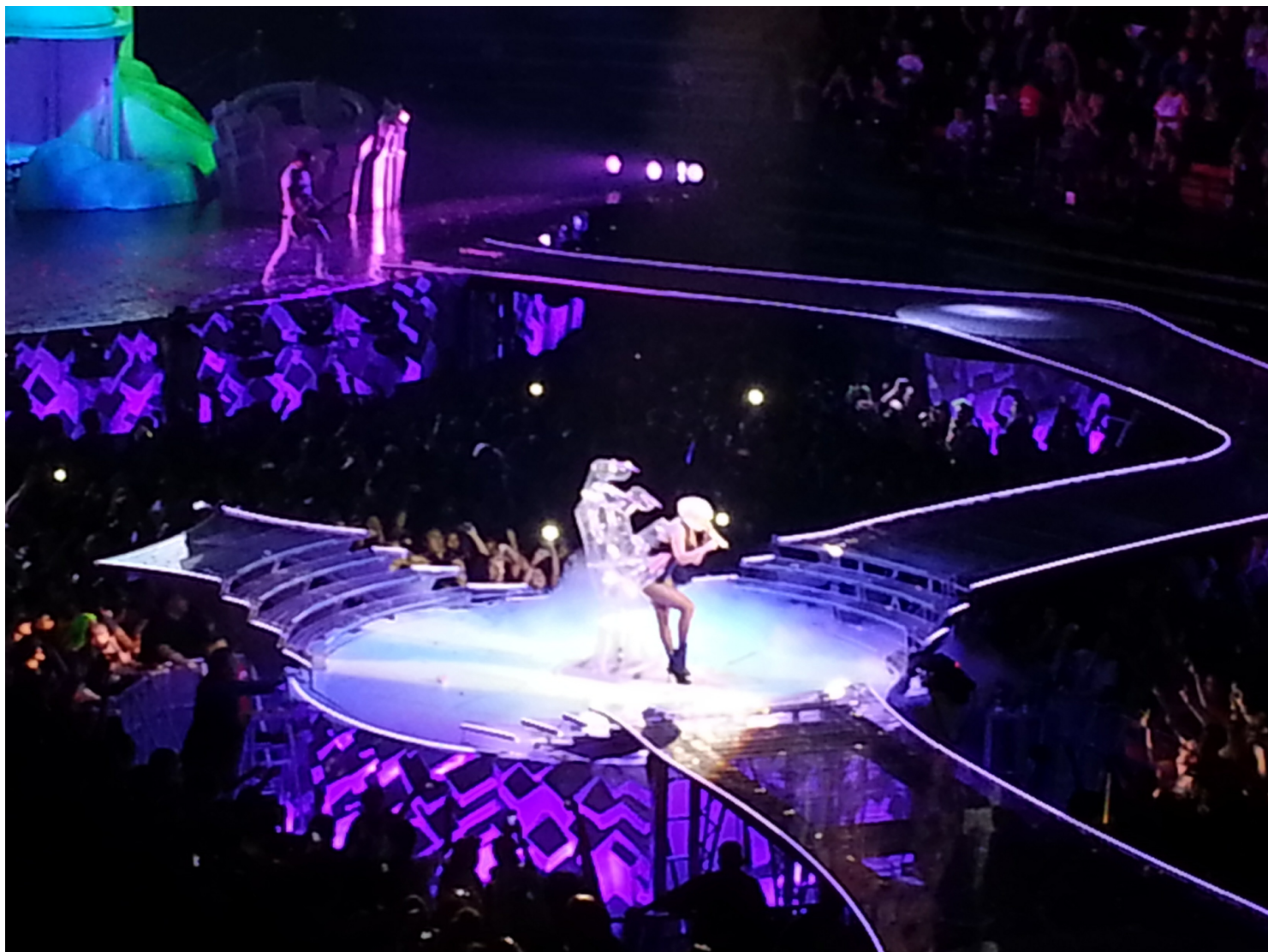


## Lady Gaga Is Still Schooling Marketers

Lady Gaga might not be dominating the headlines and airwaves as she has in years past, but she still has plenty of marketing smarts for marketers to learn from.

Lady Gaga presents her current “[artRave: The Artpop Ball](#)” tour concerts through elaborate sets, crazy dancers, and an array of antics and anthems. The concerts are sensory-overload spectacles, gaudy gigs — and breakthrough brand experiences. Businesspeople looking to make an indelible in-person impression through customer experience should follow her lead.

Lady Gaga changes costumes at least six times over the course of the two-hour concert, demonstrating the power of continuous innovation in experience design. The new outfits reveal different her sides and keep things fresh and surprising. As a concertgoer, you’re constantly looking forward to what outfit she’s going to show up in next — the anticipation and ensuing novelty hold your attention. Brands should aim to bring a similar degree of innovation, diversity, and new-ness to their customer experiences. Instead of thinking of your store as a static setting, consider how to make it more of a working stage. Instead of locking in your website design, logo, visual images, and avatars, think about how to refresh them frequently enough to attract and keep people’s attention.



Plus, Lady Gaga executes one of her costume changes on-stage. Seeing Lady Gaga topless may be as jarring as seeing her head adorned with nothing but a wig cap. But the real shocker is that she's taken something that's normally hidden backstage and brought it out for all of us to see. The scene is awkward and raw but it is also real and intimate. Pulling back the curtain on your business is a risk, but it just might pay out by drawing people closer to you and making your brand seem more human.

Lady Gaga also shows how to make brand experiences personal. Throughout her concerts, many people throw items up onto the stage including stuffed animals, posters, notes, and clothing. Unlike most other performers who ignore these items until a roadie cleans the stage, Lady Gaga uses them as a way to connect personally with audience members. She puts on the clothing and poses for photos; she goes through a wallet to find the name of its owner and then gives him a shout-out; she reads letters aloud and talks about how they make her feel. And, most significantly, she invites some folks to meet her backstage after the show.

How about if you gave shout-outs by name to the fans who go out of their way to connect with you or promote your brand? What if you invited folks "backstage" to meet with you? Or if you "tried on" ideas that are thrown out to you and showed people the result? Think about your brand experiences as two-way dialogues between you and your fans. Instead of only performing for your customers and adhering to scripted communications, consider how spontaneous personal interactions can build valuable relationships with your customers.

Lady Gaga uses storytelling powerfully throughout her shows. She tells the story of why she wrote the single "Applause;" she calls out to a young girl in the audience as she explains what was going on in her life at her age. At her concert in San Diego, she recalls an emotional weekend with her boyfriend that happened a few years ago just miles away from the venue. Performers have always used chatter between sets to explain their songs, but the emotion with which Lady Gaga speaks and the very personal nature of her stories stand out as particularly effective. She uses stories to express her values and bond with her audiences.

Brands, too, can use storytelling to cultivate emotional connections. Think beyond the usual corporate history and identify stories that capture your uniqueness – perhaps one about an important milestone or about a key customer. And then tell those stories in dramatic, creative ways.

Years ago, Lady Gaga taught marketers how to attract attention through well-designed appearances (e.g., [emerging from an egg at the 2011 Grammy Awards show](#)) and how to develop brand communities like her [Little Monsters](#). She's now setting the standard for creating mesmerizing, memorable brand experiences. Some people may love her, others may hate her, but everyone can agree she's a one-of-a-kind marketer with a lot to teach. Let's learn.