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# A guide to tying in major events to your marketing strategy

The most expensive ad slots in the world are placed in and around the NFL Super Bowl. According to fortune.com, a 30 second slot at the 2016 event cost a cool \$5 million (£3.5 million.) This was up on last year's \$.4.5 million and substantially higher than previous years. The cost of a 30-second TV ad soared by 75% between 2005 and 2014, generating a total of \$2.19 billion in advertising revenue. <sup>1</sup>

These are remarkable and possibly trend-bucking figures for a couple of reasons. Firstly, it suggests that event advertising can still be highly effective, as well as highly expensive. Advertisers at the 2016 Super Bowl included huge global brands from a wide range of retail sectors, including Coca Cola, Amazon, Toyota, Persil, Heinz and Honda. Many of these big advertisers have been involved in the Super Bowl before and, while they're not likely to be sharing their precise return on investment (ROI) figures any time soon, you can bet your own bottom dollar that careful analysis and number crunching rather than gut instinct has shown that the pay-off is more than worth the investment. This could be in terms of both direct sales generated as well as prestige and enhanced brand awareness. This could explain why a number of lesser known brands such as Quicken Loans, wix.com and outdoor clothing brand Marmot were willing to pay the rather steep price to share a platform alongside the global giants.

Secondly, it proves that, far from being a dead duck, television and other traditional marketing formats still have an important place alongside social media marketing, SEO, inbound marketing and all the other marketing buzzwords that have sprung up in the digital era. That doesn't mean that these techniques are not important of course. Canny marketers these days use an interconnected, multi-channel approach and a successful TV ad placed during a major event will also be disseminated on YouTube and other video channels and talked about on social media. You can also tie your marketing into major events using content marketing and other strategies without paying for a \$10 million-per-minute placement (and that's without the cost of making the ad itself).

There are many different ways of tying your marketing strategy to events and the events you make use of do not have to be as big or as expensive to buy into as the Super Bowl. There are many other national and international sporting, cultural and social events and there are also numerous events that can be useful on a more local level. There are recurring seasonal events such as Christmas and the summer holidays (although the latter might be deemed more a period than a single event). There are specific sales events and conferences, online opportunities and you can also fashion your own events. Whatever your business type, event marketing offers a host of different ways to boost sales and improve brand awareness and status.

# Tying into sporting events

Major sporting events are some of the most widely viewed events in the world. 2015's Super Bowl XLIX broke all prior records by pulling in viewing figures of 114.4 million in the United States alone. <sup>2</sup> Without wishing to descend into a 'Which type of football is best?' debate, 2015's UEFA Champions League final at the Olympiastadion in Berlin was watched by an estimated global TV audience of 180 million. Reinforcing the multi-channel nature of these events, 76 million Facebook interactions by 28 million people that were related to the final were also recorded. The #UCLfinal hashtag also received close to 2 million mentions on Twitter and the official UEFA Champions League Instagram account saw 500,000 people engaging with some of the best photography related to the final. <sup>3</sup>



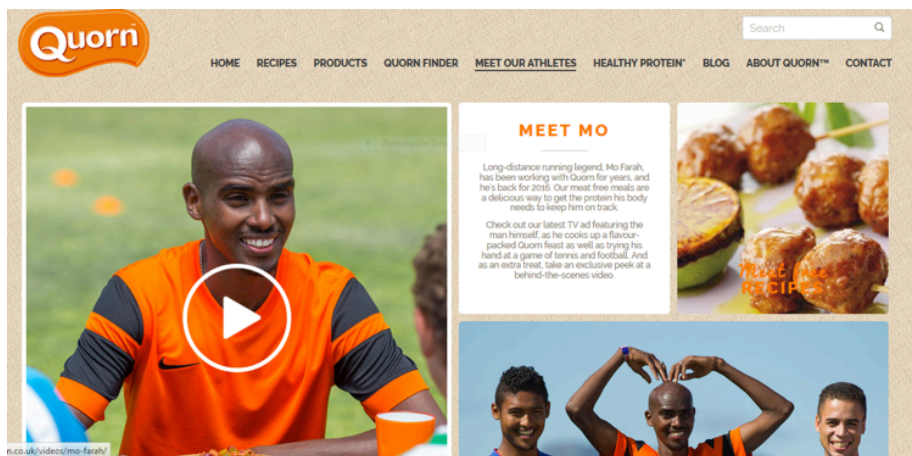
PIC 1

The 2014 World Cup final, meanwhile, put both the Super Bowl and Champions League in the shade, with 1.013 billion people watching the showdown between Germany and Argentina and the competition as a whole reaching a global in-home television audience of 3.2 billion people. In the process it broke TV audience records in a number of key international markets, including the US and Germany.

Total audience figures are only one part of the equation however; where that audience is located and how the event is broadcast is also hugely important. The Super Bowl ads, for example, are so valuable for marketers targeting the US market because they are reaching that 100 million-plus sets of eyes and ears via a single broadcaster. The event still brings in a substantial audience internationally but it's nothing on the scale of the World Cup. The World Cup audience is widely split between many markets however and the Champions League final viewing figures of 180 million were divided between more than 200 million territories. Viewing figures in a certain territory can vary depending on a number of factors, including whether that nation's team is participating in a given match.

2016 sees the UEFA European Championship, aka the Euros, taking centre stage but there's far more to the sporting calendar than football. The Summer Olympics are also taking place in Rio this year and other major sporting events such as Wimbledon, the Grand National and golf's The Masters Tournament can all generate a lot of interest and large domestic and international audiences. Choosing the right sport and event can be as important as choosing the right marketing strategies to go with them. There's always some crossover but the demographics between, say, football and polo are markedly different while extreme sports will attract a younger crowd on average than crown green bowling.

Placing advertisements around or during televised events is only one way of taking advantage of the marketing opportunities sports can offer and, let's face it, not every business can afford to place an advert during the halftime break of the Super Bowl or its closest national equivalent. Sponsoring teams, events and individual athletes and competitors can be a highly effective way to get your brand name in front of a relevant audience. Endorsements by and marketing campaigns featuring sportspeople can be a great way to get your message across. This can be particularly true if you can tie your product or services to sports or health generally (think Mo Farrah relaying the 'healthy protein' message for Quorn) but the celebrity status enjoyed by sports stars can be useful whatever you're trying to sell.



PIC 2

You can also tie sporting events into your social media and content marketing as a means of engaging with existing and potential new customers.

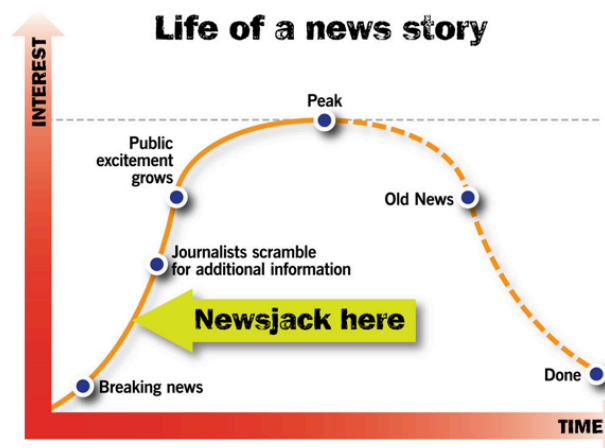
Sports marketing can be a great way to get your brand out there but it should always be approached with care. Sporting events, for example, often attract very partisan audiences. When Kevin Keegan was managing Newcastle United, for example, he struck a deal to advertise Sugar Puffs. Mascot the Honey Monster appeared nodding in a goal in Newcastle colours, all of which led to a boycott of the cereal in nearby Sunderland – given that the two cities having a fierce footballing rivalry. A Sainsbury's branch in Sunderland, in fact, reported that sales fell by 20%.

# Building the news into marketing

Some forms of content remain valid, engaging or useful for a long time. This could include various types and formats of content such as a how-to video or a written overview of a particular subject or area that isn't going to change radically over the coming days and weeks. This evergreen content can be very valuable but content marketers also face a constant challenge to come up with fresh, timely and relevant content, often on a daily basis. Tying or injecting your brand into breaking news, or creating content linked to current events, is a great way to do this.

Newsjacking, as this technique is commonly known, can be great for search engine optimisation (SEO) as web crawlers love fresh, relevant content and keywords related to major news stories. Generally they find themselves amongst the most commonly searched for words and phrases – temporarily at least. It can also be a great way to grab the attention and engage with casual surfers who might not otherwise be familiar with or particularly interested in your brand. It can suggest new angles for content ideas and you can also enhance your reputation in terms of thought leadership.

There are a number of things to bear in mind when it comes to newsjacking. The first is to try to get in on a breaking news item as early as possible. You can still utilise the news at any point that it is still being viewed and discussed but the longer you leave it the more content and comment there will be. Unless yours particularly stands out it is likely to be lost and even if it is of exceptionally high quality, it is less likely to be viewed, shared or go viral.



PIC 3



Some brands and individuals, particularly those with a casual, chatty vibe, are happy to tweet and comment on news stories of various types. For major pieces of content however, you should generally stick to news events that are relevant to your area or that you can at least tie into your own sphere of expertise.

One community manager for digital media blog Mashable said: “We’re finding digital angles to every major news event. Take (US game show host) Regis Philbin retiring, for example. It’s not a tech story — but people reacting to the news on Twitter is. You find that digital angle and run with it.” <sup>5</sup>

It’s important to stay tuned in and to remain up to date and current. Another thing to bear in mind however is to be discerning about what type of news story you jump onto. When Hurricane Sandy wrought havoc in the States for example, businesses including the clothing brands Gap, American Apparel and Urban Outfitters seized the opportunity to market some of their lines. American Apparel went so far as to proclaim, ‘In case you’re bored during the storm...’ for its promotion.

More than 200 people were killed across the United States, the Caribbean and Canada, as a direct result of the storm and the respective marketing campaigns were largely condemned as exploitative and in very poor taste. Celebrity deaths, natural disasters, terrorist attacks and other tragedies and sensitive stories should either be avoided entirely or treated very carefully indeed.

Even if you’re not actively news-jacking, you should still make sure that scheduled ads, content and automated social media posts don’t appear at inappropriate times. If in doubt it might be best to disable, cancel or take down content that could appear insensitive or cause the wrong sort of controversy.

# One-off and seasonal events

News-jacking involves following current events and reacting to events as and when they occur. Other events, however, are scheduled or announced beforehand, allowing you to plan a campaign around them. Essentially these can be news stories with a far longer than average lifespan. The announcement of a Royal wedding or birth, for example, will be a strong news event that generates a flurry of interest both in the UK and abroad. Beyond the initial announcement however, there will be a long run up to the event itself and all manner of marketing messages and content can be tailored to fit around the big day.

Perhaps at the other end of the cultural spectrum but no less valuable for marketers, big TV events like the final of The Great British Bake-Off have a huge reach and appeal. The 2015 final drew a hugely impressive 13.4 million viewers – roughly one in five of the entire UK population – with an audience that spanned different age groups and cultural demographics. Sports events like the Euros and the Olympics are, of course another, specialised example of these planned and somewhat predictable events.



PIC 4

While the scheduling of these events is generally pretty much set, the results and details are still very much in the air and marketers can often create an adaptive campaign around changing events – whether it's following the progress of a major sports tournament, a Royal pregnancy or a popular reality TV show.

Another type of major event that you can often tie into your marketing strategy is the seasonal or calendar event. Christmas is the obvious one that almost every business can make use of, whether via seasonal adverts, social messaging or special offers and sales events. Some marketing campaigns, like the John Lewis Christmas ad, have become mini-events in themselves. Easter is another one (especially if you happen to sell chocolate) but calendar events don't have to be tied to specific days. More general seasonal periods – spring, summer, autumn and winter – can also be great for targeted marketing campaigns.

# Festivals and social events

Festivals and other social gatherings provide another way to reach people and they come in many different shapes and sizes. You don't need a prominent corporate sponsorship in place at Glastonbury to benefit - although major companies do pay a lot of money to be associated with the big music festivals.

The Reading and Leeds festivals, for example, were officially titled the Carling Weekend: Reading and the Carling Weekend: Leeds between 1998 and 2007. The brand was prominently placed in promotional materials as well as being visible onstage and at various key points around the sites. It was also the only lager on sale at the event, with a more or less captive audience averaging around 75,000 per day. <sup>7</sup>

Festival-goers could always take their own drinks into the campsite but even there Carling came up with a wonderful left-field marketing idea in the Cold Beer Amnesty. This allowed attendees to swap any unopened can of beer that might have been baking in a stifling tent for an ice-cold can of Carling. This not only had the potential to introduce new customers to the brand and its taste, it saw other beer brands removed from the picture. It was also a good example of a business recognising a problem (that of warm festival beer) and proposing a solution. The idea also won the Best Festival Innovation Award at the UK Festival Awards of 2006.



Brands can also sponsor music festivals (some festivals prefer to refer to their sponsors as 'partners') without being the main or primary sponsor. The precise nature of these sponsorships can vary widely, from placing an advert in the official programme to sponsoring an entire stage.

Businesses can also rent pitches for stalls or pop-up shops. These can be expensive, but again you will be prominently placed in front of thousands of largely captive festival goers. Some festivals may offer concessions to small businesses or sole traders, especially if they have charitable connections or a green angle. As well as making money from direct sales onsite, this can be a good way to spread awareness of your brand.

On-site stalls are generally suited to particular types of business, such as food, drink and clothing brands, but you don't have to sell on the ground to benefit from a festival. Whether it's The Guardian giving away free rain ponchos bearing the newspaper's logo at the notoriously wet Glastonbury, or Vodafone providing a phone-charging truck at Download, there are plenty of examples of clever marketing, with giveaways viewed as a great way to get people to subscribe to a mailing list.

The bigger music festivals can provide some great marketing opportunities but the likes of Glastonbury, Reading and Leeds are not the only options. According to the Association of Independent Festivals (AIF), its own members have contributed more than £1 billion over the past five years, with more than 600,000 people attending events up and down the country and spending an average of £466.01 on each festival (including tickets or entry fee).

There are also numerous local festivals, fetes and fairs held throughout the UK, especially in the summer months. There are arts, comedy, food, film and various other cultural festivals throughout the country and overseas and most present opportunities for marketers to get involved. Local attractions that are there throughout the year can sometimes present opportunities, especially if they bring in significant numbers of tourists.

It can also be very useful to get involved in local events and especially those that benefit the wider community. This might mean donating prizes to be used at a church fair raffle, or an event in aid of a local charity or school, or it might be a bigger event drawing lots of visitors and media attention on a regional level or beyond. Community projects can be great ways to enhance your brand reputation, as well as allowing you to give something back to your immediate and wider community.

# Sales events and trade shows

There are many different conferences, conventions, trade shows and expos aimed at different audiences and industries. Some are primarily networking and information-sharing events that can be extremely useful if not strictly related to marketing.

Others might be more customer-centred, whether those customers are B2B or B2C, and setting up a stall or booth at one of these events can be a great place to generate leads, gain exposure for your brand and products and perhaps make some direct sales at the same time. Some events also attract a lot of media attention. This can be particularly true at events such as technology or gaming expos and car shows but the specialist trade press might also be interested in covering specific industry events. Add all this together and there are substantial benefits to be had; in a recent survey, 70% of B2B marketers said that marketing at in-person events such as trade shows had the biggest pay-off.

The first thing to do is to do your homework and make sure you're at the most beneficial event. A place at a trade show or expo is not usually cheap and there's little point turning up at the Electronic Cigarette Exhibition in Leeds if you sell accessories for pets.



PIC 6

There are trade shows, conferences and expos covering all sorts of industries and many industries have many competing events. Some are well-known within, and sometimes even outside, industry circles but if you have to make a choice about attending one event over another, you'll want to make a cost/benefit analysis.

The costs are generally pretty straightforward. As well as your registration and other direct costs you might also have to figure in travel (both for delegates and any equipment and stock) and accommodation-related costs.

The benefits of one event over another can be a little more difficult to work out. If you have attended a certain trade show in previous years, you might well have a detailed ROI analysis to consult. If not, you might have to work on the reputation and relative merits of each event. Is it new or long-established? How many people are expected to attend? Has it attracted media coverage in the past and does it have an impressive list of guests and speakers?

Once you've decided on the best event to attend, there's still a lot of preparation of you're to make the most of your attendance. You should publicise your attendance on your website, social media profiles and elsewhere as appropriate. This might involve a direct mail shot to other confirmed attendees.

Decide what you're going to have at your booths and, if possible, try to find out what any competitors are planning on doing. If you work in an innovative industry, is it time to unveil your latest development or should it still be kept under wraps for now? This can be a particularly important decision if there is likely to be media coverage as a poorly realised prototype or beta can do more harm than good.

As well as physical stock samples, you will need a full range of printed promotional materials. It might be the digital age and getting visitors to sign up to an email list might be one of your priorities but the traditional standards of cards, brochures, catalogues, leaflets and other printed materials can all be very useful in making contacts.

Giveaways, competitions and prize draws can all be great ways to draw people to your booth. Again, publicise any contests ahead of time on your website, social media and emails but make sure you have prominent visual displays on the day as well. Whilst on the subject, your signage and the visual theme of your booth should be both eye-catching and reflect your brand.

Finally, make sure that all the staff representing your business are enthusiastic and knowledgeable. You don't want a representative to be stumped by a simple question about your products or services, even if their primary role for the day is to hand out fliers while dressed as an e-cigarette or cocker spaniel.

Depending on your resources, you might want to try more creative (if often more expensive) ways of getting noticed.

Ian Greenberg, senior vice president of advertisers Show Media, said: “We try to create an event within an event where we can touch a consumer one-on-one, where you can engage directly, and teach them about your product, and do so by interacting in a quality way. I just got back from Sundance, and we were doing VIP and celebrity shuttling to events in our vehicles, and the goal for us is to create an event within the vehicle. For Ray Ban we did a truth-or-dare themed campaign. We have video within the shuttles, and asked the passengers truth-or-dare questions, and were giving away free sunglasses. We had people dancing in the middle of the street, we had people telling us their biggest secrets. And that was not only fun for participants, but became a huge hit online after the event.”<sup>10</sup>



# Conclusion

When asked by a journalist what was most likely to blow a government off course, former Prime Minister Harold Macmillan is reputed to have replied: “Events, dear boy, events”. The quote is disputed but the general point stands whether Macmillan uttered it or not. Unforeseen events, of both the internal and external variety, can be a great challenge to any business or organisation. Some events call for the intervention of the public relations department but others provide a host of opportunities for the marketers.

Incorporating news events as they unfold can take a great deal of effort but this approach can also pay dividends in terms of engagement. If everything aligns just right, your news-related content might go viral or attract the attention of the mainstream media, even becoming an offshoot element of the original news story. A news-jacking approach requires marketing on the move but there are also a wealth of events that follow a set schedule and allow a more measured and planned approach. Some events, like an extended sports tournament, invite a combination of both approaches, with pre-planned ads and content augmented by reactions to the results and progress the tournament throws up.

There are festivals and fetes, social and community events, trade shows and expositions. TV shows and other shared cultural experiences can also present opportunities to the canny marketing professional. If none of these events seems the perfect fit, you could always create or host your own, drumming up interest on social media and in the local or national press.

As well as a wide range of event types, there are just as many different ways of tying them into your marketing strategy. Social media can be great for instant interaction. Digital content can be tailored to reflect different results but traditional marketing formats shouldn't be ignored. Television advertising, for example, can be extremely effective when coupled with an event that draws a large audience.

Whichever approach you take, connecting your marketing strategy to major events can help you to reach and engage with an audience and to keep a fresh and current edge.

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