

Module 4. After-Action Reviews - Evaluation and the difficult task to end a sponsorship

Introduction

In this module, we will cover two distinct but related themes: the after-action reviews and the principles for terminating a sponsorship. At a first glance, they sound like the end of a process, but the reality is that they are just other steps in the cycle of working in sponsorships.

The best sponsorship teams are constantly looking back at what they have done and asking themselves “how do we get better?” They learn from their strategies and plans, they find consumer insights through the execution, and they identify many areas of improvement. Skipping an after-action review is a missed opportunity for the organizations, and the certainty those mistakes will be repeated the next time.

But in order to evaluate success, it is fundamental to have clear goals, as previously discussed on this course. The after-action review is nothing more than a final check comparing what you have accomplished with what you set up for doing. We will detail some of the steps and processes for conducting a proper after-action review in the next pages.

Figure 1. Mirror



From Unsplash, by T. Trad, 2018. <https://unsplash.com/photos/MoAEnt9fMbg>.

Sometimes, an after-action review may lead you to terminate a sponsorship. Ending such relationship is a positive thing. It means the company or brand has achieved the results it

was looking for when the contract was signed. It should be seen as a celebration of the success of the strategy. But as in any other personal relationships, this is not a natural thing to do. At the end of this module, we will detail how to manage these difficult conversations with your rights-holders.

The after-action review

An after-action review is not an event, it is a process. It starts at the beginning of the project and ends once all the lights are off. The steps described below apply to complex sponsorship projects, those with long duration, that require heavy financial commitments and involve multiple areas of the company. For smaller scale sponsorships, a simplified version may be more appropriate.

1. Defining legacies

During the strategy and ROI phases (previously discussed on this course), the strategy and marketing teams can go as far as defining the business impact they expect for the program. When the results of this analysis are positive, the contractual phase starts (also described in a previous module of this course). It is only when the contract has been finally signed—and after the excitement of the public announcement—that the team can finally start formally to work on the project.

Figure 2. Alignment



From Unsplash, by N. Daley, 2020. <https://unsplash.com/photos/jQOicP3A7t8>.

The natural behaviour of most managers is to jump into action right away by engaging agencies, start the creative work development, etc. But the reality is that, at this point, with the information available, it is still unclear the expected outcomes of the project, other than volume of sales and (for well-disciplined companies) financial impact.

Sponsorship projects, however, are much more than this. They have the power of impacting many other constituents, but that requires alignment and good planning. You may ask yourself: “what exactly do I need to align?” and “with whom?”.

The alignment is nothing more than a discussion among the key people involved with the business, about how the project is expected to impact the short and long-term future of the organization. The former will be defined by the business impact (volume, revenue, profits—a lot of the work that has already been done in previous phases—) while the latter is about the enduring transformations the initiative will leave for the brand and/or the company (i.e. the legacies).

Because of its high level, it is recommended that most senior executives in the organization involve in the discussion. Ideally, the CEO, CFO and CMO will be in the room alongside the sales and HR teams.

Figure 3. Meeting



From Unsplash, by Christina, 2019, https://unsplash.com/photos/Q80LYxv_Tbs.

During this one or two-day workshop, this multi-level team will debate and select a very limited number of areas they are hoping to impact. For each of them, they will develop targets and metrics.

A brand recently launched in Germany may set as their legacies the following: (1) 50 % of German adults recognizing their brand at the end of the project; (2) established relationships with the Federal Government regulatory bodies, and (3) become one of the top 100 companies to work in Germany.

A soft-drinks company may land on (1) increasing the number of refrigerators in the market by 1 million, (2) launching a new line of sugar-free products, and (3) double the level of package recycling in the country.



These very few legacies will be tracked throughout the duration of the project, and its progress reported to the highest levels of the organization on an ongoing basis. In addition to the financial targets, they will set the north of the entire project.

Legacies are not the only metrics that will be tracked. In the next step, we will define what are the other operational targets necessary for successfully delivering the project, a much more detailed set of indicators. This is where most of the team will focus on their everyday work.

2. Role sorting, core team, and master plan

If the previous phase is high-level and involves senior management, this one is all about the project team, and each team member role and responsibility.

It all starts with a broad team meeting in which the workstreams and its leaders will be defined. This is a workshop that should last two to three days and can involve over 50 people. The meeting is led by the project leader, usually a representative of the sponsorship or marketing team. It is likely to be someone who was involved in the development of the business case, evaluations, and negotiations of the contract.

He or she will invite representatives of all areas of the company. The objective is to start broad seeking engagement, and later, as the work becomes more clear, narrow down participation and activities to the necessary people and areas. You may, for example, invite representatives from your R & D (research and development team) to the workshop and realize later they have no role to play. That is not a problem.

Figure 4. Man presenting photo



From Unsplash, by M. Osborn, 2020. <https://unsplash.com/photos/wMRIcT86SWU>.

During this kick-off meeting, the project lead will present the objectives of the project, the legacies, the rights acquired, the obligations with the rights-holder, the key dates, the important facts about the asset (remember most people may not be familiar with the

rights you have just bought), and all the other relevant information necessary for the teams to start thinking about their own contribution.

Working in sub-groups, the different teams will come up with many ideas for how their functions can support the project and help deliver the objectives and legacies. Most of them will have a credible and necessarily role to play, particularly for large-scale event activation like world cups or large music events, to name a few.

Each of the groups will proceed sharing their initial ideas with the rest of the participants of the workshop. The ideas will be debated by the entire team; some will be approved for further evaluation; others will be killed during the meeting. The result will be a (still) long list of areas of work.

Examples of these ideas can be: (1) develop a new commemorative proprietary package, (2) launch a new app to assist users to connect with the brand, (3) define how to use music to amplify the impact of the campaign, (4) develop a partnership with a leading global gaming company to amplify the reach of the campaign and engage with the hard-core players, (5) use the event to launch the new version of an important product in the portfolio, (6) develop the new global campaign for brand X, and much more.

The next step for this workshop is to assign the workstream leaders for each of the areas. The teams that develop each of the ideas are the natural leaders for each of these sub-projects, and can be quickly identified.

More than assigning someone, it is important to align (after the meeting) their dedication to the project with each of their managers. Sponsorship projects are usually among the most attractive and exciting in any business, and many people will volunteer to participate in them. However, it is critical the ones that actually volunteer have the proper time allocated for it, something that only their managers can approve. This is something the project leader will need to address after the meeting, approaching one-on-one each of the managers.

The final step of the workshop is the development of a timeline and the critical activities of the project.

Armed with colourful sticky notes (like post-its), every step of every activity will be written on a note and placed on a big timeline on the wall. The teams will work together to set the right sequence of events, and define how the activities are connected to one another. That will define what needs to be done by whom and by when (the entire project timeline).



Figure 5. Sticky notes



From Unsplash, by J. Szczepanska, 2018. <https://unsplash.com/photos/5aiRb5f464A>.

At the end of the workshop, all the participants will leave with an excellent understanding of the entire project, roles, and responsibilities. This is the master plan.

This workshop is no easy task. Finding time in everyone's busy agendas to spend a couple of days discussing a sponsorship program that may take years to hit the market is tough. Most managers are constantly busy with the next months' needs, and the future is never a priority. However, the future success of the project—and the after-action review—will only be possible if the team invests the quality time needed in these initial days.

3. Follow-up meetings

The entire team is not coming together at the same time anytime soon, but the project leader will start a new monthly (or twice a month) routine with the workstream leaders, in which they will revise the progress of the work against the timeline mutually agreed.

The reporting of the project to the senior management will be one of the important outputs of these monthly meetings. Its content will serve as the main project tracker that will be used, not only during the execution phase, but also as an important input at the end of it, when the after-action review meeting happens.

In addition to the project leader, the team may also assign a junior team member to work as a project coordinator. His or her role is to keep the project leader informed, and the everyday activities—follow-ups, completion of tasks, etc.—moving. This is particularly useful in large organizations in which team members are spread in multiple locations/countries and working for different teams.

4. One year to go and six or three months to go



For longer duration projects, like the activation of quadrennial events (i.e. Olympic Games, FIFA World Cups, etc.), it is recommended that a broader check-in meeting happens in the year leading up to the event. Some leaders prefer running a 'one year to go' workshop, others prefer a 'six months to go'. Very few like to do both.

These workshops are like the kick-off meeting. They bring together all the different functions to report the progress and the activities still pending before the beginning of the event. The main objective of this meeting is to triple-check that nothing important has fallen through the cracks of the project. Changing some priorities is okay, but dropping the ball in areas that will impact achieving the main objectives, or compromise the delivery of the legacies, will be a problem.

The benefit of the meeting between 12 and 6 months to go is that you will still have time to correct any problems with incremental people, budgets, or simply attention.

This final workshop should reassure the project leader, the team, and the senior management of the company that everything is under control, and that the team is set for a successful delivery of the event. A good final workshop gives great confidence the team has completed its homework. Now, all that is left is the execution.

Figure 6. Days



From Unsplash, by A. Kristanas, 2021. <https://unsplash.com/photos/hUYZtHENCNY>.

As previously mentioned, none of the above is an after-action review, but without going through all these steps, it is impossible to conduct the proper productive after-action review.

The after-action review

There are few important components for the actual after-action review. They are the following:

- 1) The pre-work

In the days that follow the end of the event, the project leader will request a data set and some qualitative feedback from each of the project leaders. For each workstream, there will be a report detailing all the workstream objectives, what actually happened, and the conclusions/reflections for the workstream leader.

The report is usually a pre-defined set of questions—similar to all workstreams—with questions pre-aligned with the team. As they work on the event, they already know what information they need to collect, where it will be used, and how it will be reported to the broader team.

Figure 7. Crunching the numbers



From Unsplash, by Firmbee, 2015. <https://unsplash.com/photos/jrh5lAq-mIs>.

The most common format is a combination of presentation and text, with plenty of illustrations, photos, and data sets to support the conclusions.

2) Attendance

All the people who worked in the project should be part of the after-action review. They are usually the ones that attended the initial workshop at the beginning of the project—or the same functions, in case some people moved jobs or left the company.

In addition to this team, there will be a delegation from the host country, who was responsible for delivering the event (they are usually not part of the initial workshop). They will be responsible for presenting and preparing the reports for all the host country activities.

For repetitive events part of a longer duration contract—like a 12-year multi-Olympics contract between Alibaba and the International Olympic committee—the management of the next host country may also attend the meeting. For example, at the after-action review workshop at the end of the 2016 Rio de Janeiro Summer Olympic Games, the management team from the company's Japanese office also attended the meeting to learn from the event.



It is also recommended that the account team from the rights-holder attends the workshop. They are an important part of all the discussions and can benefit—and be benefited by—the discussions.

3) What is reported

- a) Media. For the traditional media buy—all but digital—media agencies would report the total media investment (by country, region, or market), the reach and the frequency of the message (i.e. how many times an average person was exposed to the message), etc. Depending on the mix, separate reports might be prepared for specific ones (for example, a report for the out of home/billboards' performance).
- b) Digital engagement. The digital engagement will be evaluated in the form of the different ways people interact with it. Agencies will report the number of interactions (likes, shares, comments, etc.), and the overall sentiment. Depending on the category of product, leads might also be reported (for example, when the ad has a call to action asking people to register, share, or even purchase a product).
- c) Advertising. The films developed for the campaign—assuming more than one—will have their performance reported via *ad-hoc* studies. Most advertisers will pre-test their ads either before producing or before airing them. It is not uncommon (particularly among large companies) that an underperforming ad is discarded, or that their best performing ad will receive a disproportional higher investment.

Figure 8. Report



From Unsplash, by M. Chesin, 2019. https://unsplash.com/photos/xDtiCFu_Z3s.

Figure 9. Facebook button pins



From Unsplash, by NeONBRAND. <https://unsplash.com/photos/I6wCDYW6ij8>.

- d) Competitors' activities. What the competitors were doing during your sponsorship campaign (or event) and what happened to their performance. Tracking marketing investment, types of activities, trade events, etc. helps companies understand how to prepare better for future events. One of the most common tools for non-sponsors is pricing. Many companies discount their products when a competitor is promoting an event (during next FIFA World Cup—sponsored by Coca-Cola—check out the prices of Pepsi in your supermarket) to entice consumers to buy them, instead of the ones from the sponsor's brand.
- e) Ambush marketing. Unfortunately, ambush marketing is still a tool many scrupulous companies will deploy to take advantage of the event. It is recommended that all ambush activities are reported as part of the after-action review.

Figure 10. Supermarket



Supermarket [online image]. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://blog.blackcurve.com/pricing-ideas-to-boost-sales-in-retail>.

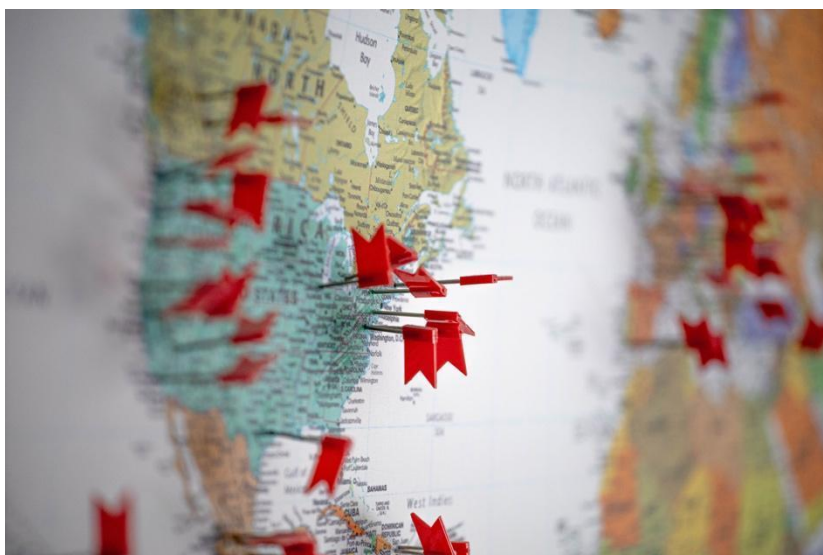
- f) Operations. For products sold at events or involved with their execution, the operation is the most critical part of all the after-action review. If you are an apparel partner of the event, and your main activity is the licenced merchandise store in the stadium,



your number one job is making sure the store is stocked, the lines are manageable, the connection and terminals used for payments are working well, that you have enough bags, and that the communication (posters, banners, etc.) is clear to motivate fans to shop. The after-action review should report all the elements above by day and by location.

- g) Crisis management. In every event, there will be a few 'crises' the team will need to manage. Sometimes is an athlete that misbehaved or was caught in the doping tests, a car crash involving staff or executives, an issue at the hotel where the hospitality program takes place, etc. It is important that the after-action review captures all the events and reports in detail how they were addressed. For most of the crises are repetitive (i.e. they will happen again at the next event), understanding how to handle them can save time and resources next time one hits.

Figure 11. Map



Map [online image]. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.asianamericanchristiancollaborative.com/article/how-i-became-citizen-redistricting-commissioner>.

- h) Issues with rights-holders. As the event kicks-off, rights-holders might struggle to deliver some rights. The nature of the events is fluid, and, in some cases, it is impossible to honour what was contracted despite their best intentions. As a sponsor, you are responsible for identifying the issue, addressing it with the rights-holder, and discuss how they will 're-pay' you (with other rights or benefits). Every single case must be captured and used later when you debrief the rights-holder—and eventually in a future contract extension/negotiation.



Figure 12. Emergency pull



Emergency pull [online image]. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://thesecuritydistillery.org/all-articles/politics-of-planetary-emergency-blog>.

- i) Hospitality. This is one of the most sensitive areas of the entire sponsorship program. While invisible to consumers, hospitality programs have a high exposure to senior management, customers, board members, investors, etc. Every important constituent impacted is an opportunity to improve the company reputation positively. When issues happen, they must be immediately addressed and proper captured.

Figure 13. Hospitality



From Unsplash, by F. Gunawan, 2021. <https://unsplash.com/photos/rXwV9ZMtYr0>.

- j) Scope of the activation. Includes the number of countries that promoted that event, how many customers were impacted, how many promotions or campaigns were launched, the volume of products sold, the incremental revenues and profit generated (by country, region, etc.), the number of new leads, brands listed in clients, extra space in store created by the campaign, new clients, bids won thanks to the event, etc. All



the business impact derived from the sponsorship must be captured on this section. This will be the basis for the ROI calculation.

Figure 14. Coca-Cola EA FIFA 2018 FIFA World Cup



Coca-Cola EA FIFA 2018 FIFA World Cup [online video]. Retrieved April 4, 2022, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6ErzVDwcla0>. Screenshot by author.

- k) Activities with partners. In the broader sense of partnerships, all specific sub-projects that were developed for this campaign should be reported as such. This chapter includes initiatives such as (a) working with an artist and a record label to create a soundtrack for the campaign, (b) partnering with a publisher to create a gaming extension of the campaign, (c) working with another sponsor to develop joint-activations or premiums, (d) a dedicated promotion created for a customer, etc.
- l) Scope of the activation in the host country. Same as above but focused on the host country. Tracking the host separately (particularly in global events) is important because they are responsible for a disproportional share of the company's overall investment. In the ROI analysis, it is recommended that the host country and international evaluations are developed separately (generating two ROIs). That will provide a more realistic picture of the investments and return. Spoiler: in most cases, the investments at the host country won't pay back and will lead to a negative ROI.
- m) Innovation projects. Many companies use their sponsorships to launch new products or new technologies embedded in their products. While launching them does not require the event, they are heavily benefited by the exposure and consumer interest for the event. Car companies will launch new models, tech companies will launch new features for their products, consumer goods companies will launch new flavours, fast food sponsors will launch new sandwiches, etc. For the sake of the after-action review, it is important to capture how the sponsorship benefited the launch of this



innovation (cheaper, faster, more impactful, etc.). This information, translated into a dollar amount, will also be used as input for the ROI calculation.

Figure 15. BMW 2012 London Summer Olympic Games



BMW 2012 London Summer Olympic Games [online image]. (n.d). Retrieved from <https://www.automoblog.net/40-down-3960-to-go-bmw-delivers-vehicles-to-olympic-committee/>.

- n) Employee engagement campaigns. Some events have the power to engage employees, making them prouder to work for the company and less interested in jumping out at the first head-hunter's call. A pre- and post-engagement survey is a good tool to evaluate the impact of that specific sponsorship in the employee sentiment. This information, similar to what was described above, should also be translated into a dollar amount and used as input for the ROI calculation.
- o) PR coverage (earned media). Some companies and their campaigns will create a lot of interest from the trade press or even the general press. The result can be measured in the form of free exposure across all media. During the after-action review, the public affairs (or PR) team will report on the results and help quantify the impact (in dollars) of the earned media. The results will also be incorporated in the ROI calculation.



Figure 16. Newspaper



From Unsplash, by A. Eletu, 2015. <https://unsplash.com/photos/E7RLgUjjazc>.

p) Agency support. Complex campaigns will demand the support of many speciality agencies like media, digital, PR, design, event activation, hospitality, and many more. At the end of the event, it is important to evaluate their performance against a specific and pre-aligned set of metrics, and have a debrief session with each of them. Developing a scorecard where all the agency work is ranked, while still fresh, will help you make decisions when selecting agencies to support you at your next sponsored event.

4) Timing: when is the best time for an after-action review?

Ideally, as soon as possible. A couple of weeks after the event ends, while all the experience is still fresh in the minds of the team, is the best time. The workstream leads of each area will need some time to collect all information and producing their reports and presentations.

It is important to note that not all the necessary information will be available in a matter of weeks. The business performance data (mostly the one coming from suppliers—market share, brand equity, etc.—) might take weeks, if not months, to be completed.

In my experience, the best approach to after-action reviews is to hold a day-long meeting a couple of weeks after the end of the event, and cover as much ground as possible. The project lead and some workstream leaders may need to regroup later, when the rest of the information becomes available to complete the analysis and produce the final report to management.

5) Output



The after-action review will generate a few different products depending on the audience.

Figure 17. Summary report



From Unsplash, by G. Tomassetti, 2018. <https://unsplash.com/photos/QCbZ4ASLhM8>; Presentation. From Unsplash, by Slidebean, 2020. <https://unsplash.com/photos/J3AV8F-B42M>; Stack of papers. From Unsplash, by B. Klutsch, 2019. <https://unsplash.com/photos/nE2HV5AUXFo>.

For the current and future sponsorship team(s), there will be a set of many reports by workstream detailing all the activities, with plenty of data, photos and films. If the entire sponsorship team disappears tomorrow, the new one that lands in the company the next day should be able to read the after-action review and understand the event learnings as if they were there. These reports have the purpose of preserving history and transferring knowledge to future generations of managers that will take this work and function forward. It is not something meant to be read casually.

For the marketing and commercial leadership, there will be a presentation with the summary of the results and key learnings. The deck should have a special focus on the marketing communications and customer programs, the areas of more interest for this audience. This presentation should be delivered no more than a month after the end of the event.

For the senior management, there will be an executive report of a couple of pages with the focus on the business/financial results of the program, the ROI results of the entire campaign (whenever possible), and a recommendation of the next steps (i.e. the future of the relationship between the company and the rights-holder).



All the steps described above are ideal for a complex, multi-regional/global, multi-year sponsorship campaign developed by a multinational company. For smaller scale events and/or companies, the logic still applies, but it requires scaling down some of the activities and elimination of the ones that don't apply.

The important message of this process is that, in order to be successful, it takes a lot of preparation, planning, and discipline. The easiest solution will always be forgetting everything that has just happened, and moving to the next event or campaign. While this is possible and has no impact in the short term, it is our duty as sponsorship leaders to understand what we have just done, learn from it, and improve for future opportunities. In this case, the easiest solution is, by no means, the best one. The hard work will pay back in your career.

Figure 18. Work harder



From Unsplash, by J. Whitfield, 2016. https://unsplash.com/photos/sm3Ub_IJKQg.

Terminating a sponsorship

As previously discussed in this course, there are many reasons for a sponsor to early terminate a contract such as misbehaviour of the rights-holder executives or athletes (i.e. corruption scandals, drug abuse, doping, harassment, etc.). This has been covered under **morals' clause** in the contract module.

These extreme cases are not the subject of this module. Instead, we will focus on cases where a sponsorship runs its course and, for many reasons, is not renewed. They can be amicable and end in good terms when managed properly.

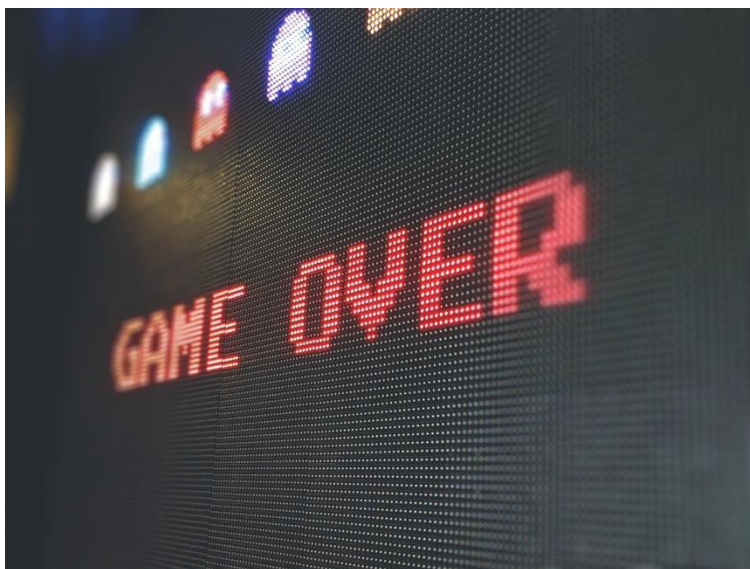
The end of a sponsorship agreement is not something advertised. Opposite to the signing, when sponsor and rights-holder create events and campaigns to announce the recently established marriage, the end is usually quiet and discreet. The sponsor doesn't want to be seen as an organization that doesn't support the partner (or the community), and the

rights-holder tries to avoid the negative publicity. “Why is brand X leaving?”, some will ask. This is why there is so much secrecy about the process and the reasons for terminating a relationship.

The best reason for terminating a sponsorship is when a sponsor reaches its original objectives.

If in the process of defining the business objectives, the strategies and plans for the sponsorship are properly developed, the company will have a clear understanding of what it is trying to accomplish. Throughout the duration of the contract, the sponsorship team will continue to monitor the development of the work against the objectives. This tracking process will be detailed at the end of every event, following the after-action review process.

Figure 19. Game over



From Unsplash, by Sigmund, 2020. <https://unsplash.com/photos/By-tZImt0Ms>.

If everything goes according to the original plans, at some point, the company will reach its goal, and the assets contracted will no longer be necessary. That doesn't mean necessarily that the sponsorship should be terminated. What should be terminated at this point is the 'use of the originally contracted assets'.

The best rights-holders are constantly re-evaluating the value they deliver to their partners and making adjusts to remain relevant. They understand that industries, companies, and people will change, and that the perception of value is likely to follow. Before they are informed the sponsors will no longer extend the relationship with them, they are capable of anticipating the new needs and redesigning their offer.

This is particularly true in long-term relationships (the likes of FIFA, IOC, UEFA, etc.), where the term of a contract can be as long as 16 years.



Figure 20. Coca-Cola 1928 Amsterdam Olympics



Coca-Cola 1928 Amsterdam Olympics [online video]. Retrieved April 4, 2022, from <https://olympics.com/ioc/partners/coca-cola-mengniu>. Screenshot by author.

When rights-holder can adapt, they have greater chances to retain their partners. Coca-Cola and Omega have been associated with the International Olympic Committee since 1928 and 1932 respectively. A relationship—started before TVs were widely available and international travel was a reality—evolved over the decades to the digital world of the 2020s equally, if not more relevant than ever (click to watch).

The company's Worldwide Olympic Partnership extends through the 2032 Olympic Games and Paralympic Games. The assets and rights acquired by Omega in 1932 certainly have little resemblance with their most recent contract signed a few years ago.

Figure 21. Heineken and the UEFA Champions League



Heineken and the UEFA Champions League [online image]. (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://www.marcaenazona.com/post/heineken-patrocinara-la-uefa-euro-2020>.

Heineken and the UEFA Champions League is another excellent example of a lasting partnership that evolved over the decades. “The brewer’s relationship with UEFA Champions League is already well established, stretching back over 25 years” (HEINEKEN partners with UEFA EURO 2020™ and renews UEFA Champions League sponsorship, 2019).

Similar to Omega and the IOC, their relationship went from visibility and awareness to experiences in the digital world. Every new contract was another opportunity for UEFA to update their offer, keeping Heineken happy and extending their contract.

However, not all rights-holders are capable of doing what the IOC and UEFA have done for Omega and Heineken. They either don’t understand the non-stop change nature of business or can’t rethink their own business model. The result is the lack of relevance. These are the rights-holders that leave sponsors no other option but terminating the agreements lacking relevance.

If you have to terminate a sponsorship, be early, honest and fair.

Rights-holders need sponsors’ money to pay their bills. If unavoidable, the earlier they are informed about your decision not to renew, the better. They will have more time to process and plan how to handle the financial shortfall created by the exit of the sponsor. That includes the search for a new sponsor in the same category.



Figure 22. Camp Nou, Barcelona



From Unsplash, by P. T'Kindt, 2019. <https://unsplash.com/photos/DPYt6UBqgOg>.

Prospecting new sponsors, reaching the right people in the new organizations, scheduling calls and meetings, presenting, and eventually closing a new deal can take months to be completed. Depending on the asset, the price, and the overall state of the economy, things can take over a year to be completed.

A good example is the replacement of a front-of-shirt sponsor brand for popular football clubs or title sponsors of events. Because these contracts can cost dozens of millions of dollars and last several seasons, replacing a brand partner is a very challenging task for the commercial teams.

For a multi-year contract, a year notice is a reasonable time that allows rights-holders to do what they need to do to protect their finances.

Be honest.

Inform your partner in person and be ready to explain the reasons why you will not be seeking the extension of the sponsorship. Despite all the personal relationships established during the sponsorship, we are adults. Sometimes the business simply demands something different, others the company can't afford the investment, or the strategy has changed, or the management team doesn't believe in investments like that anymore.

Regardless of the rational, be upfront and clear. The rights-holder will appreciate that.

Finally, be fair.



Do all you can to support your future ex-partner. From an early heads-up, to volunteer to speak with other prospect partners (in other categories), to publicly acknowledging the good things the partnership has done for your business, etc. Whatever you can do privately and publicly to make their lives easier, it will be appreciated.

A good sponsor is gracious at the exit as well. You may not realize it, but the entire market will notice and that will reflect positively on your company reputation. Rights-holder want to be well paid, but they also want to work with companies that value their work and treat them with respect.

Conclusion

Some of the concepts discussed in this module are not visible to most people outside the companies we work for. Consumers and fans might not pay much attention to your 'evolution as a sponsor', or to how graciously you depart a sponsorship, but these tasks are critical to your personal development and success as a sponsorship professional.

The after-action review and existing contracts are skills that every good sponsorship manager needs to master. Everyone, every company and good agency can organize an event, but improving the company's capabilities to become a better sponsor is only for the best ones.

Doing the hard work behind the scenes has a much longer and meaningful impact in the business. This is a contribution only sponsorship professionals are capable of doing. It is part of our job description and a moral obligation we have to do things right.

References

HEINEKEN partners with UEFA EURO 2020™ and renews UEFA Champions League sponsorship. (2019, November 13). Heineken. <https://www.theheinekencompany.com/newsroom/heineken-partners-with-uefa-euro-2020-and-renews-uefa-champions-league-sponsorship/>.

