

# The Passionate Shortcut

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RORY MAXWELL MEDIACOM SPORT 30 DEC 2012

By contributing to big sporting events, brands can endear themselves to fans, says Rory Maxwell.

The ambition of many sponsors is to create an emotional connection with their target audiences via a shared passion.

Whether it be sport, music, art, fashion or causes, such shared interests is often an important part of consumers' lives: something in which an individual invests time, money and emotional energy.

Brands that can contribute to the way people enjoy their passions are in a strong position to secure positive sentiment amongst consumers. Research shows that audiences will be more receptive to brand messages from and more likely to think positively about a brand

associated with their passions: especially those brands that can actively enhance the experience.

### Sponsorship is Unique

Though elusive, brands continue to seek this magic point of engagement, given that an emotional connection is more likely to break through over more intrusive – or, conversely, passive – forms of advertising.

Sponsorship marketing is unique, because it can be targeted to a specific community and deliver flexible assets that allow brands to create a dialogue with that target audience. Implemented correctly, sponsorship can deliver a credible and authentic message across all of the channels in which a passionate consumer engages. Those that do it well can endear themselves emotionally to that audience.

Sponsorship assets can be used not only to deliver brand awareness, but also consumer-facing experiential events, product integration initiatives, point-of-sale promotions, hospitality experiences, CSR initiatives and digital content platforms.

All these assets allow brands to deliver enhanced experiences and tangible value or benefits to the fan.

But successful sponsorship requires sound business planning and clear objectives. A clear vision, thoughtful creative execution and consistent brand values will help create the desired connection with consumers.

### Sponsorship has power across sectors

By sponsoring teams or events, a brand can tap into the passion felt by their fans and, in turn, create passion for its own brand. As a fan's relationship with, for example, a sports team develops and deepens, so will their feelings toward those companies associated with the team over the long term.

Sponsorship hasn't always been given the credit it deserves, but its power is now clearly recognised.

One of those who changed his point of view is David Wheldon, now Global Director of Brand at Vodafone Group. “I certainly spent the 1980s thinking sponsorship was a waste of money – a chairman’s indulgence incapable of driving brand engagement, brand equity or any of the other advantages I now know sponsorship can deliver. I’m a total convert to sponsorship as a marketing platform,” says Wheldon.

Brands that have long known about the power of sponsorship include Red Bull. The brand’s strategy has been to support and create extreme sports and lifestyle activities that connect with its brand values of revitalizing body and mind and increasing performance, concentration and energy levels. The brand has created an avid fan community around this lifestyle by sharing unique content with a huge, passionate audience.

In much the same way, Coca-Cola’s World Cup sponsorship single-mindedly focused on football’s moment of greatest emotion: the goal. Whether reminiscing about the greatest celebrations in World Cup history, recording a World Cup celebration song or touring the FIFA World Cup around the globe, the company has fuelled fan emotion.

It’s easy to argue that Red Bull and Coke are sexy brands, but the power of sponsorship is also used by numerous brands in low-interest consumer categories.

Take npower’s sponsorship of the English Football League – the leagues below the Premiership – and E.ON’s role as a former sponsorship of the FA Cup. Both energy companies are not only using sponsorship to establish brand visibility, but to drive a greater emotional relationship with their Premiership by bringing the fans closer to the competitions that matter to them.

The insurance sector has also been a strong player in the sponsorship industry for the same reason: to drive more brand loyalty and advocacy amongst customers by communicating with them via the emotive environment of sport.

On an even more high-profile level, P&G’s global Olympic Sponsorship as an IOC partner,

which commenced with the 2012

London games, illustrates the power that the company feels a movement like the Olympics can bring to its brands, many of which could be classified as low-interest FMCG products.

In particular, P&G has used the Olympic spirit to tell a moving story aimed at engaging a powerful audience: mums of Olympic athletes.

Perhaps the case for sponsorship is best made by those who seek to undermine it. Many brands try to ride on the coattails of official sponsors with ambush techniques: if sponsorship was ineffective, would these brands work so hard to replicate sponsorship's effects?

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