

The title "Brand lessons from Russia 2018" in large, white, sans-serif font, centered over a background image of a smiling man and a brick wall.

# Brand lessons from Russia 2018

The word "INSIGHT" in white, uppercase letters, underlined.

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There's an art to successfully reaching huge audiences at scale like the FIFA World Cup. Misha Sher, VP Sport & Entertainment at MediaCom explores who got the mix right at Russia 2018.

In the UK, the 2018 World Cup was the most-viewed World Cup to date. This was in no small part due to the number of different broadcast channels and platforms on which fans could view matches. It also helped that England progressed deep into the tournament, helping to add more than £100m to pub revenues.

A few brands also did well. But what separated the brand winners from those that failed to get out of the group stage was a willingness to be brave and to leverage the power of storytelling to connect with a broader audience.

Here are five things we can learn from them:

## Go beyond TV

Even though global sports tend to attract huge audiences, brands need to think beyond the spot. There are a plethora of ad-break distractions that go well beyond making a cup of tea, as fans turn to their phones to broadcast reactions, opinions, collect stats or see what other pundits and pros are talking about. As official Twitter stats revealed, 58% of UK fans followed Twitter updates while watching the games.

British Airways took advantage of the power of social during Russia 2018, by sharing a special boarding pass for a passenger by name of Football, who was flying from Moscow to Home. This, of course, referenced the Football's Coming Home song, which was being sung by fans all over the UK. The mock boarding pass also ran in press and on digital OOH.

Petroleum giant Caltex also thought beyond TV, rebranding five petrol stations in Australia 'Cahilltex' after the influential Socceroos midfielder Tim Cahill.

## Tell stories

When it comes to sports sponsorship, there are winners and losers. The winners are those who understand the power of stories and have the desire to bring something to the party. They don't take their positions for granted and don't expect to build affinity simply because they are associating themselves with sport.

One brand that stood out at Russia 2018 was Gatorade. Its ['Everything Changes'](#) film, which featured FC Barcelona players Lionel Messi and Luis Suarez, told the story of what happens when teammates become rivals. It topped YouTube's top 20 sponsored ads, proving fans are still happy to watch adverts and sales content when they can do so on their own terms.

Tequila brand El Jimador adopted a similar storytelling approach with 'Celebrate the Moment', an animated spot which told the story of former Mexican national player Luis Hernandez.

## Involve fans

Fans are fanatical about their team. They talk about them winning, and they talk to and engage with relevant content. And brands seeking a presence on ad-free broadcast platforms must connect with them.

At Russia 2018, Budweiser used its official partnership rights to crowdsource the Man of the Match award on Twitter, bringing fans closer to the game while allowing its voice to be heard.

Adidas also involved fans. Its 'Creativity is the Answer' campaign used a 56-strong team of brand endorsers – including players like Paul Pogba, and entertainment stars like Pharrell Williams – to encourage fans to share their own World Cup stories.

## Provide utility and stick to your business goals

There is more to life than ad awareness and McDonald's clearly realised that when they used their official rights to drive their underlying business needs.

Knowing that passionate sports fans don't have time to eat when there is so much football on, McDonald's used the tournament to push its McDelivery service (via Uber Eats), adding 200 restaurants specifically for the World Cup to ensure fans were getting fed. It used the competition to launch this service in Spain, France, Germany, and South Korea.

In Australia, electronics giant Samsung launched 'TIMVITE', an interactive digital campaign that encouraged fans to invite their friends over for the big matches via a personalised video invitation from national player Tim Cahill (created via a chatbot).

## Think beyond share of voice

Share of voice doesn't translate into share of mind, especially when consumers are seeking closer relationships with brands. The smartest brands at Russia 2018 recognised that the game was only a part of the equation.

One brand that understood this was Tesco. Its clothing sub-brand F&F tied up with charity Campaign Against Living Miserably (which promotes awareness of male mental health) to promote a new range of clothing. By creating t-shirts that together make the flag, the brand highlighted the difference between the emotions men express about football and those they fail to express about life.

Paddy Power also used the tournament to raise awareness of bigger issues. The bookmaker launched a cause campaign called 'From Russia With Equal Love', donating £10,000 to LGBT charities for every goal the host nation scored.

It's no surprise that the most successful brands were those who tried something new. When working with clients I always remind them that it's not worth doing anything if people won't notice your absence.

This, for me, is the question everyone should ask themselves. If you're simply replicating something that has already been done, then what's the point? What are the chances that anyone will differentiate that it's your brand or develop any affinity if it doesn't stand out?

*This article was first published by [Sport Business](#).*

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