



Engaging the community - Getty Images Sport

## WHAT IS THE VALUE OF CSR?

Grass roots investment during the recession. Is it worth it? **Matthew Roberts** of Eurosport argues that it is not only worthwhile but it is critical to the effectiveness of a sponsorship. Now more than ever before.

**INVESTMENT IN GRASS ROOTS** has become a common box to tick the CSR objectives off forward thinking companies but it is not a cheap option and can be hard to measure and account for.

It might be tempting, therefore, in these difficult economic times for marketers to ignore investment at the grass roots level in favour of large, mass market deals. Whilst supporting sports development can demonstrate a company has the best interests of the fans at heart it is also a very transparent relationship, putting the brands' motivations under a tight spotlight. An audience can quickly change their perceptions if they feel a company is using "their" sport for crude financial gain.

So what is the best vehicle for reaching the engaged sports fan in today's climate? The highly visible branding exercise or the detailed, development project which stimulates the next generation? If it is the latter, how will this affect the consumers' (and employees') views of companies who cut grass roots spend and will it affect the effectiveness of companies' sports marketing strategies?

To gain a clear understanding of how sports communication works Eurosport interviewed 1,600 upmarket consumers and 10 leading sports marketers whose responses created a sports marketing code of conduct for companies during the difficult economic climate. The findings highlighted several clear tactics. First and foremost, the need for advertisers to invest for the longer term to maximise results.

Short-term deals are rarely seen as effective with consumers believing it shows a lack of commitment and an assumption the brand is using sport for financial gain.

The survey also revealed grass roots investment was considered an imperative and necessary component of a successful sports marketing campaign. Although expensive, it is valued by consumers who appreciate organisations which make a real contribution to sports development.

It is a strategy that is also strongly appreciated by company employees - 72 per cent of whom claim grass roots sporting investment makes them feel their company is giving something back to the community, and two thirds of them claiming sporting investment makes them feel proud of their company and unites employees.

That said, there is a temptation amongst the sports marketers interviewed to re-route their grass roots spend into exclusive rights during the recession to ensure market share remains ahead of competitors. However, the Eurosport survey showed exclusivity was not considered an essential part of a sports marketing campaign by consumers who were significantly more likely to value quality (grass roots, longevity and fit) over quantity (share of voice), even during tough economic times.

*Business & Sport: Perfect Partners: research conducted by Eurosport in partnership with ZenithOptimedia e Synovate October 2008.*