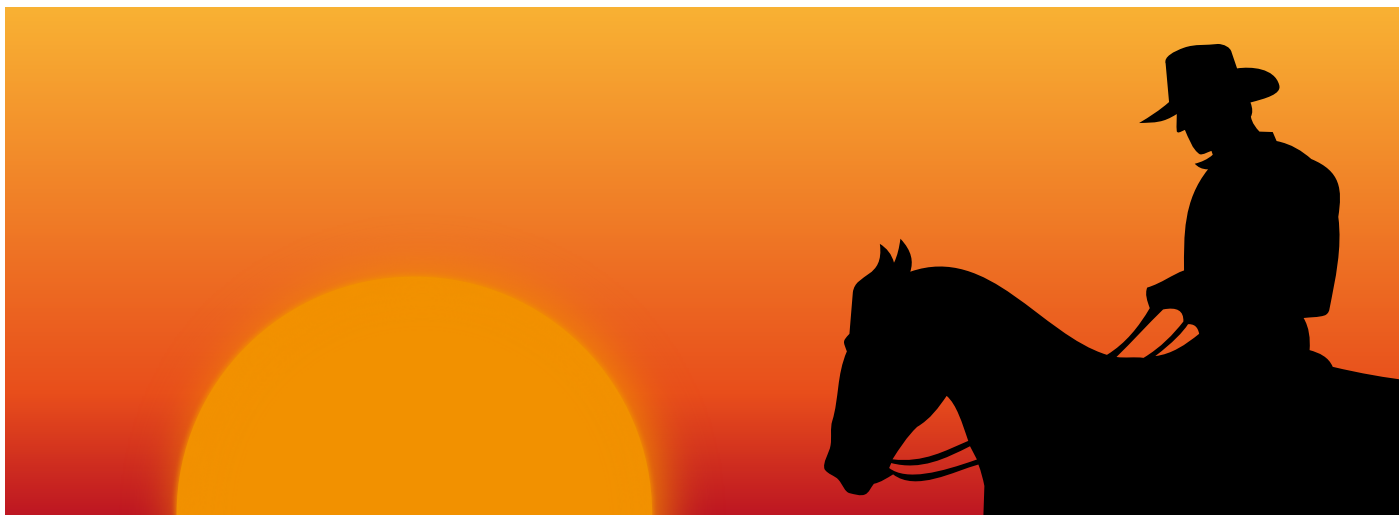
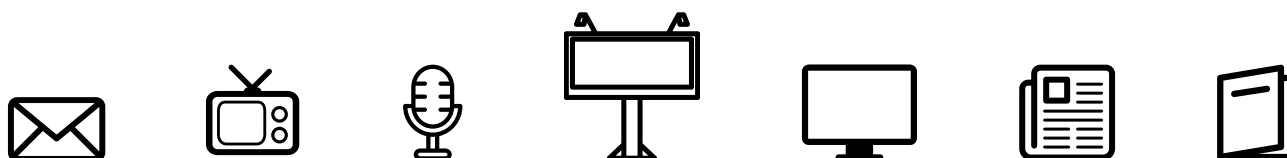


The challenge of sport sponsorship for brands



For most businesses, advertising is an essential cost to help promote and sell your product or service. In the words of Derby Brown, “The business that considers itself immune to the necessity for advertising sooner or later finds itself immune to business.”

With that in mind, if advertising is a non-negotiable spend, then consideration must be carefully given to the platforms chosen to promote your business.



To an extent, advertising your brand through more traditional, established channels carries something of a safety net.

SAFETY IN ADVERTISING

If a newspaper bears a negative headline about a murder, major job losses or a banking scandal for instance, the negativity associated with such stories is unlikely to affect how your advert is perceived by readers. They know that the primary purpose of a newspaper is to report news, whether it be good or bad. In the same way, if newspaper sales rise

or fall, the perception of your brand is unlikely to waiver.

The same can be said if you chose to advertise on the Number 37, and the bus is delayed...people aren't likely to think less of your brand because of problems with the service; or if your cinema advert is screened before a box office flop, your company won't be discredited by the performance of a dodgy director and woeful acting.

Of course this is not to say

certain brands have never received criticism for appearing in a particular newspaper or magazine, or that the content of adverts themselves have never created a negative reaction; but our judgement of ads published in traditional media forms is largely disconnected and unrelated to our view of the media itself.

THE PROBLEM OF SPORT

Yet, when we consider brands closely associated with sports teams and athletes, there is a shift in how we view brands, and suddenly performance and reputation become much more of an issue.

Sport is a performance related business and the fortunes of a team or a player can experience many more highs and lows than the performance of a television channel or newspaper. Sport involves emotion and is therefore open to many more variables than most other

forms of advertising media. Furthermore, considering the media attention surrounding sport, your brand is instantly exposed on a much larger scale to audiences both within and beyond your target demographic. In many ways, your brand is left naked and exposed, compared to the relative safety of being nestled within the print of a magazine.

For the reasons outlined above, if a team or a player who you have entrusted to be a representative of your brand says or does something that goes against your core values, then your brand can

be left damaged or broken, involving a bigger spend and greater cost to help repair your tattered reputation that that which you outlaid in the first place.

Within sport, the risks and rewards associated with aligning your brand to a team are incredibly variable.





KINGPOWER

Take for example the performance of Leicester City Football Club in the 2015/16 Premier League season. Their stadium and shirt sponsors, King Power initially signed a deal with the club at the start of the 2010/11 season, when the club ultimately finished 10th in the second tier of English Football. The club's rise to prominence as a force to be reckoned with during the 2015/16 season is a dream come true for their sponsors. More TV time, more column inches, more photographs taken and more goodwill all equates to more positive brand exposure. This, combined with the fact the sponsor supported the team before they were so successful means that they will no doubt take their share of credit for helping to make the team a success.



PHILLIPS

In contrast, if we view the fate of tech company Philips in 2000, when they sponsored 'Team Philips', a yacht racing team which set out to sail around the world in an event with a \$2 million prize fund. The team's catamaran cost a cool £4 million to build, but on setting off on their round the world adventure, the hull cracked meaning the team failed to even start the race. Adding insult to injury, the company slogan, "Let's make things better" was emblazoned on the side of the vessel. In consideration of the £1m needed just to salvage the stricken boat, the plug was pulled on the voyage all together, leaving Philips embarrassed by their own words and left a laughing stock.

Whilst things going well for a sports team can mean extra column inches for a sponsor, even more media exposure is given when things go badly. This leaves brands in the position of having to repair their reputation, not just the hulls of their sunken boats, something which is arguably much more difficult to remedy.

However some brands have the experience and foresight to block negative press before it happens.

THE UGLY



IAAF

Another example of sport tarnishing a brand is The International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF), who have suffered continual battles against corruption and doping. Due to the negative public perception of the organisation, major brand sponsors such as Adidas and Nestlé have terminated their multi million pound deals in order to protect themselves against public scrutiny.

There's no doubt, sports sponsorship is great vehicle for getting your brand out there, but being thrust into the public eye on a larger scale automatically opens you up to greater criticism.

The power of PR has the capacity to help support sports sponsorship, through reacting and responding to positive and negative associations of sports performance.

Whereas a logo or static image can only transcend so much in terms of key messaging, when that logo or brand name becomes associated with a team or a person – those people wearing the emblem become an extension of that brand and a greater element of risk is taken.

Sports sponsors need to consider carefully how they can protect themselves against the uncertainty associated with the emotional and unpredictable nature of sport.

It's vital to be well prepared and have a communications strategy in place to convey key messages and continue to exercise influence beyond the sponsorship alone. Without

this, your brand is even more exposed to the risks associated with advertising.

To a large extent, public relations is the glue that binds the marketing mix together and helps advertising make the impact your brand needs, whilst offering the comforting knowledge that if things go wrong, there's a team who can react and respond.

So if your brand is considering

sports sponsorship as a way to increase your public profile, much like the team, athlete or organisation you choose to sponsor, you need to prepare a comprehensive game plan before you leave the dressing room and enter the field of play.

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