



SBJ IN PARIS

Paris Games mark big change in Olympics sponsorship integrations

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PARIS -- From atop the medal stand, Olympians have been taking selfies with a special edition Samsung phone.

Bottles of Old Spice and Head & Shoulders are mounted on the wall in the divers' warm-down area.

Medals and cases designed by the Maisons of LVMH were featured in the opening ceremony of the **Paris** Games, complete with a video tour through the workshops of Chaumet and Louis Vuitton.

The **Paris** Games have represented a leap forward in the integration of sponsors into the Olympics, a once unthinkable deviation from the IOC's long-standing policy on clean venues.

As sponsors and other stakeholders look to future Olympics, including the Summer Games in L.A. in four years, they see more commercialization, not less.

"The Games are unique in other major international sporting events for not having field-of-play advertisement," said Anne-Sophie Voumard, managing director of IOC Television & Marketing Services. "Nevertheless, we've been historically trying to work with our partners to have a very smooth, organic integration on ways for us to be promoting their products in a way that helps with delivery of the Games or with the experience.

"We will continue to evolve in this respect and try to be smart about how we integrate our partners into the delivery of the Games."

The IOC's TOP partners are key to delivery, from Toyota's fleet of vehicles to Visa's long-standing history as the payment provider, among many others.

The Olympics have long been unique among major sports competitions for their lack of brand

visibility during the event. There are not naming rights for the venues nor field-of-play ads. Sponsors cannot buy logo space on apparel.

With a relationship dating back to 1932, Omega is one of the few TOP sponsors that shows its branding in venues as the official timekeeper of the Games.

Even with TOP deals going for around \$200M per quadrennium currently, longtime sponsors largely accepted the limitations and have sought to leverage their relationship with the Olympics differently than a traditional sports sponsorship.

“You’ve got to be ruthlessly focused on making sure you protect the brand integrity of the Olympic rings,” said Michael Payne, the former IOC marketing director. “You certainly don’t want to be getting into the logo-slapping game. I think sponsor recognition and what the IOC has evolved here is stale. There’s been very little evolution in the last two decades. I think Anne-Sophie Voumard understands that and has that as a priority for the future.”

It was in **Paris**.

Domestic sponsor LVMH made the first splash with a film featuring the making of the medals and cases shown during the opening ceremony. That followed with a presentation of one of them to Olympic legends Michael Phelps and Martin Fourcade, a retired French biathlete and five-time Olympic champion.

“My understanding was that while the IOC had signed off on some form of presence, like the suitcase, the filming inside the factory — effectively a 2-minute commercial — caught everyone by surprise,” Payne said.

It’s only one way LVMH has been visible during the Games. It designed the uniforms used during the medal ceremony and the medals are brought out on the distinctly checkered print of Louis Vuitton.

But the domestic sponsor is not alone.

For the first time, the IOC’s global sponsors are displayed on the backdrop in the mixed zone, where athletes speak to media. Sponsors and other stakeholders noted the golden Coca-Cola bottles that some athletes had during the opening ceremony.

On the medal stand, athletes have been handed a Samsung Galaxy Z Flip6 Olympic Edition to take photos.

Voumard said that was an integration that made sense because they are not allowed to bring their own phones on the podium.

“On the Samsung phones, the IOC is treading on thin ice,” Payne said. “The moment you start product placement on the medal stand, you risk opening Pandora’s box. The medal stand should be sacred, devoid of any commercial or political statements.”

Other sponsors and stakeholders have taken note, some with surprise and others with an eye on the future. If this level of integration is on the table now, it will open discussion to future Games.

“To us, that’s extremely refreshing as well,” said Andrea Fairchild, senior vice president of global sponsorship strategy at Visa. “It’s finding those authentic touch points, and for us it’s going to be leading in technology and ensuring that where those touch points are happening or where there’s more visibility and there’s an authentic reason to be. From an IOC and an Olympic legacy, that will remain consistent. But there certainly is a lot more ability now to integrate in a more unique and just culturally relevant.”

Paris “broke the threshold” on integrating commercial sponsors, said LA28 Chairman Casey Wasserman. While the Olympics might not turn into other professional sports, where everything from sideline ads to jersey patches and scoreboard ad space and time are for sale, **Paris** marks a departure from the IOC’s past.

“In professional sports around the world, commercialization is a validation. The more commercial, the more successful you are,” Wasserman said. “And I get that the Olympics will never be that, but look, it’s a commercial enterprise for us, and so to be able to have commercial integration more than it’s ever been, because I would say **Paris** is more than it’s ever been. And we will push that even further.”

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