

Out and About the Industry

An Olympic Year of Marketer Brand Commitment

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With so much media attention devoted to the presidential race, I had completely forgotten that 2012 is an Olympic year. It wasn't until last week's BP convention when I realized that the London summer games are looming over the horizon. With their official "Sponsor" designation, BP made sure that the entire convention was themed and merchandised in full Olympic regalia. It seems like just yesterday that the Beijing Games were wrapping up and the country was anxiously preparing for the 2008 presidential election. We all know how that turned out. Keeping in the spirit of the Olympics, the best group of folks to handle the bluster from that campaign was probably the equestrian event volunteers who were experienced and well equipped to shovel the heaping mounds of *Hope & Change-manure* that was dumped on the nation. But I digress.

Over the many years of my career I've had the opportunity of working on numerous Olympic events for various sponsors, including the Los Angeles, Seoul and Barcelona games. The 2012 BP sponsorship is surely to provide equal or greater levels of media and marketing investments. This demonstrates a tangible commitment to the BP brand that can be leveraged by marketers to increase sales and profits.

At this time, BP is not alone in significant downstream brand building. Late last year we attended the Shell Oil convention in Austin, Texas where they outlined a unique affinity program designed to positively differentiate them from competition into the future. Under penalty of death or dismemberment, marketers and attendees were sworn to secrecy about the program details, but needless to say, the Shell brand has something unique and special up its sleeve this year for its marketers and the motoring public.

In a couple of recent articles, I questioned the value of being branded and whether the majors were really committed to brand building anymore. It's safe to say that these two suppliers are clearly committed to providing marketers tangible reasons to continue their respective brand affiliations and loyalty. Correspondingly, in order to fully reap available benefits, marketers must be prepared to embrace the various programs and insure that their commitment extends all the way down to store personnel and the dealer network.

Unbranded operators have periodic fuel margin advantages in many regions of the country, and those that properly invest to create effective proprietary brands can compete successfully against the majors. For multi-site operators, simply being unbranded without required levels of investment and ongoing commitment will not stand the test of time. Whether an operator is branded or unbranded, consistent quality brand building is as important today as it was in the past. Long term business success will be attracted to those businesses that understand and embrace this simple fact.

If you are a branded marketer and your supplier has clearly demonstrated their brand commitment with unique marketing programs designed to build business and differentiate themselves from completion, then I sincerely recommend that you and your entire organization become fully engaged in the process. A retail brand building commitment may help overcome periodic unbranded price advantages and be the difference in long term success or failure of one or more stores. Bottom line, if you're branded with no plans to commit the necessary time and investment to properly go unbranded, then dive in and participate as fully as possible when opportunities arise.

On behalf of the entire PetroActive Services team, I want to wish all our industry friends a winning “Gold Metal” 2012. Between the upcoming summer Olympics and fall election, I’m sure this year will be more than interesting and hopefully the equestrian volunteers won’t have as much to shovel.

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