

# Adapt or die for the modern sports fan

By  Danette Breitenbach

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Over the past decade, sports audiences have changed dramatically, making relevance key for a successful sports sponsorship.



Ros Goldin, an independent analyst and ex-marketing director for Cricket South Africa.

Without relevance, a sponsorship has no meaning and will not be able to engage with the audience the brand has bought into says Ros Goldin, an independent analyst and ex-marketing director for Cricket South Africa.

## Building brand awareness

“A sponsorship is about building brand awareness and selling your product, and if you connect and engage then you will achieve that,” she continues. Goldin, together with Steve Elworthy, tournament director of the Cricket World Cup 2019 and member of the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB); Clive Eksteen the commercial director of Cricket SA, made up the panel at the CoNext Sponsorship forum.



South African Sponsorship Association has been launched

25 Feb 2019



Held in Bryanston, the forum is a platform where local sponsorship, media, marketing and advertising industries and their agencies, can gain key learnings from successful sponsorship partnerships in order to grow the quality of work in the African sponsorships arena.

Sponsorship today has to be seen in context of the evolution of modern sports and the modern sports fan. “The sports fan is a consumer and only 20% of consumers believe brands notably increase their quality of life, while 60% of content produced by brands is deemed irrelevant by consumers. People would not care if 74% of the brands they use every day disappear from their lives. Consumers have stopped caring about brands,” says CoNext founder and managing director, Andrew Ross.

## Social media is a game changer

How consumer consumes is influencing sports. With less time consumers want sports that take up less time. Newcomer sports suited to this are moving into the space occupied by traditional sports, while new venues are redefining the game day experience. “In turn, this is influencing traditional broadcasting of sports, which he believes will cease to exist in 20 years,” he adds.

The sports audience has evolved dramatically in the last decade as the environment they live in as change and while technology is a key driver here, the biggest gamechanger is social media. Goldin says:

“ It changed the rules of engagement for sports and sports sponsorship. Before social media, the media controlled the conversation and it was very rare that fans could speak to their sports heroes directly. Today, social media allows sports bodies and sponsors to produce content and to connect directly with the sports fan. Sports fan can also talk directly to their heroes on the various social media platforms. ”

However, leveraging new channels and opportunities requires sports bodies and sponsors to take the time and effort to know who they are talking to. “If you work from a solid platform that understands the fans, then you can create a great platform for sponsors to leverage,” says Goldin.

### Great diversity and gender-neutral fan

A sports body may recognise the need for a new format of a sport, but it does not mean it will take off immediately.

“F1 is a great example of a sport that was dragged into the 21st century by its new owners. They engaged their fans, and while they made some mistakes, they have done a good job. The key was that they took the time to understand their audience,” she says.

Locally the launch of the Pro 20 in cricket in 2007 by Cricket South Africa was a huge risk for the cricket body, the sponsor, Standard Bank and the broadcaster, DStv. More recently Cricket South Africa launched the Mzansi Super League. “The league is about giving fans what they want, but we faced a number of challenges to deliver it. A huge amount of work still needs to be done, but it is a positive start,” says Eksteen.

The trick is for the sport to attract new fans while retaining the faithful. “T20 is on the rise worldwide. Fans love it and so we need to play it and it is the ideal format for us to attract new fans and a new type of fan,” says Eksteen. The feedback shows the league attracts a great diversity and gender-neutral fan.

The 2019 T20 Cricket World Cup is taking place later this year in England and Wales. Elworthy who worked on the inaugural T20 World Cup in 2007 in South Africa, says tracking fans globally and connected stadiums are two of the key elements to ensure this year’s tournament is a success. “For example, Wi-Fi will be available to all the spectators at the stadiums so when they enter the gates, if they have registered, we can engage with them instantly.”

## ABOUT DANETTE BREITENBACH

Danette Breitenbach is a marketing & media editor at Bizcommunity.com. Previously she freelanced in the marketing and media sector, including for Bizcommunity. She was editor and publisher of AdVantage, the publication that served the marketing, media and advertising industry in southern Africa. She has worked extensively in print media, mainly B2B. She has a Masters in Financial Journalism from Wits.

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