ALL IN THE MIND

Any future bans on alcohol sponsorship are likely to have a series of unintended consequences, if the experience of the tobacco industry and neuro-marketing is anything to go by. By **Richard Gillis.**

MOVEMENT TOWARD *a* complete ban on alcohol sponsorship in the UK gained momentum following the release of a recent British Medical Association report, ' Under The Influence', which suggested that alcohol consumption in the UK had increased rapidly in recent years. It blamed advertising, heavy price discounting and 24-hour licensing laws, saying: "Given the industry spends 8oo million a year in promoting alcohol in the UK, it is no surprise that we see it everywhere", citing the high profile of alcohol brands in sponsoring sports events as an example.

The European Sponsorship Association (ESA) came out strongly to defend sponsorship by alcohol brands. "The threat of a ban would seriously damage the sponsorship industry, sport and other areas currently supported by the alcohol industry," it said in a statement, which suggested the alcohol sector is currently the fifth largest in the sponsorship industry. "If this vital support was to disappear, essential funding for several events would disappear with it".

The debate has obvious echoes with that relating to the tobacco industry, and SportBusiness spoke to a leading cigarette brand marketer, who preferred not to be named for the purposes of this article. He felt the BMA report represented a watershed moment.

"The most important thing to come from this current report is for the alcohol industry to accept that a ban in now inevitable. It is very much in play and is not a case of if, but when and how. The strategy adopted by the industry has to alter to deal with that new reality".

It is difficult to link sponsorship directly to sales volume of beer or cigarettes, but it has a longer term effect in terms of, 'the company you keep' as a brand. When the tobacco ban was brought in, the impact on cigarette sales was impossible to measure, he suggests, because of the impact of other factors, such as price increases, point of sale restrictions and health warnings. But five years after it came into force, the ban on tobacco sponsorship has had a series of unintended consequences.

Most notably, according to one of the world's foremost experts in neuro-marketing, cigarette companies are now among the most innovative and sophisticated marketers in the world.

Martin Lindstrom is a neuro-marketing consultant and author of Buyology, a book based on a three-year, multimillion-dollar research project that exposed 2,000 consumers to branding materials while scanning their brains. He believes his research shows that the investment in Formula One made by the tobacco industry is still reaping rewards, both in terms of their brand image, and most importantly, in encouraging people to smoke.

"I'm endlessly impressed by Marlboro's ability to take the core values of Formula One - sex, speed, innovation, coolness - and apply them to a cigarette brand," says Lindstrom.

"That is an amazing achivement....Even though that sponsorship is no longer legal we carried out experiments just showing an Fi car, and people immediately craved cigarettes. Marlboro is sending indirect, subconscious signals that are talking to the brain without explicitly telling it we are being sold to".

""The evidence is mounting that the most powerful form of sponsorship today is where you do not have a logo but you make up for this with smashable components of the brand".

Marlboro exploits its F1 past with neuro-marketing - *Getty Images Sport*

BRANDED CONTENT

Peter Christiansen, Managing Director, Precious Media Ltd on the need for brands to create their very own media.

Sportel celebrates its 20th anniversary this year. And this period has seen enormous change in almost every facet of the relationship between sport and TV. The fundamental difference is the global conviction that the highest quality sport provides one of the few reliable sources of content to drive mass audiences.

But this column is about sponsorship, not sport, which is just as well as my background is entertainment, and I enjoyed a long and deep relationship with the Pepsi Chart Show, being responsible for extending the franchise across media and territories globally for over 10 years.

From that perspective, it seems to me that the much-heralded promise of convergence between brands and media - in terms of brand integration and branded content - is going to deliver much much later than the stampede towards technological convergence.

The Pepsi Chart Show took a simple concept - presenting the people's choice of music each week; and converted that into a broadcast package tailored by region; a central location complemented by regional satellites; national chart shows on radio in over 20 markets; alongside a host of promotional activity, building brand and driving sales.

Instead of paying a heavy rights fee, Pepsi created its own media. You could argue that such campaigns demand exceptional brand commitment and confidence. And they do.

The metrics to evaluate Pepsi's value - in conventional media terms - were not difficult to develop.

The media value far exceeded comparable investments and communicated so much more about the brand. But Pepsi had confidence in its own consumer insight, which was rapidly put beyond any doubt by audiences.

Clearly, this scale of investment is beyond many brands, even global brands. But in an age of fragmented media, too many brands ignore the value of their own media: brand communications on-pack, POS and ATL are quantifiable.

They should have the same value as the equivalent exposure as a sponsor, if not greater, given the brand's total ability to control messaging and environment.

Across all media, branded content and brand integration is here to stay.

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