



LUCIEN BOYER, CEO of Havas Sports & Entertainment tells Kevin Roberts how developments in marketing and media have moved his unit closer to the forefront of thinking at one of the world's biggest communications groups.

SPEAKING THE LANGUAGE OF BRANDS

OVER THE PAST DECADE or so, SportBusiness International has chronicled the sports marketing sector month-by-month. Change has, by and large, been the result of relatively small steps rather than single revolutionary thrusts.

In fact, so gradual have been the changes that it is only when they are viewed from the distance of time elapsed that one is reminded of how significant their cumulative effect has been.

Sitting in his office Paris headquarters of Havas, just across the River Seine from the Bois de Boulogne, Lucien Boyer, CEO of Havas Sports & Entertainment is in no doubt. He has lived through it all.

Havas is part of one of the world's largest and most widespread marketing communications groups, with offices or representation in around 100 countries. It's a major player on the world stage, something which, in the past, has meant it has tended to swamp its specialist sports marketing unit which has been seen as strictly subsidiary to the mainstream advertising-based activities of its other units. That's no longer the case.

With every passing year, those tiny shifts in emphasis and intention throughout the marketing sector saw Havas Sports gain traction and credibility within its parent company.

"From a niche situation we have now been recognised as giving the group a competitive edge," explains Boyer as he reflects on developments.

In short, the sports marketing kid has grown up. Where once it had been a nice-to-have for the heavyweights in Havas, it has flourished to become a door opener and enabler, helping Havas match the breadth of offering from its global competitors.

It's far from a unique story. Whoever you ask and wherever you look you'll discover marketers agonising about new ways of reaching the audiences they crave. Content is the watchword of the new marketing age and when it comes to content, sport enjoys a unique play in the affections of consumers.

Look around the major players on the world marketing stage and each now has some sort of sports offering.

The sea-change in the way that sport is valued as part of the marketing toolbox has certainly benefitted Havas Sport and Lucien Boyer himself.

"The changes in media and marketing and the appreciation of what sport and entertainment content can achieve in brand communications means that it *is* now less of a challenge to fight sport's corner. It has a more significant place in agency life.

"Previous managements at Havas were more influenced by the traditional advertising approach. Indeed I first presented my plans for development a long time ago but the reaction then was different because the company was run by different people. Now people in the business are more aware of the need to change if we are to stay ahead."

Boyer, who is only now approaching his midges, has been around the sports marketing block a few times.

He's a graduate of France's elite ESSEC business school who cut his teeth in the world of top end ocean racing, working with the France 3 America's cup challenge in 1983 and Challenge France in 1986. Suitably enthused he moved into Formula One and became sponsorship director of the short-lived and rarely

remembered Larousse-Lola-Lamborghini team whose owner was, on one occasion, jailed in mid-season.

Rather than putting the young Boyer off sports for life, it spurred him on. In '91 he launched LMG (Lifestyle Marketing Group) in France for Saatchi & Saatchi and when, eight years later, LMG was sold to Havas, Boyer remained at the helm of what was to become Havas Sports.

Today he sits atop the management tree at Havas Sports and Entertainment, created earlier this year by merging the resources of Havas sports and the various entertainment focused units within the group, B6 Entertainment, Havas Entertainment and London-based Cake.

"This evolution constitutes a proactive response to current market trends, consumer demands and brand expectations" droned the official press release at the time.

Or in other words, the world has changed and continues to change and Boyer and his team realised that, in common with their competitors, you either changed or risked failure on a grand scale.

"It was a big change which reflects the evolution within the industry. We are now becoming a global network operating beyond the confines of sports marketing. The business is about sports and entertainment communications," he said.

"This is about evolution. We have moved beyond sports because brands want to be able to tap into the communities they serve or want to serve at any time and anywhere."

And one of the ways of achieving that is by building relationships through content. If one accepts that traditional television and press advertising is just so 20th century and that today's more sophisticated and discriminating consumers are tuning out rather than sitting up and paying attention, that means brands must be part of a new media universe of interactive digital television, the internet and video games.

"Our role is giving life to brands through positioning which makes them part of people's lives," Boyer explained.

"There are many opportunities because everything is changing and there are many ways to deliver brand messages through people's passions."

And that, of course, means that today's sophisticated marketers are thinking well beyond the confines of mass spectator sports.

"Art and culture is becoming more popular and less elitist and that is creating new opportunities for brands, while in sport we are also aware of the need to offer programmes at the grass roots and leverage hundreds of millions of people around the world who make sport part of their lives," Boyer said.

The Havas name has been central to the French media scene for over 170 years, since Charles-Louis Havas (the family name is from Hungary) founded the eponymous news agency. In fact, on nationalisation it became part of what is now Agence France Presse.

But while its headquarters are in France and much of the historic core business comes from the French and Spanish speaking world, Boyer is determined to present a global offering. Such is the focus on thinking and acting in an

CV: LUCIEN BOYER, Havas Sports and Entertainment

Before creating LMG (Lifestyle Marketing Group) at the beginning of 1991, a Saatchi & Saatchi sports marketing subsidiary in France, Lucien Boyer was Director of Sponsoring for the Larousse - Lola - Lamborghini Formula One racing team. There he developed a highly innovative marketing approach inspired by his earlier experiences with the French Challenges for the America's Cup in 1983 and 86.

LMG was acquired by Havas Advertising in 1999 and is the forerunner of Havas Advertising Sports.

Complementing this sports marketing experience, he was Advertising Manager at Saatchi & Saatchi Advertising from 1987 to 1988.

A graduate of ESSEC Business school, Lucien Boyer is 43 years old, married and has three children.

international fashion that, one insider says, it is not unknown for meetings to break into sessions focusing on how to be 'less French.'

"This is a very global business in every respect," Boyer said.

"The chairman and his businesses are very global although he remains attached to his roots. In each country in which we operate the head of the business is a local person and we certainly don't try to impose a uniquely French attitude to the business. We integrate local talent to create a multi-cultural melting pot. In fact, in our global management team you'll find seven different nationalities.

The drive to establish a truly international presence has been underway for some time as Boyer has headed a period of rapid growth, in part through acquisition of key strategic targets. Last year Havas acquired London based Sponsorship Media, one of a series of significant acquisitions around the world which spread not only the company's geographic coverage but the range of sports in which it worked. Other moves have seen it open for business in territories including China, India, Malaysia, Argentina and Mexico as well as Italy, Spain and France.

Havas Sports & Entertainment now has offices in 12 countries with a 13th, in South Africa, due on stream imminently. And the growth isn't going to grind to a halt anytime soon.

"Ultimately we need to be in 20 to 25 countries by the end of next year (2009), Boyer says. "We are currently looking at opportunities across Eastern Europe and then our focus will be on North America although we well understand that we need to handle the US in the right way," he says in acknowledgement of the sophistication and peculiarities of the world-leading US sports and entertainment markets.

With the rest of the Havas Group established in 104 countries, the claim to global coverage is clearly more than an idle boast. In fact it is central to Boyer's core proposition.

"We want to work with global brands and properties on a global basis and believe that in many respects we are a first mover in many of these areas," Boyer said.

"Our goal is to create experiences which connect brands to their customers."

While that is hardly a unique objective in the world of modern sports and entertainment based marketing, Boyer believes that the discipline and structure which undercores his company's approach will be key to its ultimate success. And this is where advantages of being part of a major advertising group become clear.

"We have been inspired by advertising and try to speak the language of the brands in the way that advertising agencies do," he said.

"What we do is about bringing brands to life and I believe we have a unique methodology' which is quite strict and typically rational. In the past in marketing things were left to happen almost by chance. But today life is too expensive for that for

that. Our clients have to have a genuine and well structured rationale to justify their investment.

"While it remains important that we retain the capacity to be audacious in our creative approach, everything has to be supported by hard facts. Doing that allows client to make good decisions by allowing them the information they need."

And those clients are increasingly widely spread as the economic map of the world is redrawn. Boyer is clearly excited about the possibilities for business outside the company's traditional core markets.

"We have been in China for a few years now because we want to have a presence in those countries or regions which are holding major events. We now have 20 of our own people in China together with Havas group offices in around 40 cities and we benefit from the huge amount of expertise and experience in the existing network there.

"We look on ourselves as a 360 degree creative company working across disciplines including design, PR, research and event management among others. In mature markets, where it is more difficult for brands to gain recognition, I believe that creativity can add create something new and different. In developing markets our aim is to accelerate progress. We want to take them from Y to Z not just A-Z by drawing on

"We have been inspired by advertising and try to speak the language of the brands in the way that advertising agencies do,"

our experience to create short-cuts. In many respects Havas Sports & Entertainment is typical of the major players in global sports marketing. While they may not share the Anglo Saxon roots of many of their competitors, the company has been moulded by the same set of world economic conditions and the impact of new technologies on the way the public consumes and reacts to media. Inevitably there are similarities in attitude and approach.

Noting the course that the major agencies have taken, it is tempting to conclude that they, have found the keys to an increasingly global future and that only they are equipped to perform on this stage, leaving less and less room for smaller, perhaps more specialist operations.

Boyer disagrees, outlining a future in which the principles which make new-generation sports and entertainment communications so persuasive will operate on more than one level.

"Looking ahead I think there will be an increased tendency to develop a need for content, driven by global and events and properties, which works across borders. Yet there is another side to the coin which is the need to communicate to highly targeted local markets through local events,

particularly grass roots sports which are particular to a specific region.

"The media revolution has made it possible to do both. We have the ability to reach huge global audiences through content created around the mega events which everybody can feel they have a stake in, while at the same time it is possible, through digital channels, to communicate effectively with micro communities wherever they may be.

"Because of this there will always be a role for smaller, locally based agencies. More and more brands want to get closer to the community and the way people live. The ability to understand local communities and their issues and create content and deliver programmes which resonate with them is a task best carried out by specialist local agencies.⁷

Boyer also believes that the way that the public engages with media, particularly in the sports sector, may change. "Some traditional sports may become 'less interesting' for the younger generation who are more concerned with sport and exercise for pleasure and health than with the traditional ideas of competition," he says.

"Youth will have a different relationship with different sports and brands are already embracing this change as an opportunity. They want to get involved in grass roots and participant sports and, by investing in these sports, have an important role to play in their development."

And while some observers believe that the primacy of sports content may come under threat from broader-based entertainment, Boyer feels it is more likely that a combination of factors is likely to drive them closer-together than ever before.

"One of the continuing challenges for sport, particularly live sport, is to continue to make events fresh and interesting. That means integrating additional content in the sports experience so that a visit to a stadium becomes a complete entertainment experience. We are already seeing more general entertainment being added to the sports experience and I am sure this will continue.

"The other factor to consider is that the movie and music industries face significant distribution challenges in the digital age. So where better to promote a new product than in front of 80,000 people at a sports event?"

Boyer's passion for sports and the role that it will play in society and economics in the years ahead is underscored by his advocacy of the First Global Sports Forum, scheduled to take place in Barcelona in February 2008.

The event will bring together politicians, leading business and cultural figures, health experts and others whose views help shape the future. Over three days they will examine the future of sport in a changing world from a variety of fresh perspectives helping to chart a course for a future in which Lucien Boyer aims to play a leading role.