

A bumper year predicted for sponsorship as fan events make a comeback

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Investment into sport and brand sponsorships is set to make a big comeback in 2022, as brands realise the potential of sponsorships and their capability to outperform other tools in the marketing mix, particularly when it comes to keeping audiences engaged and connected at scale.



Neil Jankelowitz

This is according to Neil Jankelowitz, CEO of Mscsports, a performance-driven sponsorship agency and winner of Agency of the Year, Event/Competition Sponsor of the Year, and Campaign of the Year for its Castle Lager #InOurBlood campaign at the recent 2021 Hollard Sport Industry Awards.

“The past two years have seen all areas of our lives disrupted, and whether we like it or not, the pandemic will continue to impact everyone for the foreseeable future,” Jankelowitz says. “However, we cannot take everything we have learnt as an agency for granted, and how we have adapted to survive, and in many cases thrive over this time.”

Jankelowitz outlines the sponsorship trends he believes that are likely in 2022:

Hybrid event experiences

For the past two years brands have had to think digital-first, especially because physical events and activations were (and continue to be at risk of being) cancelled overnight. Digital fan experiences exploded in popularity with brands finding innovative ways to ensure they continued to reach consumers via digital channels.

“The focus was always on the stadium experience in the sports sponsorship world, but the pandemic compelled a shift towards the digital world where fans unite around an event or a cause,” he explains. “The digital social world has the added benefit of being able to provide more specific feedback so that brands have more measurable data to measure their return on their investment.”

Not only are consumers used to enhanced digital experiences, but they also now expect engaging digital content to be part

of the overall fan experience – and it could be anything from video or augmented reality (AR) enhanced experiences to exclusive or behind the scenes content.

With a gradual return of fans to stadiums and event venues, brands must ensure they provide an engaging, hybrid fan experience that includes elements of the physical and virtual worlds.

World Cup opportunities provide longevity

Opportunities will abound for brands in the sports sponsorship arena over the next few years, with the upcoming FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022, and the Cricket World Cup, Rugby World Cup and Netball World Cup, all in 2023.

However, brands must ensure year-round fan engagement through these sponsorships to realise a greater return on investment. Fans are no longer satisfied with watching their favourite teams and sports stars competing in-season only. They want to know what they're doing in the off-season too.

"At a time when everyone is craving connection, fans want to remain connected to their favourites all year round – which presents a wonderful opportunity for brands to produce engaging content with leading personalities both off- and on-season, creating longevity for messaging and achieving sustained impact too," Jankelowitz adds.

Deliver measurable outcomes not tactical outputs

A tactical plan will only get an agency so far with its clients. From a strategic perspective, brands must insist on measurable agency outcomes, not just agency outputs. Any agency can deliver a spectacular event with all the bells and whistles, but if it doesn't meet or exceed the client's business objectives, millions will be wasted.

"Our agency has developed an in-house proprietary measurement tool called the Sponsorship Efficiency Index (SEI) that reports so specifically on the reach and effectiveness of our campaigns that we can show our clients their exact return for every rand spent," he says.

"The SEI assesses various metrics to deliver an impact score for each campaign, giving our clients including the likes of Discovery, Castle Lager, Engen, Prudential and many others, a scientific measurement of the results achieved by each campaign.

"I believe the industry is finally on the road to recovery. While I remain cautiously optimistic about what lies ahead, I am bullish when it comes to the value we provide and measurable returns we deliver to brands who trust us to manage their sponsorships," he concludes.

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