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Cricket, **the Genuine All-Rounder?**

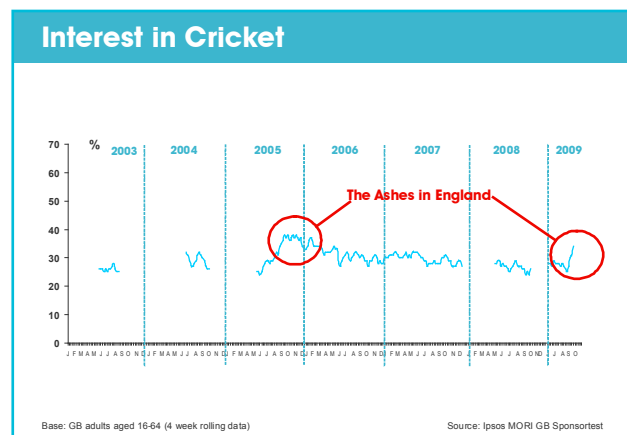
Sponsorship Perspectives

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Jamie Robertson, sponsorship expert at Ipsos MORI, explains to us why **cricket's specificities** make it a **versatile** type of sponsorship.

So with autumn now well and truly upon us and the football season in full swing, a busy summer of cricket has come to an end with the Ashes, once again, safely tucked away in the trophy cabinet at Lords. Now, I don't profess to be an expert on cricket, in fact I probably embody the bulk of cricket "fans" in this country. I watch international matches occasionally, show a passing interest in the newspaper coverage on the way to work and have a desktop scoreboard on my PC during the Test matches. For sponsors, however, cricket is (becoming) a versatile beast.

Generally, interest in cricket has been stable over the past half a dozen years with the odd peak when the Aussies have come to visit (see below).



Cricket interests about one in three of us and, whilst it is behind many of the other major sports, it still gives brands a substantial base to work with. Despite this stable interest, cricket does seem to be becoming a little bit "sexier", which should help maintain this interest and attract a new generation of fans.

The players themselves are also attracting more interest from punters and brands alike. Remember Lily Allen's "tweet" that she rather fancied Graham Onions? Stuart Broad has become the new pin-up boy and heir apparent to Freddie as the country's cricketing icon and team all-rounder, culminating with an appearance on the populist Jonathan Ross show. And speaking of Freddie, he is now the first cricketing "gun for hire" having turned down the England and Wales Cricket Board's offer of an incremental central contract and made himself available to anyone (including England) who requires his prowess.



There has also been the recent proliferation of tournaments which has come with the establishment and popularity of the shortest format of the game - twenty20. Now there are four domestic formats, three international formats and a number of international tournaments for domestic and International teams such as the Champions League, ICC Trophy and World Cup, not to mention the interest in the Indian Premier League which transcends the globe. As well as the tournaments there is also the opportunity to associate with the teams either on a domestic level or increasingly at a global level with tournaments such as the Champions League looking to develop teams with no profile beyond their own borders into international brands in their own right.

These diverse properties are opportunities for both domestic and global brands to engage with specific audiences in a multitude of ways. Brands as diverse as Vodafone, Emirates and Adidas and categories including consumer electronics, energy and many

from the financial services sector have all found an opportunity in cricket sponsorship.

This variety allows these sponsors to connect with a slightly different target audience depending on the competition, the extremes being the “traditionalists” who follow the five day game versus the “new converts” who love the spectacle and carnival of twenty20. It also provides an opportunity for budgets of all shapes and sizes.

These properties, as well as attracting different demographics, also have different values and attributes associated with them. Whilst they will all share some common traits, it is impossible to say that the image of the “crash, bang, wallop” twenty20 properties are the same as the strategic battle of the Test match arena. This also gives sponsors the scope to choose the property that best fits their brand or embodies the changes they want to make to their image, and provides cricket with the flexibility to offer a solution for a multitude of brand objectives.



For key sponsors such as npower, Vodafone and NatWest, cricket, like other sports, has the opportunity to reach not only the broadcast viewer through activations like TV sponsorship, site screen branding, perimeter boards, big screens and 4/6 cards, but also to the captive audience at matches. These consumers have more time to absorb and engage with their environment beyond concentrating on the action in the middle in comparison to most other sports. This gives sponsors an excellent opportunity to engage with their targets using experiential marketing activity and provides an opportunity for face-to-face dialogue between consumers and brand ambassadors. Additionally, because the nature of the game prohibits most of us (except those with the most understanding of partners) watching an entire match, cricket gives sponsors the opportunity to activate across a broad range of media touchpoints; as well as TV and newspapers, it particularly lends itself to online and mobile media for those that want ball-by-ball news and scores.



So, with a strong fan base and a plethora of properties to suit all pallets and wallets, cricket is a property with an attractive portfolio. But the flipside of this complexity is the risk of confusing the consumer. As with all sponsorships the trick to fulfilling the potential of a cricket sponsorship is to be very clear about what you are trying to do for the brand, with whom and what position you are taking as a sponsor i.e. what are you giving back to cricket? This is critical when it comes to choosing the vehicle in the first place and activating it going forward, and of course as a researcher I should stress the importance of evaluating its contribution to the brand's strategy. So, in the same way Freddie Flintoff was, or perhaps even still is, for England, for all kinds of brands and objectives, cricket can be a genuine all-rounder.



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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