

A SPORTING CHANCE

This year, two of the world's largest sporting events hit the world stage – with the Olympics in Beijing, and half a continent away, the Indian Premier League involving top cricketers from across the globe. Both are going to be billion dollar bets for sponsors, in addition to a wide range of other regional and local events – the question has to be asked – how to optimize a sporting investment?

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We've been conducting research on China on return on investment, and intend to expand this to other markets shortly. The best companies tend to do a few things very well...

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1. Identify the business issue. Is the opportunity brand enhancing, business enhancing or just something the Chairman has had his eye on? Successful sports exploitation can only come when the goals and measures are clearly defined. JNJ, for example, have used its Olympic sponsorship to significantly enhance its brand values, and create a stronger 'mother brand' umbrella – something that was clear as an issue from the start
2. Consider the passion points. To optimize a sports sponsorship, you need passion – internally within the company, as well as externally with the consumers. Several sponsors of table tennis in China have found it hard going, despite the sports' number one position in terms of popularity – because the home team is always just expected to win. By comparison, the NBA has tapped into passion with its own US players as well as exploiting Yao Ming and Yi Jian Lian
3. Understand the depth of exploitation. Most sports sponsors don't do enough due diligence on just how far they can go to access the assets of a property. Can you use the player's images in merchandising? Can they come to internal events? Will you have complete rights in the digital domain? What are the limits on exclusivity? Often opportunities are missed, because they just aren't thoroughly considered at the initial stage. A number of India Premier League Sponsors, for example, have found that

the experienced sports marketers have got considerably more value from their packages , because they have thought this through

4. Sponsorship is nothing without measurement. Setting up metrics to assess success is crucial - as is linking those back to business objectives. Research can often be as simple as exit interviews , or as elaborate as tracking to benchmark performance. In our Olympic research, the best marketers have taken swift action to address some issues in their campaign performance. China's largest dairy company, Yili, was quick to develop more direct messaging of their official Olympic sponsorship, supported by a strong brand campaign featuring sports stars such as Liu Xiang , Yi Jian Lian and Guo Jing Jing – and already, they are seeing improvement in awareness and brand health. Coca-Cola have been able to use their sports marketing research to woo athletes and analysts alike._

With the increased fragmentation of media, and the growing passion and professionalism of sports in Asia, there's going to be significant investment by brands to gain more leverage and traction. Sports is not for the faint of heart though – if you come to it with the same passion and commitment, you can better go for gold.

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