

(SP) HOW IS THE MARATHON BOOM MANAGED?

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Introduction

The running scene is booming across Europe. In particular, the fascination with the marathon is captivating more and more people. Running events are equally popular amongst runners, spectators, organisers and sponsors.¹¹ The classic marathon distance is often complemented through additional running distances and an attractive supporting programme. The number of running events as well as the development of participant, finisher and spectator figures substantiate this trend. For example, the number of marathons runs more than doubled within the last 8 years from 71 in 1997 to 153 events in 2005 in Germany.¹² At top level the five world-wide largest marathon competitions in Boston, New York, Chicago, Berlin and London have developed an own premium marketing platform “The World Marathon Majors”.¹³ These events attract thousands of participants, millions of TV spectators and viewers along the track. But there is no empirical analysis which has described the managerial particularities of running events at all. Against this background the purpose of the study is to investigate the organisational structures of the marathon scene in Germany in 2005. Subsequently, the related management and marketing aspects have been addressed, empirically analysed and evaluated within the scope of a representative nationwide investigation. The following abstract introduces the most important results of the study.¹⁴

Methods

Altogether, about 3,800 running events – of which 153 were marathon events – were offered 2005 in Germany. A total of 139 marathon promoters listed on the website “www.marathon.de” have been selected and written to within the scope of a national postal survey conducted from 1 June to 15 July 2005. Of those promoters, 50 responded to the extensive questionnaire, which corresponds to a response rate of 42%. Here the sampling is to be rated as representative in relation to the distribution over the course of the year and the size of the marathon events in the parent population. Items asked were managerial aspects like financing, sponsoring, use of naming rights, products and industries suitable for sponsors, promotional tools, legal form of organizing bodies, organizational structure, ratio between professional and volunteer organizers, timing systems, number of runs, number of participants and finishers, offered competitions, promoter’s information and communications policy.

Results

Running events have experienced a veritable boom in the past ten years, which the promoters encounter in various ways. Three clusters can be created in relation to the participants: Small running events with up to 500 participants, medium-sized running events with 500 to 2,500 participants as well as large running events with over 2,500 participants, whereby the latter can be once again divided into mega events

¹¹ Van Bottenberg 2006, 27

¹² www.marathon.de/news

¹³ Hohenauer 2006, 22

¹⁴ Bezold/Kaiser 2005

with 15,000 or more participants. In terms of organisation, a reaction to the increasing organisational challenges occurs within the scope of a cooperative combine organisation, which partially permits cooperation with the traditionally non-profit-oriented clubs, association support and with commercial organisations. While doing so, the club has preserved its prevailing position, even if it has been abrogated with regard to the large city marathons through commercial event or marketing agencies. In terms of personnel, the utilisation of voluntary staff still plays a central role. In technical terms, the “ChampionChip” has achieved a very broad degree of acceptance with regard to the timing. The participation fees (55,6%) and the sponsoring (30,1%) represent the most important financial sources of income throughout all size categories, whereby the majority of the promoters work with a sponsor pool of 10-20 partners. Approximately one-third already utilise a naming right. Start numbers, tapes, one’s own Internet presence and start/finish bridges are the most popular sponsoring measures. Companies from the sports manufacturer and trade industry as well as the food and beverage industries dominate with the sponsors. The utilisation of the internet for information and registration formalities is indispensable in the realm of communications. Moreover, mouth-to-mouth propaganda amongst the runners, print media advertisements in the regional press and periodicals as well as the presence at other running events represents the most important media. Insofar as the selection is concerned, the running calendar in Germany hardly leaves any desires unfulfilled. During the main season from April to October, an average of five to six marathons per weekend is available for selection. In addition to the classic marathon distance, an average of three to four other distances and/or other disciplines – such as inline skating or Nordic walking – are offered in the large majority of running events, whereby the half marathon distance, 10 km runs as well as short distances for children and youngsters are the most popular.

Discussion

The management and marketing of running events differs from the traditional spectator event management, because the active participants are the most important target group. Mostly the spectators’ audience along the streets is for free, while the financing is realized up to 85% out of participation fees and sponsoring. This result turns the attention to special marketing concepts and tools, which are focused to attract participants rather than spectators or the selling of TV rights. For city policy makers, it is an interesting finding that marathon events are rather organised in form of private public partnerships, mostly municipalities with clubs and commercial agencies, than at a single organization level. In order to attract participants, the internet is the most important information, promotion and recruiting platform. For further research, it would be of great interest to analyse the managerial differences related to the size of the event clustering in terms of participants, spectators, budgets and revenues. Also, the use and application of the generated revenues and spendings of the organizers could be addressed in further studies, especially in comparison to other types of major sport events.

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