

# Hunting out the rogue element

Claire Spencer, i to i research, argues that marketers need to know their enemy in order to successfully sell their message

IN THE LATEST HARRY POTTER book, JK Rowling cleverly juxtaposes the threats of today's world with those of the magical world. In the first chapter we find the British Prime Minister stewing over recent murders and other public acts of violence. We later learn that these incidents have been caused by rogue elements within the magical community. The Prime Minister is described to us as feeling 'faint' at the prospect of 'invisible creatures swooping through towns and countryside, spreading desperation and hopelessness in his voters'.

In a democratic society where the public is regularly called upon to vote and pledge its support, it is not unusual to attract the 'rogue element'. While rogue elements are most often invisible and passive in their opposition, they can also be visibly hostile and vocal: witness protests around the hunting ban and May Day demonstrations against corporations.

With London's bid to host the 2012 Olympic Games, it was obvious from the outset that some of the British public would not support the bid. This was borne out in early opinion polls in 2004, which suggested that while support levels appeared high, typically around the 70% mark, there was always the question of 'What did the other 30% think?'

The aim of the research we undertook in January 2005 was to better understand the 'rogue' 30% that were, ostensibly, not in support of the bid. What were their views? Did they pose a risk to the bid? Was communication having a positive effect on them?

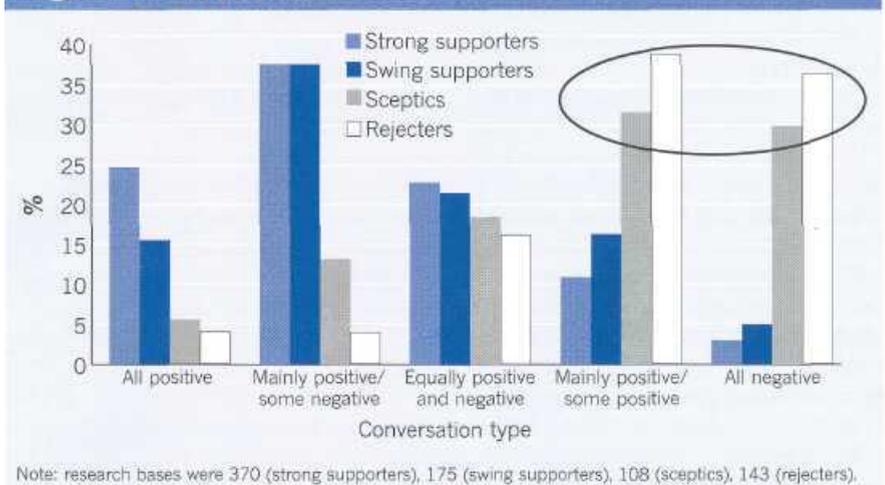
## Supporters and non-supporters

We were able to identify four distinct segments of support: strong supporters, 'swing supporters' and two groups of non-supporters, the 'sceptics' and the 'rejecters', who together made up about a third of the public.

What characterised these latter groups was their negative attitude to the Games. Much of their negativity centred on their

FIGURE 1

### Negative word of mouth



perceptions of the impact of the Games on London and Londoners, namely congestion, the legacy of unused stadiums and the cost.

By profiling this group, we were able to glean insights into who they were and how they felt about London hosting the Games. In terms of demographic profile, the only significant differences were that the 'sceptic' and 'rejecter' groups tended to be older, and female.

The psychographic analysis revealed that non-support for the bid was strongly correlated with two factors: interest and participation in sport and a general attitude towards Britain hosting events. Those who were least in favour of London hosting - the sceptics and rejecters - were

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less likely in general to be involved with sports or in favour of Britain hosting events.

This suggested that these two groups were likely to have deep-seated attitudes and that their support for London hosting the Games was unlikely to shift. This was borne out by the response of these groups to our communication.

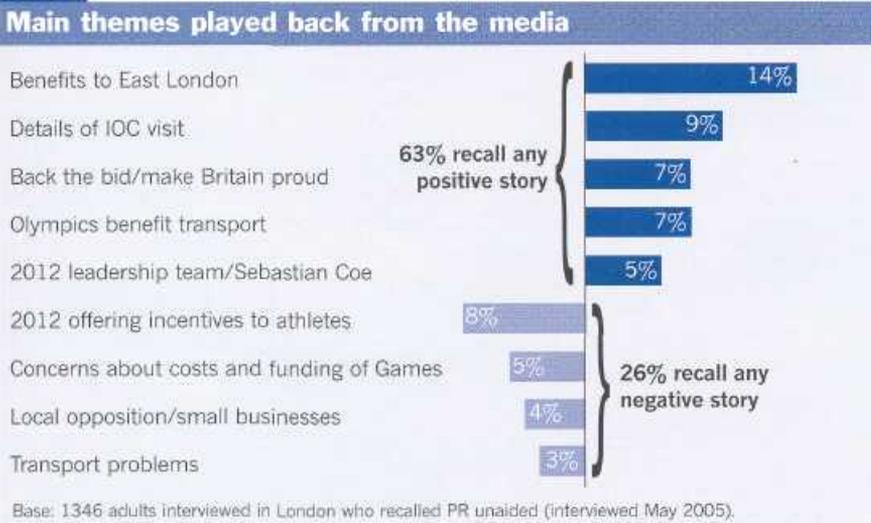
Our analysis showed that the communication had saturated London and the rest of the country. In London, everyone claimed to have seen advertising or PR coverage, with a high degree of overlap - 83% claimed to have seen both. While we saw a beneficial effect of people having been exposed to both advertising and PR, we were also keen to evaluate how the disciplines were performing relative to each other on the key performance measures for the campaign. We found that those claiming to have seen only media articles and programmes had very positive attitudes about the bid, whereas those claiming to have seen only advertising were much more negative.

By comparing the 'ad aware only' respondents with other respondents we established that they mainly comprised the sceptic and rejecter groups. The key learning was that it wasn't that the adver-

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FIGURE 2



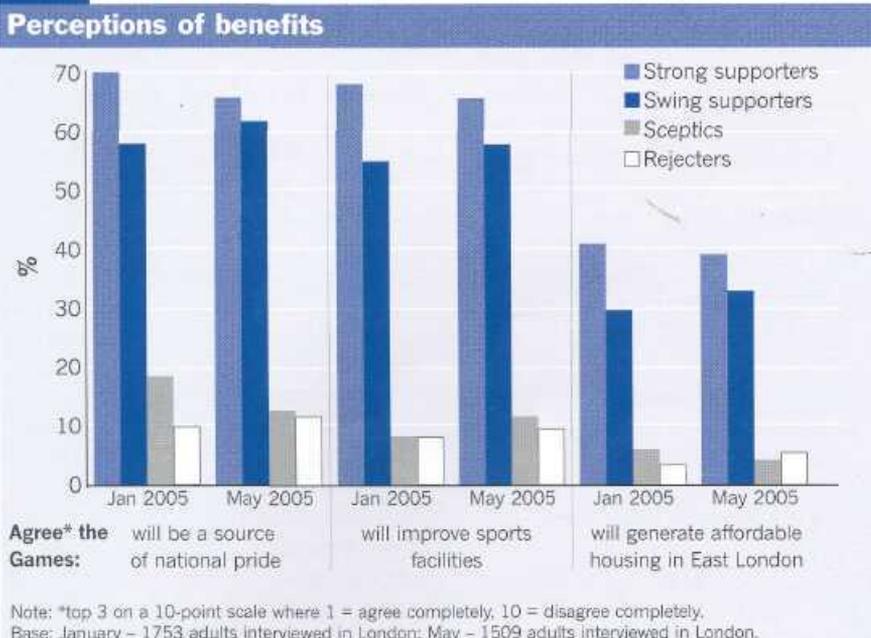
tising wasn't working, but that these groups were self-selecting the communication.

Given the negative attitudes of this group, and the saturation of the media, the hypothesis we formed was that non-supporters were making a conscious effort to avoid the media communication.

While it was not possible to avoid the advertising - it was everywhere - it was possible to choose not to read articles in the press about the Games.

It became obvious at this stage that any attempt to win over non-supporters would be fruitless. But this group posed a risk.

FIGURE 3



## Neutralising the rogue element

A key plank of London winning the bid was the demonstration that Britain was an 'enthusiastic country', with a strong desire to host the games. And the sceptics and rejecters were not just unenthusiastic, but vocal too. Our research established that 72% of sceptics and 55% of rejecters were having conversations about the bid and that the content was either all, or mainly, negative (see Figure I).

This was the rogue element, and the challenge was to contain them.

The risk they posed was that their negative views would infect a sizeable, yet vulnerable, group of swing supporters. Accounting for 29% of the general public, their support was deemed important to the success of London's bid.

A 'show' of public support focused on two important milestones, the visit of the IOC to London in February and the signing of the support registry.

In January, when the first wave of research was conducted, registration levels were low among all groups, except the strong supporters. Much of this was attributed to a lack of awareness of the existence of the registry. Although the poster advertising carried a call to action - to 'back the bid' by texting or going to the website - the research showed that this message was not getting through.

With five months to go until the IOC voting in Singapore, efforts were redoubled to boost registration levels, contain any negative opinion and shore up support among swing supporters.

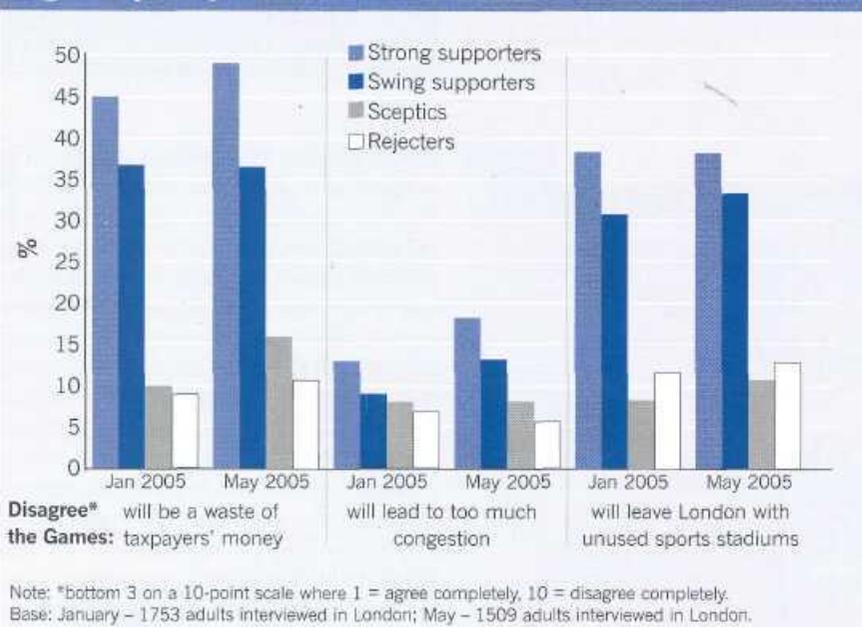
Communication efforts were directed towards giving people reasons why they should support London's bid. Media relations activity was particularly suited to this task, given investment limitations and the ability of the media to deliver multiple storylines.

## Positive media coverage

Between the two waves of research, an analysis of media coverage showed that the stories carried were largely positive. Articles expounded the benefits of Lon-

FIGURE 4

Negative perceptions diminished at Wave 2



don hosting the Games and put considerable focus on the IOC's visit to London.

From an analysis of the message out-take from the media in May, much of the messaging around the benefits of London hosting the Games was being played back unaided. In addition, the media proved to be a good carrier of the message around 'Back the bid/Make London Proud', the main theme of the advertising (see Figure 2).

Given the risk of the rogue element, it was important to understand if support

was holding up among swing supporters. By isolating this group, we determined that a higher percentage was being exposed to positive media stories and word of mouth at Wave 2 than at Wave 1.

The net effect of this was to strengthen attitudinal support among swing supporters. Between the two waves of research in January and May, agreement levels among this group around the benefits of London hosting the Games strengthened (see Figure 3).

Negative opinion about the effects of London hosting the Games was mainly contained among the sceptic and rejecter groups. While swing supporters were still undecided that the bid was altogether a good thing for London, they were no more negative at Wave 2 than they had been at Wave 1 (see Figure 4).

Support levels held up among all groups from Wave 1 to Wave 2, a testament to the success of the communications in shoring up support (see Figure 5).

Other measures of success that were evaluated were confidence in London's ability to win the bid and registration levels. By May, a third of swing supporters rated London's chances of winning as high, with 30% stating they were more convinced than they had been at the start of the year that London could win.

Rising registration

The acid test for the communications was the recorded increase in registration. Registration increased most dramatically in the swing supporter group. This corresponds to growing awareness levels of the Bid Support Registry between the two waves of research. Figures provided by the London 2012 marketing team show that registration doubled in the period January to May, from one million to two million.

While many factors contributed to the ultimate success of London's bid to host the 2012 Games, the general public did their bit in providing a show of support

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and enthusiasm. The advertising and PR proved to be highly visible, and engendered a sense of national pride, giving people reasons to back the bid and dismiss any negativity from rogue voices.

By using research at two critical stages of the bid process, the 2012 team was able to take the pulse of the nation, identify the serious threat that the rogue element posed and fine-tune the campaign to effectively manage both controlled and uncontrolled channels of communication.

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FIGURE 5

Support remains constant

