



OLYMPICS

Without traditional Olympic park, brands pivot to activate around Paris

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For decades, Olympic sponsors could count on having a captive audience at a designated central location, a place where fans would congregate between sporting sessions and sponsors could engage with large crowds. Think Centennial Park in Atlanta or Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park in London.

But starting with **Paris**, those days might be numbered, at least for the near future.

Paris organizers elected to forgo building an Olympic park or new venues in favor of creating the first truly urban Games, weaving sports throughout existing or temporary locations across the city. They did offer showcasing space, but those areas were much smaller than usual — Ludivine Roosebeke, director of partnerships for **Paris 2024**, estimated the footprint was around 600 square meters (nearly 6,500 square feet) compared to typically around 2,000 square meters (about 21,500 square feet) at past Games.

There were also restrictions, including on the use of air conditioning and a requirement that sponsors only be consumer-facing. TOP sponsors had traditionally been able to combine their consumer-facing activations with a separate B2B space in the same showcase.

Additionally, **Paris 2024**'s top-tier domestic sponsors would pay for the land space.

“The offer we made to the sponsors is, ‘OK, there’s no Olympic park, but we’re offering you the city of **Paris** as the Olympic park and you’ll be in the best spots in the city,’” said Roosebeke.

“We said, ‘This is not going to be big and beautiful. This is going to be small and pretty.’”

Indeed, it has turned out that way.

The showcasing space **Paris** organizers offered TOP sponsors and its top-tier domestic sponsors is located near the Eiffel Tower, where beach volleyball has one of the Games’ most

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iconic venues, and on the Champs Élysées, near the fencing and taekwondo competitions in the Grand Palais.

But few brands opted for those spaces. Only domestic sponsor Sanofi and TOP sponsor Mengniu are showcasing in narrow displays along the Seine, while TOP sponsors Samsung and Alibaba have showcases by the Champs Élysées. **Paris** organizers worked out an exception for Omega, whose showcase — which includes multiple rooms and displays of its timekeeping and a 10-meter track for fans to test their speed out of the blocks — weighed too much to be located on the Seine, and placed the longtime TOP sponsor near Bercy Arena, where gymnastics is being held.

With the restrictions in place, a lot of TOP sponsors “immediately walked away” and started looking around **Paris**, said Jessica Giordano, chief partnership officer at GMR Marketing. “Once brands started doing that, they were like, ‘Oh my gosh, we have this amazing canvas of all these beautiful French historic buildings. Now we have the liberty to be creative. We have full control inside.’”

P&G has built its B2B space inside the Musée Rodin. In addition to its public showcasing, Omega has its house in The Hôtel de Poulpry, Maison des Polytechniciens.

Omega President and CEO Raynald Aeschlimann said he supported the integration of the Games in the city, even if that leads to smaller sponsor showcasing areas.

“Some urban sports are making an entrance in the Olympics, so somewhere it’s a must, so that the space is not there,” he said. “Most of the people, they’re so happy to be able to go to competitions so the time of the visit will maybe come a bit later.”

Coca-Cola created its Food Fest near Les Invalides, bringing in 10 chefs to offer cuisines from around the world alongside its products. It separately has its Coca-Cola House in the Palais Garnier opera house.

“We want to be where the consumers are,” said Brad Ross, vice president of global sports and entertainment marketing and partnerships for Coca-Cola. “Our philosophy hasn’t changed fundamentally. We’re doing a lot of the stuff that we’ve always done. But I do see that some of the sponsors are also now seeing the opportunity to be more consumer-facing than just business-facing in terms of their activations and what they’re doing.”

Several sponsors took advantage of **Paris** 2024’s offer for in-venue activations, which had to fit certain categories such as adding a sports activity, cultural activity or place for fans to rest. Alibaba has a 360 camera to create a video for fans in three venues, while Samsung has charging stations in 11 venues.

The changes are part of a larger shift that is likely to last beyond **Paris**. Sponsors might not build expo-sized buildings like they did during the Beijing Summer Olympics in 2008, but they will need to find ways to interact with consumers.

“We’re shifting where do those physical fan engagement opportunities show up?” Giordano said. “It’s not your big brand showcase as opposed to more of that human-to-human connection that is then driven and amplified by social content.

“The big fan parks may or may not be days of old, but the Olympics have to drive consumer engagement if people are going to still keep investing. B2B is not going to carry that investment, but it’s going to be ‘How do we think about assets differently?’”

Longtime Olympics stakeholders said that shift was already on the way before a COVID Games without fans accelerated it. With upcoming hosts Milan-Cortina and Los Angeles being more spread out than these Games, brands will have to think about how they reach consumers differently.

The days of the Olympic park might not be gone forever, however, especially if the International Olympic Committee returns the Games to former hosts that had success with them previously; Salt Lake City, for instance, took advantage of its Utah Olympic Park in 2002 and could utilize a similar plan in 2034.

But the **Paris** Games are giving sponsors new models as they think about how to reach consumers during the Olympics.

“It was a fun, cultural sort of element of the experience of the Games,” said Michael Lynch, the former head of global sponsorship at Visa and a consultant to multiple Olympic sponsors. “And now you’re seeing it, but they’re one-offs located around the city. There’s some cool stuff that’s out there, but you gotta go find it.”



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