

## MARKETING: *sports*

# Breaking Through Amidst The Avalanche

by Jon Last, Tuesday, February 11, 2014 10 AM

While I've touched on this in my last couple of postings, I can't stop thinking about the transformative impact of cross-platform media activation on sports marketing.

As a quick contextual refresher, we've completed a couple of really insightful studies recently that dispelled the myth that new media was disrupting traditional channels and was, rather, contributing as value added in high-passion verticals inclusive of multiple sports that we work within. In simpler terms, the proliferation of new and often social media platforms was not replacing legacy sports media, but was complementing it, and adding a new dimension to the passion that fans harbor for their favorite teams, athletes and properties. In fact, our data showed that sports fans were in many cases, actually increasing the amount of time that they allocated to a wide range of vertical sports media.

Now, fresh off of completing the analysis of the 2014 edition of our annual sports omnibus study with 1,500 highly avid sports fans, more of the picture is coming into focus. The added insight begins with what on the surface seems counterintuitive. For several years consumer tracking research has revealed a portrait that illustrates a time crunch convergence. That is, consumers have expressed growing frustration with their inability to find the time to get everything done in their increasingly over-scheduled lives.

In fact, for the most affluent of fans and participants, time was becoming a more precious commodity than money, even amidst recent challenging economic conditions. Certainly, most of us in the sports marketing industry can relate to that observation. We are working longer hours. We are frequently traveling for business. In a pejorative context, the moms and dads among us relate to the negative connotation of "helicopter parents" in an American society that our research has continued to show, is becoming acutely child centric.

Yet, in the 2014 data, we see a provocative shift in a number of attitudinal statements that infer that sports fans are actually becoming more comfortable in a world of 24-7 content. In fact, couple this finding with the earlier media consumption work, and the simple conclusion is that avid sports fans are adapting to and embracing the content onslaught in ways that many of us may never have imagined possible. Might I say, that for those properties of greatest resonance, fans value the abundance of content. Now, in some cases, this suggests that something else has to give. Our research thus far has not declaratively explored potential time shifting away from other activities, but I would surmise that such has been the case, at least on some level.

A byproduct of this information avalanche, our research has shown, is that multiple platforms are co-existing at higher consumption levels – in part, because of the prevalence of multi-tasking. Sports fans are watching events on television with mobile devices in hand, tweeting, posting and seeking further context as the events unfold. One merely need look at the many reports of Twitter blowing up during the Super Bowl for further evidence beyond what our research has shown. DVR usage is becoming more prevalent both in real-time and post event, which can allow a variety of time "optimizing" behaviors.

So this has three particularly large implications for properties and brands activating through them. First is the fact that the delivery of engaging and contextually relevant marketing content is an even greater critical success factor than it ever has been. This could mean a shift back to the old days of umbrella sponsorship of

programming or content. Just look to increasing interest levels in native advertising for evidence. It's easy for me to say this as a researcher, but if you aren't testing the relevance and resonance of your sports marketing messaging within the proper contextual environment, you are not optimizing your efforts.

The second implication is perhaps the most difficult for marketers and that is the need to be ever more integrated and customized in the dissemination of messaging around sports and its various platforms. Part of the most valuable learnings of our research includes insight into the relative strengths and weaknesses of various sports media platforms. Each has unique benefits as well as specific and unique content areas, which are particularly relevant. More research-driven behavioral targeting can be a valuable tool here.

Finally, there should be a continuous effort to create and own unique and undistracted "communities" of content ... where the messaging can be woven into the environment. Interestingly, we've seen how platforms such as print and on-site, in-venue marketing can deliver some unique competitive advantage in this regard.