

Mission Accomplished

As more marketing dollars than ever shift to “experiential” marketing, brand marketers are finding themselves deluged with sports, entertainment, cause and event sponsorship proposals. Some of these proposals may actually make sense, but how can a brand filter them to ensure that they are aligning with the right properties at the right price to deliver the right results?

The U.S. Army takes a “portfolio” approach to sponsorship and event marketing to create and manage against a defined sponsorship strategy that guides investment decisions to optimize their R.O.O. (Return on Objectives).

After making a decision to invest in sponsorship and event marketing to help achieve its business objectives, the U.S. Army defined an overarching strategy for identifying relevant properties that could both increase awareness and provide lead-generation opportunities among target prospects and key influencers.

The core steps in process of developing the Army’s sponsorship and event marketing strategic framework were:

Target Definition. Whom do we want to talk to? We are seeing an emerging — and necessary — trend toward “micro-targeting” segmentation. The vast difference in lifestyles and related psychographics between an 18-year-old and a 34-year-old make 18-34 an outdated targeting model.

Target Immersion. Through tools such as MRI, Simmons, Scarborough, the ESPN poll, etc., the Army was able to gain a deep understanding of its target’s interests and passions. The key was to go beyond viewership, attendance and participation to gauge affinity for a given sport (or other passion point). Affinity is a key indicator of the leveragability of a given passion point as a marketing platform.

Articulated Objectives. Objectives need to be articulated in an actionable and measurable way, and then prioritized. Everything else flows out of this process.

The U.S. Army filters sponsorships and finds recruits.

by

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The articulation and prioritization of a brand’s objectives determines the strategies, tactics, and weighting within a given budget and plan.

Screening Criteria. Establish a defined set of sponsorship criteria that all future proposals can be filtered against. The criteria include such basics as target match/relevance, geographic relevance, timing, cost, exclusivity, etc. If the objectives are centered on mass awareness, the criteria will filter for opportunities that have mass-reach vehicles built into them. Or, if the objectives are about one-to-one engagement, the criteria will filter for opportunities that deliver those types of opportunities.

The establishment of this overarching strategic framework has allowed the Army to transform what had been a localized sponsorship process into a truly national and integrated marketing platform that has increased/validated leads, and improved awareness each year.

As a result, the Army was able to identify the most relevant and impactful sponsorship opportunities to achieve their objectives and map out how those sponsorship opportunities would work across a calendar year to hit their targets at every relevant passion point.

The understanding of both the target and the business objectives allowed the Army to articulate activation plans in

support of each sponsorship to optimize the R.O.O. that each investment delivered. Mapping out the plan across the calendar year also allowed the Army to identify “gaps” in the plan and fill them with proprietary event-marketing programs.

The plan is inclusive of fully integrated partnerships with NASCAR, NHRA, AFL, PBR, and PRCA among others. Proprietary events such as the U.S. Army All-American Bowl, Army College Tour and others add nearly unprecedented street-level depth to the plan.

Activation plans in support of each property extend the dialogue well beyond the event and capitalize on every relevant consumer touchpoint to ensure delivery of the Army’s message and ultimately, conversion of leads to contracts.

This strategy has enabled the Army to meet its recruiting mission in each of the previous five years. Over the course of those five years, the Army has generated 500,000 qualified leads out of a total of 1,000,000, as well as tens of millions of impressions.

The strategic framework has also empowered the Army to say “no” to the mountain of sponsorship proposals that do not fit within the screening criteria while saying “yes” to opportunities that may not have gotten proper consideration in the past. ■



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Marketing, which partnered with the U.S. Army to create and manage their sponsorship and event-marketing portfolio. For a free initial consultation on how best to optimize your existing sponsorship investments, or to create a strategic framework for evaluating sponsorship opportunities, email kevin.adler@relayworldwide.com or call 312.297.1404