

## Sutton Impact

# Take steps to understand how your business is perceived

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**BILL  
SUTTON**

In the current marketing and sales climate, the need to illustrate ROI and improve the bottom line has increased more than ever. If you want to truly affect the bottom the line, you must first affect how clients and potential clients view you and the opportunity to do business with you.

Spend some time evaluating your relationships and business practices and ask yourself some critical questions:

Are you innovative?

How do your prices compare with the competition?

How do you treat your customers?

Do you have a lot of client turnover?

Do you understand how the competition works and what they offer?

The following suggestions should become operational procedures if you want to set the standard in your marketplace. The key is that as comparisons are being made by the purchasers (ticket buyers and sponsors), a sports organization must be proactive to influence these perceptions in its favor.

### ■ Conduct reconnaissance

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Outside of the sports industry, most organizations have a very clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of their competition. If you have any doubt, just watch the AT&T and Verizon ads. They understand the pricing, the terms and the benefits of every proposal and every deal.

Very few sports organizations that I have observed have the same depth in terms of this type of knowledge about the competition. Conduct your own mystery shopping of what the competition has to offer. I can assure you that every sponsor and every ticket buyer in a city that is home to more than one professional team has this knowledge and aims to use it.

### ■ Set the standard

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If you are one of multiple teams in the market, you should set the standard and expectations that ticket buyers and sponsors have not only of your team, but also of the other franchises in town.

For example, if you conduct a sponsor summit, you should endeavor to conduct the best possible summit that meets the needs of your partners. Involve them in the planning process and let them help create the program. They will be happier with the end product. When they attend a sponsor event

create the program. They will be happier with the end product when they attend a sponsor event offered by one of your competitors and they are not given a similar opportunity for input, they will have even more reason to think positively of you and how you conduct your business.

## ■ Activate with impact

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Last fall, I attended a promotional activity presented by Gillette on the University of Central Florida campus. The concept was a clinic on how to shave the proper way, and if that would have been the entire package, it would have been poorly attended and very unsuccessful. However, the instructors slated to teach us how to shave were Tiger Woods (pre-scandal) and Derek Jeter, who had recently starred in the World Series.

When my colleague and I arrived at UCF Arena, where the event was being held, a video game competition, offered by a co-sponsor, was under way along with a variety of activities and interactive exhibits. There were also soft drinks and snack foods designed to attract and retain the audience until the main event. When the main event began, Woods and Jeter came on stage all lathered up and actually did teach us how to shave. And I found out that I had been doing some things incorrectly for about the last 40 years.

Before we left, each of us received Gillette gift bags containing our new razors and shaving cream, deodorant, and several other Gillette products. What did Gillette accomplish that afternoon? It:

- Made the audience aware that there was a proper way to shave.
- Made the audience aware that Gillette had the products to help us to do so.
- Provided samples so we could connect with the brand immediately at no expense.
- Attempted to create brand preference for a product with a high lifetime value in a way that was memorable and effective.



GETTY IMAGES

**Gillette made an impact by having its athlete endorsers, including Derek Jeter, lead clinics on how to shave properly.**

## ■ Invite all assets into the pitch planning

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If you are truly selling business solutions, and not your own inventory or preconceived notions of what the client needs, then every asset should be a possible part of that solution. Community relations is often excluded from sponsorship proposal development, but the community relations staff knows the players and knows the community. To not have their input could be a critical mistake.

The same can be said for game entertainment, Web site managers and other personnel who should be seen as more than the fulfillment house. They can help to effectively design a promotion or program element because they understand how it will be executed much better than the sales staff.

## ■ Consider a zero-based budget approach

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A zero-based budget, a concept that was very "in" during the recession of the early 1980s, begins at zero, not at the budget figure from the previous year. Why? Because it forces each department head to really examine what they have been doing and what they want to do, and determine how to best move forward through the allocation of resources. It encourages creativity, collaboration, prioritization and true strategic planning.

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This approach is often criticized, because while it forces you to painstakingly review even those programs you know you want to continue, it also reacquaints you with the costs associated with those programs and the opportunity to make cuts or additions based upon the organizational priorities.

All of these ideas take a little more time to implement because they are asking you to be more strategic, deliberate and contemplative in your approach. What we all learn over time is that we become a little rushed, a little more sure of ourselves and learn to cut corners because we have all been there before.

As Captain Kirk would say, this is a new star date, and some of us are facing challenges and demands that we have not seen before. If our businesses are going to "live long and prosper," then we must take the time to understand our business environment and create a much better world view.

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