

Something A Little Extra



Create experiential events to “wow” your camp community

|| By Marissa Allaben
and Alison Rothenberg ||

SUMMER CAMPS

often include special events on the calendar to create excitement beyond the routine activities. Yet often these events are one-dimensional as the programming may only feature costume dress-up or a themed show. To increase camper engagement, camps have been upgrading their programming to include more “experiential” events.

Experiential events transport campers into experiences that involve immersive elements, two-way interactions, and camper participation. The special-event theme of “Pop Star Day” can illustrate the difference. A one-dimensional approach would encourage campers to dress up and watch a music show. An experiential approach to “Pop Star Day” would feature multiple, integrated activities to make campers feel like VIPs at a concert. Campers receive a VIP, all-access badge and pass through “security” to enter a backstage party. They are transformed into pop stars as they ride in a limo, take photos on a red carpet, get pampered by a glam squad, and record a music track. The day concludes with a concert featuring local musicians.

The result of experiential events is to create memorable activities that emotionally connect campers with the camp’s brand and therefore increase retention. However, these complicated events take time and effort to coordinate. Following a clear plan will significantly assist your team with creating a successful, large-scale event.



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Planning And Brainstorming

● **Start early.** Brainstorm with your team in the fall to provide ample time to conceptualize the options. Write out a variety of themes and discuss how the overall experience will come to life. For example, can you enhance a circus-themed day to make campers feel like they are actually at the circus? Can you add a ticket booth, popcorn stand, and juggling workshop so the day feels more authentic?

● **Work your connections.** Think about how your network and their connections can enhance the event. Reach out to staff members, camp parents, or friends who work in industries that are a good fit for the theme. For example, ask if any camp parents work in a talent agency or media company. They may have a connection with a celebrity, sports figure, or brand.

● **Research pop-culture ideas.** Choose a theme that is currently trending in pop culture. Can you build an event around a hit movie or TV show? Is there an event experience you can recreate, such as a Renaissance Fair with jousting horses? What experiences are popular outside of camp? It's important to think about the overall "experience" vs. the entertainment.

Developing A Selected Theme

● **Finalize the budget.** Once the theme is selected, discuss an "all-in" budget with your team. Carefully review the budget to ensure you can afford the necessary entertainment and items to create a full-scale event. Use an organized spreadsheet, such as Google Drive or Excel, to itemize all purchases. Be careful not to spend the entire budget on one show or item; remember that you are creating a multi-layered experience, and many items are necessary to execute the vision.

● **Reach out to vendors and community businesses.** Many local businesses are willing to work for little





or no cost in exchange for promotion to your camp community. Ask these businesses to perform a service or provide a giveaway that relates to the theme.

- **Develop event branding.**

Create a “concept board” to visualize the branding of an event. Search for inspirational photos, colors, decorations, and fonts. Work with a graphic designer or use Canva.com to generate an event brand kit. Vistaprint.com is also a great website to design custom banners and giveaway items. Order all items well in advance, and clearly label items for easy day-of set-up.

Preparing For Day-Of Execution

- **Create an event timeline.** Write a “run of show” to review the plan with key team members. The timeline should include details for prep and setup, as well as the start and end times of the actual experience. Hand out a copy of the timeline and conduct a walk through to map out specific locations for activities. Divide all event items into categories in advance so staff members can quickly move items to relevant areas.

- **Assign team roles.** Larger events require more staff members to assist in a variety of roles. Create a list of the staff members who will be helping for the day, and review their responsibilities. Assign an “Event Staff Leader” to check in on staff members to ensure they are completing their roles effectively.

- **Organize performers and vendors.** Compose a “vendor contact sheet” with relevant information for all outside vendors. Review the schedule and timing as these vendors will be interacting with other vendors. Ensure that performers and vendors feel welcome upon arrival. Provide them with a “staging area,” where they can get dressed, eat lunch, and leave their belongings.

- **Have fun!** Watch the event come to life as campers and staff members participate in a memorable camp day.



Following Up

● Recap with video and photos.

Take photos of the setup before the campers arrive to capture the details and create a virtual photo album on social-media platforms or a website like Shutterfly to share with the public. A compilation video is also a great way to showcase the event to enrolled and prospective families.

● Share through media outlets.

Utilize social media to share the event as it's happening in real time. Create an Instagram story throughout the event so parents, alumni, and prospective families can live the experience. Reach out to local media outlets and pitch exclusive access to interviewing celebrities and/or campers and staff members.

● Offer year-round events.

Host similar immersive events during the off-season to bring alumni back to camp, and showcase sample events to prospective campers. For increased attendance, plan events around holidays, reunions, or popular characters. For example, an Easter Bunny Festival may feature an Easter egg hunt, photos with the Easter Bunny, spring arts and crafts, and more.





By planning early, utilizing key relationships, and creating an organized timeline, your camp can take traditional special event days to the next level. While not every event needs to “wow” a camp community, the well-executed experiential events will create memories for campers to last a lifetime. **CB**

Marissa Allaben is the Director of Rolling River Day Camp in East Rockaway, N.Y. She oversees operations and programming for 35+ unique camp activities offered to children ages 3 to 15. **Alison Rothenberg** is the Associate Director of Rolling River Day Camp. She conceptualizes, plans, and executes all special-event programming weekly for 900+ campers and staff members. For more information, contact camp@rollingriver.com or visit www.rollingriver.com.

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