

Make your sponsorship work for your brand: Work at your sponsorship

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Sponsorship is not about slapping a brand or logo next to another.

The purpose of sponsorship is to help build your own brand, hence it is imperative to really think about the type of sponsorship and the brand you are about to be associated with. Sponsorship should allow you to gain advantage that you otherwise wouldn't get without it.

The best sponsorships or partnerships are ones leveraged to the maximum, and what you really want is a sponsorship or partnership that is a perfect strategic fit. By 'strategic fit' I mean brands that are sometimes in different categories but have very similar strategic platforms.



Sponsors effectively run the race with you... © Prakaymas Vitchitchalao – 123RF.com

For example, hypothetically speaking, if Apple were to sponsor TED Talks, this would make perfect sense, because Apple is a brand that prides itself on and is known for being both creative and innovative. On the other hand, TED is a brand about forward thinking and having the challenger mindset. The cherry on top is the fact that both brands attract people of similar mindsets and psychographics, meaning that Apple would be engaging with or have the opportunity to engage with people that fit their profile, so it's an opportunity for targeting.

Sometimes, sponsorship is not and doesn't really have to be based on strategic similarities, but can also just be that the sponsor realises or sees the opportunities that lie in sponsoring or going into a partnership with another brand or an event, whatever the case may be.

Sunfoil is doing it right

[Sunfoil](#) is a great example of a brand that is leveraging its sponsorship to help build the brand, not just through association, but also through activities that bring the sponsorship to life. Sunfoil sponsors cricket in South Africa at three levels: development, domestic and national.

At development level, they have what they call the 'Sunfoil Development School Trust'. Here they help unearth untapped talent and provide the necessary resources to ensure that the talent is not just discovered, but also well looked after. They do this by giving young promising students from disadvantaged backgrounds the opportunity to attend schools that will help them (students) develop and nurture their cricketing talents. At cricket matches, every boundary scored generates money that will go into the education trust.

They also sponsor cricket at domestic or provincial level. But the most interesting aspect of this sponsorship is how they leverage their sponsorship of the Proteas. The Proteas players are part of the sponsorship deal, engage with Sunfoil products and are seen using the products. This helps the brand garner credibility and trust, both pillars that drive trial at the least.

By bringing in the lead singer of Micasa, J Something, they are also doing something that's not expected with the brand, making it cool and aspirational. Stretching the aspirational approach, the focus is not the products themselves, but what the products enable one to produce in terms of meals. This helps Sunfoil to enhance the brand's image by influencing how it is perceived.

Ford's strategic fit sponsorship

A great example of a sponsorship or partnership that has a perfect strategic fit is that of Ford and *Idols* South Africa. Ford's biggest equity at the moment is the EcoBoost (which they are leveraging across most if not all their cars – whether you are driving a Ford Kuga or a Figo or a Fiesta, you are driving with an EcoBoost) engine. The engine is said to be the best in terms of fuel efficiency, environmental friendliness and performance (it has won 'Engine of the year award for 2014 – so it must be true). *Idols* SA is about performance. So the sponsorship of *Idols* allows Ford to link their product's key attribute or benefit to an event, based on that key attribute; 'performance' and therefore brings that attribute to life.

The specific car associated with *Idols* is the Fiesta, this too is a strategic, or more accurately, a target market fit. Based on the sponsorship, it is clear who the Fiesta is aimed at. Young, go-getters who are not afraid to get what they want, who are fresh and stylish.

The sponsorship is therefore a fit at two levels; at the car (Fiesta – stylish, fresh, edgy, beautiful design) because of the similarities in the target market for both brands, and product attribute (EcoBoost engine – performance, because after all, *Idols* is about having the best performance in order to win the hearts of both judges and the viewers) level.

Not to mention the fact that *Idols* SA enables aspiring singers to 'go further' (Ford's pay-off line).

Absa – A brand struggling with sponsorship

Albeit the above headline, Absa has started to leverage its sponsorship of the Premier Soccer League (PSL) by linking its products and services to football. Absa is achieving this by running competitions that encourage football fans to engage with the bank – although this is not enough, and there's plenty of room to explore effective opportunities.

Prior to this; the sponsorship felt random as there were no deliberate efforts to engage football fans with any of the brand's assets. Football presents a wide variety of contact and engagement opportunities with fans. There's the game itself, the presenters of the game, the analysts, commentators, the PSL clubs themselves, players, match days, pre-match, half time, post-match, pre-season, during season, post-season, and not to mention the football club that wins the premiership title – Kaizer Chiefs, which is one of the most decorated teams in the country, both by way of accolades and the number of fans has won the premiership two times in the last three seasons – what are the possibilities if you somehow link the premiership champions with your products and services? All these moments are moments in which fans are well engaged (of which degrees may differ) with what is happening.

With so many opportunities, for a long time, I could not understand how the sponsorship of this magnitude was not leveraging what is affectionately known as 'the beautiful game'.

In leveraging one of the starting points for Absa: sponsorship of the PSL, I guess one of the questions and areas to explore would be around 'Prosper'. How does 'Prosper' fit into the world of football in South Africa? How can we interpret the idea of prospering in the PSL? Not limited to these questions, but as a starting point, these question will unravel amazing opportunities, not just for creative executions, but I think also for content, whether on digital or any platform, medium or channel of contact between brand and consumers. I should probably get paid for this!

How should you manage or engage in your sponsorship?

The sponsorship of another brand or event should bring your brand some level of awareness, that's a hygiene factor, especially if the sponsee is a well-established brand that has amassed credibility and has a substantial following, but beyond that, the sponsorship should help build your brand and help you strengthen both your positioning and identity through association.

Ask yourself these questions about the sponsorship that you are about to embark on:

- How is the sponsorship going to help build our brand and through which brand assets are we going to achieve this? This will enable you to iron out the expectations from either side of the sponsorship, and also affords you the opportunity to identify unconventional brand-building opportunities, through relevant brand assets.
- Is the sponsorship a strategic fit (whether at the positioning, product or target market levels)? This will help in ensuring that the sponsorship is not just sponsorship for the sake of sponsorship, and that there is an over-arching objective of building a brand.
- What assets of the brand that we are sponsoring can we leverage? Establishing specific assets or equities that your brand can associate with is critical as this enables your brand to be strategic with what your brand is actually associated with – it has to fit your brand's identity or positioning.
- What activities can we co-create with the sponsored brand/event? This is an opportunity for collaboration and to create or produce unique or never-done-before content or activities. This question will enable you to work at your sponsorship – meaning you will proactively look for the growth maximisation of the sponsorship.

Remember, sponsorship is not advertising, so don't just aim to have your logo featured at the end (or beginning) of an event or next to the sponsored brand's logo, like it is a TV commercial. Work at your sponsorship.

At the least, sponsorship should afford your brand some level of distinction that is so pertinent to creating an impactful brand.

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