



Editorial



Polarity and the need for research

IMR, publisher of this journal, has just launched a new report series, *Sponsorship Today*. The first issue analyses European football sponsorship and among the findings is the huge polarity in deal values between clubs in the same league.

In Spain, for example, Barcelona now receives 32 million euros per year from the Qatar Foundation for its jersey branding, whereas seven clubs in La Liga started the 2011-12 season unable to attract a sponsor. This, remember, is supposedly the second most popular league in the world's most popular sport. Around the world, hundreds of millions of fans are exposed to the teams who can't get sponsorship.

The English Premier League, arguably the number one global sports property, has sponsorship deals ranging from more than 22 million euros to a paltry 0.35 million. Again, all clubs receive global exposure.

Obviously the differential can be explained mainly by the stature of the leading clubs that have become global brands – but do they really offer 60 times the potential of lower placed equivalents?

The answer is no. Admittedly those smaller clubs don't have the same brand allure, but they do have global exposure and they do have dedicated national fan bases and the credibility of participating in the world's leading sports events.

So what can they do to increase revenues? The first step is to change their mentality and take a more professional attitude to sponsorship. Too many simply approach would-be investors with little or no evidence to demonstrate their value.

While many have TV viewing reports, often given to them by their national leagues, how many commission socio-economic profiles on their fans, competitor analysis, image attribute surveys or qualitative research into fan attitudes to sponsorship? Very few, is the answer.

This is the type of information that can help a rights holder to understand which brands would best fit their property and would save a lot of time (and money), therefore, in narrowing down the list of potential sponsors. But more importantly, it would help to prove that the rights holder is taking a business-like approach to the issue and is seeking a partnership in which it can deliver real benefits to the sponsor. The days of sticking a brand on a shirt and then saying 'see you again next year for renewal' are long gone. Sponsors learned to activate their rights in the 1990s, but rights holders still haven't caught up. They shouldn't simply help sponsors to deliver activation programmes, they should be proactive in making it happen.

Businesses around the world are cutting marketing spend and doing so especially in Europe. To attract interest now means presenting a business case rather than sending out a salesman with a begging bowl. Only research and a demonstrable understanding of sponsor requirements will show value and relevance to potential sponsors.

The case for research among rights holders is therefore stronger than ever – it might seem like an extravagant cost in times of recession, but compared to some of the over-inflated salaries paid to second-rate players, it is an absolute bargain.

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