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## MARKETING: *sports*

### Lessons From A Sports Marketing Pioneer

by Jon Last, Tuesday, October 11, 2011 12 AM

It's a shame that most of you reading this don't know Bruce Florine. Bruce is one of the first sports marketers that I ever met and, clearly, one of the best. It was some 20 years ago that I took my freshly minted Wharton MBA degree to Florida and the PGA of America. And it was there, alongside Bruce, that I began my *real* sports marketing education. Just a few years older than I, Bruce, myself, and several others, formed a dynamic team that current PGA CEO Joe Steranka had brought on board to help develop and execute Joe's marketing vision to further leverage the association's assets and build new consumer-oriented businesses.

One of the first things that Bruce and I worked on together was developing marketing strategies for PGA Championship ticket sales and event product licensing, retailing and marketing. I may have taught Bruce a little bit about market segmentation and the use of research and strategic analysis. But he certainly taught me a lot more about the pragmatic realities of understanding and going beyond the formulas and "ideal scenarios" in ways that motivate people to toss aside provincial interests, work together and use varied backgrounds and perspectives to create things bigger and more compelling than any text book model could envision.

From Bruce, I began to learn from a peer who combined an incredibly creative and open mind with a confident, "can-do" optimism and an uncanny ability to make people like and trust him. To this day, those are among the most valuable attributes that any sports marketer can bring to the table and a great lesson for any of us in this often capricious and ever evolving business.

I will always assert that too many decisions in the sports business (or perhaps any business) are made on gut and intuition or for largely political reasons. As "Moneyball" now enters the public vernacular, it might be easy to suggest a small victory for us "data geeks." But Bruce's examples are always a helpful reminder that to win in sports marketing, you also need to be a people person. One who then leverages analysis and acute understanding of both the client and ultimate end consumer to spawn creativity is a sports marketer who truly provides ROI to his clients. "Substance and Style" was the tagline that we once used to promote a golf apparel marketing event, and it's also a fitting sound byte for what today's successful sports marketer needs.

Both Bruce and I went on to ultimately start our own companies and, in those initial years, he remained a confidante and strategic partner as our firms grew, always teaching and always eagerly consuming new information in ways that output brilliant and effective ideas. We've celebrated our successes, soothed our respective wounds and been there for each other to bounce off ideas and pitch programs together, be they the integration of database marketing best practices into fan loyalty programs or in integrating unique fan experiences like wine tastings into sports events. That ongoing two-way dialogue is another lesson sports marketers can take from Bruce Florine ... the power of building your own "network" of experts from outside your present organization.

Just recently, Bruce spearheaded a promotional event in support of the 2012 Ryder Cup Matches where team captains Davis Love III and Jose Maria Olazabal hit seven iron shots from Chicago's Trump Tower to a target on a makeshift barge, 16 floors below in the Chicago River. Like most of what I've seen from Bruce, the event was another great example of how sports marketing can be simultaneously creative, on message and executed within a complex network of clients and constituents of varied interests. Unfortunately, it will be his final example.

Bruce, still a young man, was tragically taken from us on Sept. 30 when struck by a falling tree limb on a golf course in his home state of Michigan. The horror of these circumstances makes it even more difficult for all of us touched by Bruce. We have lost a true friend and an innovative and creative spirit who leaves a legacy of success and many important lessons for those who practice both the art and science that is sports marketing. It is a shame that most of you did not get to know Bruce Florine as I did. I hope that, in reading this, you can still learn something valuable from him.