

Digital gives marketers a sporting chance

By  Deseré Orrill

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It's no secret that sport never sleeps. As Ant Pascoe, general manager of TEAMtalk media noted in his recent opinion piece, somewhere in the world, and at any one time, there is a sporting event happening with vast audiences engaged in the action and conversation. What's great about this is that from a marketer's point of view, we pretty much know when and where our audiences will be focusing their attention.

Reinforcing this premise over the past two weeks was the 2016 Rio Olympics. Who can forget Wayde van Niekerk's gold medal performance in the 400m or Luvo Manyonga's silver medal in the long jump and of course, Caster Semenya's epic run in the 800m. All three proved the country proud and together, once again. It didn't matter if you were watching it live, or only caught up with the news the morning after, the point is that a sporting triumph fired the imagination of pretty much an entire nation and the world, especially one where the champion needed to overcome some form of adversity and had a strong message to convey. This sporting event, like so many, presented ideal opportunities to start a conversation and to 'engage'.



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So when this 'engagement' is presented in the form of melding the 'always on' nature of sport with the world's desire to laugh and feel good about themselves (and others), it stands to reason that it can be converted into a marketing power play, especially when it takes on a life of its own and then goes 'viral' – every marketers dream.

The winning combination of the world's biggest sporting event and South Africa's national rugby side is a case in point. The Springboks video message to the SA Olympians, artfully promoted the #LoveRugby campaign while also drawing attention to the sporting spirit on which the Olympics is founded. Shot over the opening weekend of the Games, the hilarious video shows Trevor Nyakane attempting artistic gymnastics, Lood de Jager tackling table tennis, Coenie Oosthuizen giving Usain Bolt a run for his money and even Damian de Allende trying his hand at shot putting.

In just six days, the video had amassed almost half a million views on the Springbok Facebook pages, with an average of 10,000 new views per hour, making it possibly one of the fastest spreading campaigns on the Springbok social media pages to date. In addition to this, it had also been viewed countless times on YouTube and ranked on Twitter, proving that sport (and good humour) really does unify across cultures (and time zones).

The Rio Olympics may have drawn to a close, but the video is still relevant, serving as a reminder of what the Games stand for: Have a look for yourself and see what you think...

Another notable example was Nike's 2012 Olympics Ad – Find Your Greatness - that managed to brilliantly use situational content to emotionally connect viewers to their childhood dreams of sporting greatness. They then followed it up in 2016 with their Chris Mosier advert, honouring the USA's first openly transgender athlete, and therefore capturing the current narrative around gender bias in a positive manner that totally engages audiences – by making them think and comment.

Both examples highlight how brands can take advantage of current affairs and use visual storytelling to reach broad audiences. They both have powerful messages to convey and people to influence – we need to broaden our tolerance of difference - and the best way to do that today is digital storytelling.

'The Assembly' also residing on the BokTube channel is another homeground example of engaging the goodwill of the nation and promoting 'feel good factor'. Meeting up at the airport and having to find their own way to their training ground, opens the viewers eyes to not only some great locations in Cape Town – and some brands - but also connects with a number of diverse audiences, particularly those who do not have formal transport to go where they want to go, but are nevertheless die hard Springbok Rugby fans.

Lastly, the BlitzBoks #GotYourBack is another instance where timing is everything and how sport crosses many borders. In the hunt for an Olympic qualification and a World Title, a host of South Africa's favourite entertainers united to wish our rugby Sevens team well. This was also shared innumerable times and because they could lend their support, so could we, and we did. It's also worth seeing again as a reminder how we can all come together:

In each of these examples there is an element of emotion that instantly resonates with viewers and connects with 'passion points' that drive conversation. At the end of the day, it is this discussion that we want to harness as marketers, and with the advances in technology, the growth of access to channels where these stories can be viewed, and the immediacy that video and digital storytelling presents, we now have more than a sporting chance of getting it right.

ABOUT DESERÉ ORRILL

Deseré Orrill is a co-founder of the Ole! Media Group and is currently the group CMO as well as managing director of MobilMedia, a mobile engagement company within the group, and HoneyKome, the strategic digital consulting arm of OMG. She is intrigued by the way in which digital communication is redefining the relationship between brand and consumer, and how mobile in particular has become the catalyst for changing the traditional marketing monologue into a conversation.

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