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## **Protecting or Policing? Examining Brand Protection, Ambush Marketing, and the Olympic Games**

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### **Protecting or Policing?**

#### **Examining Brand Protection, Ambush Marketing, and the Olympic Games**

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### **Background**

It has been well documented that the size and scope of the modern Olympic Movement has reached epic proportions. A number of factors have contributed to this escalating growth, including the considerable support and investment in the Olympic Games via corporate partnerships.

Representing a diversity of programs, levels and categories, the management of these marketing relationships has become quite complex, coordinated and even – it has been argued – controversial. For example, the Vancouver 2010 Organizing Committee (VANOC) was able to secure over \$750 million in national support (CDN) for the 2010 Games through partnerships with over 75 national companies. This represented unprecedented national corporate support for Games hosting, and created a unique marketing management challenge for the host committee; who, in turn, adapted a very tight enforcement division within the marketing function regarding Commercial Rights Management (CRM) [typically understood as Brand Protection (BP) by the International Olympic Committee (IOC)].

CRM was tasked to protect the commercial rights of Games stakeholders including VANOC, the National Olympic and Paralympic Committee, the IOC, marketing partners (sponsors) and licensees against the misuse and/or infringement of the Games marks as well to assess any ambush marketing activities or unauthorized commercial associations with the Games (VANOC,

Commercial Rights Management, 2010) in the effort to protect the corporate support and investment necessary to “host a successful Games” (VANOC, 2007).

VANOC also worked with regional and national governments to enact critical – and criticized – legislation that would also legally support these initiatives and policies (Bill C-47: The Olympic and Paralympic Marks Act, 2007). During Games-time, CRM absorbed the lead marketing functions of the OCOG, monitoring brand infringements, ambush marketing violations, and intellectual property and clean venue concerns. This division also managed a number of important cases related to various stakeholder interests (including the NOC, IOC, corporate partners). As such, it is clear that the marketing management accomplishments of the 2010 Games were significant, leaving interesting and important marketing legacies regarding brand management for future Olympic Games hosts in particular, and sport event hosting in general – and as such, created a unique opportunity for further related research in this area.

## **Objectives**

The purpose of this study – to expand previous research (Burton & Chadwick, 2008; McKelvey & Grady, 2004; Seguin, Ellis, Scassa & Parent, 2008) and understanding of Olympic Brand Protection – is three-fold. First, this presentation will provide a theoretical overview of the evolution of the brand protection model, examining the development of Olympic Brand Protection as first grounded in marketing management literature to its contemporary legal interpretation, specifically addressing the ‘protecting or policing’ dichotomy of its philosophy. Second, this presentation will discuss the specific and distinctive CRM systems and process enacted by the Vancouver Committee for the Olympic Games. Third, this presentation will also discuss brand management in the context of ambush marketing and brand violations by summarizing major cases and enforcement actions taking during the 2010 Games. Further, a critical analysis of discussion of related future Games programs and related legislation will be presented.

## **Methods**

A qualitative case study was used for this research. To meet the objectives of this research, a review of Olympic brand management literature and legislation was performed, as well as a case analysis involving VANOC and the CRM division. Data collection involved the triangulation of interviews, direct observation and document analysis. Purposeful sampling was used to access informed VANOC personnel. A total of five (5) in-depth interviews with senior VANOC CRM team leaders representing marketing and legal persons were conducted. Direct observation was conducted during the Vancouver 2010 Olympic Games. VANOC and CRM brand and marketing management related documents, including daily Games-time reporting and function reports, government documents were gathered. All interviews, field notes and observations were transcribed, and both iterative analysis and interpretive coding was used to determine emergent themes (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The ATLAS.ti (5.2) software program was used to assist in the coding and retrieval of the data. Content analysis of the data revealed emergent themes regarding Olympic brand management and protection.

## **Implications and Conclusion**

The purpose of this research is to expand the understanding and interpretation of Olympic Brand Protection with contributions for both sport marketing and the law. A model will be presented which reviews the contemporary practices of brand protection relative to the Olympic Games, as well as an assessment of current ambush marketing cases will be offered. Implications for future Olympic Games hosts and sport event hosting will be presented, as well as will recommendations for brand protection strategy for future Olympic Games.