Who’s Winning the Battle? Academic and Industry Perspectives on the State of Ambush Marketing

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60-minute symposium, roundtable, or workshop

Room 322

The purpose of this interactive symposium is to examine the current state of ambush marketing from key academic and industry participants, through an assessment of both business and legal perspectives. Panelists in this symposium will discuss their complementary research agendas and industry engagement emanating from recent Olympic Games. This symposium discussion will be enhanced through the contribution of practitioners who have been on the ‘front line’ of the ambush marketing battle, including invited members of an Olympic Organizing Committee (OCOG), a National Olympic Committee (NOC), and, a senior marketing executive representing a premier corporate partner of the Olympic Games.

Related topics in this symposium will include a(n) (a) review of ambush marketing relative to sport marketing and sponsorship; (b) overview of ambush marketing and the Olympic movement (including corresponding IOC/OCOG policies); (c) examination of the current ‘state’ of the ambush marketing, from both business and legal viewpoints, including brand protection models and corresponding government legislation; (d) analysis of the future of ambush marketing for sport marketing (challenges and opportunities); and (d) introduction to future research and industry direction.

First identified during the Los Angeles 1984 Olympic Games (Crompton, 2004) as a "well-planned effort" (Sandler & Shani, 1989) to "create customer confusion" (Meenaghan, 1994), ambush marketing is defined by the International Olympic Committee (IOC) as "any unauthorized attempt(s) to associate with an event through any one or more of a range of marketing activities [including] leveraging the goodwill and reputation of an event at the expense of official sponsors" (VANOC, 2008). Accordingly, ambush marketing is considered to be a major liability for sport event rights holders and affiliated stakeholders, and as a result, has received considerable discussion and disdain throughout the sport industry.

Specific concerns of ambush marketing discussed by practitioners often include loss of brand equity, impact on consumer perception, and overall loss of sponsorship value to sport properties and partners. As such, sport organizations have actively championed corresponding 'brand protection' units (also referred to as 'Commercial Rights Management') within their legal and/or marketing functions to protect their property and partners from ambush and related marketing activities.

In addition, the industry has actively engaged in efforts to curb and monitor ambush marketing, establishing such bodies as the 'Doing Away with Foul Play in Sports Marketing' to help "sensitize and alert brand sponsors and sports franchises to trademark trespassing, property rights violations and online scams, frauds and infringements" (Chief Marketing Officer Council Worldwide, 2010). Further, within the Olympic movement, the IOC now requires Olympic host organizing committees to enact corresponding national and local 'event specific legislation' which is perceived to strengthen the Olympic Movement’s legal actions against ambush marketers.

Industry's concern with ambush marketing has also received considerable attention in the sport management literature, with academic study of major sporting events and the Olympic Games to examine the overall impact (both actual and perceived) of ambush marketing and the value of corresponding brand protection strategies. Other key ambush marketing research has included the evaluation of consumer perception (McKelvey, 1994; Shani & Sandler, 1993, 1998; Stotlar, 1993), the review of communication and brand clutter (Meenaghan, 1994; Seguin et al., 2005, 2008), and, the assessment of corresponding brand protection legislation (Burton & Chadwick, 2008; McKelvey & Grady, 2004; Seguin, Ellis, Scassa, & Parent, 2008). Of interest, the findings and implications from this emerging body of literature has revealed important, and even contradictory, perspectives regarding industry’s ambush marketing concerns.

Thus, while ambush marketing has been well-debated in the literature and discussed throughout the sport industry, there has been little opportunity for interpretation and interaction between related industry thought and academic findings. Therefore, the purpose of this symposium is to bring together key academic and industry participants to discuss the current 'state' of ambush marketing.
marketing. This moderated panel symposium discussion will include an introduction and overview of key ambush marketing issues, will review the perspectives of ambush marketing concerns, will debate future challenges of ambush marketing, and, will conclude with concluding with an open participant discussion.