

Sponsorship is more than just a badge on a Springbok jersey

 By [Chris Mberdyk](#) 3 Sep 2015

More than a century ago a cynical fellow called John Wanamaker bemoaned the fact that while he knew that he the money he spent on advertising was wasted, he couldn't work out which half...



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One wonders what facetious remark he would have made about the hundreds of millions of Rands in marketing budgets being ploughed into so many sports sponsorship campaigns these days? Probably something like; "...sponsorship is nothing more than an outrageously expensive way for corporate executives to goof off at the game and call it work."

And to a certain extent he would have hit the nail right on the head. Because sponsorship is both difficult and expensive to quantify.

But, there are companies that get it right. Unfortunately, a lot more who get it wrong and end up spending millions that would most likely have earned them a far better return on their investment if they had chosen instead to buy fleets of unroadworthy pirate combi taxis with armed AWB members in full uniform as their drivers.

Those who get it right look at event sponsorship as part of an overall and on-going marketing strategy. They know that it is highly unlikely that just having billboards dotted around the field will do the job.

Wise sponsors will also not be in the least concerned about the fact that pitifully few die-hard football fans are able right now to remember who all the sponsors were for the soccer World Cup only five years ago.

Because the point of sponsorship is not about anyone remembering who sponsored the Olympics or even last night's episode of *Isidingo*. Or just having a logo on a TV screen or slogan on a player's shirt. Sponsorship, they'll tell you, is about long-term brand recognition and loyalty as well building relationships with customers, suppliers and employees. Sponsorship works only when it is persistent, consistent and leveraged to the point of getting blood out of every possible stone in sight.

And it also only works when enough budget is put aside to use good old-fashioned qualitative and quantitative research using a big enough sample of the target market to measure attitudes, awareness and perceptions.

Combined with broadcast delivery, peripheral publicity and sales results, research can not only provide answers to effectiveness, but can also nail down a credible return on investment number. But only in time. The big picture takes time to emerge. And money and patience.

An indication that it must be working is the fact that only a decade ago, sponsorship amounted to just under 10 per cent of traditional advertising expenditure in South Africa.

This figure, I reckon, is now probably two to three times that. Which certainly suggests to me that a lot of big and by

implication, conservative players in corporate marketing are only getting involved because they're able to work out with reasonable accuracy, just what sort of ROI they are achieving.

Interestingly enough, when the now defunct Marketing Federation of Southern Africa published its comprehensive and I might add, first class, guidelines to sponsorship a few years ago, it titled the tome an "Investors Guide to sponsorship." With a significant portion dedicated to measurement.

Event sponsorship is now a very serious business. So much so that no country will get past first base in its bid to host the Olympics or a World Cup if they don't have ambush marketing legislation in place, and then be prepared to apply the law with gusto. As South Africa did that with the Cricket World Cup and Football World Cup, lawyers threatened to sue everyone making use of World Cup logos or trying to muscle in on the action.

Companies ploughing millions into World Cups expect these laws to be upheld even to the point of waylaying a sports journalist as he arrived at one of the warm up matches of the Cricket World Cup, not because he had left his press pass at his hotel, but because in his briefcase he had a cold drink brand that was a competitor of one of the official sponsors.

ABOUT CHRIS MOERDYK

Apart from being a corporate marketing analyst, advisor and media commentator, Chris Moerdyk is a former chairman of Bizcommunity. He was head of strategic planning and public affairs for BMW South Africa and spent 16 years in the creative and client service departments of ad agencies, ending up as resident director of Lindsay Smithers-FCB in KwaZulu-Natal. Email Chris on moerdykc@gmail.com and follow him on Twitter at [@chrismoerdyk](https://twitter.com/chrismoerdyk).
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