
THOUGHTS: ENGAGING AUDIENCES THROUGH SPORT SPONSORSHIP

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Sponsorship has been considered as a powerful execution tool (which no doubt helps to raise mass awareness of a brand), it also presents an opportunity for a brand to better manage its reputation, especially pertinent in a world where reputation governance is an important function within brand guardianship.

A brand will enter the world of sponsorship with an objective; typically - and in the most part historically - to raise awareness. Now however, sponsorship has the ability to deliver so much more; to enhance the reputation of a brand and bring positive association to the values and core DNA which defines that brand. This potential brings with it the importance to define 'why' - why a brand has associated itself with a specific event or initiative.

The question 'why?' brings with it some imperative considerations; what is the link with the core business and brand strategy? And what is the demographic the brand is trying to appeal to?

Only once the strategic match is realised can a compelling story around the partnership of your brand and the event which you are sponsoring be told. If this is not done then you are simply placing your logo in the environment without communicating why you are there and what you want to the consumer to think about your brand.

Consumers will make up their own mind about your organisation and find synergies with their lifestyles, however the more you can influence this and promote your attributes and motivations, the more your message and ultimately your product/purpose will resonate with the consumer.

Credibility is important, brands now are interacting with people's life more and more, so it is important that your presence in the environment of sponsorship is neither intrusive nor redundant. The resulting perception of the sponsorship link up with the consumer should ultimately benefit your organisation and the event which you are sponsoring.

By defining a truly compelling message and visual expression your brand will not only create relevance and appeal to your target audience, but also create differentiation in what is a very competitive landscape, where many brands compete for airtime and stand out. A good example of a brand that has done this well is Castrol. A brand recognised for its rigour in analysis, technology and innovation of premium lubricants it has successfully developed a proposition in sports sponsorship known as 'Winning Performance'. Known for its ability to understand what it takes to win, enables them to credibly enter the world of sport and tell a compelling story through the eyes of that sport and talk directly with their consumers and fans in a relevant and meaningful way.

The ability to achieve a link with your audience does not come as easy as stamping your logo on a perimeter board. It comes through careful consideration of the message you are communicating, the channels of communication you are using and the media you are buying to deliver your brands message.

Once your brands strategic link and visual expression is defined, consistency of the message and expression of that message becomes of paramount importance. How you cascade that message across the different audience types in different markets becomes a challenge in itself. By developing and defining proof points for why that message is relevant to that consumer will help guide local markets to effectively cascade the message in a consistent way and a way which does not deviate from the core strategy, 'the reason to believe'.

Regardless of whether the initiative is being run centrally or locally, guidelines are imperative. Without clear directions for strategy, messaging, tone of voice, and visual execution, consistency and real effectiveness will never be achieved. As a result your brand will become fragmented as consumers will hold a different perception of your brand in different markets, resulting in an inconsistent representation of your brand.

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Sponsorship guidelines are not a duplicate of corporate or other centralised guidelines you may have. Instead they are a guide for how your brand is represented within a specific scenario - how your central brand values are represented through the lens of the initiative or event you may be sponsoring. They allow the integrity of the Masterbrand to be maintained; however flexed to suit a specific requirement.

The guidelines therefore achieve two key objectives; firstly, they provide all marketers and agencies with the strategic intent, the key messages and execution guidance, to effectively and consistently deploy the intended message to your audience. Secondly they inform how the event/initiative relates back to the Masterbrand. Guidelines will help with this execution and enhance the reputation of the Masterbrand through effective deployment.

Sponsorship is far more than just raising awareness of your brand. Simply placing a logo in a break bumper or branding a perimeter board is neither credible nor differentiating. In this instance the message and visual execution will create a negative attribution with your brand. Carefully considering the strategic link, the visual representation of your brand and the event/initiative, your strategy, the messaging and the visual execution of how the branding features will create a positive attribution with your brand.

Approaching this consistently through the use of sponsorship guidelines across all markets will define and positively impact the reputation of your brand.

At The Brand Union we stand by these strategic fundamentals but always seek to push our approach that bit further by creating sponsorship and creative strategies for our clients which challenge convention and break protocol.

We believe that in order to truly differentiate and cut through the noise a sponsorship campaign must truly excite the consumer. A technology company putting its name on the bonnet of an F1 car will not engage their consumer or enhance the reputation of their brand. It is a literal partnership which in many instances is thought up in the boardroom.

In contrast the further you stretch the articulation and visual representation of your brands core DNA the more you will engage with your consumer and enhance the reputation of your brand. The unexpected and the exciting will engage your consumer and create advocacy for the message you are trying to promote. It is however important to retain and represent the attributes which are unique to your brand, without these the reason 'why' is lost in translation.