

RAISING THE BAR IN THE BIDDING BATTLES

Campaigns to win the right to host major events have become increasingly sophisticated as the stakes rise with each round of bidding. By **Kevin Roberts**.

HAVING HEADED the International Olympic Committee's evaluation Commission, which reported back on the four cities vying to stage the 2016 Olympic Games, Denis Oswald commented publicly on what he saw as the 'debauchery' of lobbying in support of the bids.

Well, quelle surprise as they say down Lausanne way.

This was probably the closest Olympic bidding race of all time, fought to exacting standards within the confines of tight rules laid down by the IOC to spare its own blushes after the debacle of Salt Lake City where an over-generous bid team had attempted to handsomely compensate members in return for their votes.

In many respects the IOC is caught between a rock and a hard place. While Oswald is not alone in being concerned about some aspects of the campaigning, the bid campaigns are simply a response to the size of the prize.

And the fact that the prize is simply enormous sits very well with the IOC as it underscores the unique nature and commercial value of the property. Some observers believe that the IOC simply wants to have its cake and eat it; to present the Olympic Games as a unique opportunity for sport and for the cities which host them.

They want competition to ensure that the best hosts - and therefore custodians of the Olympic brand - are selected, but they look down their noses at the grubby business of lobbying which inevitably accompanies that process.

Sport and politics are inextricably linked and nowhere is that more obvious than in the upper echelons of its governing bodies.

Whether the prize is a valued seat on an influential committee, the inclusion of a particular sport or discipline in a Games programme or the right to host an event, there are campaigns in place to influence the outcome.

Such is the importance of campaigning that there is even a thriving trade in the information

around which those campaigns are constructed. And there is no shortage of consultants happy to spend their time in the bars and lobbies of Lausanne's grand hotels.

They Hoover up conversation and sort the wheat of intelligence from the chaff of gossip for not in significant fees plus expenses.

But this is just one aspect of an increasingly sophisticated process of campaign building and execution which has become the norm for every successful Olympic bid.

Given the strict demand of its Bid Book, the IOC has more or less ensured that every potential host which becomes a candidate city is able to submit a technically competent and acceptable bid and is able to guarantee the funding and multi-tiered government support required to stage Games.

Beyond the Bid Book

So what is the difference between Bid A and Bid B? Is it to do with location, amenities for visitors? Is it to do with geo-politics or the environment? Is it just to do with who wants it most and who is prepared to be more aggressive?

The reality is that it is all this and more. Developing the narrative around a bid city and its promise and delivering it persuasively to a relatively tiny number of voters has become a hugely sophisticated process which is getting more and more intensive and complex.

Mike Lee is head of Vero Communications, the agency which handled the communications, though not lobbying, programmes for the winning Olympic bids for both London 2012 and Rio 2016.

As such, Lee is an experienced campaigner and has worked extensively in sport but also in the world of UK politics. He is perhaps particularly well placed to draw comparisons.

"The principles of good campaigning apply no matter what you are doing. The strategy you

develop has to be appropriate to each and every objective. When you talk about bidding it is all about developing the right narrative, engaging stakeholders and building momentum."

And, observes Lee, every fresh campaign involves raising the communications game.

"When I look back four years to the London 2012 campaign it is clear that the process has moved on by as much as 40 per cent. The 2012 campaign established a new benchmark but that was back in 2003. It is already at another level.

"The process is now more thorough because of the extension of the role of the Evaluation Commission and the Lausanne event which gives every bid city an opportunity to present to all IOC members and then take part in an exhibition.

"This has certainly moved up a notch in terms of communications and marketing and while it is true you are ultimately seeking the votes of a



Brazil President Lula campaigned hard- Getty Images Sport

little over a hundred IOC members, they each have much broader constituencies. That means a campaign has to be a multi-dimensional jigsaw and every piece ultimately has to fit.

"The quality of the 2016 campaigns suggests that the IOC process is working and is in a healthy state. The quality of evaluation is certainly first class," Lee says.

Other bid races

"You only have to look at the levels of creativity in brochures, films and letters to see how high the standard is."

And while the Olympic Games may set the standards, all indications are that the levels of sophistication applied to landing the biggest prize of all, are being applied to other events.

"Look at the FIFA World Cup bidding process for 2018-22," says Lee. "It may not be on the

same scale or format as an Olympic bid and the electorate is smaller but a highly professional approach is absolutely essential. They are all highly sophisticated international people."

Jon Tibbs is another Briton who has made a name for himself in the cut and thrust of international relations, brand building and communications in sport.

Tibbs was associated with the winning Athens and Beijing bids while heading the sports team at Hill and Knowlton and helped secure victory for the Sochi 2014 Winter Games campaign after forming his company JTA.

"If somebody was to come stright from the world of political campaigning and try to apply exactly the same strategies and tactics to the sports world they would fail," he says.

"Everything we do addresses a smaller constituency and the quality of the conversation

with voters, together with the ability to listen and react to what they say, is critical to our success.

"It is about taking every opportunity to achieve those conversations which are simply not possible when you are conducting a major political campaign."

That said, Tibbs is keen to learn the lessons of other campaigns and to evaluate campaigning tools as they emerge.

"It is important that we understand the power of digital communications media such as twitter and Facebook.

"But that doesn't mean that we are about to see a massive rush to use digital media when they are not appropriate... and right now there are many reasons why they are not appropriate," he explains.

Among these are the age and media usage habits of the target audience. "It is certainly



'Rio is ready' the communications strategy - Getty Images Sport

likely that use of these media will play a more important role in the years to come. I am sure, though, that their time will come, but for now the use is limited."

Lee is also sceptical about the current relevance of digital media to such closely targeted campaigns.

"There's a bit of a myth about this," he says. "There are some very influential websites but were not really talking about viral marketing in this respect.

Tibbs, for his part, is a believer in a thorough, measured and constantly evaluated approach to developing and delivering critical bid messages.

"In key respects a bid is a brand and you have to be able to tell that brand's story in a compelling and persuasive way to a range of different audiences," he explains.

"Our approach is based on a constant cycle of understanding of where we are, where we need to be and developing the communications initiatives that are required to get us there.

"It's a non-stop rolling process but the fundamental building block is understanding your starting point and constantly evaluating and inputting the quality information that is required to enable you to make good decisions about the bid's brand narrative and strategy.

Like Lee, he believes that the bar is constantly being raised with each new bidding cycle.

"Every fresh campaign brings with it different challenges and fresh and higher levels of expectation," Tibbs explains.

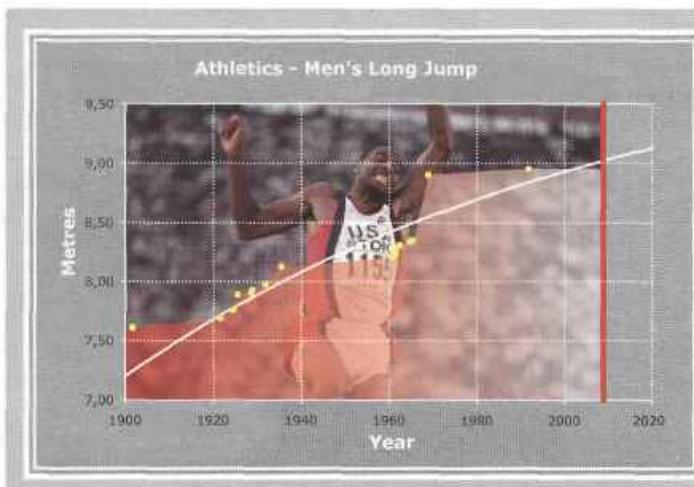
"Sport is a tight-knit world and news, gossip and innuendo travel with lightning speed. To operate successfully in that world it is essential

that you have a real understanding of the individuals involved and their personal issues and concerns together with an understanding of the group politics involved.

"I think that the business of bidding will continue to develop and become even more sophisticated as the quality of competition among potential host cities and countries improves.

Like other areas of the communications sector we will evaluate emerging technologies and new disciplines to establish whether or not they are applicable to particular campaign programmes and apply them as appropriate.

"The fact is that there is no one size fits all rule in this business. We have a wide range of communications tools at our disposal and will use whichever are appropriate to give our clients the best chance of success."



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LONG JUMP

Like sprinting, the Long Jump has largely been left to man's own development. That is why Mike Powell's 9.95 metre record has been unbroken since 1991. And Powell's gigantic jump came almost 25 years after fellow American Bob Beamon had the high altitude of Mexico City to assist his 8.90 m leap.

World Record development Long Jump

Mike Powell (USA)	9.95	30-Aug-1991	Tokyo, JPN
Bob Beamon (USA)	8.90	18-Oct-1968	Mexico City, MEX
Ralph Boston (USA)	8.35	29-May-1965	Modesto, USA
Ralph Boston (USA)	8.34	12-Sep-1964	Los Angeles, USA
Igor Ter-Ovanesyan (URS)	8.31	10-Jun-1962	Yerevan, URS
Ralph Boston (USA)	8.28	16-Jul-1961	Moscow, URS
Ralph Boston (USA)	8.24	27-May-1961	Modesto, USA
Ralph Boston (USA)	8.21	12-Aug-1960	Walnut, USA
Jesse Owens (USA)	8.11	25-May-1935	Ann Arbor, USA

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