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Opinion

A sponsorship opportunity that can help a city rebuild

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As many of you know, my consulting practice includes a number of NBA teams that I began working with during my tenure at the NBA. One of those teams is the New Orleans Hornets and as such I have traveled to New Orleans on numerous occasions in the past year. While my consulting activities have not focused on sponsorships per se, I am involved in identifying and maximizing revenue streams.

While I applaud the restoration efforts of the city, state and the league (the 2007 NBA marketing meetings were held in New Orleans and the 2008 NBA All-Star weekend will take place there in February), I feel that the rest of America — myself included — has done little to help rebuild the city or jump-start the economy.

For many Americans, Hurricane Katrina and its aftermath are yesterday's news, a sad and unfortunate disaster. This is a sorry fact and inexcusable for a country like the United States.

We all need to pitch in and help one of the great cultural and historical cities regain its prominence.

Many of us, however, are geographically and/or financially limited in what we can do. I suggest the following sponsorship and activation program in the form of an open letter to a potential corporate partner to team with the Hornets (or expand to the entire NBA).

Because Americans eat out numerous times each week, I am targeting the quick-service-restaurant or the pizza segment as the most viable corporate partnership for the proposed endeavor described below.

Dear corporate America:

Recent trends in sponsorship activities have shown that while there is still a great emphasis on ROI, the return on objective (ROO) is growing in importance. The fragmentation of the American media market has led to some media leaders stating that it is more important for sponsorship to make an impression than it is to count impressions.

As a sport marketer who believes in making an impression as well as in ROO, ROI and in driving traffic back to the franchisees, I offer you the following concept for your consideration.

Tom Cruise as Jerry Maguire said it best: "Help me help you." Therefore, I suggest that a QSR or pizza chain form a partnership with the New Orleans Hornets (which could be extended to the NBA) to help America rebuild and re-energize New Orleans.

This can be done by creating a New Orleans-style po' boy sandwich or a pizza featuring menu items and ingredients (such as spices, andouille sausage, etc.) native to New Orleans cuisine. Such a sandwich or pizza might appeal to your regular customers and motivate them to make an additional visit for something new.

The sponsorship also contains a cause-marketing element that may appeal to consumers who have never visited the sponsoring restaurant. I would suggest that the QSR or pizza chain donate 25 cents (call it a "French Quarter") for every sandwich or pizza sold.

This "French Quarter" would be donated to the rebuilding efforts in New Orleans and managed by the New Orleans Hornets Community Investment Department. Hornets players and New Orleans residents could be featured in the campaign to generate awareness and to remind us about the needs of the people of New Orleans and their rebuilding efforts.

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A national campaign could also be activated in all 30 NBA markets with local community relations departments and an NBA spokesperson in each. A percentage of the dollars generated in those other 29 NBA markets could remain in those markets for local rebuilding projects; the remainder of the "French Quarter" charitable contribution would be sent to New Orleans.

Imagine the potential impact of such a program! Americans could all help rebuild New Orleans by doing something they typically do every week (eat out). And the QSR/pizza restaurant has a cause-marketing effort that also has the potential to drive incremental traffic to its franchisees while demonstrating a sense of civic responsibility and national pride that is rarely produced in sponsorship activities outside of the Olympics.

In February 2008, during the NBA All-Star weekend in New Orleans, representatives from the QSR/pizza chain and Hornets players (or the respective NBA team delegates if the sponsorship is extended league-wide) could participate in activities that would put the funds to good use not only through construction projects but by rebuilding peoples' lives.

I believe the result can be a win-win-win sponsorship.

One, the QSR/pizza chain would have an effective cause-marketing platform that would attract national interest and publicity and drive traffic to the franchisees.

Two, purchasers of the sandwich could feel that they are trying a new product while contributing to an important cause.

And, three, New Orleans residents could feel that someone cares, that they are not forgotten and that tangible help in the form of those "French Quarters" is on the way.

We can all help NOLA and rebuild it bit by bit. Or in sandwich terms, foot by foot.

Author's note:

I've used the QSR/pizza chain to illustrate this concept, but I am in no way limiting the concept to that specific or industry. Big-box home repair and supply, grocery stores (which might elect to use their vendors/suppliers in this endeavor), beverage companies and electronic stores are welcome to use this platform to extend their reach.

I would welcome feedback from readers in any field of endeavor, including potential corporate partners who may see an opportunity for national reach and impact and the value in such an approach and who may care to offer any suggestions or thoughts for consideration.

Please let me hear from you.

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