

## **Victory in Vancouver: Marketing the 2010 Olympic Winter Games**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This case examines real-world data from the 2010 Olympic Winter Games including corporate and domestic sponsorship. This case is intended for use in management, sport management, branding, promotions, marketing or international marketing courses.

Keywords: Olympics, marketing, international marketing, sport management, sponsorship, IOC.



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## INTRODUCTION

“How can I tell the next person what went well, and what did not?” Katherine Gold (fictitious name) the marketing director of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) was assessing the marketing efforts of the IOC and of the Vancouver Organizing Committee for the Olympic Games (VANOC), now that the XXI Olympic Winter Games were completed. The Games, hosted in Vancouver and nearby cities from February 12<sup>th</sup>-28<sup>th</sup> 2010, had been successful both financially and athletically, especially for Canada, which had not won a single gold medal at either the 1976 Montreal Games or 1988 Calgary Winter Games. This time, Canada’s third as Olympic host, its Olympic team had a breakout performance winning an unprecedented 14 gold medals, and in doing so setting the record for the most gold medals won at a single Winter Olympics (Waldie 2010). In fact, IOC President Jacques Rogge declared the games to be a “great success,” saying that the games “were managed in such a way that they...delivered the original vision and left a solid legacy” (Final Report, p. 7).

Ten months later, Gold was reading the marketing reports and the final accounting report from PricewaterhouseCoopers. It was her job to identify problem areas and to highlight all of the changes VANOC had made compared with past Olympic Winter Games. It was also her job to try to identify why these Games had gone so unexpectedly well financially, especially since the Games took place during the worst economic recession in recent memory. Highlighting how these games had been marketed during uncertain economic times could help her incorporate those successes into the marketing of upcoming Olympic events.

When the Vancouver Winter Games began, there were only nine corporations signed on as top tier sponsors, although the ideal number of corporate sponsors was thought to be 12. This lack of corporate sponsorship left a gaping hole in the financial support for the 2010 Winter Games, and Gold did not want to allow such a gap to recur. In the months since the Games ended, two additional corporations had joined The Olympic Partner – TOP – program, which pleased the International Olympic Committee (IOC), but which did not quite solve the problem.

Still, the success of the Vancouver Olympic Winter Games had certainly played a role in enticing those large companies to invest so many millions of dollars – but why exactly had they decided to join, and could that investment rationale be replicated for at least one additional corporation? The TOP program was still shy one committed member, and those last two additions felt more like a happy coincidence than Gold was willing to tolerate. As a marketer, she wanted to understand the reasons behind the successes and failures of the Vancouver Winter Games, so she decided that the best place to start was with “the big picture,” with a broad overview of how marketing an Olympic event works.

## BACKGROUND

The Olympic Winter Games occur once every four years, in locations that can be a different city each time. The location must have consistently cold winter weather for all of the outdoor events such as skiing and luge, although most competitions on ice (including speed skating) have been held indoors since the 1992 games in Albertville, France. The Olympic Winter Games typically have smaller viewership and attendance than the summer Olympic Games, which are also held every four years. The two sets of Games are separated by two years, so that every other year in the even-numbered years there is a large Olympic event somewhere in the world.

The IOC is a non-profit organization, also non-governmental, which has been organizing Olympic events since 1896 (Sant et al. 2014, Senn 1999). In addition to the IOC, each city hosting a specific Olympic Winter Games or Olympic Games creates its own Organizing Committee for the Olympic Games (OCOG). Further, a National Olympic Committee (NOC) represents each country or territory participating in the Games. Finally, there are seven International Federations (IFs) for Olympic winter sports that govern their respective sports and that the IOC funds, “to support the development of sport worldwide” (Olympic 2014, p. 9).

Historically, for each edition of the Games these different groups had to coordinate their efforts regarding fundraising and marketing the Games, which was complicated and cumbersome. For the Olympic Winter Games in Sarajevo in 1984, for example, the Sarajevo “OCOG sign[ed] 447 foreign and domestic sponsorship agreements” (Olympic 2008, p. 19). The sheer volume of sponsors created confusion as to which companies were official sponsors and which were not. There had to be an easier way!

Most people think of broadcasting rights as a mainstay to fund the every-other-year Olympics, which now accounts for about half of the IOC’s total revenue (Fung 2014). Given that most of the expenses of an Olympic event start years before the Games begin at a particular site, however, the IOC sought to spread out its revenue stream. Broadcast revenues certainly do have a major role in overall funding, but it tends to be a relatively short-term source. The IOC wanted to secure a longer-term funding source for the Games.

## **GLOBAL SPONSORSHIP**

That long-term funding desire led to the creation of The Olympic Partners (TOP) program in the 1980s, granting global sponsorship rights within specific industries or product categories (Pound 2004). Ranging from nine to twelve global sponsors every four-year cycle, each company commits an average of \$80 million U.S. for exclusive rights to use its Olympic association in its own promotions for a period of four years, called a quadrennium. Each quadrennium includes an Olympic Games and an Olympic Winter Games. According to Gerhard Heiberg, chairman of the IOC marketing commission, “Corporate sponsorship provides essential support for competing athletes and contributes to the overall success of the Games. Put simply, without the support of our official commercial partners, the Games would not be able to happen” (IOC Marketing Report 2010 p. 44). The support of the TOP partners provides the long-term support that shorter term ticket sales or broadcast revenue cannot.

Approximately 50% of TOP contributions go to the local OCOG, about 40% to the NOCs, and the remaining 10% to the IOC (Olympic 2014, p. 13). In addition to the companies’ own promotions, the IOC permits each TOP sponsor exclusive global marketing rights within the sponsor’s industry or product category for all NOCs in 205 jurisdictions (O’Reilly et al. 2011). Table 1 (appendix) includes information on TOP participants through 2012. There were only nine TOP members for the Vancouver Winter Games as three sponsors – Manulife, Kodak, and Johnson & Johnson – declined to renew after the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing. The nine sponsors for the Vancouver Winter Games are noted in Table 2 (appendix).

For one of the global sponsors, Acer, Vancouver was the first time the company had been a TOP member, assuming the computer category vacated by Lenovo. Others have been sponsors for decades, with Coca-Cola holding the record with continuous sponsorship since 1928, even before the TOP program was created. Coca-Cola especially values the global nature of the Olympics, “evaluation is a global undertaking at Coca-Cola because that is the level of analysis

at which they are interested” (O’Reilly et al. 2011, p. 243). In fact, while TOP program participants such as GE, Omega, and Visa are asked to commit only to a four-year quadrennium, Coca-Cola is one of the five sponsors, along with McDonald’s, Panasonic, Samsung, and Atos that have committed to remaining in the TOP program through at least 2020 (Giannoulakis 2008; Grohmann, 2014). Understanding why these corporations have found the Olympic name so useful to their own branding would help the OIC understand why these companies would commit to sponsorships of a decade or more, rather than for only the four years of a quadrennium asked of every TOP program participant.

## **BRANDING**

The well-known Olympic symbol with its five interlocking rings is one of the most recognized global brands (Graphic A, in the appendix). Approximately 96% of people around the world can identify the Olympic rings, according to the IOC Marketing: Media Guide (2010). Three ideals that the IOC wants most closely associated with its brand are the values of excellence, friendship, and respect (IOC Marketing Report 2010). The IOC also has very specific objectives that it wants linked with the Olympic brand, and it rather jealously guards its brand as a result. The objectives of the IOC’s marketing program, according to its Marketing Report (2010, p. 21), are:

- To ensure the independent financial stability of the Olympic Movement, and thereby to assist in the worldwide promotion of Olympism.
- To create and maintain long-term marketing programs, and thereby to ensure the future of the Olympic Movement and the Olympic Games.
- To build on the successful activities developed by each Organizing Committee for the Olympic Games, and thereby to eliminate the need to recreate the marketing structure with each Olympic Games.
- To ensure equitable revenue distribution throughout the entire Olympic Movement – including the Organizing Committees for the Olympic Games (OCOGs), the National Olympic Committees (NOCs) and their continental associations, the International Federations (IFs), and other recognized international sports organizations – and to provide financial support for sport in emerging nations.
- To ensure that the Olympic Games can be experienced by the maximum number of people throughout the world through broadcast partnerships.
- To protect the equity that is inherent in the Olympic image and ideal.
- To enlist the support of Olympic marketing partners in the promotion of the Olympic ideals.

Before the Vancouver 2010 Winter Olympic Games, the IOC hoped to raise the ideals embodied in the Olympic Movement with youth around the world. “The Best of Us,” a promotional campaign first launched in 2007, was continued after the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games in an effort to motivate youth around the world to be active in sport. Public Service Announcements (PSAs), bold graphics in outdoor and other promotional media, and innovative YouTube entries helped raise awareness of Vancouver 2010 for this younger demographic group. An online initiative, “The Best of Us Challenge,” was visited by almost half a million viewers from nearly 200 countries (IOC Marketing Report, p. 155). It was on the weekly chart

of most popular viral videos three different times in Advertising Age magazine, and was covered in public relations articles around the globe. Global brand awareness was therefore quite high for the Vancouver 2010 Winter Olympic Games.

## DOMESTIC BRANDING AND SPONSORSHIP

The host city's OCOG also has the opportunity to add its own unique brand to the Games, called the Games emblem. Cities usually create an emblem linked to that specific city, but Vancouver's OCOG, VANOC, had a different idea on how to brand its Winter Olympic Games. VANOC chose an emblem to represent not just Vancouver, but to be a larger brand intended to represent all of Canada (see Graphic B in the appendix). The emblem was named "Ilanaaq," which is the Inuktitut word for friend (IOC Marketing: Media Guide 2010). It is an interpretation of a type of rock statue called an "inukshuk" used as guideposts by the Inuit people of Canada's arctic region (IOC Marketing: Media Guide p. 7).

In fact, VANOC deliberately wanted to incorporate First Nations participants with all Canadians in planning and implementation, and to position the 2010 Winter Games as "Canada's Games" rather than as belonging only to a single city (Vancouver 2010). Toward that end, the motto chosen for these games was, "With Glowing Hearts/Des plus brillants exploits," recognizable to Canadians as excerpts from the Canadian national anthem, *O Canada* (Vancouver 2010, p. 12). It also did not hurt that the Government of Canada, as "an equal partner" with the Province of British Columbia, took on large infrastructure projects before the Games were even awarded, projects that allowed significantly easier cross-Canada transportation (VANOC 2010, p. 33).

Several mascots were also created for the Vancouver Games. Miga and Quatchi, along with a Paralympic mascot named Sumi and a mascot sidekick named Mukmuk, each represented an Aboriginal legend or story. Each was also intended to represent an animal or mythical creature associated with the region in which these Games were held (Vancouver 2010). Plush toys of these mascots were very popular, with some 3,000,000 units sold, resulting in 26% of all product sales (IOC Marketing: Media Guide 2010, p. 37).

This deliberate country-wide positioning may have been a key factor in the unprecedented amounts of domestic sponsorship received and managed by VANOC, nearly double the amount raised in Turin for the 2006 Olympic Winter Games as seen in Table 3 in the appendix (Davis 2012). These domestic sponsorships were organized into three levels called National Partner, Official Supporter, and Official Supplier. There were six National Partners, each contributing between \$50 million and \$200 million CAN, with each of these proposals secured six years before the start of the Games (VANOC 2010, p. 43). There were ten Official Supporters whose proposals were secured five years before the Games, with contributions of between \$15 million and \$49 million CAN, and 34 Official Suppliers contributing between \$3 million and \$14 million CAN (VANOC 2010, p. 43). Each level of sponsorship granted the sponsor exclusive marketing rights within Canada for a set period of time, and the right to associate that firm's name with the Vancouver Olympic Winter Games (IOC Marketing Report 2010).

## **BROADCASTING**

Since 1896 the success of the Olympics has depended on news reporting of the events, first as newspaper stories, then radio, television, and online broadcasts earning attention worldwide. In 2001 the IOC created its own Olympic Broadcast Services (OBS), to manage the host broadcaster operations. However, the IOC did not fund the entire host broadcaster operations until the Vancouver 2010 Olympic Winter Games (Olympic 2014). With these Winter Games the IOC assumed the role as sole owner for "...the global broadcast rights for the Olympic Games – including television, radio, mobile and internet coverage – the IOC is responsible for the negotiation of rights agreements with media companies around the world" (IOC Marketing Report 2010, p. 25).

By taking on the role of "permanent host broadcaster for each edition of the Olympic Games," OBS was able to eliminate "the need to continually rebuild the broadcast operation for each edition of the Games" (IOC Marketing Report 2010, p. 31). This meant that rights-holding broadcasters in countries around the world would have more standardized offerings to show their viewers. It also meant that the IOC was now able to advance other innovative broadcasting ideas, such as the Olympic News Channel, a 24-hour sports news service that packaged half-hour programs dedicated to highlights of specific sports. This way, rights-holding broadcasters worldwide could pick and choose 30-minute programs to show their audiences, focusing on the sports of most interest in their own countries.

The amount of television coverage for the Turin Olympic Winter Games of 2006 was almost doubled for the Vancouver Winter Games (IOC Marketing Report, p. 28). About half of all broadcast output for the 2010 Winter Games was digital (IOC Marketing Report, p. 31). There were "... over 235 broadcasters and television stations showing coverage of the Games in more than 220 territories... representing 31,902 hours of broadcast coverage in total" (IOC Marketing Report, p. 28). In addition, "on official rights-holding broadcasters' internet and mobile platforms, there were more than 265 million video views and in excess of 1.2 billion page views during the Games" (IOC Marketing Report, p. 28). Other innovations offered by OBS in 2010 included mobile phone feeds, high definition broadcasting, and other enhanced digital media options.

Overall, broadcast revenue has become the single largest revenue source for the Games, as shown in Table 4 (appendix). Unfortunately, it also remains a short-term source, as broadcast revenue is concentrated into a compact timeframe surrounding the Games.

## **TICKET SALES**

Ticket sales for the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games brought in dramatically less money than for other previous summer Games because of a deliberate decision by the Chinese government to offer tickets to relatively poor Chinese citizens for as little as 75¢ U.S. (Hamakawa and Elam, 2011). After extensively researching likely Canadian spectators, VANOC set prices for Vancouver 2010 resulting in more than half of all tickets priced at or under \$100 (VANOC 2010, p. 44). In addition, ticket sales for Vancouver 2010 began early, in October 2007. Through every phase of ticket sales, tickets were sold earlier than for previous Winter games, allowing the Organizing Committee to reduce revenue risks. Most impressive, 97% of all available tickets were sold, an all-time Games record, and exceeding VANOC's target of 96% of all tickets sold (IOC Marketing Report, p. 102).

## LICENSING

Directed by the IOC but managed by VANOC, officially licensed merchandise was also very popular for Vancouver 2010. By allowing companies to use the Olympic marks on selected merchandise and then splitting the revenue with that licensee, all parties experienced excitement on the part of consumers, and spurred sales. Official “Red Mittens” sported both the Canadian Maple Leaf and the Olympic Rings, with 3.5 million pairs of Red Mittens sold by the end of the Games (IOC Marketing Report, p. 115). Almost 50 licensees resulted in a typically wide range of souvenir products.

Official merchandise was available through several outlets, the largest of which was the downtown Vancouver “Olympic Superstore” in a location made available by the Hudson’s Bay Company – a Canadian retail outlet – which had more than 10,000 customers daily during the Games. Six additional Olympic stores also did brisk sales, and a seventh was the online platform at vancouver2010.com. Every sport venue had kiosks with official merchandise, and officially licensed products were also available at “400 Hudson’s Bay Company stores across Canada, and more than 2,500 other retail stores” (IOC Marketing Report, p. 119).

## ADDITIONAL REVENUE SOURCES

An auction allowed fans – for the first time in Olympic history – to bid for and own items from the Vancouver 2010 games. Ski gates, hockey pucks used during the Games, medal podia, and more were auctioned shortly after the Games were completed. All items auctioned came with a certificate of authenticity, and each also featured the Vancouver 2010 official hologram (IOC Marketing Report, p. 119).

Two official video games were also released as part of the IOC’s licensing program, giving gamers the chance to ‘control’ their favorite athlete’s avatar. Both games were introduced by Sega and International Sports Multimedia, the companies that created “Mario & Sonic at the Olympic Games” for the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing. The games released to coincide with Vancouver 2010 sold more than six million units worldwide by the end of 2010 (IOC Marketing Report, p. 120).

## MARKETING CHALLENGES

Unauthorized ticket sales, counterfeit sales, and ambush marketing are common headaches for event planners today. The practice of “ambush” marketing has been defined as, “a planned event (campaign) by an organization to associate themselves indirectly with an event in order to gain at least some of the recognition and benefits that associated with being an official sponsor” (Sandler and Shani, 1989, p. 11). To demonstrate to its partners that sponsorship – via the TOP program and others – was taken very seriously, Bill Cooper, Commercial Rights Manager at VANOC was quoted as saying, “Excellent deterrence messaging about the consequences of unfair marketing tactics across most major Canadian media just previous to the Games ultimately translated into minimal brand infringements during the Games” (IOC Marketing Report, p. 142). This helps both partners and the IOC, as “consumers are more willing to support sponsors” when those sponsors are positively identified as assisting athletes to attend the Games (Macintosh et al. 2012, p. 51).

Being proactive allowed VANOC to get the upper hand early before the Games began. As a result, commercial rights infractions were remarkably few in number, as noted below (from VANOC 2010, p. 60):

- More than 400 likely domain names were officially registered to VANOC prior to the Games.
- Approximately 185 marks were officially registered (trademarks, copyright marks, etc.) prior to the Games.
- Approximately 35,000 counterfeit items were seized, compared with the millions of legitimate items sold.
- 98% of infraction cases were fully resolved by the end of 2010, and the other 2% was deemed to be “of minimal commercial harm.”
- Only six cases were pursued with legal action by the end of 2010.

## CONCLUSIONS

According to the IOC, VANOC achieved its goal of delivering the 2010 Olympic Winter Games on budget and debt-free (IOC News 2014). The IOC’s official statement read: “VANOC’s final financial accounting reports both revenues and expenses of approximately CAD 1.9 million, with all suppliers paid and all revenues collected. As promised in December 2010, the Olympic Winter Games in Vancouver have been concluded free of debt, and with no additional government funds needed” (p. 1).

Katherine Gold continued to ponder all of the information gathered so far. The situation was much better than it had been at the end of the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing when four of the 12 TOP sponsors had left. Acer had taken Lenovo’s place for the computer category of the TOP program soon after the Beijing Olympic Games ended, but most of the planning for Vancouver had been completed with only nine TOP participants. The vacated categories had been for health care products (when Johnson & Johnson left), for life insurance (Manulife) and for film/photographics/imaging systems (Kodak). After the 2010 Vancouver Winter Games ended P&G signed up for the TOP program, filling the health care category, although Gold wondered whether that should be renamed as the personal care category. The Dow Chemical Company (Dow) also signed up for the TOP program, which did not quite fit either the vacant life insurance or film categories. Business environments continually change, and so the nature of the final category may need to be rethought before she could send out requests for proposals to fill the 12<sup>th</sup> TOP sponsorship spot.

It was wonderful that those two corporations had joined the TOP program since the Vancouver Winter Games had ended, but Gold was still uncertain of the specific reason why these companies had now decided that a TOP sponsorship brought them sufficient value to make that four-year funding commitment. How could she entice a 12<sup>th</sup> corporation to be that final TOP sponsor? Also, was it better to strive to secure a 12<sup>th</sup> sponsor, or to restructure the TOP program to only have 11 sponsors at a time? An even larger question also loomed. What could she do to encourage existing TOP sponsors to do as Coca-Cola and four other corporations have done, to commit to more than a decade of TOP sponsorship at a time?

Gold could calculate the IOC's considerable contribution from these TOP sponsors to VANOC's operating budget easily enough, and compare that to the IOC's contributions for past Olympic events in other cities. She wondered if the missing TOP participants were the reason for VANOC's increased efforts to gain so much more domestic sponsorship (Table 3)? Or was there more Canadian sponsorship primarily because the 2010 Olympic Winter Games had been positioned all along as an inclusive all-Canada event, rather than as a city-specific event? If future Olympic events faced a similar situation, in which there were fewer than 12 TOP participants, would such 'nationwide' positioning be required for success elsewhere? Would Olympic events be sustainable without as much domestic support as VANOC had achieved? The 2010 Olympic Winter Games had worked out well, but Gold must decide which of the questions she had identified would be the ones on which to focus, and then what set of recommendations to recommend to the IOC. Her decisions would impact not only short-term actions for immediate gain, but also the long-term value and viability of the Olympic brand and its relevance to corporations worldwide.

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## APPENDICES

**Table 1: TOP, The Olympic Partners Program**

Quadrennium	Winter/Summer Games	# Partners	#NOCs	Revenue
1985-1988	Calgary/Seoul	9	159	\$96 million
1989-1992	Albertville/Barcelona	12	169	\$172 million
1993-1996	Lillehammer/Atlanta	10	197	\$279 million
1997-2000	Nagano/Sydney	11	199	\$579 million
2001-2004	Salt Lake/Athens	11	202	\$663 million
2005-2008	Torino/Beijing	12	205	\$866 million
2009-2012*	Vancouver/London*	11*	205*	\$950 million*

\* Olympic MFF 2014, figures are through 2012. There were nine companies in the TOP program for the 2010 Vancouver Olympic Winter Games, two additional companies joined as TOP sponsors later in 2010. There were 82 participating NOCs in the Vancouver Winter Olympics.

**Table 2: Worldwide Olympic Sponsors of the 2010 Vancouver Olympic Winter Games**

Corporation	TOP Sponsor Since
Acer	2009
Atos	2001
Coca-Cola	1986
GE	2005
McDonald's	1997
Omega	2003
Panasonic	1987
Samsung	1997
Visa	1986

**Table 3: Winter OCOG Sponsorship Programs**

Olympic Winter Games	Number of Domestic Partners	Revenue and Support
1998 Nagano	26	\$163
2002 Salt Lake City	53	\$494
2006 Torino	57	\$348
2010 Vancouver	57	\$688

All dollar amounts are in millions of that year's US dollars.

Source: OMFF 2014, p. 17.

**Table 4: Olympic Marketing Revenue**

Source	1993-1996	1997-2000	2001-2004	2005-2008	2009-2012
Broadcast	1,251	1,845	2,232	2,570	3,850
TOP Program	279	579	663	866	950
OGOC Domestic Sponsorship	534	655	796	1,555	1,838
Ticketing	451	625	411	274	1,238
Licensing	115	66	87	185	170
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,630</b>	<b>3,770</b>	<b>4,189</b>	<b>5,450</b>	<b>8,046</b>

All figures are in millions of that year's US dollars.

Source: Olympic 2014, p. 6.

Graphic A: Olympic Logo



Graphic B: VANOC Emblem

