

On your marks...

Brands are poised for London 2012. The gold medal is a slice of the biggest sporting event the UK has ever hosted, and the exposure and comms opportunities that come with it. **Molly Pierce** talks to some of the sponsors, partners, and agencies hoping to be first out of the blocks

As you might have noticed, the UK is playing host to a rather big event this year. Seven years on from the announcement in June 2005 that London had won the right to host the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games, the country is busy preparing for the six weeks in July and August, when the eyes of the world will be trained on London.

The scale of London 2012 is quite staggering. There are 10.8 million ticketholders for the Olympic and Paralympic Games, and an Oxford Economics study estimates that the total contribution of the Games to the UK over the 2007-2017 period will be £2.09 billion.

As a communications opportunity, London 2012 will provide unrivalled brand exposure for global and local brands. The routes into partnership with London 2012 are as many as there are partners, and many of the relationships have been in place for several years. Hornby, the British company best known for making trainsets, was awarded a license to produce official merchandise for the games in July 2009. "At the closing ceremony of Beijing 2008, a red London bus was used as the symbol of the handover to London," recalls Alex Balzaretto, London 2012 project director for Hornby. "It seemed like a great natural fit for us, because we're known for making specifically British vehicle products. When we put in our bid for the contract, in early 2009, I don't think any other company in our corner of the market had really woken up to the possibilities. So we were very proud that LOCOG recognized us as a suitable and capable company for the license."

Westfield Stratford City is the Olympic Park's nearest neighbor, meaning that a partnership was always on the cards. Mark Zimmer, who heads up Westfield's brand alliance with London 2012, describes it as inevitable: "It started with the construction of the infrastructure of the Park – we

had a very close relationship with the Olympic Delivery Authority, which developed into a series of conversations with LOCOG. It's such a special event for London, and we wanted to make sure that our commercial needs were protected during the Games, as well as being able to engage with the corporate opportunities."

There is a four tier system in place when it comes to sponsorship of the Olympics: Worldwide Olympic Partners, London 2012 Official Olympic Partners, London 2012 Official Olympic Supporters, and London 2012 Official Olympic Providers and Suppliers. BP, which has had its headquarters in London for over 100 years, fits into that second tier as the official Oil & Gas Partner.

Its sponsorship work on the Games tie into the company's sustainability strategy – a matter of some public interest since the communications crisis brought about by the Gulf of Mexico spill in 2010. Carbon offsetting is a key part of the plans for London 2012, and BP is collaborating on this through its Target Neutral programme, which will encourage spectators to offset their travel carbon to the event. As well as providing advanced fuels and engine oils for the official Games vehicles, BP has its sights set on a world record – although not one with a gold medal. "It's our hope that we can set a world record for the most number of people offsetting their travel-related carbon to a single event," says Mike Sharrock, partnership director at BP. "It's an exciting opportunity to reach and educate millions of people, and we're focused on creating a sustainable legacy for London 2012."

As well as sponsorship of London 2012 as a discrete event, brands are also able to work with the individual athletes who will be competing in July and August. BP has a roster of British athletes with whom it works, including the athletes Jessica Ennis and Richard Whitehead, and the cyclist Lizzie Armitstead. The investment bank Citi,

meanwhile, is sponsoring the 2012 US Olympic and Paralympic teams, and working closely with Landor Associates on the task. "A multi-agency team has been put together to work on Citi's sponsorship strategy," says Jane Geraghty, MD at Landor's London offices. "The objective is to revitalize the brand with employees, stakeholders and communities, so Landor will create the brand system that will bring the sponsorship programme to life, including the creative concept, visual identity, and guidelines. We will also develop the internal communications to employees."

In fact, the potential that a major sponsorship offers for improved internal communications is not to be underestimated. Landor is also working with Freshfields Bruckhaus Deringer, which is the official legal services provider for London 2012, on its strategy and design for the project. "FBD has created an internally focused communications campaign," says Geraghty, "which is intended to motivate and inspire staff; initiatives include an exhibition and personal challenge commitment. The events invite staff to work together and consider the company's best assets across the whole business."

Jessica Enoch, account executive at Synergy, which works with brands including Bupa and Aviva on their sports sponsorship, agrees that involvement with the Olympics is a great tool for employee engagement. "An Olympic sponsorship can provide a powerful focal point to drive a business and its employees toward an exceptional year," she says. "Sponsors can use ambassadors for staff meet and greets, inspirational speeches, coaching, and assets, and involvement in the Games themselves can reward, retain, and recruit staff. An engagement plan is crucial – if your company doesn't have a Games time plan for employees, your competitors will." Enoch suggests that companies can work with public enthusiasm for the Games by making arrangements for



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employees to watch key events in the workplace, or by having flexible working options available.

The focus on London for the Olympic and Paralympic Games means that brands without official involvement will still hope to maximize the comms opportunities. However, new legislation passed in 2011 by the government marks a new era for unofficial Olympic association – ambush marketing, and attempts by brands to align themselves with London 2012 without sponsorship agreements, will be illegal during the period. The bill extends to any branded communications within 200 metres of Olympic sites.

Geraghty believes that the comms calendars of many brands will have been distorted by these rules. “A number of companies have taken the conscious decision to avoid clashing with the Games by shifting launches back or forwards,” she says. “But we could speculate that there will still be some ‘ambush marketing’ activity, perhaps utilizing social media platforms as a communications channel.”

“We have absolutely no marketing association rights for London 2012,” explains Balzaretti. “They’re very expensive, and they’re bid for quite aggressively by the main partners. So other than via our actual products, Hornby can’t market itself as in association with the Games: but we’re still generating fantastic coverage because of the strength of the product.”

At Westfield, however, non-sponsors will still be able to carry on as usual. “Lots of our retailers aren’t sponsors,” says Zimmer, “and through our agreement with LOCOG we were able to clarify the position. Inside Westfield, it will be business as usual during the Games, and there are restrictions on signage and structures outside. But we’re also able to offer a proximity to the Olympic Park for non-sponsors that’s never been possible before – there are several suites that can provide hospitality services for businesses so that they can take advantage of the Olympics being in London.”

The design agency hat-trick recently threw its hat into the Olympics ring, sending out a booklet of ‘Olympic non-events’ which commemorate the everyday activities that will no doubt take place alongside javelin-throwing and water polo this summer, such as #11 – Lifting a finger, and #27 – Throwing a spanner in the works. “It was actually something we’d been thinking about doing for ages,” says director Gareth Howat of the tongue-in-cheek graphic symbols. “Deciding to tie it into



the Olympics just seemed like too good an opportunity to pass up – it is very firmly unofficial though.”

And when it comes to activities that will take place alongside the Olympics in 2012, it’s worth remembering that London 2012 isn’t the only major event happening this summer. “It’s easy to forget there’s other sport this summer beyond Stratford,” says Charlie Almond, senior account director at Hill & Knowlton Sports Marketing & Sponsorship, “but certainly for brands such as adidas and Castrol (which is owned by BP), UEFA Euro 2012 is very much a major part of their plans. The Olympics have coincided with the Euros for decades, so it’s nothing new – but maybe because England didn’t qualify for Euro 2008, coupled with the games being on our doorstep, the summer of sport seems more significant.”

However, Geraghty believes the two events are “entirely different propositions. Euro 2012 is a significant sporting event with an estimated 420 million viewers; the Olympics are a global cultural event with a potential audience of over 4 billion. In terms of breadth, the Olympics are unprecedented.”

And for those who would like to avoid the ‘summer of sport’ entirely? The best advice, perhaps, is emigration. But for brands, there are a variety of cross-discipline opportunities to engage with audiences across the spectrum, such as through the programme of arts events known as the Cultural Olympiad. Global focus on London during the Olympic and Paralympic Games provides a fantastic opportunity for the best of the UK’s arts scene to get exposure, and BP aims to help with that through its partnership with the

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◀ Cultural Olympiad. “It’s a great opportunity to showcase the UK’s cultural excellence and amazing diversity,” says Sharrock. “There are many London 2012-inspired arts and cultural programmes across the UK, so BP is thrilled to be part of the largest cultural celebration in the history of the modern Olympic and Paralympic movements.

Brands involved with London 2012 have the potential to break new ground when it comes to digital interaction with sport, and, more broadly, live events. “I think Phil Fearnley at the BBC described it best as the ‘first truly digital’ Olympics,” says Almond. “We’ve had fantastic digital capabilities at previous games, both in Vancouver and Beijing, but this will be the first where technology such as Twitter and Facebook are truly integrated into communications.”

“The ‘digital’ bit of the digital Olympics really does derive significantly from brand activity,” says Enoch. “Whilst timing, training preparation and drug testing have all never been more sophisticated, thanks in large part to digital, the core of the Olympics is still physical activities taking place in the physical world. And yet for brands, much Olympic-orientated communication is already happening online. What clever brands are doing is combining online with the best elements of offline to deliver the ultimate brand experience. A good example is Nike’s #makeitcount campaign – so far over 60,000 people have already responded. The brands that will ‘win’ these Olympics will be the ones interacting and integrating most smartly and naturally in this space.”

Having the BBC as host broadcaster is also a boon for digital, Almond believes. “Over the past couple of years the BBC has shown via its F1 coverage that it can fully embrace the latest

technology and weave it into the fabric of the shows, making for a far more interactive viewer experience. And brands are taking this lead – rather than a one-way stream of ‘Hey, look at us, we’re a sponsor’, you’re seeing two-way interaction and that’s thanks to digital technology.”

The access to coverage of the Games through multimedia channels means that the return on exposure for sponsors will be increased, according to Geraghty. “Platforms such as iPlayer mean that everyone will be able to access coverage from anywhere, any time,” she points out. “This will be a powerful platform for those who have sponsorship agreements with LOCOG. And brands who don’t activate on TV can maximize their sponsorship agreements through engagement on social media – we expect to see pretty much all the key sponsors of the Games making a massive SM push before, during and after them.”

Brands planning out their Olympic strategies can’t afford to stop communicating in August, however. Sponsors and the organizations affiliated with London 2012 and its athletes are already considering just what their own version of the Olympic legacy will look like.

BP’s messaging for London 2012 is in fact focused around future sustainability as well as current, with a programme named London 2012: Fuelling the Future, and its Young Leaders Programme, which works with disadvantaged young people to involve them with the Games. And its partnership with the London 2012 Cultural Olympiad and the London 2012 Festival is also forward focused: “We’ve also extended our long-term partnerships with four of the UK’s major cultural institutions; the British Museum, the National Portrait Gallery, the Royal Opera House and Tate Britain,” says Sharrock. BP will invest almost £10 million in the arts over the next five years.

At Hornby, the demands of working to the standards set by a London 2012 contract will hopefully provide impetus for the company in the future. “The stipulations set by the contracts – covering diversity, integration, sustainability, sourcing, duty of care, etc. – have a certain amount of overlap with industry standards,” says Balzaretti. “But there’s a lot on top of it. You come out as best in class afterwards: I can’t imagine that there’s a license anywhere we wouldn’t get. It’s onerous, and out of the ordinary – but it’s definitely worthwhile. Hornby will be showcased on a world stage during London 2012.”