
USING PUBLIC RELATIONS TO LEVERAGE SPONSORSHIP

"Twenty years ago when sponsorship costs for a top team were in the hundreds of thousands instead of seven and eight figures, you could find companies willing to take a pro-active look at team sponsorship. These days, a decision goes to the very top of the company. You have to show these companies the value. There has to be a return on investment."

Derrick Cope (NASCAR driver)

EXPLOITATION ROUTES AND REQUIREMENTS FOR SUCCESS

There are two elements of sponsorship - procurement and management. The effectiveness of sponsorship depends on the context in which the brand reaches the target audience. In general, audiences that attend the sponsored event draw on the positive association of the event and the activities undertaken. By association, a sponsor aligns the brand with this positive experience creating a more receptive comprehension of key messages.

In considering Sponsorship, it is important to link your brand with credible activities, community groups and causes that are relevant to the brand.

As a general rule every dollar given to the organisation being sponsored must be followed by a further two dollars spent on leveraging the sponsorship. This ensures the commercial success of sponsorship as a brand communications tactic. Sponsorships are a bit like participating at exhibitions... where you have to work beyond the initial payment. Remember to augment your sponsorship payment with sufficient budgets to promote the sponsorship itself.

Let's consider sports sponsorship as an example. One would imagine from the amount of media space dedicated to sport makes sports sponsorship the perfect event to put your bets on. The back section of the newspaper, dedicated television channels, supporters' web sites, front pages of magazines ... clearly the quantity and quality of editorial space dedicated to sport surpasses that of any other interest. Match reporting and results have escalated into news, features, profiles, technology, behind-the-scenes, calendars and graphics. Sport is a common currency regardless of social background, nationality or age.

Despite the proliferation of outlets and the media space available, securing coverage is still very competitive. Sport's coverage is dominated hugely by cricket in India and soccer across Europe, baseball in US, etc. These sports have specialist staffers on newspapers that follow the sport internationally as well as substantial periods of dedicated television time. This provides a challenge for the other sports to break through.

To secure a return on investment for the dollars that have been spent, sponsors want to ensure that their brands are visible across the various media platforms that their target audiences listen to, watch and read. Here we enter a game between two sides as competitive as anything you see on the pitch - the editorial independence XI versus the commercial cut through XI.

Brands can cut through the clutter via a variety of means:

1. Photography - a good relationship with photographers and photo editors can ensure good visibility from action shots. Contracting a 'name' photographer is another effective option.
2. Player contracts put the sponsor in a powerful position, enabling negotiation to take place on appearances in return for visibility. This can include branded photography, regular columns or ghost articles, as well as satisfying the media's constant appetite for interview time.
3. Television programming allows sponsors to achieve strong visibility through a number of editorial and commercial means. Commercially, ad spots around the television programming or a broadcast sponsorship deal that integrates the sponsor into intros and breaks leads to a very effective positioning. Branded graphics packages are also a means of securing on-air presence. There is also the underwriting arrangement where there will be a guaranteed number of verbal mentions or minutes of branded coverage.
4. Creative media angles which appeal to the readership and style of a particular paper and which integrate the sponsorship in an editorially sensitive manner are where the in-house PR team or external PR agency can add significant value. Strong ideas rely on good media contacts, solid knowledge and a keen sense of the media outlet concerned.
5. The proliferation of the Internet has given sponsors another route to reaching existing or indeed new audiences. This can be done in a number of different ways, from presence via editorial and branded banners on the official web site to links and cross-promotions to other relevant sports and media web sites. Sponsors can develop their own dedicated micro sites but this is only advisable if they provide real added-value - such as an on-line press office - and do not try and compete with an official site which is likely to draw many more visitors.

The ability to successfully publicise a sponsorship through some of the mechanics suggested above is determined by a number of factors.

1. The first of these is the sponsor's contract. The contract concentrates on the quantifiable rights - number of hospitality passes and tickets; size of logos; number of boards - and also addresses access to players, requirements for promotional days or image rights issues. Contracts can also be vague as to the responsibility of the various parties to provide public relations services - and fails to recognise the different agendas. The rights holder is often primarily concerned with generating publicity to assist ticket sales whereas the sponsor, although recognising that a well-attended event is valuable, will usually view brand building communications opportunities as priorities.
2. An integrated approach to marketing communications is one of the strengths of sponsorship but at the planning stage the role of the various disciplines needs to be recognised. For example, awareness can primarily be driven by television programming and advertising, whereas the strength of public relations lies in using the sponsorship to drive key messages about the sponsor's brand and business.

3. The third determinant is appropriate resource levels. Whether through the sponsor's in-house PR department, the resources of the event organiser or external support through freelancers or PR consultancies, sufficient time and personnel need to be allocated to the event. Public relations - unlike some of the other marketing communications disciplines - is largely a factor of time.
4. The final success factor is an appropriate budget. There are still sponsors that pay large rights fees and do not allocate funds to leverage their involvement. Often this is because there is an expectation that PR will flow naturally from their involvement or that it is the role of the rights holder or event organiser. There have been various industry ratios put forward of rights fees to leverage budgets but the objectives of sponsors differ - as do the breadth of the sponsorship rights - so each PR programme needs to be costed on its own merits.
5. Finally, one of the glories of sport is its unpredictability. The freak result, the nail-biting tension and the dramatic incident can amplify the awareness of an event to unprecedented levels. A well thought-out PR programme can deliver excellent returns from a strong event as well as providing a platform for taking advantage of the unexpected.

Successful sponsors recognise the extraordinary synergy that can result when two major brands come together - in this instance an association with the world's largest sporting event. But this benefit can quickly be usurped when the image of the Olympics becomes tarnished. Why then would a sponsor align itself with a major sports event whose image, crucial to its commercial success, was arguably tarnished?

THE OLYMPICS AND SPONSORSHIP - A MATCH MADE IN HEAVEN?

At a major conference held at the University of Sydney during the 2000 games the Australian Judge Patricia O'Shane noted, in a debate on the moral health of the Olympic movement, that: "The IOC is not living up to the ideals it expects the athletes to embrace. It certainly doesn't hold moral and ethical values at the core of its business." And it would appear that consumers think the same way as a nationwide poll undertaken by Performance Research shortly after the Salt Lake City scandal broke indicated that 40% believed "Their overall impression of the Olympics has been damaged".

But it seems that in the minds of most consumers there's a distinction between the IOC and the Games and the companies who sponsor them. In the same poll 85% indicated that they "welcome corporate sponsorship if it keeps the Olympics going", and, even more encouraging for sponsors, 30% said that "a company's involvement in the Olympics has a positive impact on my everyday purchasing decisions". Evidence from the Sydney Olympics would suggest the trend continuing since, thanks to a deliberate strategy by the organising committee of not repeating the commercial circus that Atlanta had been. Awareness of Olympic sponsors involved in both Games was much higher in Sydney than Atlanta - a leap of 9% to 35% in the case of McDonald's. Less is clearly more - over 200 companies had some form of commercial partnership with Atlanta whilst in Sydney only 100 could lay claim to an official Olympic involvement.

Perhaps, for the first time in Sydney, the right balance was found between the commercial needs of the Games and the aesthetics of the event. Consumer-oriented Olympic sponsors finally woke up to the fact that buying the rights to the rings would not, alone, achieve anything and only by adding value to the occasion in an appropriate and strategic way would they stand the remotest chance of achieving something resembling a payback on their investment.

The Athens 2004 Olympics were able to attract fantastic sponsorship sums from a nation on the bottom rung of the economic ladder within the European Union. Alpha Bank, for example, somehow determined that £43m was an acceptable price to pay to become the Official Bank of the Games, the largest amount ever paid by a single national sponsor, three times the minimum amount required by the tender and twice the amount paid for the same category sponsorship in Sydney.

McDonald's Olympic Sponsorship

For 35 years, McDonald's has been committed to the international Olympic Movement. Beginning in 1968, McDonald's began airlifting hamburgers to U.S. athletes in Grenoble, France and since then has served millions of athletes, their families and fans. The Athens Games marked McDonald's fourth Olympic Games as a TOP (The Olympic Program) Sponsor and fifth as the Official Restaurant of the Olympic Games.

McDonald's plans for the Athens Games covered various stakeholders including its team members and customers. Its creative application to draw benefits from sponsorship were as follows:

McDonald's Olympic Champion Crew

Just as the world's athletes compete to earn a coveted slot on their home country's Olympic team, McDonald's 1.3 million crew worldwide vied for the opportunity to become a member of McDonald's Olympic Champion Crew. Participating McDonald's restaurants around the world are hosting competitions to select the "best of their best" based on criteria including service, quality, speed, accuracy and teamwork—reflecting the ideals of the Olympic Games. These outstanding employees were honoured in Athens at a special pre-Games event where they demonstrated their championship skills to the world. While in Athens, they helped serve athletes and spectators, attended Olympic events and participated in special entertainment activities.

Olympic Day Run

McDonald's is the exclusive worldwide sponsor of the Olympic Day Run, an annual series of community "fun runs" that coincides with the annual Olympic Day celebration on June 23rd, and is the only worldwide simultaneous event of its kind, taking place in more than 150 countries. The worldwide event is designed to promote the Olympic ideals and a healthy, active lifestyle for men, women and children, while commemorating the founding of the IOC.

McDonald's Olympic Venues

McDonald's built three full-service restaurants to serve more than 300,000 athletes, coaches, officials and spectators. The restaurants were located in the Athens Olympic Sports Complex (OAKA), adjacent to the Olympic Stadium; at the Main Press Centre (MPC); and in the Olympic Village.

Sponsors have not been slow in coming forward to support Beijing 2008 either. Not surprising, given the potential scale of the Chinese market, one might say. But what is more surprising is that those sponsors who openly criticised the IOC for its slack ethics in relation to Salt Lake City and who feared for the potential damage such association might have on their brands, clearly think that the opportunity for business in China vastly outweighs the potential downside of an affiliation with an event in a country with an appalling human rights record. Both Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have criticised Olympic sponsors for their apparent hypocrisy on this matter, and sponsors will have to be very aware of the risk to their brand image should it be proven that China is guilty of further human rights abuses directly linked to the Games.

Perhaps, and at the risk of being over-optimistic, Beijing 2008 can finally provide an opportunity for Olympic sponsors to not only benefit from the commercial exploitation of their involvement with the Games but to also make a tangible and visible difference to the lives of the Chinese population. For example, instead of following the expected path of avoiding any interference in the organisation and running of the event, the time might be right for media, telecoms and communications sponsors to press hard for restrictions on freedom of expression to be lifted before the Games, and for clothing and footwear sponsors to ensure, finally, that fundamental labour rights are adhered to.

With the turnover of the largest corporations exceeding that of the GDP of some countries, perhaps sponsors can become a force for change to leave a lasting, positive legacy for the markets in which the Games are taking place, and for the population who will ultimately, it is hoped, become consumers of their products.

TAKING THE LID OFF FOOTBALL SPONSORSHIP

Researching this piece during the FIFA World Cup makes a comment on the World Cup mandatory. One could be excused for thinking that the only news fit to print happens every four years ... is the World Cup. Cover stories to special pull outs, news media is dominated by Soccer, that too in a nation that has never sent a team to the World Cup and is unlikely to do so in the near future.

Young and old don Brazil's yellow and green colour shirts, wealthy Indians headed off to Germany to catch a slice of the action and children demanded birthday parties with a soccer theme. It's impossible to escape the football frenzy as all other TV programming pales in comparison. Even the retail environment is full of collectibles and merchandise of this sporting event.

World Cup 2002 was regarded as highly successful both commercially and operationally. Worldwide viewing figures are estimated in the tens of billions. And the sponsors? Well, "Nike won the World Cup" according to Marketing Magazine (4 July, 2002). Likewise Adidas's investment in 2006 is being hotly debated to be a great success.

It's no longer about accountability and the right deal at the right price; the future will be about relevance, creativity in execution, long-term partnerships, integrated campaigns, added value from rights holders to sponsors, and the fans.

For example, Adidas and football makes sense – there is relevance between the two. Seriously Strong Cheddar and Kilmarnock (Scottish Premier League) is a bit of a stretch, "I associate beer with football, not cheese" a perplexed fan commented.

And where is the creativity in sponsorship? It's basically the same deal each time, packaged differently. Creative advertising resonates with the consumer - how often does football sponsorship achieve any real connect with the fans?

Thankfully there are a handful of sponsors who understand integration and the need to commit to long-term relationships, which supports the property and the fans. And some companies go to great lengths to make the fan the focus of their efforts.

Arguably, no one does it better than Coca Cola, who since 1930, have had plenty of time to refine their proposition. "Of course advertising is only a small part of Coke's marketing activity during the World Cup, which includes an emphasis on kids and grassroots activities. In a world of diversity, and increasing mistrust of US cultural hegemony, one suspects the soft drinks monolith has finally got its football strategy right." Marketing Magazine (30 May, 2002).

McDonald's has also been a longtime supporter of football for more than 25 years at the grassroots level to the glory of international tournaments. McDonald's has served as sponsor and Official Partner of the FIFA World Cup since 1994 in the United States, continuing through 1998 in France, 2002 in Korea and Japan and 2006 in Germany.

As a worldwide sponsor and Official Partner of the FIFA World Cup, McDonald's pursued a powerful strategy of making stronger, more relevant connections with its customers around the world. McDonald's sponsorship of this premier sporting event provides the opportunity to speak to consumers across the globe through the universal language of football, a shared interest among millions of customers and employees.

The global centrepiece of McDonald's FIFA World Cup activation was the **Player Escort Programme**. Through this exclusive initiative, which supports McDonald's commitment to balanced, active lifestyles, 1,408 children of 6-10 years received the chance to make their FIFA World Cup dreams come true. At the start of all 64 official FIFA World Cup matches, McDonald's Player Escorts walked onto the field hand-in-hand with the world's best football players and experienced the glory of the World Cup firsthand. The Player Escort Programme had participation from a total of 51 countries, with 226 international children and 1,182 children from host country Germany.

In markets around the world, McDonald's restaurants engaged customers through special promotions, contests, advertisements, in-store activations and special menu items to bring the excitement of FIFA World Cup to local communities. Some examples include:

- Germany: In a first for the FIFA World Cup, Official Fan Dancers have been recruited by McDonald's to entertain fans before all six matches in Berlin, including the Final alongside official mascot GOLEO VI. A panel of German celebrities selected the Official Fan Dancers.
- Leveraging the growing popularity of on-line fantasy league gaming, for

the first time, McDonald's offers Internet users around the world a chance to participate in the FIFA World Cup experience through an exclusive global sponsorship of the McDonald's/FIFA Fantasy(TM) Game on <http://www.FIFAWorldCup.com>, available in nine languages. Football fans will be able to manage a squad of football superstars and compete against celebrity fantasy teams in the ultimate online football fantasy game.

MEDIA VALUE: SPONSORSHIP'S HOLY GRAIL AND ACHILLES' HEEL

The research by marketing press into the levels of media exposure for sponsors of individual Formula 1 teams, undertaken on a daily basis of every type of broadcast across seven European countries from January to June 1999, revealed that Ferrari (30%) and McLaren (22%) accounted for over half the available exposure between them (Source: SRI). Not surprising, given the relative success of both teams in the season's championship. More surprising, though, was that this exposure had been valued at over \$3bn each, had that airtime been purchased at commercial airtime rates.

What does this value tell us? On the face of it, it might say that McLaren and Ferrari are generating an extraordinarily good return on their investment, were we to know what their true investment in the sport really is. Or we might surmise that the marketing rights for F1 teams are massively undervalued.

In reality, valuing media exposure in isolation at commercial rate-card cost is misleading and meaningless. Very little advertising is ever bought at this price, and sponsorship media value quoted in this way fails to take account of the regular discounts that advertisers normally derive. Thirty seconds of logo exposure on screen, one mention of the sponsor in a press article, one reference to the sponsor within a radio broadcast, does not deliver the same impact as the same amount of broadcast or print space bought to communicate an advertising message.

There are very rare occasions when it can be argued that the value of being at the heart of an event, appealing to an audience usually difficult to reach by more traditional methods, might be worth more than rate card value. The same might be said for a product very visibly endorsed by an athlete in the heart of positive action. But more often than not marketers and rights holders persist in using hyper-inflated media value when presenting the outcomes of their events, without reference to context or campaign objectives.

Why is this? We believe there are three major issues at stake. Firstly, the industry lacks any universally agreed formula to approaching the discounting of rate card media values. We have seen factors of anything between 5 per cent and 100 per cent applied to the visibility of event signage within an industry that cannot agree on what is acceptable or meaningful, or reach consensus on a scientific approach upon which to base that assumption.

Secondly, too many sponsors still hold the belief that media coverage alone will achieve sponsorship goals (assuming these were known in the first place) and spend very little in exploiting the equity of the event to fully reach the hearts and minds of the audience. If the media component of a sponsorship package is evaluated in isolation, no account is taken of the impact of the message on the consumer or the

quality and tone of the impression. There is also no understanding of the impact of the clutter of other sponsors on the recall of the consumer.

Thirdly, the use of rate card values for media coverage provides rights holders with the opportunity to oversell and overstate the media impact of their event to naïve marketers who should know better. Many take data provided by the rights holder at face value, as a means of post-rationalising a sponsorship spend and without undertaking their own independent assessment. It is little wonder, in our experience, that once an impartial evaluation is undertaken, so many sponsorship contracts and promised deliverables fail to stand up to scrutiny.

What can be done? Thankfully, we are seeing an increasing shift towards the understanding that sponsorship impacts the consumer in a different way to traditional communication methods, and that measuring media value is simply not enough. Integrated campaigns, trade and consumer promotions and on and off-line support all ensure maximum value from the equity of the event, and given the increasing entry cost and complexity of a decent campaign the need for an objective, strategic sponsorship approach is crucial.

All major sponsors need a return on investment framework that, dependent on the goals of the sponsorship in the first place, assesses not only the reach and media coverage of the activity but considers the impact on consumer behaviour, brand favourability and direct sales, where these can be specifically isolated. The media exposure that major events can offer is (usually) the major draw for sponsors, and if a value must be placed on it, far better to use a comparative index over time than a random use of rate cards and discounting factors. Impartiality is vital and this analysis should take place independently of the event's stakeholders - the rights holder, the rights sales agency and the event management company if used.

This framework enables sponsors to demonstrate to all levels of the business the value of the investment and enable comparisons between different sponsorship activities. It also helps to determine the strengths and weaknesses of the programme allowing remedial steps to be taken if the contract is long-term and a reconsidered approach and strategy to the next sponsorship if not.

THE ETHICS OF THE AMBUSH SHARP BUSINESS OR SHODDY PARASITE?

At the 1998 World Cup, over 250,000 people visited Nike's "People's Republic of Football", opened by the Brazilian Football Team, and featuring interactive games, merchandise and soccer skills areas. Miniature cars emblazoned with Nike logos and filled with Nike players roamed the streets, stopping and offering free clinics. Advertising hoardings were everywhere. Six competing teams wore Nike strip.

Nike generated a 32% sponsor recognition rate. Adidas, as the Official Sponsor, with rights to the official logo and perimeter boards around the pitch reaching a TV audience of an estimated 40 billion people and nearly 3 million live spectators, achieved only 3% more (source: Sport+ Market study 1998) Over two-thirds of British consumers failed to recognise or mis-identified the Official World Cup Sponsors (source: Marketing Week July 1998) Is this savvy marketing or unethical business practice that confuses the consumer?

Ambush marketing has been defined as "the practice whereby another company, often a competitor, seeks association with the sponsored activity without payment to

the activity owner". This company attempts to deflect some of the audience attention away from the sponsor to itself.

Whilst regulations govern what marketers can or can't do, rules do not cover all aspects of the decision making process. Whilst a company is likely to have its own written codes of ethics and unwritten company cultures, a marketer will often have to make decisions based on additional ethical considerations beyond what is legal, or within industry guidelines. Much press debate has centred on misleading advertising and the impact of deceiving consumers, but sports sponsorship differs from advertising in that the message and the medium in which it is carried are inextricably linked.

Ambush marketing can provide a means of piggybacking on an event without paying exorbitant fees to do so. This activity can take the form of:

1. Sponsoring the broadcast of the event - Broadcast sponsorship by a non-competitor is of course a perfectly legitimate activity but can result in much higher awareness than for event sponsors who have, through their actions, enabled the event to happen. Although increasingly rights holders build broadcast rights into event sponsorship contracts in an effort to avoid this.

Heineken Export were both event and broadcast sponsor of the 1995 Rugby World Cup and achieved an awareness rating of 74 per cent - substantially higher than the next best-placed sponsor in South African Airways who achieved 45 per cent and sponsored the event alone. Most surprising, though, was the achievement of 26 per cent awareness for Sony, who had nothing to do with the event at all. Sony were the broadcast sponsor of the 1991 event, and scored so highly on awareness that they were still thought of four years later, beating a number of official event sponsors in the process. (Source: TSMS Connector)

2. Buying ad-space during event transmission times - yet more cost prohibits most sponsors from buying commercial airtime in the broadcast, which is more often than not bought by competitors.
3. Using event imagery and association to run major promotions around events - for all the efforts of FIFA to trademark the World Cup name and image, numerous companies promote their own un-related football rights at this time or use more general football imagery to suggest an event association.
4. Sponsoring teams or individual athletes - it is usually financially prohibitive and commercially unviable for a sponsor to tie up the rights to the event, the national teams taking part, the players, TV and radio broadcast and Internet rights in order to block out competition entirely. Coca-Cola paid a reported \$33m to be the Official Sponsor of the 1992 Olympics, only to have their efforts much reduced by Pepsi's endorsement of Magic Johnson who featured heavily in advertising at the time. This was sufficient for the IOC to threaten legal action against Pepsi.

It can be argued that ambush activity reduces the effectiveness of the official sponsors' promotions and reduces the potential revenue stream to, and the viability of the event, if that sponsor then refuses to renew. Increased ambush activity (along with rising costs and clutter) has led, in part, to a number of high-profile sponsor withdrawals, notably IBM and Mars from the Olympic TOP programme.

Equally, rights holders incur increasing costs (largely due to pressure from their sponsors) for the policing of rights and protection from ambush - costs which could otherwise be channelled back into the development of the sport or the enhancement of the event.

So is it morally right? The answer to this question depends on who you are asking. Paying millions in rights fees is no security to the sponsor that they will not be ambushed by a competitor, and both rights holders and sponsors regard ambush as a major irritation. There is an inherent risk that as sponsors shy away from increasing rights fees and ambush on the battlefield, revenues may decline and the ability of that sport to develop and grow will be seriously impaired.

Ambushers regard their activity as a legitimate reality in a free market, and may equally argue that they have a moral duty to find the most cost-effective and innovative means of delivering value to their shareholders. Failure to aggressively promote sponsorships leaves the door wide open for ambushers to steal the thunder, and there are many sponsors who buy rights, sit back and do nothing. In the words of one former Nike marketer: "If companies aren't aggressive in promoting their sponsorships, then they should be ambushed. Sponsors should dominate all of the public relations, advertising, promotions. Blitz the town where the event is held, buy up all the billboards. Make sure that everyone knows you are the sponsor. Do this and the ambusher looks like a bit player. If you are sloppy, then maybe an ambush will force you to become a better marketer..."

None of us can forget the 1996 cricket World Cup held in the sub-continent. Though Coca-Cola was the 'official' sponsor of the event, Pepsi stole the limelight with its 'Nothing official about it' tagline. The instance perhaps marks the most famous example of 'ambush marketing' in India. And no denying that it worked!

International Cricket Council (ICC) has since decided to introduce a clause for its future tournaments seeking to outlaw 'ambush marketing' and has urged individual Boards to take up the matter with their players on a priority basis.

Another instance of Pepsi's ambush marketing was seen during the 2002 football world cup, where Pepsi dominated on television with globally popular brand ambassador David Beckham, whereas Coca-Cola was the major sponsor of the event.

Taking a leaf again from the Coke-Pepsi bag of marketing gimmicks, another clever example of ambush marketing came during Michael Jackson's tour of Thailand. Michael Jackson who had a multi-million dollar contract with Pepsi, was supposed to perform at a concert in Thailand, but postponed the concerts pleading illness and dehydration from the heat. Rival Coca-Cola almost instantly took a shot at Jackson by running a print ad in Bangkok, which said, "Dehydrated? There's always Coke."

Ambush marketing tends to bring out the best of creativity. It also helps to break the clutter of conventional advertising. Meanwhile, it appears that in any given situation it would be almost impossible to completely stop ambush marketing, as it would amount to controlling the free flow of ideas.

ON A SMALLER SCALE

There's a raft of companies running conferences and seminars, which provide sponsorship opportunities. Are they useful or should they be avoided like the plague?

For B2B and industrial marketers, a sponsorship and speaking programme should be considered an essential part of the PR programme; for others it's more discretionary. A sponsorship should be viewed as more than the opportunity to speak to those in the room at the time. It has to reinforce strategy and reach important and often diverse target audiences. Sponsorship of a luncheon at a conference with the opportunity for just 10 minutes to speak can sometimes be very valuable.

The key consideration is how much - and how widely - can the forum be leveraged. The opportunities for gaining exposure include:

- Getting your name on the pre-mailings which publicise the event (typically less than five percent of those mailed a commercial invitation attend).
- Providing handouts to attendees.
- Put the preparation into your presentation. Craft the messages, produce a superior PowerPoint presentation which shows you and your company in a good light.
- Editing and representing the speech into a format that can be mailed to customers, suppliers etc.
- Putting the presentation (or an edited version) on your website.
- Gaining publicity for the presentation either in trade (or in some circumstances daily) media.
- Often a conference or seminar can be used as the occasion to officially announce a new product or service. You have a ready-made audience and an occasion which gives it more prestige. Skilful PR can then exploit this in publicity.

The key to success is in choosing the right conferences and seminars. The first priority is to proactively choose only those seminars that fit your needs rather than waiting to be invited.

A careful analysis has to go into the occasion, researching the speakers, participants and experiences at past conferences. You will be surprised as to how much information can be gained if only you ask and are persistent.

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