

Disrupting Official Sponsorships

Over the past two decades, we have seen explosive growth in sports-marketing sponsorships around the world in every realm — Nascar, Formula One, as well as in altogether new and extreme sports. In the 12-18 months leading up to the Olympic Games, the cacophony of advertising from official sponsors can be deafening.

The accompanying ads and marketing programs don't always meet their objectives. However, each and every such initiative is made in the recognition that

nothing is more powerful than a passionate fan — and that reaching, energizing and rewarding that fan can drive the success of a team, a brand or an entire company.

Why is it, then, that so often the communications surrounding a sponsorship is reduced to a throwaway tagline for a limited period of time? That practice is so pervasive that it regularly provides standup comics around the world with material, poking

fun at a brand's quest to become the *official* lip-gloss, toothbrush, or shoelace.

With today's high price of official sponsorships, it is more important than ever for brands to harness the power and the passion of the fan and get the *lift* they are looking for in the hearts and minds of their target audience. But how?

ADIDAS +10

The answer lies in interrogating the conventions of *official* sponsorship. The Olympic Games and the World Cup involve the additional conventions of iconography, procedure, ceremony, media coverage, and

of course, the deep emotional currents of national pride and lifelong affiliation with a team or sport.

During last year's World Cup, adidas provided a great example of a successful execution of an *official* sponsorship by refusing to rely on the passive role of a sponsor title. Instead, adidas breathed life into every aspect of the World Cup — engaging and rewarding both its fans and the media along the way.

By way of background, the adidas brand has been defined by its passion for sport and innovation since 1931, and prides itself on the depth and breadth of its brand history. Adidas sees itself as the true, legitimate, global sports brand, supporting the largest variety of sports, and more importantly, endorsing every athlete at every level — truly getting to the heart of sport.

Not aiming simply at boosting the egos of a few top-ranked athletes, adidas champions *every* man and woman who strives to improve performance beyond their dreams. Adidas celebrates these everyday champions and their desires to overcome barriers and limits through a mantra of *Impossible is Nothing*.

As an official sponsor, supplier and licensee of the FIFA Soccer World Cup 2006, adidas challenged the conventions of official sponsorship — and itself — to deliver brand experiences that equaled the passions of World Cup fans everywhere.

To set the stage, adidas celebrated the team spirit — or *Teamgeist* — required in soccer, using the introduction of a new match ball it designed especially for the World Cup games as a visual anchor and focal point.

Adidas delivers brand experiences to match the passions of World Cup fans.





The campaign, called *+10*, reminded us all that, in soccer, whenever you pass, kick or block the ball, you are never doing it alone. This not only provided a platform for the brand's presence in the World Cup, but also something else equally important—a source of inspiration in local markets all over the world.

AUKLAND: SKY SCREAMER

In New Zealand, with an eye toward delivering an interactive experience to the 17-and-under crowd, adidas executed a football marketing strategy so disruptive that fans literally screamed with excitement.

A campaign called *Buy the Ball, Be the Ball* launched December 10, 2005, in Auckland—and we do mean *launched*. A large-scale replica of the adidas

+Teamgeist match ball was built, strung on bungee cords from two tall cranes, and pinned back to the Earth like a slingshot. We called it *The Sky Screamer*.

Once three people were stuffed inside the giant ball, they listened to an announcer provide commentary on the game as the ball moved down the field. Ultimately, at the point the ball was kicked, the three people inside were too—shot into the air at 105 mph. *The Sky Screamer* bungee ride gave queues of eager thrill-seekers a chance to feel what it's like to be the ball. Literally.

The Sky Screamer, along with an accompanying billboard—an enormous replica of Liverpool striker Steven Gerrard “kicking” the big ball—certainly constituted an unconventional attempt to connect with

consumers. It gave fans a tactile experience of the brand, and shook them awake to the adidas football heritage—from the inside out.

Most important, *Be the Ball* helped adidas show significant growth in the football category with an increase of 64% in year-on-year sales growth during a time of year when football sales are traditionally slow in New Zealand. The effort also garnered adidas +10 an estimated \$797,111 (NZD) in free media exposure as it was carried on local and international news stations.

COLOGNE: FOOTBALL FRESKO

In Cologne, Germany, the world's largest football fresco was created in the main lobby of the Cologne central train station. The approximately 40-meter long and 20-meter wide spectacular displayed the ten best

worldwide adidas football players in a very unique way—like football gods in football heaven.

The players featured in the fresco were: Michael Ballack (FC Chelsea), captain of the German national team, and his teammate Lukas Podolski (FC Bayern München), David Beckham (Real Madrid and England), Zinédine Zidane (Real Madrid and France), Raúl (Real Madrid and Spain), Kaka (AC Milano and Brazil), Lionel Messi (FC Barcelona and Argentina), Juan Román Riquelme (Villareal CF and Argentina), Nakamura (Celtic Glasgow and Japan) and Djibril Cissé (FC Liverpool and France).

The artwork for the fresco was created by Felix Reidenbach. The illustration took almost 40 days to complete, or approximately four days per figure. More than 8.5 million people saw the fresco live and millions

Disrupting the Super Bowl

January is the time of year when marketers debate the collective power of football fans, and the value of advertising in the Super Bowl. In a previous issue of *The Hub*, (*Disrupting The Super Bowl*, January/February 2006), we analyzed what it takes to create a Super Bowl ad that really breaks through to drive a brand or company's business—as well as whether a brand should advertise in the Super Bowl at all.

In summary, we offered this short list of *do's* and *don'ts*:

DON'T

- **Force It.** Does the ad belong in this environment?
- **Shill Product.** Don't expect a Super Bowl ad to fix a lagging product
- **Have Tunnel Vision.** Don't bet on one spot without support
- **Assume People Care.** Be relevant to the target or don't play
- **Abandon Identity.** Don't step out of character as a means of gaining attention—it will backfire

DO

- **Be Natural.**
 - **Focus on the Brand.** Not a lagging product or line extension
 - **Think Beyond :30.** Find at least three other points of supporting connections during the period in which the audience will be interested
 - **Be Engaging.**
 - **Be True.** Don't step out of brand character.
- Every item on the Super Bowl *do* list remains valid and can be applied to a successful *official* sponsorship. However, at least two more rules should be added as follows.
- **Be Playful.** Create opportunities and venues for fans to participate in the sport and with each other. Not unlike community and cause-related opportunities—like the chance to carry the Olympic torch—successful sponsors create games within the games. Contests of trivia, stats, and athletic prowess are all good examples of how to include and excite your fan base.
 - **Be Local.** Give the brand room to breathe locally. Remember that fans are fiercely territorial. The chance to *play* with the brand, on their own terms, must be authentic and not forced.



Left: Adidas created the world's largest football fresco in the main lobby of the central train station in Cologne, Germany.



saw it across all media. Five minutes after revealing the fresco, it already was on national TV; during the full course of the FIFA World Cup 2006, the fresco was part of global press coverage. The results exceeded expectations with a P.R. value generated by this single installation of approximately 8–10 million euros.

MUNICH: AUTOBAHN KAHN

In Munich, adidas constructed a colossal outdoor billboard and, for the first time, placed an advertisement across the Autobahn. The billboard featured a 65-meter-long Oliver Kahn, arguably the world's

greatest (and now definitely the world's largest), goalkeeper. He was shown in a four-lane-highway-save, successfully catching an adidas Teamgeist ball. Oliver also served as a welcoming host for thousands of international football fans traveling to the World Cup via Germany's Munich airport. He truly lived up to his name of the "Titan."

The +10 campaign also gained traction elsewhere around the world, as youth teams from virtually every country played in local and national tournaments to earn the right to play on the adidas *World of Football* pitch in Berlin—where fans could watch soccer stars of the future on the pitch, or the real thing on a big screen outside the stadium.

Because adidas was not willing to settle for a mere advertising campaign with an *official* tag line, the brand connected with its audience across 17 different touch-points and media on local, national, and global stages. Adidas successfully engaged its audience to participate, to take ownership of the brand and its success as an *official* sponsor.

Most important, adidas matched and fueled the passion of the fans by facilitating the celebration of everything that is right about World Cup Soccer—namely, *Teamgeist*. ■

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Laurie Coots is chief marketing officer of **TBWA\Worldwide**, and is an advisor on emerging consumer behavior as it relates to converging technology and entertainment. Laurie can be reached at laurie.coots@tbwaworld.com or call (212) 804-1000.