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Coke mulls Olympic relay plans

Beverage giant signs as presenting partner for the Beijing 2008 torch relay and taps Pico for logistics

By Arun Sudhama

BEIJING Coca-Cola has selected Pico to provide support in China for its Olympic torch relay sponsorship, following news that the beverage giant — along with Lenovo and Samsung Electronics — has signed up as a presenting partner of the Beijing 2008 Olympic torch relay.

According to sources, Coca-Cola selected Pico following an R3-managed pitch that included as many as 12 agencies, including an Ogilvy Action/JWT alliance and Publicis Shop Betterway (Media, 28 March). Pico will work closely with Coca-Cola global activation agency Ignition to provide logistic support for what is being billed as China's largest-ever ground event.

For Coca-Cola, the move marks the sixth time it is sponsoring the relay in 12 years, a fact that is expected to give it a distinct edge in its efforts to build brand equity around the event. The beverage giant has also revealed that it will adapt its global 'Coke side of life' ad campaign to incorporate an Olympics theme, under the unwieldy 'Live Olympic on the Coke side of life' tagline.

Lenovo's own sponsorship deal comes as its torch design, 'Cloud of promise,' was chosen from over 300 competi-

tors for the Beijing 2008 Olympic torch. Samsung, meanwhile, plans to kick off its mainland Olympic marketing campaigns via a public concert in Beijing in June.

Observers noted that Lenovo and Samsung would need to spend heavily if they were to match the kind of success that Coca-Cola has historically had through its Olympic torch relay activities. "In my experience of working with Olympic sponsors, the sponsorship itself does not guarantee a return on the investment," said Desgrippes Gobe regional MD Craig Briggs.

"The general rule is that you must spend another dollar for every dollar you spend on the sponsorship. Simply bolting names onto the myriad sponsorship materials will fail to make any deeper, emotional connection and association with the Games."

Official partnership with the Olympic torch relay guarantees a series of marketing rights, including the ability to select 1,500 torchbearers, use relevant logos and hold related events. Coca-Cola also plans to expand awareness through product packaging, consumer communications and media programmes.

Additional reporting by Benjamin Li



Coca-Cola...experience in sponsoring the Olympic torch relay will give it a distinct edge for Beijing