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## Some sponsors strike gold

By Tan Yingzi (China Daily)  
Updated: 2008-07-18 10:06

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Even before the Beijing Games has begun, winners have emerged among Olympic sponsors in the fierce marketing battle in China.

And the awards go to Coca-Cola, Yili and Lenovo.

Marketing consultancy firm R3 and its partner CSM Media Research recently announced the results of their latest research into China's consumers and their Olympic preferences.

The survey shows the global beverage giant and veteran Olympic sponsor Coca-Cola has achieved the most with its Beijing Olympic sponsorship, followed by two Chinese companies: dairy enterprise Yili and IT corporate leader Lenovo.

CSM and R3 employed a face-to-face approach, interviewing 1,500 consumers in 10 Chinese cities every three months - allowing for more in-depth discussions and the testing of visual stimuli.

"With less than a month to the Games themselves, we now have a clearer picture than ever of the likely winners in the sponsorship war," said Greg Paull, principal of R3.

"Those that have chosen athletes wisely and maintained consistency have performed 10 times better than companies who haven't."

On the question of return on investment, R3 and CSM have linked sponsorship costs and total media investment to both consumer perception results and published business data for mainland sales. The researchers developed a proprietary method called the OP (Olympic Performance) Index, which weights awareness, purchase intent, value and recall.

While some companies such as China Mobile have invested close to 5 billion yuan (\$700 million) in measured media over the past two years, their "cost per OP point" is 31,000 yuan. By comparison, Coca-Cola's cost per point is 4,000 yuan, while some giant enterprises such as China Netcom have a cost per point of 50,000 yuan.

"So purely from a consumer impact point of view, some companies are outperforming others by 10 times," he said.

As a first-time Olympic sponsor, Yili Group has done a much better job than its counterparts.

The report says Yili's business in China grew 21 percent in the first quarter of 2008 and is on track now to be over 20 billion yuan by year's end.

"Yili has made some smart choices on stars such as Liu Xiang, Guo Jingjing and Yi Jianlian - but used them in a relevant and creative way. Using Liu Xiang with his parents is a strong method to build differentiation and drive impact," said Paull.

"Without an Olympic association it would have been difficult to achieve."

But amongst the stiff competition of more than 60 active sponsors, some have failed to leverage their Olympic investment.

"A lot of the State-owned enterprises are relatively new to consumer marketing, and don't have the experience of Coke or the talent pool of companies like Yili," said Paull.

"Sinopec, Air China, China Netcom and others have all done tactical work to support their investments, but the payback has been poor. This has been a great learning curve for them though, to see how other world-class Chinese companies such as Lenovo and Yili have generated a positive return."

(China Daily 07/18/2008 page3)

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