smiles we value, the seriousness needs to be balanced with some fun. It’s been said that “one part professional, one part profound, and one part play” is the secret recipe for extraordinary experiences.

Ask: Can we create opportunities for participants to play? Moments of pure fun? Chances to just be silly? Where can we design opportunities to be creative? Can we build in touchpoints that encourage curiosity and exploration?



The Elements of Smile



Attention

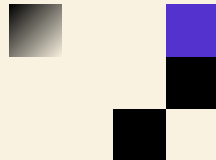
The difference between an ordinary, prosaic, run-of-the-mill experience and a mindful experience is attention. When purposeful mental engagement is required, participants switch off their auto pilot mode and activate a different part of their brain. This is the first step toward a true smile-inducing experience.

More attention means more mental availability for a marketing message, and more impact on brand and business building objectives. Greater attention leads to gains in the upper funnel (memories / recall) and in the lower funnel (purchase decisions / choice).

The tension is that the valuable attention we seek is ever more scarce. To earn people's limited attention, we must be bold and brave in designing experiences that genuinely stand out. As we like to say, if it's not remarkable, it will be invisible. Remarkable experiences earn the attention needed to create smiles and positive memories that grow brands and businesses.

A deluge of low quality, invasive marketing is draining people's attention and damaging their perceptions of our industry. When designing experiences, let's be realistic about the level of attention people are able (and willing) to give in each context, and design accordingly.

In our view, true experiences only exist when they capture and sustain someone's conscious attention. The longer we can hold a person's attention, the longer we can sustain the interaction, and the more smiles we can create.



The Elements of Smile

Remarkability

If it's not remarkable, it will be invisible. We create remarkable experiences that are designed to stand out from the sea of sameness and demand to be noticed. Invisible is impossible for us.

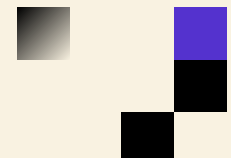
To be remarkable we work to surprise people. Experiences that stimulate smiles are often unexpected and unusual, pushing the boundaries of what is standard and expected.

Optimal Incongruence is the where something feels different and pulls people in because of the slightly unexpected approach it is taking. Brand consistency and authenticity are important, but they're also creatively limiting. When something feels slightly incongruent and unexpected, people are interested enough to pay attention.

Experiences are more likely to be memorable if they occur in unique spaces. A little bit of novelty infused into even an ordinary experience can transform it. A skateboard park on a barge floating on the Hudson River. A speakeasy at the top of a mountain trail. A BMX race in a Walmart parking lot. Seek to maximize the remarkability of our experiences, surprising the participants, and watching the smiles spread like wildfire.

The arrangement of diverse touchpoints in unique but intentional ways holds the attention of participants, who are wondering what's going to happen next. As experience designers, we can think like composers and songwriters, using dynamic rises and falls in action, creating dissonance and harmony, and adding touches of novelty to create multifaceted, unexpected experiences for participants.

Ask: Is there an opportunity to consider Optimal Incongruence? Could even the most basic touchpoints of be designed for remarkability?



The Elements of Smile

Resonance

Intentionally designing touchpoints that create emotional resonance is the next step toward generating valuable smiles. Stoking emotion drives business results.

Emotion and memory are closely linked because both involve the amygdala region of our brain. When we experience an emotional event, the amygdala activates and signals the hippocampus, where our memories are made and stored. In this way, experiences that make us smile create positive memories. And it's not just joy that has this effect, it's many other positive emotions including happiness, excitement, amusement, gratitude, pride, inspiration, awe, hope, and nostalgia. For us, those emotions are all "smiles".

And here's the really magical part: the neurotransmitters work both ways. Positive emotion doesn't just create positive memories, positive memories reactivate the amygdala, triggering the same emotional response that we're remembering. Memories influence future behavior.

Participating in a smile-inducing experience with a brand imbeds a positive memory. Then the next time that person thinks of the brand involved in that experience, the memory will trigger a similar positive emotional response. And those positive thoughts about the brand accelerate the path to purchase, loyalty, and advocacy. Smiles have value for brands and businesses.

Emotions create memories. Memories create emotions. Put our client's brand at the heart of that positive cycle, and we're in business. Marketing channels that are high emotion, like Brand Experiences, are simply more effective.

Ask: How can our experiences be designed to create a stronger emotional response? Where are the right moments to do this?

The Elements of Smile

Discovery

When a participant learns something new about themselves, the world around them, or their place in it experiences can become personally meaningful to participants. And when something has meaning, the emotion and memory created is even deeper.

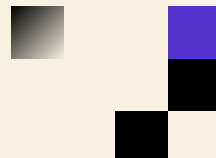
We design experiences to enable these opportunities. Moments that teach participants something and help them expand their knowledge. A new insight about themselves, or a new fact they believe to be important, or a new way to look at a long held point of view.

Discovery is often the result of co-creation, in which participants play an active role in the experience, learning something new along the way. Maybe what they discover through the experience is something new, relevant, and valuable about the brand's product or service?

Moments of discovery can become building blocks for our personal identity and worldview. For this to truly happen, participants will need time during an experience to reflect on the meaning of what has occurred and it's personal implications.

Confucius said, "I hear and I forget. I see and I remember. I do and I understand."

Ask: Where in the experience can we design an opportunity for discover, learning, and increased understanding? Can we provide space for both individual and group reflection? Could that happen during the experience, or should it happen afterwards?



The Elements of Smile

Relevance

One of our favorite experience design mantras is that we're creating experiences that are both "On Brand and On Event".

This starts with contextual relevance: communicating a relevant message to a receptive audience in a manner they will value at a place and time they're willing to listen and engage. But what makes this relevance even more powerful is when it's done in a way that remains true to the personality, positioning, and voice of the brand. On Brand, and On Event.

Getting this right starts with a meaningful understanding of the participants and an understanding of their needs (emotional, physical, psychological, etc) and their expectations at the moment of engagement. Who are they as a group? Who are they as individuals? How do they think? What do they think, feel, and do related to the brand? What do we want them to think, feel, and do?

It also requires a deep, internalized understanding of the brand. What is the heritage? Where are they going? What do they stand for? Why do they exist in the world beyond selling products and making money? What specifically do they want to achieve?

It's then about synthesizing all of that information to identify the place and time where the brand can show up and interact with that audience in an authentic and meaningful way. Often the location is predetermined, but either way the next step is understanding the nature of the place so we can anticipate the needs of the participants and the brand can show up in a seamless and relevant way that creates smiles.

The Elements of Smile

Sensation

A common element of the most smile-inducing brand experiences is the engagement of all five senses to deliver a memorable and immersive experience for participants.

Considering how each touchpoint can be designed with sensory experience in mind is a mindset that helps us elevate the overall experience we're designing and delivering.

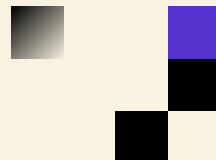
Things like literal hands-on, tactile touchpoints. A surprising use of color and texture and materials. Thoughtfully orchestrated music and sound to create the right vibe and energy.

What do you want the experience to smell and taste like? Are there aromas from the surrounding area that will flow into the experience? Is that a good or a bad thing? What food and drink flavors can we bring in to communicate the intended message?

What does the space feel like to the touch. Are participants walking on grass? Pavement? Barefoot in the sand? The location selected for the experience is vital in this regard. When you change the place, you change the experience.

Technology like touchscreens are efficient and cost effective, but pushing buttons is fun. Our brains are wired to love tangible cause and effect, so adding physical elements to interactive experiences can make them naturally more memorable. Less transaction, and more experiential.

Ask: What emotions do we want all of these sensory decisions to evoke? What kinds of sensory touchpoints will create positive emotions and generate smiles?



The Elements of Smile



Connection

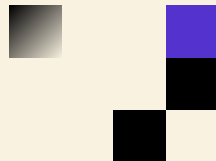
Research shows that we need to feel connected in order to experience joy. It's part of how humans are wired. Most of us are simply happier when we're interacting with other people.

Experiences designed to be shared with others tend to stimulate more positive emotions and generate more smiles. When experiences provide opportunities for interaction with others, that camaraderie, fellowship, and sense of togetherness becomes a powerful memory maker.

As we design experiences, we're intentional about giving people the opportunity to interact with each other and with the brand in a meaningful way. This creates community and connection and can enhance relationships. Those are things worth smiling about, and remembering. The biggest predictor of joy is connection.

Games. Contests. Competitions. Group activities. Prizes and rewards designed for participants to enjoy with friends or family. What else?

Ask: Did the experience offer a chance to interact with other people? To enhance friendships and build community in some way? What can we design to enable connection?



The Elements of Smile

Departure

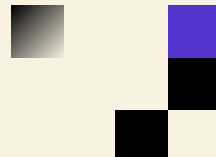
Experiences that are extraordinary and create lasting positive memories often transport people from their ordinary lives to someplace new. When we're giving participants a moment of escape and departure from their daily lives to a new, special, elevated place - we're generating smiles.

How can we make the experience feel like a different world than the ordinary world that exists just beyond the boundaries of the experience? What touchpoints can create a feeling of escape from the stresses and demands of daily life?

When people feel transported, they're more likely to be engrossed in the experience, and experience valuable heightened emotions. And when a brand is central in the experience, those heightened emotions are memory-making machines that drive value for brands.

One key to creating a sense of Departure is the concept of "liminality". Think of the liminal space as the space in between the participants' ordinary world and the extraordinary world of the brand experience we're designing. When participants must cross a liminal plane to enter into an experience, they're being given a chance to leave their day-to-day cares behind and open their minds to something new. It can be a quick and simple step like opening a secret door, or something more involved like boarding a train to an unknown destination. But whatever it is it must be an active point of transition where participants leave one world behind and embrace the rules and dynamics of another

Ask: How can we create a liminal plane that must be crossed? How can we design this magical threshold? What steps are required for participants to enter our world? What kind of cues can we create that remind people their entering a new experience?



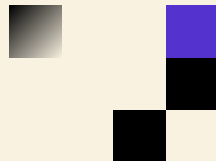
The Elements of Smile

Challenge

People don't like when things are too easy. Spin a wheel, get a prize, is not the path to memorable and meaningful experiences. Research shows that participants emotional satisfaction and fulfillment is highest when they are presented with a challenge to overcome, and have the skills to do so. A sense of accomplishment and feelings of competence and mastery are powerful emotions and they embed valuable memories tied to the brand.

There's a fine balance involved when designing these elements, ensuring the experience provides an actual challenge for participants to overcome, maybe even one where working with others is required, while keeping things aligned with their skills and abilities so success can be reasonably assured. If it's too easy, it falls flat. If it's too hard, it can create negative emotion.

When people become intrinsically motivated to participate in an experience, rather than participating for some anticipated reward, the experience becomes more meaningful to them. This often happens with experiences that involve some kind of challenge. People can discover something about themselves and the world by working through an intentionally designed challenge. Discovery creates meaning, and the more meaningful the experience, the more emotion is involved, and the more brand and business building memories are created.



The Elements of Smile

Autonomy

Choice, personalization, and a sense of agency are significant elements of smile-generating brand experiences. Designing things so that participants feel they have some control over their own experience is important.

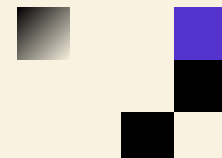
People don't want to feel like sheep being herded and processed. Sheep don't smile.

Keep the rules of the experience to a minimum, making sure they enhance the experience rather than impede it. Autonomy demands freedom.

Different participants crave different levels of participation. Skimmers stay on the surface, not often going below the surface. Swimmers jump in to play and splash around. Divers go deep, immersing themselves and staying a while longer. Smile-inducing experiences should provide valuable ways for each type to engage.

Optionality is a valuable feature in brand experiences because it satisfies the desire for autonomy. The rule of thumb: not none, not too many. Having too many choices can impair participants decision making ability. Think of a restaurant with menus that have ten pages. That's not a great experience. Most people prefer choosing between only a few different options where the differences are distinct and recognizable.

Ask: Are we giving participants choice, empowering them to choose a personalized path? Are there touchpoints we can intentionally design for the Skimmers, the Swimmers, and the Divers? Does the experience work at all three depths of engagement?



The Elements of Smile



Order

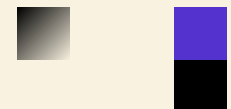
Brand experiences that create smiles and generate lasting positive memories don't just happen out of luck and intuition. They happen through an intentional, repeatable approach to experience design – from strategy, to creative development, to production planning, and all the way through execution and delivery of the experience.

The degree of order we can create both behind the scenes and throughout the experience itself plays a huge role in whether an experience ends up embedding a positive memory that drives value for the brand, or becomes a forgettable mess. And creating order takes planning.

The planning elements that we've learned over time are essential to the design and production of smile-inducing experiences include:

- Comprehensive Pre-Production Planning & Alignment
- Realistic Budget Planning & Management
- Expert Project Leadership
- Ample Staffing & Local Resourcing
- Detailed Location Research & Site Visits
- Robust Asset tracking & Inventory management
- Detailed Run of Show Development
- Proactive Crisis & Contingency Planning
- Discerning Vendor Procurement
- Thoughtful Learning & Optimization Plan

Ask: What groundwork can we lay ahead of time to create order, stability and clarity during the execution of the experience?



The Elements of Smile

Fidelity

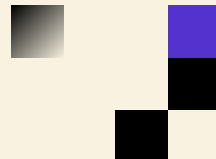
The alignment between experience design and delivery is known as implementation fidelity. High fidelity is a trademark of the smile-inducing experiences we design.

Remarkable experiences designed to create smiles can quickly become meaningless if the execution and delivery of the experience is poor.

Regardless of the objectives of the brand, the demands of the location, or the needs of the participant in the moment, there are several executional elements to consider to ensure high fidelity between the design and delivery of the experience, including:

- Leadership: accountable lead producer who understands strategy, design, and goals
- Well-trained Staff: understand the intent of the experience, expectations of their role, and how their actions will contribute to creating smiles
- Competent Staff: skilled, knowledgeable, credible, reliable, responsive
- Engaging Staff: enthusiastic, positive, welcoming
- Clear Communication: signage, wayfinding, and other info is clear
- High Quality: physical elements of the experience are high quality and comfortable
- Creative / Visuals: design, displays, lighting, signage, props all enhance the experience
- Accessibility: inclusive design for neurodivergent, sight, hearing, or mobility limitations
- Active Line Management
- Basic needs like physical safety, general cleanliness, available hydration, reliable power, protection from the elements, phone charging, restroom access, etc.

Ask: When, where, and how can we collaborate across all parts of the agency to ensure High Fidelity? How do we make the reality of the experience we create look exactly like the render?





BEFORE.

