

Ipsos ASI

The Advertising Research Specialists



Backing the **Right** Horse?

Sponsorship Perspectives

December 2009

How can brands use research to help choose a sport and evaluate whether it is a worthwhile investment for them?

No, this isn't an article about horseracing or its sponsors. It would have to be one of the sports I am least qualified to comment on as displayed by my approach to betting, which involves the horse's name and the colour of the jockey's silks! As there is a bit of a lull in the sporting calendar, I thought I would take some time to look at how brands can use research to help approach the choice of sports and evaluate whether it is a worthwhile investment for them.

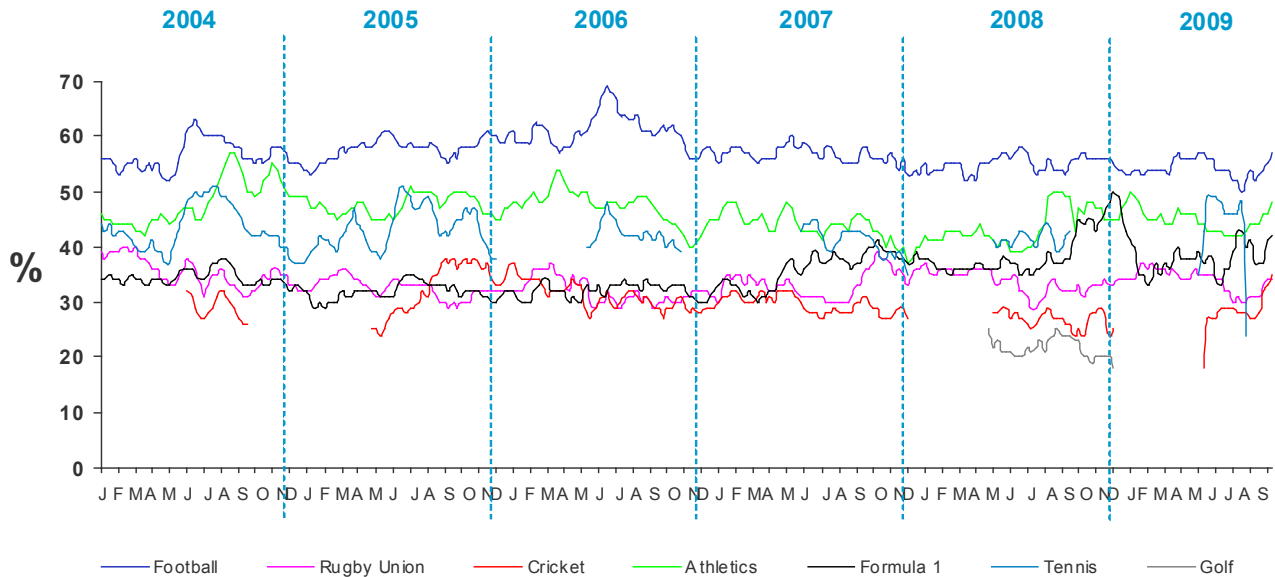
Our Sponsortest tool (sponsorship association tracker) has run nearly continuously for over 10 years. It provides us with a wealth of data on the major sports, the numbers of people who follow them, how they follow them and which brands

are associated with those sports. This enables us to follow a sport's popularity over the course of a year and understand things such as the seasonality of sports, the relationship between success and association, and how a brand might go about engaging the fanbase. Having this sort of data to hand is great for us for writing articles like this, but also great for our clients when it comes to understanding the performance of their sponsorships.

When choosing a sport to get involved with, a brand has to understand whether the fanbase is right. How many people follow the sport, and therefore will you have the critical mass to meet your brand's objectives? For example, unsurprisingly football is the sport which claims the prize as the most followed in the UK.



Fig.1 Interest in Sport



Base: All GB adults aged 16 - 64

Sponsortest Data

Fig. 1 shows that football is, year round, the most popular sport, even in the off season. In fact during the summer recess, when there is a major international tournament such as the World Cup or European Championships, interest soars (except when England fail to qualify – 2008). This is down to an increase in “fair weather” fans gripped by the hope that England will lift a major trophy for the

first time since '66. Athletics is football's closest challenger and also sees a boom when the Olympics comes around every four years, tennis sees its spike around Wimbledon and F1 has reached unprecedented levels of interest in recent seasons following some recent British successes and high profile scandals such as 'crash' and 'liar-gate'.

Does the profile of those who are interested in a sport closely match the target audience of the brand or product? Sponsortest tells us that there are a few key differences between the demographic make up of some of the mainstream sports in this country. Football is ubiquitous with the broadest appeal. Of the sports we track rugby appeals to the oldest audience, with football and F1 appealing to the youngest. Tennis has the biggest female audience and cricket is predominantly the preserve of the men. If you are after those with the money then rugby and tennis are the sports for you.

Once you have a sport with a sufficient fanbase and the right profile, it is important to assess how you will position your association. From our ad-hoc research we have seen that those brands which achieve the greatest success assume a role as a sponsor and make the effort to communicate that role. For example some brands champion the fan and their experience and enjoyment; brands such as Coca Cola and the beer brands often take this approach.

Other brands assume the role as a benefactor to a sport, supporting the professional game with others going for a role at the grass roots of a sport, such as Barclays Spaces for Sport or NatWest's Cricket Force. Our studies demonstrate that when it is done well, assuming a role as a sponsor and showing the fans that you are giving something back to the sport increases acceptance of a brand and often increases the subsequent warmth generated towards that brand by the association.



From our other recent research we have seen that brands achieve much more with their sponsorships when they support them with sufficient activation, and that the rewards are far greater when you communicate more than just your association. There are a number of considerations...which media channels offer the best opportunities to bring your messages to the fans? Does the deal struck with the property offer exclusive media rights? How will your sponsorship activation fit in to your mainstream marketing activity or will it replace it?

Of course to truly understand whether there is an opportunity in sponsorship for a brand, research can play a key role. Primary research can help a brand to understand whether a sport has a good fit with a brand, how the fans engage with the sport and their

attitudes to brands currently associated with it. It can also help a (potential) sponsor understand the property's image and values which can be leveraged to improve their own position. Many brands use media value as a measure of the success of a sponsorship, but this only tells part of the story. As with advertising you can measure the opportunity to see, but the missing pieces are; whether someone has actually recognised and processed the information and what subsequent change in behaviour or attitudes there has been? This is where ad-hoc research or tracking of an association and its activation can really allow a sponsor to realise the potential of their investment and manage their relationship in the right way. Only then can a business understand whether they truly have backed a winner.





About Ipsos MORI

Ipsos MORI is one of the largest and best known research companies in the UK and a key part of the Ipsos Group, a leading global research company. With a direct presence in 60 countries, our clients benefit from specialist knowledge drawn from our five global practices: public affairs research, advertising testing and tracking, media evaluation, marketing research and consultancy, customer satisfaction and loyalty.

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