MARKETING EXCELLENCE

McDonald’s

Winning the audience over

 headline sponsor
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MARKETING SOCIETY
AWARDS FOR EXCELLENCE 2013
Marketing excellence can drive breakthrough business results for the short and long-term. Marketing excellence requires great strategic thinking, great creative thinking and perfect execution.

But how do we assess marketing excellence? First we choose brilliant industry judges who are all experienced and successful practitioners of excellence and we ask them to pick out the cases which they see as remarkable. We ask them to look for two key qualities from our winners: creativity and effectiveness.

But marketing continuously changes and evolves, as consumers become more sophisticated and demanding and the media for communicating with them ever more diverse. So the standards for marketing excellence change and in turn become more demanding.

We believe that The Marketing Society Awards for Excellence in association with Marketing set the standard of marketing excellence in the UK.

They have established this reputation over a period of more than 28 years, and they have always been based on the principle of searching out the best examples of different marketing techniques in action, that showcase great strategic thinking, great creativity and perfect execution.

In order to be a winner of one of the Society’s Awards, marketers have to demonstrate that what they have done is outstanding in comparison with marketing in all industries not just their own particular sector.

If a marketing story has been good enough to impress our judges, then all marketers can learn from it – however senior they have become. The collection of case histories brought together here is the best of the best from the past two years of our Awards, and I am confident that it truly demonstrates marketing excellence. As you read these case studies I hope you are inspired by them and impressed at the talent and expertise in our profession which created them.
McDonald’s

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Snapshot
McDonald’s successfully overcame initial criticism of its Olympic Games sponsorship with an imaginative campaign celebrating the general public’s role in the event.

Key insights
• McDonald’s was being criticised for the inappropriateness of a fast-food brand associating with an event that celebrated sporting perfection.
• The campaign’s vision of focusing on the pivotal role that the general public would play in setting the Games alight and the imaginative use of digital media significantly transformed the brand’s standing.
• The results were increased brand affinity and positive word-of-mouth as well as a sales uplift.

Summary
McDonald’s is the world’s leading food-service retailer, with more than 34,000 local restaurants serving nearly 69 million people in 118 countries each day. When the Olympic Games came to London in 2012, the company’s prominent position in the market made it a natural sponsor of what was set to be one of the most exciting Olympic events in history.

Nevertheless, along with other sponsors, McDonald’s came in for fierce criticism by those who felt certain brands were a bad fit with a sporting event, and who dubbed London 2012 “The Obesity Games”. So the company and its agency, Leo Burnett, faced a big challenge: to drive affinity for the McDonald’s brand by making people feel good about its sponsorship of London 2012. Ultimately, the aim was to increase sales, as affinity is a proven sales driver.
The solution was to find common ground between a sponsor and an event seemingly poles apart by celebrating the values that London 2012 and McDonald’s shared: democracy and generosity of spirit. It shifted the focus from athletes to the people, recognising that the Games are a special and inclusive event where everyone has a role to play.

Content was delivered to consumers in a fun way through different media and invited people to share it via digital channels. The campaign resulted in increases across all appropriateness and affinity measures and changed the conversation, reducing negative and increasing positive buzz. August 2012 saw McDonald’s UK’s biggest ever sales along with a healthy return on investment (ROI).

**Brand under pressure**

Brand affinity is a proven sales driver for McDonald’s, and the Games offered a prime opportunity to generate affinity on a global stage. London 2012 was McDonald’s’ ninth Games as ‘official restaurant’, and its first as the official presenting partner of the Games Makers, or all the volunteers who would actually help make the Games work. However, it presented what was probably the brand’s toughest affinity challenge ever.

Health campaigners, politicians and media criticised sponsors that people felt were a bad fit with athletics. London 2012 was dubbed “the obesity Games” and the London Assembly urged the International Olympic Committee to ban sponsorship of the Games by companies that produce high-calorie food and drink (Figure 1).

To make matters worse, McDonald’s came under fire for exclusivity arrangements regarding the sale of chips in the Olympic Park. By July 2012, McDonald’s was the sponsor with the highest awareness, but fewer than one in five people thought it was an appropriate sponsor. Similarly, McDonald’s dominated online conversation compared to other Games sponsors, but over half of that chat was negative in sentiment.

Meanwhile, YouGov’s brand index showed McDonald’s net sentiment at -12.5, the lowest for two years. So, as the association of McDonald’s with the Games became a hornet’s nest of negativity and criticism, how could McDonald’s’ Olympic sponsorship be used to make people feel good about the brand?
Finding the right story to tell

McDonald’s Olympic association goes back to 1968, when the company airlifted hamburgers to US athletes who were homesick for Big Macs. Since then, McDonald’s had often highlighted its role in “feeding the Games”, providing “athletes, coaches and officials with a familiar taste of home.” However, the cultural climate of 2012 meant that the campaign couldn’t focus on athletes. The solution would be to find shared territory with the Games.

The Olympics have long celebrated values such as excellence. But for London 2012 there was a new vision. As Lord Coe, chairman of the London Organising Committee of the Olympics and Paralympics Games (LOCOG), said in 2007: “London 2012 will be everyone’s Games. This is the vision at the very heart of our brand. It’s an invitation to take part and be involved.”

McDonald’s positioning is “the people’s restaurant”, a place that is democratic and populist. From Olympic athletes to the man on the street, “There’s a McDonald’s for everyone”. McDonald’s had great Olympic stories to tell — from training the Games Makers to the champion crew. But research said that no story would drive affinity on its own.

So to make people feel good about the sponsorship, the company and its agency decided to highlight the things that people love about McDonald’s, including inclusivity, democracy and generosity of spirit and show how these values were shared with London 2012.

To demonstrate these shared values, the discussion shifted the focus, from the athletes to the people and, in doing so, recognised an essential truth: that the Games were not just a demonstration of sporting excellence, but also a kind of carnival, a celebration of human endeavour that appealed to not just “the fans”, but people who do not ordinarily follow sports events.

People would be coming together to cheer on the world’s athletes and would create an atmosphere of connection and euphoria on the streets. They would be warm hosts, welcoming the world and proudly showing them the best of their country and what it can achieve. The records would be broken in the stadiums, but the people would make the Games (Figure 2).
This was expressed in the line: “We all make the Games”:  
• It was a rallying cry celebrating how the public, Games Makers and McDonald’s crew would come together to make London 2012 the greatest show on earth.  
• It was a unifying story that wrapped a range of McDonald’s Olympic contributions into a coherent theme.  
• It was refreshingly different. Many brands fell back on tired sporting analogies, giving the brand an opportunity to stand out.

For the first time, people would be capturing and sharing the Games as they happened. They would not just be watching it on TV or in a stadium, but actively participating in creating the narrative of the Games. This was an unbeatable opportunity to not just say, but really show, how “we all make the Games.”

It was clear that this would be the first “people’s Games” in a very real sense, because they would be the first Olympics where social media had come of age. McDonald’s, as “the people’s restaurant” could support this behaviour. There was confidence that the brand could play this role, because, despite the criticism, consumer tracking showed a solid and increasing baseline of trust in and affinity for the brand.

Meanwhile, the Games were riding a wave of positivity: in 2007, just 7.5% of people thought that the Games would have a positive effect on people. By 2011, 27.9% thought so. And while there was plenty of pre-Games carping about logistics, that was seen as simply the British way to be pessimistic about what could go wrong. But the company and agency believed that once the “home advantage” and an unprecedented celebratory context was added in (the Royal Wedding and the Golden Jubilee had brought the nation together, most notably in street parties, the like of which hadn’t been seen since 1977) Britain was primed for a summer of saying “I was part of it”.

Creating a virtuous circle  
This all led to the guiding principle of the campaign: the collective story of the Games would be celebrated in a way that would be alive and responsive and capture the mood of each moment as the Olympic story unfolded. This would show clearly that ‘We all make the Games’.

The campaign wove a universe of touchpoints together (Figure 3):  
1. Celebrate. The people behind the Games were celebrated with a launch TV commercial.  
2. Invite. People were invited to share their Olympic content through digital channels, while live footage of their experiences was captured.  
3. Amplify. People’s Olympic content was fed back to them in fun, rewarding ways using a range of channels across different media, including two new TV commercials, to respond to what was happening during the Games.

Figure 2. Campaign touchpoints
1. Celebrate
The campaign launched two weeks before the opening ceremony to capitalise on the anticipation. The TV ad and a huge 48-sheet outdoor campaign introduced the idea of “Olympic fan types”: Games Makers, champion crew and fans experiencing the rollercoaster emotional ride of the Games in all kinds of ways. The commercial invited people to Facebook, asking “What kind of fan are you?” (Figures 4 and 5).

2. Invite
The call to get involved was echoed across multiple media, with placements next to relevant Games content. On Facebook, people used the Fanalyser app to share pictures of their Olympic experiences. 20,000 people from 39 different countries did so – a 60% conversion rate. But you didn’t have to submit content to get involved: film crews were capturing Games moments as they happened at venues and fan parks.

3. Amplify
This film content fuelled four new TV ads from the Olympics and Paralympics, made up of live moments of real people experiencing the Games.
- For example, as Bradley Wiggins won his gold medal, “The fake hair on cheekers” was introduced (Figure 6).
- Soon after Usain Bolt won the 100 metres, “The 9.63ers” were showcased.
- As the Paralympics began, “The inspired to try-ers” became the heroes.

Responsive TV was only the start. The pictures submitted through Facebook, and the footage from the film crews, became the basis of the digital outdoor campaign. Outdoor delivered both impact and frequency. It was the largest-ever live poster campaign to date, involving 250 digital posters and over 300 pieces of digital display. This was about using a large media spend innovatively to service the people’s narrative, not simply to broadcast brand messaging (Figure 7).
The message comes alive

Dominating London transport hubs ensured that almost everyone arriving for the Games would see the celebrations of fellow fans. Special builds all included digital screens, with 3G wifi technology to enable live updates. Meanwhile, the rest of the country saw thousands of 48-sheets, using premium backlit formats to maximise impact. The ads included the name and home town of their star, ensuring that they didn’t seem London-centric.

Back in London, the iconic McDonald’s Piccadilly sign displayed the fans’ submissions. The amplification linked back to small screens, with the people starring on all McDonald’s touchpoints, digital display, and an MSN homepage takeover seen by 4.7 million unique users. In addition, to make sure they didn’t miss a thing, fans were told via Facebook when and where they would be appearing on the digital outdoor, with video clips showing their moment of fame (Figure 8).

A partnership with News International took ‘We all make the Games’ into people’s hands with national institutions like The Times and The Sun celebrating Olympic fans’ contributions to the Games. Across the entire 17 days, the Sun ran a co-branded double page spread showcasing the best pictures of how the public were “making The Games”, rewarding them with a moment of fame, and inviting others to get involved. Meanwhile, The Times reached opinion formers,
telling the Games Makers’ stories. Both papers placed campaign content alongside Games news, bringing the media and people’s narratives together.

With the ‘amplify’ phase firing across social, broadcast and media platforms, the restaurants told a more detailed story.

- Photos of real Games Makers, champion crew, farmers and customers helped create a photographic mosaic that formed the silhouette of an Olympic crowd (Figure 9).
- A full window takeover was applied to 32 flagship restaurants, while window friezes, mobiles and tray liners highlighted the stories of the Games Makers, farmers and champion crew.
- Taking the message to the Olympic venues, press ads in the official programmes celebrated the Games Makers.

The campaign culminated in a TV commercial made entirely of footage captured during the Games, broadcast in the break after the Paralympics closing ceremony and celebrating the fact that ‘We all made the Games’. It echoed the ‘inspire a generation’ ambition with new types of fans such as ‘the future gold-getters’. Finally, a special Games Makers souvenir edition of The Times was created as a legacy, with copies given to all 70,000 of them.

Winning results
The results proved that the campaign transformed the perception of the brand’s fit with the Games.

1. Reduction in negative conversation about the brand.
There was a reduction in the negative conversations about the brand immediately after the main burst of media, reflecting its powerful cut-through in a very crowded context. The campaign achieved 77% standout compared to other Olympic advertising. McDonald’s saw a significant increase in positive word of mouth offline compared especially to other sponsors.
2. Appropriateness and affinity.
People who were aware of the campaign were considerably more likely to believe that McDonald’s was an appropriate sponsor and that the campaign went beyond this to make them actually feel good about it.

August saw biggest-ever sales for McDonald’s UK. ‘We all make the Games’ also achieved a significant sales impact despite the unusually tough context. Commercial viewing was down 22% due to the BBC Olympics coverage and communications awareness dropped for most brands tracked during this time, while retail sales in August were down by 0.4% on a like-for-like basis vs August 2011.

4. Return on investment (ROI).
The campaign delivered a healthy ROI. Although the econometric modelling showed a short-term ROI, it is believed that this is because it was an emotional, affinity-building campaign rather than a short-term sales driver so will continue to deliver a return on investment over the longer term. Long-term econometric models run by media analysis agencies consistently show ROIs that are at least 25.5 times higher than the short-term ROI, so it is estimated this campaign could deliver more over time.

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About The Marketing Society

Inspiring bolder marketing leaders

The Marketing Society is an exclusive network of senior marketers. Over the past 54 years we have emerged as one of the most influential drivers of marketing in the business community. The Society challenges its members to think differently and be bolder marketing leaders by supporting the development of leading-edge thinking and promoting the evidence of effective marketing. We do this through The Marketing Society Awards for Excellence, our publication Market Leader and in the online Clubhouse. Our well-respected calendar of world class events provides extensive networking opportunities and inspiration with speakers including Lord Sebastian Coe, Sir Terry Leahy and Paul Polman.

We are the place for discerning marketers to learn, develop and share best practice.

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MARKETING EXCELLENCE

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Professor Patrick Barwise, London Business School, Chairman of Which?

“These cases are a great source to stimulate your thinking. Some will stimulate new thoughts; some will unlock ideas from the back of your memory. All of them however are great fuel for growth.”
Keith Weed, Chief Marketing and Communication Officer, Unilever

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