

The Measure of Success:

IS SPORTS SPONSORSHIP WORTH THE WHISTLE?



Executive summary

Sponsorship could be one of the most value-creating elements of the marketing mix. Customers are not cynical about sponsorship - as they increasingly are about advertising. Instead, they see sponsorship as benefiting the community and providing the means for events that otherwise would not take place.

But many sponsorship programmes are entered into without being planned properly and without being measured properly. Companies invest millions of pounds in sponsorship but are they getting the returns that their investment deserves?

Existing methods of evaluation are frequently inappropriate. There is an over-reliance on awareness as a metric. And attempts to be more scientific produce confusing, complex passages of rhetoric that help neither the sponsors nor the sponsored.

From Coca-Cola to McDonald's, major sponsors are cutting back on their sponsorship outgoings or removing themselves from programmes altogether. This is because they are gradually realising that their planning has been less than effective and the returns simply do not justify the investment. It's not good enough to continue with things the way they are - not when there's so much money involved.

Marketers must act now to redress this balance. Marketers can turn customers' tacit approval of sponsorship into active support - by pushing for more effective planning, more rigorous evaluation, and more innovative sponsorship.

ONE: JUST DO IT - OR DON'T DO IT

Sponsors in the UK invest more than 1 billion pounds annually in sport. Globally, the figure is an astonishing \$20-24 billion.^[1] And an estimated €570 million was spent sponsoring the 2004 Olympics 2001 to 2004 - 29% of the total budget for the event.^[2]

Nike has signed a deal with tennis star Serena Williams believed to be worth in the region of \$55-60 million over eight years.^[3] But can Nike really expect to achieve their desired ROI from such a contract? The eight year timescale will almost certainly take Williams to the end of her career.

The story is the same the world over. In China, Red Bull is sponsoring the NBA in China in the region of \$2.5 to \$5 million.^[4] Mobile phone group O2 has embarked on a £12million sponsorship deal with UK football team Arsenal, to last until the start of the 2006/7 season.^[5] And the highest value sponsorship deal in 2003 was in the US, where telecoms giant Nextel has taken over sponsorship of the NASCAR Winston Cup Series motorsports event to the tune of \$300,000,000 over 10 years.^[6]

Staggering figures like these demonstrate the value companies place on sponsorship. But can these deals really be worth these kinds of numbers? For every \$6 billion spent on European sports sponsorship, up to \$5 billion is wasted because the sponsors are not exploiting the medium to its fullest potential, according to a report prepared by Sport Business Associates, an international consultancy to the sports industry.^[7]

As a result, many sports sponsorships are:

- Poorly planned
- Poorly measured

What do we mean by poorly planned? There are several elements to inadequate planning - and many sponsorship programmes are guilty of all of them.

- Weak targeting - sports events attract huge audiences but inevitably, much of that audience is not core target.
- Inappropriately matching sponsor with event
- Seeing sponsorship as a separate communications method - instead of integrating it into the rest of the marketing mix as part of a coherent strategy
- Sponsoring events with too short a lifespan for acceptable results to be achieved
- Sponsoring individuals disproportionately to their long-term value

As a result, many companies are cutting back on their sponsorship programmes. IBM pulled out of the Olympics after 2000. 'We concluded that the investment simply could not be justified by the available business return,' said a spokesman.^[8]

Even Coca-Cola, the highest investor in sports sponsorship worldwide, is now showing signs that it wants to tighten its belt on sponsorship. Having spent in excess of \$1 billion pounds annually in sports sponsorship for the last few years, Coke is recognising that investing millions of dollars in sports events is not, perhaps, the real thing after all.

'Hopefully we'll do more and spend less,' says Chuck Fruit, Coke's senior Vice President for worldwide media and alliances. 'Sponsorships can be a critical component in our marketing mix. But we're taking a more disciplined approach to how we activate them.'^[9]

Nigel Geach, UK Director of Sports Marketing Surveys, an international research agency and consultancy which specialises in sponsorship and the sports sector, acknowledges that some companies go into sponsorship programmes 'without clearly defining objectives - which is the critical thing. You've got to ensure it's leveraged and measured so that you get return on investment as well as return on objectives.'^[10]

It's vital that this situation is redressed. The costs of sports sponsorship are leaping up, making them unviable unless they can be more effectively planned. FIFA, for example, is demanding higher and higher rates for sponsorship of the UEFA matches, with the cost of TV rights jumping sixteenfold to about \$900 million.^[11]

TWO: POINTS DON'T MAKE PRIZES

Key to better sports sponsorship programmes is more effective planning.

In the 2002 World Cup, first-time sponsor Hyundai achieved more than twice the cut-through that JVC achieved. How was this possible? JVC had been sponsoring the World Cup for 20 years - surely it should have been more associated with the event and achieved better results? The reason is that JVC planned their campaign ineffectively. Perhaps

resting on their laurels after so long an association, JVC spent no money on TV advertising airtime, distinct from the sponsorship itself. Hyundai, on the other hand, spent heavily on advertising airtime, and as a result was the much more successful sponsor.^[12]

As well as indicating the huge significance of TV as the effective medium in which to advertise (JVC did spend some money on radio and newspaper advertising), this shows how sponsorship should be a component of the mix, not the be-all and end-all in itself.

There is also a prevalence of sponsorship deals conducted on the hoof - the CEO of a particular company likes a particular football team, and so sponsors it for the next season. In the early days of sponsorship, an engineering firm would sponsor an opera house - because the chairman's wife liked opera. David Haigh, Chief Executive of Brand Finance plc, gives the example of Ernst & Young, which in 2000 sponsored a Monet exhibition at the Royal Academy.

'Now I'm sure E&Y's PR department waxes lyrical at all this art sponsorship,' Haigh says. 'But what message are hard-nosed financial and business folk meant to take away from this? I am doubtful that many of the people going through the turnstiles even notice the sponsor is E&Y. Most clients don't care and are probably not interested.'^[13]

Why do companies engage in sponsorship programmes with such little thought? Because sponsorship is still a soft science. 'It works - do it and don't worry about it,' is a common view.

Whyte & Mackay sponsored Leeds United in 2003.^[14] Why? Statistics showed a high prevalence of beer drinking amongst supporters, so a beer company might have had justification in sponsoring it. And recently Bulmers have successfully promoted their Strongbow brand by sponsoring the team - cider having a similar demographic to beer. But did Whyte & Mackay really expect their sponsorship deal to lead to an increase in whisky drinking? The sponsorship was inappropriately matched with the event.

And there is too much focus on brand-building at the expense of solid returns. When South Korea co-hosted the 2002 World Cup, Deputy Prime Minister Jin Nyum said that the games were about 'the brand-making of Korea' - hoping to benefit with the association of Japan, a country with a much better manufacturing brand image. But was there any economic advantage to South Korea? Not according to ABN Amro analyst Franklin Poon, who described the event as 'largely an expensive party without any long-term benefits.'^[15]

An ill-thought out strategy does nothing for a company's sales or brand values. Cathy Ace, a marketing consultant at the University of British Columbia, Northwestern, explains why: 'Because it's hard work to get it to work, and damned hard work to get it to work well! The best sponsorships take time, planning, the best will to succeed on the part of all parties and excellent execution that is perfect down to the last detail. Put simply - it often doesn't work as well as it could because it is frequently poorly planned and unprofessionally executed.'^[16]

How can sponsorship be more effectively planned? Firstly, consider what companies aim to achieve from sponsorship.



Diagram 1: Goals of sponsorship

- **Generate awareness.** There is an estimated global audience of 1 billion for each Premier League match. And unlike much standard advertising, which is screened out by the viewer (by channel hopping during ad breaks), sponsorship increases awareness because it is omnipresent. A sponsor's logo will appear much more regularly and frequently than a conventional advert.
- **Increase brand name retention and reduce brand decay.** The sponsorship is remembered as part of the event itself - simply calling an event the Stella Artois Championship creates much more awareness than a series of advertisements. A sponsor's omnipresence reduces brand decay.

- **Grow brand equity.**
- **Grow market share.** Kodak and Coca-Cola claim the multi-million dollar sponsorship deals at the 2004 Olympics are worth it to knock out the competition.^[17]
- **Generate goodwill.** Unlike advertising, sponsorship positively associates the brand in the mind of the consumer - because it is seen to be supporting a sport (for example) and thus putting something into the community. An IOC survey showed that 53% of respondents stated they felt more favourable towards a company if it is associated with the Olympic movement.^[18]
- **Increase sales.**

THREE: THE GOODWILL FACTOR

Sponsorship could and should be one of the most flexible, creative and cost-effective methods of effective marketing communications. This is because it is one of the few forms of marketing that consumers are not cynical about.

More than four out of five adults acknowledge that without sponsorship, many important events and services would not take place. Instead of being cynical about sponsorship, 79% of people think that it is a good way for councils and local communities to get funding for events. And 77% of people think welcome all forms of sponsorship that benefit schools.^[19]

Compare this to conventional advertising. 75% of people questioned by Mintel admitted to fast-forwarding through the adverts when they video record a TV programme. When prompted, nearly half those questioned thought that advertising promotes 'pointless desires and superfluous needs'.^[20]

It's generally accepted now that traditional advertising has lost some of its impact because of the proliferation of media channels and the consequent information overload facing consumers.^[21] Nine out of ten advertising agency clients feel that the traditional power of advertising has been eroded over the past five years.^[22]

So sponsorship is a key area where marketers could reverse the consumer's trend towards cynicism and weariness of marketing messages. At the moment, there is still some hostility to sponsorship - in the same Mintel study, 38% of adults think sponsorship is 'devious' - but the dislike of sponsorship is significantly lower than that of advertising. There is room here for marketers to work on the public's perception of sponsorship and highlight the benefits it brings.

If sponsorship is potentially such an effective marketing tool, why is it not achieving the returns it could? If consumers generally support the idea of sponsorship, why are companies curtailing their sponsorship activities?

FOUR: AWARENESS IS NOT ACTION

The corollary to effective planning is effective measurement. When it comes to measuring the effects of sponsorship, the focus is too frequently on awareness as the key metric of the sponsorship programme. Much as with some forms of advertising, the sponsor's view is that if we have our product filling the arena, that cements our product in the customer's mind as opposed to that of a rival.

Companies know that the potential awareness generated by TV coverage of major events is phenomenally large. Formula 1 has a worldwide TV audience of 53 billion people. The

2004 UEFA Euro 2004 had an estimated European audience of 9 billion viewers.^[23] Surely, argue the sponsors, achieving that kind of awareness makes it worth paying major sums.

But there is a gap between sponsors' contentment at having achieved 'awareness' and the fact that customers do not buy, once the initial period of sponsorship is over. Only 5% of viewers say they are influenced to buy a particular brand because the company sponsors an event.^[24]

Like the low hit rates with direct mail, this 5% is significant when the audience is so vast. But it shows that there is plenty of room for improvement - could we turn that 5% influence into 10%, or 15%?

We believe awareness does not work as a metric any more. More than half of UK adults failed to recognise any of the 8 official sponsors of the official sponsors of Euro 2004, according to a Marketing Week survey.^[25] 'JVC and Canon struggled to achieve more than 1% of recognition of their ads during the tournament', the report said

And at the 1992 Winter Olympics, 57% of surveyed TV viewers in the US claimed that Wendy's was the official sponsor of the games. In fact it was McDonald's. A somewhat less impressive 37% of viewers got this right.^[26]

Decorating a sports ground with logos does not automatically lead to awareness. And even if awareness is achieved, it's debatable whether that awareness translates into sales. We need more effective metrics and a more rigorous evaluation of whether a sponsorship programme works or not.

FIVE: THE GRASS IS GREENER

A sponsorship programme has to be coherently planned, effectively measured and have the spark of originality that lifts it above the opposition.

IBM has sponsored the Wimbledon Lawn Tennis championship since 1990. The programme is successful because it matches the six-point plan outlined below (See Diagram 2, 'Six steps to sponsorship success'). The event is relevant to the sponsor, because 'it's the combination of the technology showcase and similar brand values that make the sponsorship highly relevant to both the AELTC (All England Lawn Tennis Club) and IBM,' according to Christian Johansson, IBM UK's Strategic Brand and Advertising Manager. 'We are able to demonstrate and communicate our brand values of client success, trust & innovation through the solution we provide to the AELTC.'^[27]

The relationship avoids the problems associated with one-off sponsorship - the partnership is now in its fifteenth year. The sponsorship is innovative, with IBM willing to invest budget in wireless applications that enable viewers, journalists and photographers to stay in touch with events on the court. Giant plasma screens at train stations and TV screens in taxis carried live feeds of scores - the excitement of Wimbledon is conveyed to people on the move, and it is clear to the customer that it is IBM that has supplied these innovations, because of the prevalence of the uniform 'Wimbledon is on' strapline.

The taxis carried adverts on the side of the cabs saying 'Get in, Wimbledon is on'. Once inside, the captive passenger was shown a bespoke IBM trailer, with the live score running across the top of the screen.

Innovation like this makes the sponsor appealing because the customer appreciates the investment the sponsor has made for the customer's enjoyment - it doesn't come across as irrelevant sponsorship by a company interested only in raising its profile and making money. The relationship has become a partnership. 'The technology is what the club wants,' says Johansson, 'and the marketing of Wimbledon makes it useful to IBM.'

And IBM measure the results of the sponsorship proactively. 'We look at Wimbledon's objectives and IBM's objectives,' says Johansson. 'We provide technical solutions for them, and IBM's marketing department creates customer pull.' Johansson points to the hospitality suites that are part of IBM's remit at the event. 'We have more than 1,000 customers and 150 Business partners passing through these suites in the two weeks,' he says. 'We aim to develop and enhance customer relationships, whilst they are enjoying tennis.'

Web stats provide effective metrics of success. Click-through rates were 5 times the industry average and the site - which again used IBM technology to increase capacity - had 21.8 million site visits. 'Within three weeks of the championships, we are already seeing significant lead revenue contribution to the business, thus justifying the continued investment in both the technology solution and from marketing,' says Johansson.^[28]

It's by constantly re-evaluating how the partnership works on both sides that ensures IBM stays true to its promise of providing flexible - 'on demand', as they define it - solutions.

SIX: TOUGHER METRICS

Better measurement is the single most important challenge facing the sponsorship industry, according to Sean O'Neill, Diageo's Brand and Market Communication director. 'I also believe that it's the biggest opportunity,' he says.^[29]

Himanshu Vaishampayan, Global Brands/Communications Consultant to Shell International Petroleum, agrees that awareness is a weak metric. 'Shell have tried to move beyond awareness,' he says, 'and we have three different measures to evaluate the Ferrari sponsorship, which is the company's largest deal.'^[30]

- Evaluate the exposure the brand gets on the signage. 'We discount that heavily,' says Vaishampayan, 'because there's a difference between those viewers who notice the brand, and those who notice the cars. But we still try to attach a figure to it.'
- Shell assign a Preference Premium - this compares differences between those who are aware of the sponsorship, and those who are unaware of it.
- A Purchase Premium is also assigned. This compares the difference in purchase share of those who are aware of Shell's sponsorship of Ferrari, compared with those who are not. The technique attempts to translate awareness into a solid indicator of financial return; however as it is newer, it has not been tested as rigorously as the Preference Premium methodology.

The usefulness of the Purchase Premium technique is yet to be tested and communicated to a wider audience. But it demonstrates that Shell are recognising that the purpose of sponsorship is no longer about

increasing brand awareness. The intention is to make sure 'that the value received is greater than the amount we spend on it,' confirms Vaishampayan.

SEVEN: RECIPE FOR SUCCESS

A successful sponsorship programme must be seen as part of the integrated whole of the marketing mix. It mustn't be expected to do the work of advertising - 'advertising informs, sponsorship transforms the product into a different awareness,' says Nigel Geach. 'Take Formula 1 - the image of your product as sponsor is transformed into the excitement, glamour and speed associated with the race.'^[31]

- **Don't sponsor one-off events.** A successful sponsorship will require a long lifespan.
- **Plan, plan, plan.** The sponsorship programme should be part of the integrated mix - it shouldn't be treated separately.
- **Set clear, measurable objectives.** Awareness should be the beginning, not the end. Distinguish between whether you are developing the brand - in which case awareness is a useful start - or trying to achieve more than brand recognition, in which case you need a better metric than measuring awareness.
- **Make sure the event matches the sponsor.**

- **Be disciplined with budget allocation.** 'Budget allocations should be on the basis that no more than 50% of the total budget is spent on the sponsorship itself,' says Cathy Ace, 'thereby allowing at least 50% of the total budget to be spent on leveraging the sponsorship investment. This budget should be seen as sacrosanct, or else the initial investment becomes almost null and void.'
- **Be creative.** Take some managed risks. It's the unusual or unexpected that can create the differentiator that makes your sponsorship noticed - like IBM's use of technology in sponsoring Wimbledon.

to what sponsorship is trying to achieve. But are we up to the challenge of redressing this and making sponsorship more rigorous?

Sponsorship could be the most powerful component of the communications process. It's one of the few methods available that can benefit more than one party at a time, and it is also one of the few methods available that has the ability to deliver a controlled message to one single person for a very short time - or to reach literally billions of people, globally, for a lengthy period of time. The public are in favour of sponsorship. And solid metrics like those being developed by Shell will enable marketers to present the results of sponsorship to CEOs and finance directors in satisfying terms.

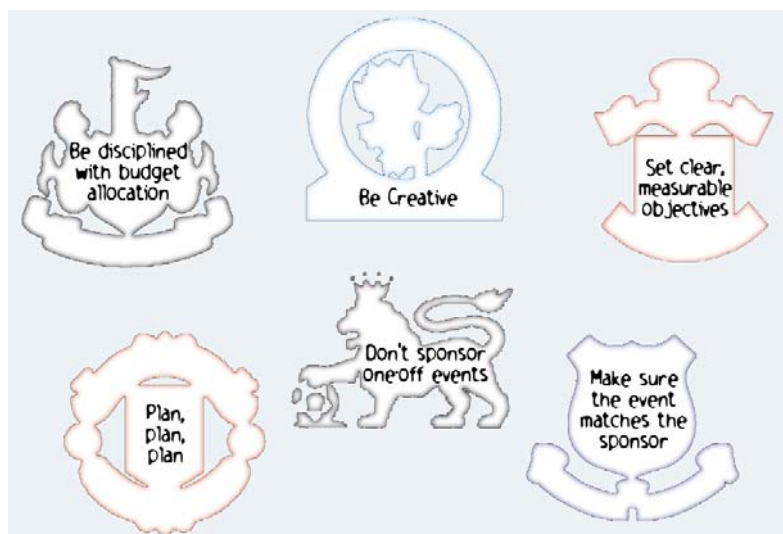


DIAGRAM 2: Six steps to sponsorship success

EIGHT: MARKETERS CAN MAKE THE DIFFERENCE

Many companies seem content to leave sponsorship as a soft science, despite the money poured into it. Marketers can make the difference between success and failure by pushing for more rigorous measurement and a tougher approach

Sponsorship is also the one part of the mix that can really change the perception of a brand. 'If you're a fuddy-duddy brand and want to be perceived as young and trendy, sponsorship's the fastest way to change your image,' says Nigel Geach. 'For example, in the 90s, Renault was perceived as a staid family saloon car. Since its association with Formula 1, it's been transformed into a sexy, modern vehicle.'^[33]

Perhaps we will be left in the situation where we have to say 'we know it works but we don't know why', and continue with soft metrics and vaguely measured returns. But if marketers push for more rigorous planning and harder evaluation of the value of sponsorship, it might yet reach its potential and become the strongest element in the marketing mix. That really would be an Olympian achievement.

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Appendices

Increase sales

Samsung experienced a 44 per cent increase in telecoms sales in the year following the Sydney 2000 Olympics, and augmented this by sponsoring the 2004 Athens games. Samsung worked in close collaboration with the IOC and ATHOC to increase communications efficiency in the games, providing more than 22,000 wireless devices to athletes, officials, media and staff.

[Source: Marketing Matters, January 2004 page 5.]

Awareness does not work

There are notable exceptions. For some companies awareness is a useful metric, particularly if the aim of the sponsorship is purely to increase brand memory and/or if the company is new, or small in size, and wants to increase its profile. 1180.com, for instance, sponsored BMW in the 1998/99 Formula 1 season at a relatively low cost. 'No one had ever heard of them before,' says Tim Hymans, Marketing Manager for Toyota Motorsport (Formula 1). 'But awareness went up 75% after one season of sponsoring Formula 1.'

[Source: Correspondence with insights, August 2004.]

Exposure is the most important thing in sports sponsorship for companies like Vodaphone, which are keen to increase brand retention. Heavily branded hoardings and banners, placed at narrow intervals, constantly remind the viewer of the omnipresence of the brand. These messages are semi-consciously absorbed by the viewer, and the omnipresence ultimately influences the viewer to trust, invest in and use the product.

And there are many metrics that will measure effectively and in great detail exactly how much brand exposure is achieved highly. In Formula 1, each section of the car - the bonnet, wings, door panels, roof, boot and so on - are separately measured by Sports Marketing Surveys and they can calculate exactly how much brand exposure each section of the car achieves. 'Every calculation can then have a value put on it,' says Tim Hymans.

Sports Marketing Surveys' measurements are quantitative, as in the above case, and this works well for companies who want precise measurements of brand exposure. It also enables both sides of the sponsorship deal to agree on an exact value to apply to the deal. But for B2B sponsorship, qualitative metrics are needed.

Awareness is achieved

Even if the programme successfully generates awareness, how long does that increased awareness last after the event has ended? A major player with a fiercely competitive challenger on their tail might find value in constantly re-emphasising their presence to consumers. So for Coke battling Pepsi and McDonald's fighting Burger King, keeping the rival off the hoardings is worthwhile. Both companies sponsor the Olympics, the World Cup and the UEFA European Cup. But for the majority of companies, the value of increasing awareness is debatable.

Most awareness based measurements in the past have been weak - counting up the column inches in newspapers that the sponsorship achieves, for example, or monitoring sports publications for brand exposure in photographs and commentary. All admirable attempts to turn the intangible into the tangible, but ultimately vague and ineffective.

Plan, plan, plan

Techniques for good planning:

- Avoid 'on the hoof' sponsorship decisions.
- Be aware of, and use the new legislation to protect yourself against, ambush marketing. [FN and link to the Nov 2003 legislation].
- Avoid sponsoring individuals unless you are very confident their brand will stay strong for the duration of the campaign. Since the revelations of his affair, David Beckham has been dropped from Marks & Spencer's children's clothes line, a sponsorship deal that was worth £10m.
[Source: David Taylor, FA must pick Apple lessons for brand new start, The Guardian, 6th August 2004, p xx.]

But on the other hand, Vodafone have renewed their sponsorship deal with him.

- Don't sponsor one-off events. Cathy Ace: 'Often the sponsor doesn't think enough about the long term nature of a successful sponsorship relationship, and, sometimes, nor does the sponsored party. Whilst special event sponsorships can work, it is often those where the relationship grows over time that bear most fruit, using the time to build the relationship between the parties in the minds of the target audiences.'

Make sure the event matches the sponsor.

'Do brand suitability research before any sponsorship deal,' recommends Cathy Ace, 'to check match between the supporters of the event, and the product. The match between the sponsor and the sponsored should be discussed at length and understood by both parties: often the sponsored person/team/venue doesn't understand fully what the sponsor wishes to achieve and therefore cannot contribute to the sponsor's success as much as they could or would like to.'

[Source: Correspondence with insights, June 2004]

Solid metrics

General Motors has built an evaluation model that 'assigns value to the assets of a promotion' with respect to GM's value, not marketplace value, according to Steve Tihanyi, GM's director of marketing alliances and regional operations. 'We're trying to bolster the science part of it, but you need to have a vision of the market dynamics and what a certain sponsorship can do for you.'

[Source: http://promomagazine.com/mag/marketing_road_map]

Another technique is event study analysis, which examines the impact of a single event on the stock value of the firm. Event study analysis is accepted as a viable metric in finance and economics, and has recently been introduced to market research as well [Source: Assessing market value of event sponsoring: corporate Olympic sponsorships, Miyazaki, Anthony D. Journal of Advertising research, Jan/Feb 2001].

This method assumes that stock prices reflect investor assessments of the present value of the firm.

Notes and Sources

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