



Marathon Marketing: It's All About The Runners (Stupid!)

When Greek water carrier Spiridon Louis won the first Olympic marathon in 1896 it must have seemed unimaginable that endurance running would expand so much that the 2014 London Marathon would offer \$300,000+ in prize money. Endurance running is booming: the number of events and sponsors are growing. IEG reports US endurance sport sponsorship spend grew 6% between 2013-2012 to total \$108m. Furthermore, marathon sponsors tend to commit for the long term. John Hancock has backed the Boston Marathon for 29 years, Virgin Money's London Marathon sponsorship is a 10-year-plus deal and Tata Consultancy's multi-million dollar NY Marathon title sponsorship is for at least 8 years.



Endurance running sponsors understands building runner relationships isn't just about activation spikes at single events, but about long term engagement and enabling/enhancing lifestyles.

It might be stating the obvious, but recent endurance event activation, from London Marathon partner Adidas' '26ers Club', to AT&T's 'Boston Marathon Digital Mosaic' and Asics #BetterYour-Best campaign, shows it is all about the runners, stupid!

Adidas 26ers: A Branded London Marathon Running Club > Inspired by the London Marathon, adidas 26ers aims to be more than just a marketing campaign. It's also a participatory club, a community with a common goal - 26.2 miles.

In addition to logo presence across a slew of London Marathon assets from runner number badges to the finish line banner (and plenty of on-course signage), the German sportswear giant is activating its London Marathon partnership through this participatory '26ers' club campaign.

The London Marathon, which adidas itself describes as the most iconic race in the world, the 26ers initiates aims to bring all of the sportswear giant's assets together to help runners conquer the course.

Targeting all participants - from those aiming for sub 2:30 to the five hours plus fun runners - the initiative is based around a campaign clubhouse in the basement of the official London Marathon Store (at 1 - 3 Norton Folgate, Bishopsgate, London E1 6DB).

The campaign infrastructure reflects a classic running club: free to join, it comes complete with free changing rooms, lockers and shower facilities (and an array of adidas Boost products, London Marathon kit and a campaign-specific adidas running range).

Using the hashtag #adidas26ers and the tagline 'We are the adidas 26ers and these are the miles that make us', the initiative's launch event on 27 March (which itself included a run) saw star appearances and talks from Liz and Martin Yelling, Simon Freeman and Scott Overall.

At the launch adidas also gave out t-shirts

that marked how many marathons each attendee had completed.

The club has been organising a series of training runs (from 5K to 13 miles) for members - including a final run the Sunday before the marathon itself.

The club also offers on-site experts providing training, nutrition and gait advice

'The adidas 26ers is designed to offer runners of all levels specialised training along with a home from which they can meet like-minded individuals, share their running and training experiences and get the best training advice and support possible, says adidas UK running director James Foster.

'The training run times can be found online, and guided runs will take place across different times and distances so all you need to do is choose the run that is most suited to you.'

He tells me: "The hectic non-stop lifestyle means Londoners need to channel their stress levels in other directions, which many feel running provides.

'Running, even for 30 minutes, can re-energise and provide escapism from the office and the many scenic running routes around the city help you to fall back in love with London every time. Motivation and team spirit is a huge benefit of group runs. It creates a community and helps to create a unique bond with fellow runners.'

Another nice touch in this initiative sees the brand offer members who have forgotten their trainers a chance to trial adidas Boost footwear on club runs starting from the clubhouse.

26ers sees the brand aim to create a brand-backed community where runners can find friends and partners to share their tales and tips and the marathon experience.

Adidas, which has a rich marathon sponsorship heritage that also includes partnerships with major races such as Boston and Milan, isn't alone on leveraging the pop-up marathon related space.

This year sees vintage running brand Saucony launch a Covent Garden pop-up in the run-up to the marathon, And the Run Dem Crew, started







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by DJ/Poet Charlie Dark, is also running training clubs as well as mentoring young Londoners explore the city in a safe and healthy environment via post run workshops, films and talks.

While Nike (which has its own Nike Training Club) ambushes adidas' race sponsorship with one of its intermittent 'We Own The Night' races in May.

AT&T Curates Consumer Generated Boston Marathon Digital Mosaic > Boston Marathon wireless partner AT&T is activating its rights and supporting the 'One Fund Boston' initiative with a new feature to this year's race by curating a consumer-created digital mosaic - showcasing pictures and videos of Bostonians, marathoners and fans from around the globe.

The brand-backed #ItsOurBoston social mosaic will be displayed via a giant video screen in the Athlete's Village on Marathon Monday and the object is for each photo and film submitted to the initiative to act as a form of encouragement for the runners.

The initiative aims to give runners, fans and city citizens a unique way to show their passion for one of the nation's most beloved marathons and share what Boston means to them during this year's poignant race.

AT&T itself will contribute \$1 to One Fund Boston for each of the first 10,000 submissions.

A commitment which builds on the company's initial \$1m donation to One Fund Boston when it was first launched last year.

The telco began collecting consumer content on 31 March with a launch Boston tour, connecting running clubs and city community groups.

Throughout the first half of April an AT&T branded SMART car is touring college campuses, running clubs, Boston sport events and other local destinations in Marathon route communities and surrounding towns to collect mosaic submissions.

The tour began in Boston's Back Bay and travels through Cambridge and the surrounding area with stops ranging from the Newbury

Street Lululemon store, to TD Garden on 4 April for that evening's Boston Celtics game.

Pictures and videos can be submitted via Twitter using the campaign hashtag #ItsOurBoston and via a campaign website at atwww.itsourboston.com.

'We wanted to create a unifying way for Bostonians and marathon fans around the world to be a part of the Boston Marathon,' says AT&T President Patricia Jacobs.

'There's a real sense of community bringing all of us together as we approach Marathon Monday. The digital mosaic is an opportunity for the public to share what Boston and the Marathon means to them and to provide much-needed support for One Fund Boston.'

Those AT&T customers who wish to personally support the One Fund Boston can also text BOSTON to 80108 to give \$10. The donation will be charged on their monthly AT&T bill.

'Our One Fund Boston support and Marathon Monday services are just a few ways we can support an event we love and a city where we live and work,' adds Jacobs. 'Marathon Monday will demonstrate once again to the world that Boston is a truly special place, full of pride and remarkable and resilient people.'

An appropriate addition to the brand's usual array of activation channels and services for this year's race - one year on from the tragic bombing at last year's race.

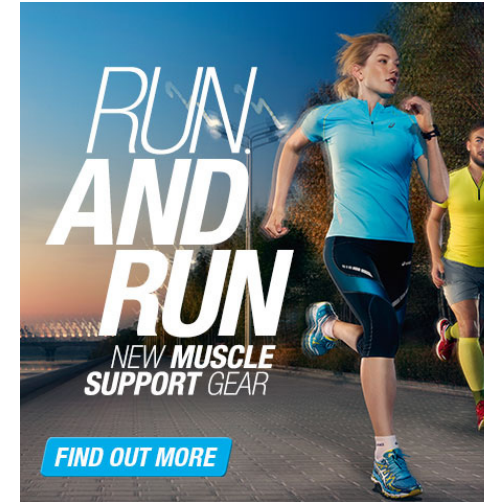
AT&T is the official wireless provider of the 118th Boston Marathon and has been a sponsor of the event since 2008.

Its partnership also sees the telco offer a host of mobile features to help keep runners and spectators connected on Marathon Monday.

These include:

- AT&T Athlete Alert: which enables fans to track the progress of individual runners (from family members to elite stars) via mobile text or email real-time updates.

- Free Calling Stations: five free communication centres for finishers in the family meeting area to help runners contact their loved ones



after the race by phone or text.

- Free Wi-Fi: free Wi-Fi for AT&T customers at the start and finish lines and boosted 4G LTE network capacity around the course to boost capacity.

#BetterYourBest Aims To Leverage Asics Running Strengths To Other Niche Sports

> Asics has begun rolling out a multi-channel, multi-phase pan-European campaign to extend its strength in running apparel into other sport segments including rugby and tennis.

Continuing its everyday athlete call-to-arms – ‘Better Your Best’ – the initial wave of work promoting its ‘Muscle Support’ collection is led by a new spot running across TV and VOD channels revolving around a classic ‘boy-meets-girl’ narrative.

This core pan-European launch ad is supported by a more technical, product-specific longer version – adding more functional messaging to the more emotive, story-telling 30-second spot.

‘Muscle Support’ was originally designed for marathon training, with a key aim of improving the wearer’s posture, and includes marathon-specific executions timed to coincide with the spring marathon season (including The London Marathon) and using the tagline ‘Run. And Run’.

This includes a new ‘We Are Marathoners’ TV spot inspired by the attitude, energy, and passion

of the ‘select group of runners who are proud to call themselves “Marathoners”’.

The pan-European creative comes in multiple market-specific language including French, German and Italian.

The push includes several event-specific local market activations and initiatives - such as its ‘Asics Better the Best Treadmill Challenge’ at the Barcelona Marathon.

This marathon marketing wave is a lead-in to the launch of additional Asics ranges across a target set of niche sports which will appear via a phased launch later in the year and will include Asics first ever non-running TV advertising.

As well as including a set of specific ads for Triathlon and Trail Running, Asics will attempt to engage with Spanish Padel tennis players and later in 2014 it will market to rugby players as part of an initiative building up to next year’s Rugby World Cup with a campaign featuring both the Australian and South African national rugby union teams.

While in the tennis segment, Asics has partnered with two new player ambassadors – Wimbledon doubles champion Jonny Marray and Canadian Top 40 player Vasek Pospisil – and will use them to front tennis work within the wider campaign running under the tagline ‘Advantage You’.

The push has been developed in partnership with creative agency 180 Amsterdam and is being delivered across a range of above- and below-the-line platforms, this new year-long campaign includes TV work, print executions, digital brand films, online engagement initiatives, POS work, event-specific activation.

It also links to its evolving online training tool, MY ASICS, which offers an increasingly fully integrated digital engagement platform.

The work follows last year’s ‘Journey Of Improvement’ campaign – led by its ‘Better Your Best’ TV commercial - which the company claims was its most successful advertising initiative ever (based on brand awareness and sentiment metrics).

The new campaign builds on Asics’ strong running shoe sales figures in 2013 (despite adidas and Nike both stepping up their own running marketing programmes) and is the focal point for the company’s current strategy of investing heavily in generating attention in other sports.

Indeed, 2014 sees the brand commit to a 20% year-on-year increase its pan-European media spend with a focus on pushing its apparel lines deeper into niche categories like tennis and rugby.

The brand plans to maintain its current commitment to the running segment, whilst also expanding

out into other sports.

This approach, according to marketing manager Max Keen, is a direct response to Asics consumers' current purchasing habits.

Already three out of four customers who buy Asics already use the products for non-running sports.

'Our strategy is about being number one in running. That won't change but there's a natural affinity to running and other sports,' explains Keen. 'Three out of four people who buy Asics use it for sport. That's almost double the rate of the market, which is more like four out of 10 because people use them for leisure also. <

