THE growth DISTILLERY
IN REAL LIFE ENTERTAINMENT
ENTERTAINMENT NATION 2026

WHAT WE DID

A large scale quantitative survey was conducted in April 2026 with a nationally representative sample of 3,647 Australian respondents aged 18 and older. The survey captured varying levels of audience engagement across six categories: Streaming, Audio, Cinema, Gaming, Live Events, and Cultural Events.

Unless otherwise specified, all data are sourced from The Growth Distillery research and the methodology outlined above.

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To understand what's really driving the behaviour behind real life event spaces, we looked at the numbers behind it, the motivations, engagement levels and audience profiles to see whether audiences are getting what they need out of event spaces.

IN REAL LIFE EVENTS OVERVIEW IN NUMBERS

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AUSTRALIANS ARE FULLY ENGAGED ACROSS ALL THREE CATEGORIES OF IRL EVENTS.

Cinema Visits L12M

~4.5 Average.

Cinema goers are ***3X*** more likely to have attended a standard cinema experience, compared to Gold Class (22%) and Imax (21%).

Live Event Attendance L12M

~4.6 Average.

Over 1 in 3 live event attendees have attended a musical theatre show or major concert tour, whilst ***over 1 in 4*** have attended music festivals, comedy shows and headline shows.

Cultural Event Attendance L12M

~3.6 Average.

Almost 3 in 4 attendees have visited a museum, whilst ***1 in 2*** have opted for art galleries, ***2 in 5*** have visited a cultural or heritage site, whilst **1 in 4** have attended outdoor exhibitions or sculpture parks, and **1 in 5** partaking in immersive experiences and science discovery centres.

IRL EXPERIENCES ARE A PARADOX IN THE ENTERTAINMENT SPACE, DELIVERING ESCAPISM AND UNWINDING WHILST SIMULTANEOUSLY OVER INDEXING ON NOSTALGIA AND SOCIAL CONNECTION.

	ESCAPISM AND UNWINDING	NOSTALGIA AND COMFORT	SELF EXPLORATION AND VALIDATION	SOCIAL CONNECTION AND SHARED ENERGY	THRILL AND CATHARSIS
CINEMA	74%	42%	13%	38%	38%
LIVE EVENTS	62%	55%	23%	50%	39%
CULTURAL EVENTS AND EXPERIENCES	65%	50%	30%	42%	24%

Despite the scale of these events, IRL experiences allow consumers to lean into social connection and comfort, a compelling mix for consumers who are looking for multiple needs to be served.

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While our census covered the wider landscape, this deep dive zooms into the three in real life (IRL) categories and unpacks what the transformational modern day consumer looks like, allowing for brands to identify what true value means to these consumers.

IN REAL LIFE ENTERTAINMENT DEEP DIVE

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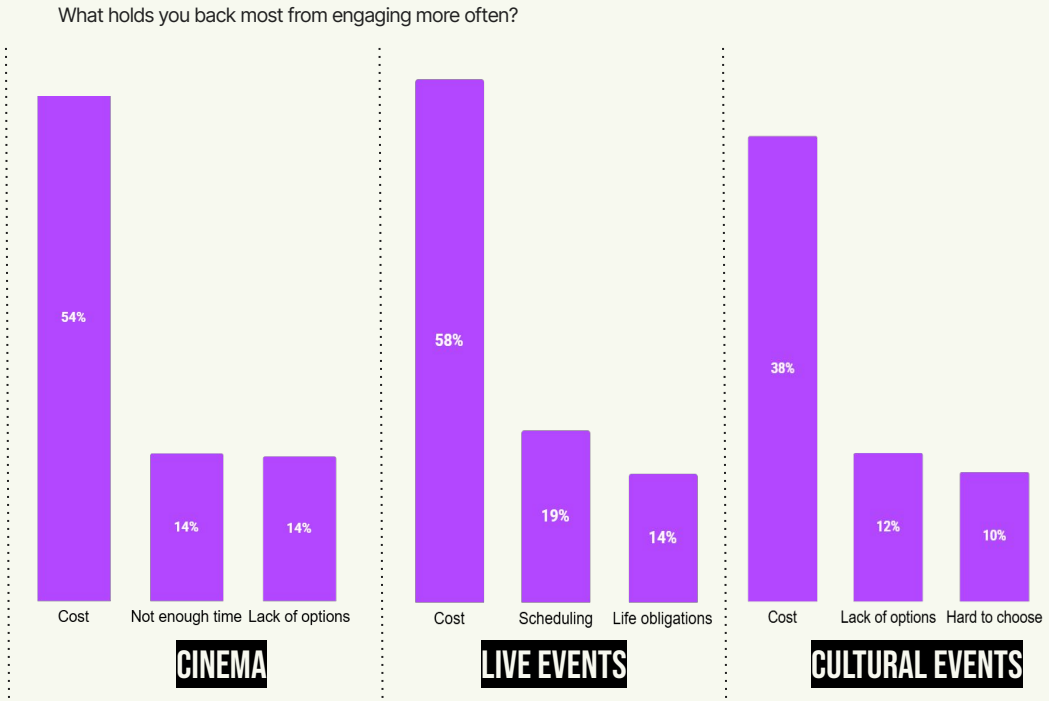
IN IRL ENTERTAINMENT COST IS THE BARRIER EVERYONE NAMES.

Across cinema, live and cultural events, price is the number one reason Australians give for not engaging with them more often.



AND AUSSIES ARE FEELING THE FINANCIAL SQUEEZE

42%

OF AUSTRALIANS FEEL WORSE OFF THAN THEY DID 12 MONTHS AGO.

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BUT COST ISN'T ACTUALLY STOPPING THEM.

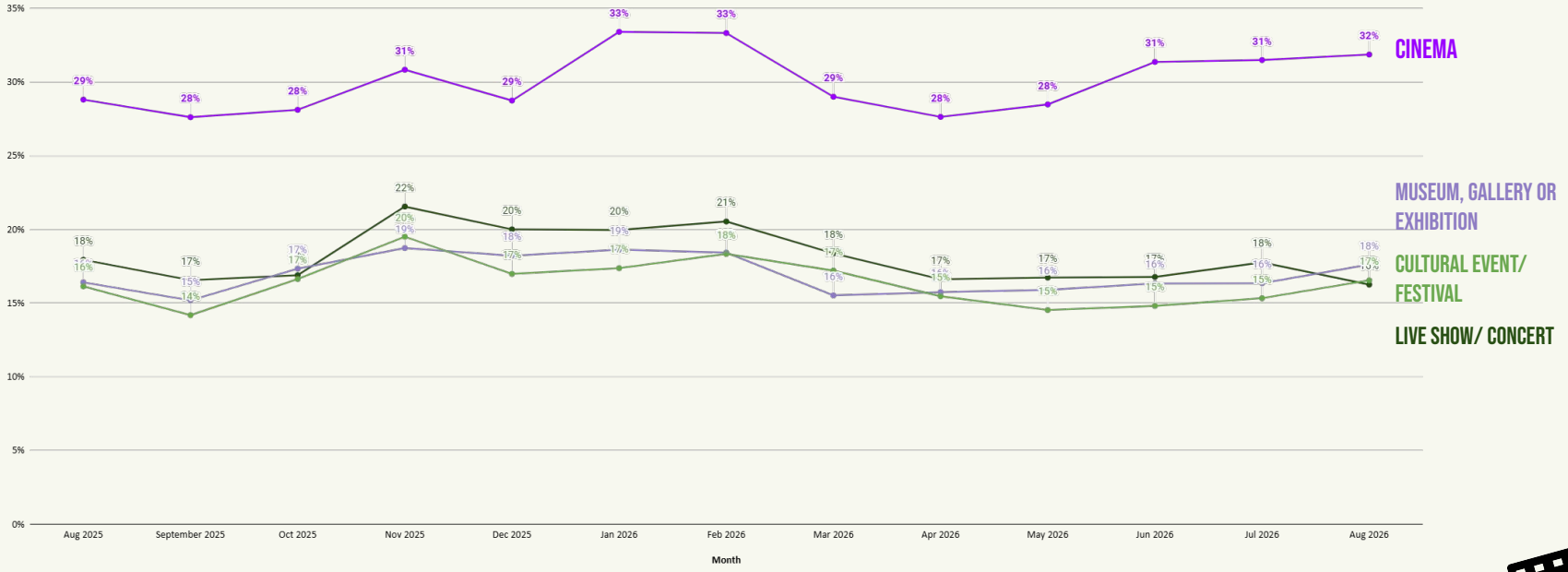
COST IS WHAT PEOPLE SAY.

VALUE IS WHAT THEY MEAN.

WHEN THE VALUE IS CLEAR, PEOPLE KEEP SHOWING UP.

Even under financial pressure, frequency holds when audiences can see what they're getting for their money. Attendance across all types of in real life entertainment is remarkably consistent over the last 12 months.

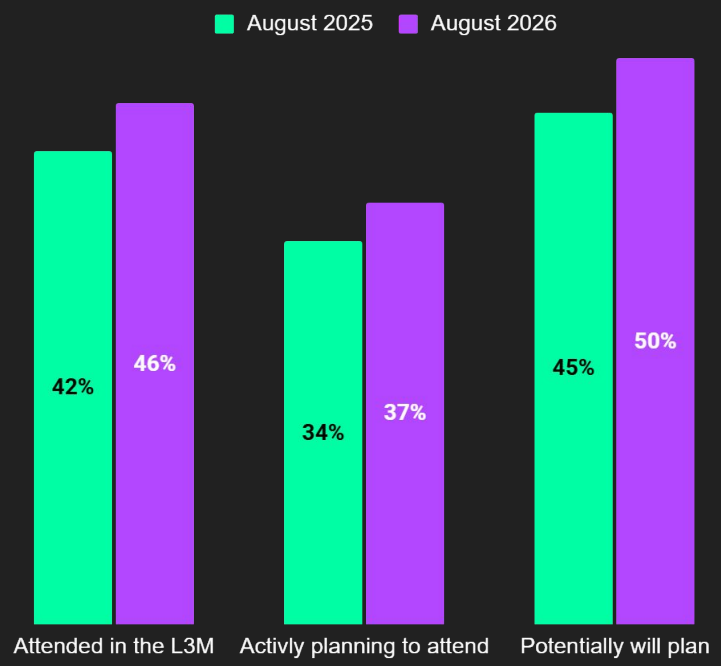
Attended in the last 3 months.



Source: Lighthouse 2025-2026 Data

AND THEY'RE PLANNING TO DO MORE, NOT LESS.

Looking at both recent attendance and future intent, audience engagement is projected to increase, not decrease.



Source: Lighthouse 2025-2026 August Data

SO PRICE ISN'T REALLY THE PROBLEM. PROVING IT'S WORTH IT, IS.

So why would a squeezed Australian keep spending on a night out?

What we value has changed. We're living in a new consumer age, where experiences matter more than 'things'. To understand value today, we need to understand the people buying it.

THE EVOLUTION OF THE CONSUMER MINDSET

INTRODUCING THE TRANSFORMATIONAL CONSUMER.

WE'VE GONE FROM BUYING WHAT WE NEED, TO WHAT WE WANT, TO WHAT WE FEEL.

NOW, WE'RE BUYING WHO WE WANT TO BECOME.

While these shifting attitudes and behaviors are often dismissed as mere "Post-Covid" trends or results of the Cost of Living Crisis, the reality is far more deeper and complex.

The truth is that consumers are moving along a distinct and predictable path, one that economists and sociologists mapped decades ago. And it's arriving right on schedule.

THREE LENSES. ONE DIRECTION

PHYSIOLOGICAL

HOW WE LIVE

From
MEETING NEEDS
to
SHAPING IDENTITY

Source: Post Industrial Society Model, Daniel Bell. 1970's

ECONOMIC

HOW WE SPEND

From
GOODS AND SERVICES
to
EXPERIENCES & TRANSFORMATION

Source: The Progression of Economic Value model, Pine & Gilmore's. 1990's

SOCIETAL

HOW WE GROW

From
SURVIVAL
to
FULFILMENT

Source: The Consumer Evolution Theory 1990's

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THE EVOLUTION OF THE CONSUMER

From survival to self-actualisation: What people buy has always reflected **what they value most.**
The **Transformational Consumer** values personal growth and self actualisation.

PRE 1760S

PRE-INDUSTRIAL ERA

TYPE OF CUSTOMER:
The Pragmatist

PURCHASED: Raw materials

PRODUCTS: Timber, wool, livestock, tools

VALUED: Basic survival and essential physical needs met

1760S - 1970S

INDUSTRIAL ERA

TYPE OF CUSTOMER:
Status Seeker

PURCHASED: Mass manufactured goods

PRODUCTS: Model T, colour TV, packaged food

VALUED: Social status through ownership and luxury

1970S - 2010S

POST-INDUSTRIAL ERA

TYPE OF CUSTOMER:
Experience Chaser

PURCHASED: Convenience, experiences and memories

PRODUCTS: Walkman/ipod, packaged holidays

VALUED: Time saving, curated experiences and enjoyment

2010S - NOW

TODAY

TYPE OF CUSTOMER:
Transformational

PURCHASED: Identity-shaping offerings

PRODUCTS: Oura ring, AI, Immersive festivals

VALUED: Personal growth over possession, self actualisation.

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AND THE MONEY IS FOLLOWING.

WE ARE SEEING HOW THE DESIRES OF TRANSFORMATIONAL CONSUMERS ARE REWRITING MARKETS.

~3X FASTER

Growth across the global experiences market grew 2.6%, whilst non-essential goods only grew by 0.8% between 2023-2025.
(La Royale Group)

~26%

Growth in live event attendees interested in VIP packages between 2023-2024.
(Mordor Intelligence)

~46%

Of Europeans in a recent study state they are willing to spend less on tech and streaming in order to fund more experiences, with 57% willing to pay more for activities that support local businesses.
(Mastercard)

WHEN WHAT WE VALUE CHANGES,
WHAT WE BUY CHANGES WITH IT.

PRICE MATTERS LESS WHEN THE
EXPERIENCE MEANS MORE.

SO THE QUESTION TO ANSWER.

HOW DO YOU CREATE MORE VALUE FOR THE TRANSFORMATIONAL CUSTOMER?

THREE WAYS TO DELIVER MORE VALUE.

1. SPARK THE TALK.

Let others tell people it's worth it.

2. SECURE THE TRUST.

Make people certain before they commit.

3. STRETCH THE EXPERIENCE.

Make it bigger than the moment.

1

SPARK THE TALK

WORD OF MOUTH IS THE NEW CURRENCY. WHEN EVERY DOLLAR HAS TO COUNT, PEOPLE TRUST EACH OTHER BEFORE THEY TRUST BRANDS.

WHILE SOCIAL BUZZ HAS ALWAYS MATTERED, GETTING PEOPLE TALKING IS MORE CRITICAL THAN EVER

The transformational consumer is hyper-vigilant and tries to reduce buyers remorse at all costs. Real time validation from peers is what eliminates psychological friction and quickens their purchase decision making.

A friend's "you have to go" takes the risk away and gets them to yes faster.

WORD OF MOUTH IS FLIPPING TOP-DOWN MARKETING.

THE CROWD NOW DECIDES WHAT PASSES THE TEST.

Word of mouth via **friends, family or colleague** suggestions is the number one tool for discovery for live and cultural events, whilst it's second for cinema (only 3% behind trailers).

38%	49%	44%
Cinema	Live Events	Cultural Events

SO HOW DO BRANDS GET PEOPLE TALKING ABOUT VALUE?

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MAKE IT WORTH TALKING ABOUT

Telling people your product or experience is valuable is very different to showing it. You must design moments people want to pass on, and let your audience sell it for you.

01
UNFILTERED UGC CONTENT

Offer perks for unfiltered, partnered content creation to provide honest reviews of events.

02
TACTICAL LEAVE BEHINDS

Be more personalised in the tokens & activations. Consider biometric summaries, particularly for thrill/high energy events and allow people to publish it and share.

03
PEER CO-CREATION

Let attendees feel like they have some say in what they are paying for. Let them vote on artists, setlists, vendors, and even location.

04
SECRET DISCOVERY

People love bragging about things they had to discover themselves. In event forums, hide secret giveaways or upgraded passes.

05
ENGINEER ANOMALIES

Predictability can ruin conversations. Create moments like unannounced cameos, secret collaborations, and surprise setlists.

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2

SECURE THE TRUST

AUSTRALIANS STILL WANT TO GO. THEY'RE JUST LESS SURE IT'LL BE WORTH IT, SO THEY'RE WAITING LONGER TO COMMIT.

THE “WAIT AND SEE” CONSUMER STRATEGY IS DERAILING ADVANCED SALES.

People are holding off, scouting for the right price, and buying later than ever. Fans are combining last minute primary purchases with secondary market scouting to ensure they secure the right price.

57% LATE BUY

57% of live music tickets are now bought in the final week before the event. The same study showed that the average window time between the date of purchase and the actual event has decline by 26% between 2022-2024.

(Eventbrite)

-33% LESS

Concert goers spent 33% less than average on tickets when purchasing them on the day of a concert, and 27% less than average the day before.

((Finance Buzz))

+14% MORE

Buying far in advance costs 14% more than the secondary market average.

(Finance Buzz)

RIGHT NOW, WAITING PAYS. SO PEOPLE WAIT.

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WHY? BECAUSE THEY DON'T TRUST WHAT THEY'RE BEING SOLD.

For real life entertainment spaces, there is a widening gap of distrust between consumers and companies due to two significant factors.

FACTOR 01

A PRICE THEY CAN'T PREDICT

A recent global study reveals Australians are among some of the strongest opponents of dynamic pricing in entertainment, rejecting surge pricing as unfair across multiple categories: live concerts (57%), theme parks (55%), and sporting events & cinema (53%).

(YouGov)

FACTOR 02

A PROMISE THEY CAN'T BELIEVE

AI-polished marketing makes it harder to tell what's real. The 2024 Glasgow Willy Wonka Chocolate Experience saw event promoters using AI generated content to sell a magical universe with ticket pricing ranging upwards of $45. The reality: an empty industrial warehouse with sparse props, resulting in police intervention and over 4,000 attendees joining online scam action groups.

CERTAINTY CREATES VALUE.

WHEN PEOPLE KNOW WHAT THEY'RE GETTING AND WHAT THEY'RE PAYING, THEY'RE HAPPY TO COMMIT EARLY.

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WHAT YOU SEE IS WHAT YOU GET

Today, consumers are increasingly skeptical of marketing that over promises and under delivers, and this challenges brands to be taken at face value. When you close the gap between expectation and reality, you drive faster purchase decisions, eliminate disappointment, and build the positive brand associations that keep consumers coming back.

01

PRICE IT UP FRONT

Eliminate hidden fees. Show the full price including booking fees and taxes upfront. When a brand surprises audiences with a 10-15% booking fee at checkout, this is the last place you want customers assessing value.

02

SHOW THE REAL THING

Consumers are highly skeptical of idealised digital renderings of an event space. Use real photography and raw, authentic video from past events to show exactly what the experience looks like.

03

TIER BY TIME, NOT PANIC

Replace real-time surge pricing with predictable release based tiers. When consumers can see a brand panicking, they know their not in control.

04

MAKE BUYING EARLY WORTH IT

To boost earlier sales, communicate better inclusions for early bird buyers. These can consist of being fully refundable, better seating, early gate access, dedicated amenities and reserved parking.

05

LOWER THE RISK OF SAYING YES.

Easy exchanges, transfers and flexibility. Make cancellation, refunding and rescheduling feel easy.

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3

STRETCH THE EXPERIENCE

THE TRANSFORMATIONAL CONSUMER DOESN'T WANT A CHEAPER TICKET. THEY WANT MORE FOR THE TICKET THEY BUY.

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PEOPLE AREN'T JUST BUYING THE EVENT. THEY'RE BUYING HOW IT MAKES THEM FEEL.

Across every category, the reason people show up is bigger than what's on the stage, screen or wall. The event is the reason to go. The experience around it is the reason it's worth it.

50%

of live event goers say they attend for the shared energy and social connection.

50%

Of cultural event goers say they attend to feel a sense of comfort and nostalgia

74%

of cinema goers say they attend to escape and unwind, with 73% saying the cinema is an important part of their routine.
(Global Cinema Federation)

THE BIGGER THE OCCASION, THE WIDER THE AUDIENCE.

When Barbie and Oppenheimer released on the same day in 2023, audiences treated it as an event, not two films.

1 IN 3

tickets for each sold in presale, well above the 13% opening-weekend benchmark.

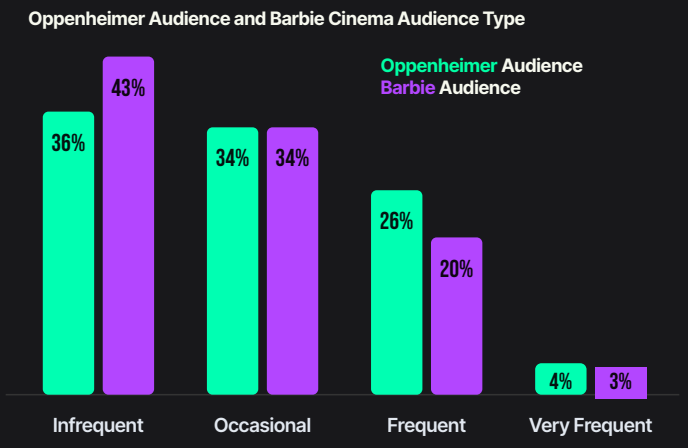
(Vista Group)

17%

of the Oppenheimer audience viewed both movies, 10% of Barbie audiences watch both.

(Vista Group)

MAKE IT AN OCCASION, AND PEOPLE WHO WOULDN'T NORMALLY COME WILL SHOW UP.



Source: Vista Group

VALUE LIVES BEFORE, DURING AND AFTER THE MOMENT.

Streaming, audio and gaming are on demand. Real life entertainment is the one category that controls the room, the crowd and the senses, and that is its advantage. Brands that design the whole journey, not just the main event, give people more reasons to say yes and more reasons to come back.

MAKE IT BIGGER THAN THE MOMENT

The event is only a few hours. The experience can last far longer. Design the build-up, the day and the afterglow so the ticket feels like it buys more than a seat.

01

BUILD THE ANTICIPATION

Give people something to do before they arrive. Recap screenings ahead of sequels, pre-show warm-up gatherings, curated playlists, or early-access previews turn the wait into part of the experience.

02

BUNDLE THE DAY

Turn a single visit into an outing. Double features and day passes in peak seasons, festival tickets bundled with dining or transport, and late-night museum sessions with food and music give people more for one decision.

03

TRANSFORM THE SPACE

Make the venue part of the story. Themed rooms, takeovers, dress prompts, signature drinks and tailored pre-show content immerse audiences before the main event begins.

04

GO BEHIND THE CURTAIN

Give fans access they can't get anywhere else. Live Q&As with cast, artists or curators, soundcheck and backstage access, making-of content and guided expert tours turn a standard ticket into a premium experience.

05

EXTEND THE AFTERGLOW

Keep the experience going once people leave. Retail partnerships, limited-edition merchandise, after-parties and members' perks give the moment a life beyond the night and a reason to return.

COST IS WHAT AUSTRALIANS NAME.

VALUE IS WHAT THEY'RE REALLY WEIGHING UP.

Australians haven't stopped showing up for real life entertainment, and they're planning to do more. But today's transformational consumer isn't just buying a ticket. They're buying who they want to become. They need proof it's worth it before they commit.

DON'T LOWER THE PRICE. RAISE THE VALUE.

1. SPARK THE TALK.

Let others tell people it's worth it.

2. SECURE THE TRUST.

Make people certain before they commit.

3. STRETCH THE EXPERIENCE.

Make it bigger than the moment.