



Recent events, such as this with the Chinese Olympic Committee, show the excitement around the Games

Marketers Aim to Stir Chinese Passions

Capitalizing on Olympic sponsorships requires local market understanding

By Nick Griffith

This year, we are truly witnessing history in the making in China. Like a hurdler pushing himself forward as far and as fast as his muscles will allow, China is making great strides in its preparation for the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games. Architectural wonders for sports, commerce and culture have opened in rapid succession. Infrastructure, not only in Beijing, but in cities throughout the country, has been modernized to greet visitors from every corner of the planet. Meanwhile, the country's interest and participation in sports has reached

record levels, inspired by China's ascension to the world's sporting elite in the last 20 years.

Not coincidentally, sports marketing in China has seen a similarly large surge in interest. While in previous years sports marketing focused on advertising and hospitality, recently Chinese corporate sponsors have become more adept at developing fully integrated engagement models that serve as effective promotion tools to help companies reach their objectives.

An Olympic sponsorship is one of the most powerful marketing tools a company can use to help build its busi-

ness. However, it can only be effective when it is used to engage target audiences and tap into their passions. A number of the programs that Chinese Olympic sponsors have developed serve to emphasize this fact.

Octagon's Passion Drivers® research helps explain the key factors that contribute to the excitement that consumers feel for various sports, as well as for the Olympic Games in general. For example, soccer fans in China possess a strong overall love of the game and admiration for the skill and athleticism of the best teams and players, regardless of their home countries. On the

other hand, Chinese love of badminton and table tennis stems from their more immediate connection with the sports, primarily because so many love to play these games.

We have also found that fans of the Olympics in China are driven overwhelmingly by their support of the national teams. This contrasts with Olympic fans in Canada and the United Kingdom, who are chiefly motivated by the history and traditions of the Olympic Games and sports, and fans in the US, who are inspired by an overall love of the events and interest in the athletes' lives away from the competition.

Based on these findings, it is important for sponsors in China to demonstrate that they not only support the Games themselves, but the Chinese Olympic Team as well. The Games' "Dancing Beijing" logo has been ubiquitous over the last few years as sponsors (and some overenthusiastic "ambush marketers," which have no official relationship with the Games) have promoted the mark on everything from outdoor billboards and phone bills to instant noodles packaging. However, only a handful of sponsors have promoted the national team, including McDonald's with its "I'm lovin' China wins" ("我就喜欢中国赢") campaign, and adidas with its ad campaign featuring an endless sea of fans supporting some of China's brightest stars.

Beyond the foreign multinationals,

these Games are also an opportunity for local brands to make a name for themselves. For example, Yanjing Beer, the Official Domestic Beer Sponsor of the 2008 Games, originally became involved in sports to raise awareness for their brand. It sponsored an athlete

gan "Cheers to China" ("为中国干杯"), which has been featured in advertisements, product packaging, at points of sale and on their website. (Since the launch, several other Olympic sponsors have also announced "cheer"-related slogans and themes to tap into Chinese

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awards show held at the Great Hall of the People and ads could be seen court-side at Rockets games during the early part of Yao Ming's career in the NBA. However, with a massive investment in the Beijing Games, Yanjing Beer needed a comprehensive strategic approach to maximize their return on the Olympics.

We recommended a strategy in which they would celebrate the greatness of China and Chinese athletes. In 2007, they unveiled a new Olympic slo-

consumers' patriotism.) Yanjing also recently launched a special-edition can (see picture left) featuring the slogan and the Chinese Olympic Committee's new commercial logo to demonstrate that they support all of China's athletes competing in the Games, not just one or two specific sports.

Chinese Beijing 2008 sponsors like Yanjing are at the beginning stages of forging long-term partnerships with the Olympic Movement in China. Many will learn from this experience as they associate their brands with other sports properties in subsequent years. Certainly, the future of sports marketing in China is very bright. However, the leaps taken in recent years will likely slow somewhat after the Games. The industry's progression will likely occur in more measured steps.

As Chinese companies develop exciting leveraging programs around the Guangzhou 2010 Asian Games and 2011 Shenzhen World University Games in the coming years, and perhaps even a China-based NBA All-Star Game down the road, we'll look back on the 2008 Games as a watershed moment for sports marketing in China. 🍻

Nick Griffith is Director of Olympic Consulting at Octagon, a global sports and entertainment marketing company. He has been based in Beijing for more than four years.



COURTESY OF YANJING

Yanjing's "为中国干杯" slogan aims to draw on China's support for its Olympic Team