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Sports sponsorships represent an important and growing part of many marketing budgets. For large companies, sponsorships can be a way to enhance attitudes. Events are usually more important to people than brands so even well respected brands can enhance their image by becoming associated with events like the Olympics. For smaller companies, sponsorships can be a way to level the playing field making sponsoring companies seem larger relative to their bigger competitors.

Sponsorships also present other opportunities. They allow companies to more efficiently target certain lifestyles. In the era of mass communication, some people find events to be a more personal form of communication. Often, too, sponsorships come with exclusives and so they are a way to further differentiate oneself from the competitors. And certainly going to an event with customers or partners is more fun and presents more selling opportunities than watching a :30 commercial with them.

But sponsorships have a dark side. People seldom take notice of an event's sponsors. And they are often

confused by who sponsors what events. This confusion certainly occurs before and after the event, but also (to a lesser degree) during the event itself. In the minds of consumers, most events are temporary phenomena and usually have short shelf lives in helping to

their sponsorship. Another 25 companies obtained different levels of sponsorship. The results were surprising. Many sponsors failed to be recognized as sponsors at all. Some worldwide sponsors were less recognized than their non-worldwide counterparts. Even worse, some companies failed to differentiate themselves from their competitors with the result that people were as likely to name the competitor as the sponsor as they were the real company.

Awareness of Sponsors

Some sponsors are much more successful than others in linking their names to the sponsored event. Among the top 10 most frequently named sponsors, there was a five to one difference in awareness between the best remembered and the 10th best remembered sponsor. McDonald's was the best remembered 2002 Olympics sponsor. However, Delta Airlines, the 10th best remembered sponsor was only remembered by one in 12 respondents. An amazing five of the seven worldwide sponsors did not even make the top 10 list. (See Table 1)

Confusion about Sponsorship

When asked to name as many sponsors of the Summer Olympic Games as they could respondents mistakenly named several non-sponsoring companies as sponsors.

TABLE 1

2002 WINTER OLYMPICS TOP TEN SPONSORS IN TOTAL UNAIDED AWARENESS

1. McDonald's	40%
2. Coca-Cola	35%
3. Visa	24%
4. AT&T	21%
5. Bank of America	19%
6. Home Depot	18%
7. Budweiser	16%
8. Eastman Kodak	13%
9. Hallmark	11%
10. Delta Airlines	8%

forge a link between the event and the sponsors.

An example of this fleeting and confused awareness can be seen in research that Gallup & Robinson, Inc. conducted on the 2002 Winter Olympics in Salt Lake City, an important sponsorship opportunity for many companies. Seven companies (Coca-Cola, Panasonic, Samsung, SchlumbergerSema, Sports Illustrated/Time, Visa and Xerox) spent upwards of \$50 million for the rights to be named worldwide sponsors. This, of course, didn't include costs for participating at the games and for promoting

TABLE 2

2002 WINTER OLYMPICS
TOP 16 COMPANIES IN
TOTAL UNAIDED AWARENESS

1. McDonald's	40%
2. Coca-Cola	35%
3. Pepsi	29%
4. Nike	27%
5. Visa	24%
6. AT&T	21%
7. Bank of America	19%
8. Home Depot	18%
9. Budweiser	16%
10. Eastman Kodak	13%
11. Hallmark	11%
12. Adidas	10%
13. United Airlines	8%
14. Delta Airlines	8%
15. Ford	7%
16. General Motors	6%

COMPETITIVE NON-SPONSORS AND
SPORTS APPAREL NON-SPONSORS IN BLUE.

In some product categories (airlines and automotive), the competitive

company was as highly associated with the Olympics as the actual sponsor. In other categories (soft drinks) a gap existed, but it is close. What makes the Coca-Cola versus Pepsi situation noteworthy is not that the Cola Wars carry over to sponsorship perceptions, but that the gap between the two has closed so much from the over 2 to 1 spread that we observed for the 2000 Olympics. In addition, companies like Nike and Adidas present unusual situations since neither company was an official Olympics sponsor, and yet being so well entwined in the fabric of international sports performance, they both were perceived to be sponsors. Nike is actually the fourth highest ranked Olympics sponsor, something it achieved without having to spend a dime. (See Table 2)

As this research suggests, some companies are simply donating the benefits of this high-priced sponsorship to their key competitors. Other companies are able to obtain the privileges of sponsorship without paying for it. Both of these situations, of course, dilute the value of sponsorship for some sponsors in particular and all sponsors in general. Findings such as these emphasize the importance of using one's communications program effectively to convey and re-enforce the company's sponsorship status to reduce confusion, and to help organizers protect and enhance the value of the franchise. Sound sponsorship research programs uncover potential problems and enable advertisers to leverage the value of their investment. 

