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From The Field Of

## Borrow Disney's birthday promotion and make it your own

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SUTTON**

Disney's offer of a free ticket on your birthday to visit one of its theme parks is a smart promotion. The incremental spending creates a significant return on investment, and the return on experience is an area where Disney has always been the gold standard.

Think about the incremental spending attached to that free one-day ticket (face value of approximately \$70):

- As this is a national promotion, it is fairly safe to assume that those traveling to Orlando will be staying more than one day. Therefore, they will probably add at least one additional day to that ticket, not to mention the incremental spending while they are in the park each day.

- Unless they are from Orlando or own property or a time share, the birthday guest will need a place to stay. Why not stay at Disney?

- It would also be logical to assume that the birthday guest will not be traveling alone, so whoever is accompanying him/her will also need tickets and a place to stay.

This is truly a well-thought-out promotional concept that, especially in this economy, positions Disney as a company that's considerate of ways to stretch the entertainment dollar.

### ■ Sports application

What has been missed is how applicable this same concept is to spectator sports, not only in the United States, but also abroad. For months, I have been explaining to my clients why they need to implement this same promotional offer. While there are no hotel rooms to sell, the additional tickets purchased by companions, the opportunity to up-sell the free ticket (and the companion tickets) to a more expensive location, and the incremental spending by the birthday group alone makes this an excellent promotional strategy.

What may not be so obvious is the opportunity this promotion creates for teams to address and bolster specific periods on their schedule. Because there are up to six months when baseball, basketball, hockey, football and soccer schedules are not in season, teams cannot honor those fans whose birthdays fall on dates that occur out of season. For example, NBA teams have no regular-season games from mid-April until around Nov. 1. Thus, any fan with a birthday during that time appears to be excluded from the promotion.

Statistics show that NBA teams are much stronger in attendance after the December holidays. Therefore, why not take all of the birthdays that occur in the NBA offseason and allocate them for games in November and December? The free tickets, and the incremental tickets sold from that promotion, can strengthen league attendance during that less-well-attended time period.

The same can be the case for Major League Baseball. All of the fans with birthdays occurring in October through March could be allocated their free tickets for games in April (excluding Opening Day) and May, when the weather is often an issue and school is still in session.

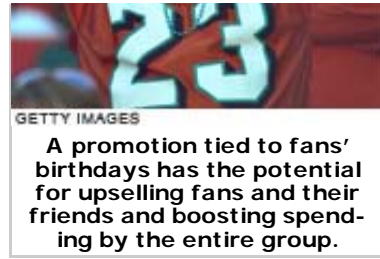


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Borrow Disney's birthday promotion a...

The promotion addresses not just incremental ticket sales and spending but also the schedule's period of weaker attendance.

I have presented this same idea to the Armani Jeans basketball team in Italy. The team was quick to realize that in a soccer-crazed market like Milan, this birthday promotion gives it an opportunity to build a following among the youth who may not have determined which sport will be their primary focus as a participant or spectator.



## ■ Title sponsorship

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While we were discussing how best to implement the birthday concept, we struck on the idea about pitching title sponsorship to McDonald's. The sponsor would have the opportunity to:

- Provide the birthday guest with a meal at McDonald's.
- Have signage in the arena promoting its Web site to register for the birthday program.
- Increase its database with people who have opted-in for the birthday promotion.
- Up-sell the birthday meal into a birthday party.
- Have PA announcements and on-court recognition of all birthday honorees.
- Design featured pop-ups and registration through the team Web site linking to the McDonald's Web site.
- Create a 12-month marketing platform. There is no season for birthdays; they happen every day.

As of this writing, I have no idea how the sponsorship presentation will turn out, but the birthday concept has numerous applications and benefits in any setting that calls for a ticket, a membership or some similar requirement.

## ■ Learning experience

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Let me point out that a great idea doesn't need to be original; it just needs to have an application that fills a need, solves a problem, opens a new revenue stream or simply creates a discussion of what might be.

Sometimes too much effort is expended looking to find the next great thing when, in fact, it might already exist in another setting. All it needs is a new part or option or maybe a fresh coat of paint to make it viable in your particular situation.

Great sports marketers are not just observers. They are consumers looking to experience what the world has to offer.

Their perspectives are not limited to just the sports world. They embrace popular culture and what is going on around them. They see what works, study it and figure out how it pertains to them and their respective situations.

Watch the great brands: Apple, Nike, American Express, Nordstrom and Ritz-Carlton, to name a few. There is always something new to be learned and applied from them.

We live in a global society and require a broad world view to enjoy it and capitalize on it.

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