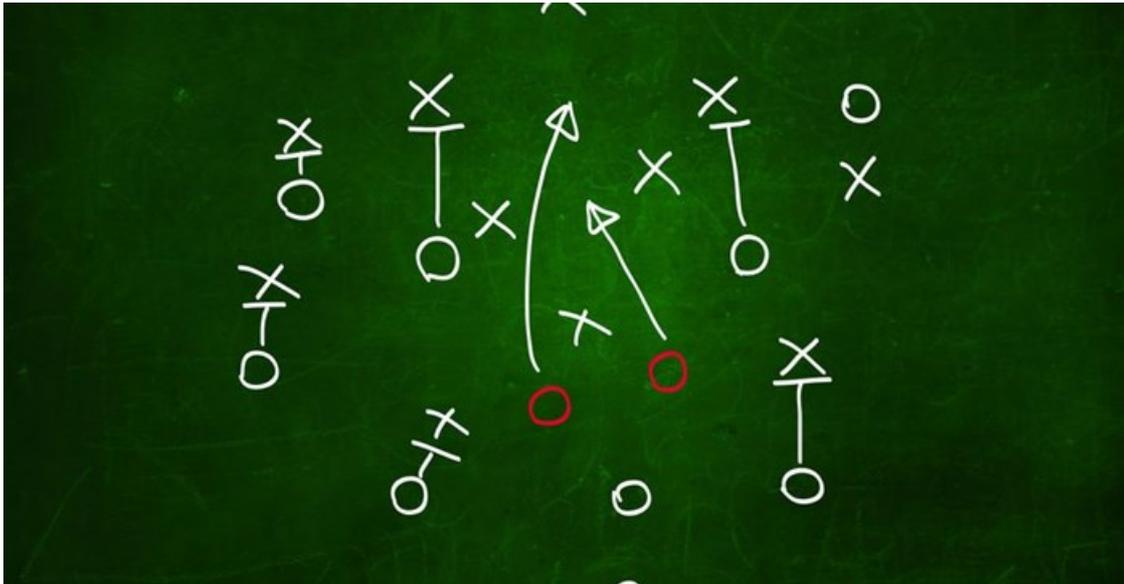


Sports sponsorship: The new playbook

By  Gareth Marshall

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Traditional marketing (TV, print and radio etc.) in its increasingly fragmented formats have become far less effective at truly engaging an audience. We as marketers need to find other ways to stand out and really engage our audiences and connect in a unique way. We need a platform that already has a highly engaged fan base to tap in to - for me, its sports sponsorship.



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When executed correctly, sports sponsorship is still one of the most powerful options to connect with an already highly engaged, highly emotional audience. Because we're in an era of message overload, but sport offers something extremely valuable: real raw emotion - and there's not much that equals the power of sport to excite, engage and inspire.

Making emotional connections with consumers while still delivering a functional message is not always easy to do but sport gives brands the opportunity to do both. With this being the basis of a marketing strategy, marketers have the unique ability to reach an audience through one hyper-focused channel while providing content to engage in another. By selecting a partner (a team or individual player) that shares the same values as your brand, this proven model ensures that consumers are more likely to be receptive to your advertising campaign.

For sports sponsorship to be effective, marketers need to define key players and how to engage them in an authentic way:

- **The brand:** Have you clearly defined your business goals and objectives? Once you have this defined then you will be able to move on to the next steps.
- **Relevant rights holder:** Is this a team or an individual player? Do they share your brand's values and are they aligned to your business goals and objectives?
- **The consumer/audience:** You need to clearly define who the audience really is. Once agreed, they always need to be at the heart of the campaign. So, by tapping into their passions the brand is relevant and enhances what they love.
- **The activation:** This is critical to leveraging the power of your sponsorship and bringing this partnership alive for consumers. Consistently create theatre around sport online and offline, not just during match-time. This will have a major impact on the type of engagement and enable you to be more original with storytelling.

- **The impact:** Need to clearly define the desired outcomes. From changing attitudes and behaviours towards the brand and driving trial and purchase. This all needs to ladder up to the desired return on investment from the campaign.

It's time for brands to throw out the old rule book and bring new, fresh thinking and creativity to campaigns. The secret to the future isn't doing what you've done in the past better; the secret is creating new unique things and experiences the world has never seen before.

With this in mind, let's look at two opportunities in sports sponsorship that enable brands to leverage the power of sponsorship:

The new era of storytelling - Content marketing

Today, sponsorship offers the opportunity to create content and tell stories that are authentic. Previously, sponsorship meant just having your brand logo on sports assets presented to the media.

People love good stories. In a cluttered environment, stories help drive recall, making them critical to building any successful brand, whether it's for a product, a service, or a sports team.

Activating a partnership in an authentic way not only allows you to unlock opportunities for consumers but allows brands to tell a story across various media channels. To do this effectively, creativity is needed but so is authenticity. Remember you are talking to an already engaged audience that already connects with the sport.

As an example, the Shield brand has been able to share many success stories by activating our partnership with Chelsea FC and Orlando Pirates.



#NewCampaign: Shield is going for gold at the Sport Industry Awards

Jessica Tennant 14 Aug 2018



Footballers who have successfully proven themselves through the Shield *Sbonisi iDiski* programme have been able to experience life as a professional footballer training with Chelsea FC and one player has landed a professional contract with the Orlando Pirates MDC team.



Shield, Chelsea Football Club partnership announces fan competition

17 May 2017



Data-driven marketing

With the amount of data available today, targeting a specific target audience is a lot more accessible. We are now, as brands, able to move from the “one message for all,” to the “right message for the right person”.

Across social networks, marketers can define exactly whom the message should reach: geo-targeting, demographic targeting, interest targeting – nothing’s impossible and no-one’s out of reach.

Targets can get a lot more defined - for instance, we could look at football fans aged 18 to 29 in the Soweto area. The trend is heading away from push marketing and towards engagement marketing.

In conclusion, sport continues to provide a unique platform for brands to connect with consumers, but the rules of the game are changing. It’s time to rewrite the playbook.

ABOUT GARETH MARSHALL

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