

New report highlights foul play in sports marketing

PALO ALTO, US: The latest CMO Council study shows that optimism and the potential for increased spend has amplified the need to stop brand trespassers, ambush tactics and scammers as online channels intensify threats; the report highlights the need for more proactive brand protection and property rights management.



A new study from the Chief Marketing Officer (CMO) Council indicates many sports marketers and sponsors ignore or inadequately invest in brand protection programs even though they believe trademark violations and property rights issues are undermining brand value and assets. The marketer poll was part of the CMO Council's latest initiative, *Doing Away With Foul Play in Sports Marketing* (www.sportsbrandprotect.com), which aims to sensitise sports franchise owners, event hosts, marketers and sponsors to trademark trespassing, property rights violations and online scams, frauds and infringements.

Wake up!

Doing Away With Foul Play tapped into the insights of more than 225 senior level sports marketers across leading consumer market categories, compiling a comprehensive assessment of how brands safeguard themselves and whether these measures are effective. Sponsored by MarkMonitor, a global leader in enterprise brand protection, the study shows most sports marketers believe brand infection negatively impacts the value of their sponsorships and undermines brand trust. Unfortunately, many companies do not have brand protection programs, and many of those that do focus on the wrong threats. In an industry expected to see revenues of US\$141 billion (about R987 billion) by 2012 (PwC), this highlights the need for brands to wake up, understand the threats and learn how to better protect themselves.

Most sports marketers and property owners (72%) believe sports sponsorships are a valuable and effective way to brand while engaging customers. An additional 15% say sports sponsorships have always been a part of their marketing mix. Only 9% plan on cutting back or eliminating their sports marketing spend.

Ambush marketing a major concern

However, while counterfeiting and knock-off merchandise may have been the biggest threat to brands in years past, the study reveals that marketers today have other concerns. 41% of respondents list ambush marketing by competitors as the top issue in brand protection, well ahead of the 29% still focused on counterfeiting. 27% say improper behaviour by elite athletes and players is a top issue, and 26% focus on online brand hijacking, showing marketers' increasing sensitivity towards digital media.

To protect against these threats, the study reports sports marketers and property owners are employing a variety of new defences. 34% run "genuine and authentic" marketing and merchandising programs to combat IP infringement, and 24% try to minimise the impact of these issues to reduce potential negative exposure. Almost as many marketers (23%) use third parties to gather intelligence on violations, and 20% actively pursue and prosecute counterfeiters. However, 26% do not participate in any brand protection programs at all.

'Not enough brands are adjusting to the new challenges'

"The brand protection issues that sponsors and sports properties must protect against are changing," noted Donovan

Neale-May, executive director of the CMO Council, a global executive group representing some 5500 marketers in nearly 100 countries. "Sports marketers are using the same strategies and tools to protect their brands and IP that they were using when knock-off merchandise was the only threat. But as the sports industry grows globally, and as fan bases go digital, not enough brands are adjusting to the new challenges."

Effective brand protection in a constantly evolving digitally connected, social media world is one of these new challenges. 52% of respondents report they track, monitor or measure the use of their brand in these new engagement channels, while 23% are developing a strategy to do so. Still, 25% do not have a brand protection plan for digital media.

"Digital media is a double edged sword for sports properties," said Frederick Felman, chief marketing officer of MarkMonitor. "The level of engagement with consumers and fans is a huge opportunity for marketers to boost awareness and grow their brand. But they are also facing constantly evolving online threats and need to have a plan to protect themselves."

Detailed findings of the online consumer survey can be found by visiting www.cmocouncil.org/resources/form-foulplay.asp. The report outlines the biggest brand protection challenges facing sports marketers and property owners, along with detailed best practices accounts from executives from leading sports franchises and corporate sponsors.

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>