

Lessons marketers can learn from NBA Finals

By Raed Kablawi, Gulf Marketing Review – 31 May 2018

65.8 billion dollars.

This is the amount of money spent on sports sponsorships around the world. If this was a country, its GDP would rank in the top 30% of the entire world.

But just a decade ago the billings were less than half of what they are today. What's the reason, it's not that the number of teams has doubled? The number of games is pretty much the same. So the question is why?

Why have sports captured your marketing dollars? It's the passion, dedication, and purchasing decision made by consumers.

A sports-related purchase goes through fewer decision factors than that of a jacket, a computer, or a phone. Passion and desire fuel these experience-based decisions.

While the big global numbers put local and regional brands out of the game, today we stand amongst the wave of truly local sports experiences than ever before.

Mohamad Salah is a Global football phenomena, Ferrari is back to its winning ways and that affects our Abu Dhabi F1 Season, the FIFA World Cup is upon us and for the first time ever there are four Arab countries participating. The tides are carrying MENA sports forward.

When you think of the sports that are heavily utilized by brands in the region, it's obvious that football reigns supreme, however it's becoming increasingly cluttered and you're about to witness that first hand during the World Cup.

Other sports such as cricket and rugby usually target a particular demographic and have their own limitations.

The NBA, on the other hand, offers brands a unique proposition in that when dealing with the NBA, partners get access to all 30 teams that are part of the association.

What this means is that, unlike what we see in football where a number of brands within the same industry can offer the same experiences by associating themselves with different football clubs, no other competitor would be able to offer NBA experiences to its target audience.

This means that partners get to build relationships with fans of all 30 teams.

The current size of the NBA market in UAE and KSA is 8.6M, growing by an average of 25% year on year. This includes fans who follow the game on TV or online. With the plans that sports bodies in both countries have, this number will only grow bigger.



There are talks to host an NBA Global game in the region, which would bring the NBA closer to the fans and build a momentum for brands to invest in it.

This is something the NBA is keen on as mentioned by Ben Morel, SVP and Managing Director of Europe & Middle East, in his latest interview.

Discussions are ongoing with the proper stakeholders, but brands should seriously consider striking a partnership before, as it gives them early access to the NBA IP, assets, and their ways of doing business and puts them a step ahead of their competitors.

What also makes the NBA appealing, is that it's now more than a sport, it's become a lifestyle brand. While the sport itself is a huge attraction, followers of the NBA brand are equally interested in getting fashion, music, health, & fitness inspirations from the players and celebrities surrounding the game.

This is attractive to brands because now they can customize and deliver content that is relevant to a wider range of audience and across multiple content genres.

Furthermore, our recent research shows us that 78% of NBA fans in the region are considered hardcore fans, in that they will watch games that feature their favorite teams or players and will check the highlights of all other teams, most likely on digital platforms such as League Pass or social media.

It also means that these fans are more likely to engage with the sponsors or buy the sponsor's product.

We as Publicis Media Sport & Entertainment work with all the big sports properties in multiple markets and manage brand sponsorship and consultancies across different industries, and have witnessed the power the NBA has, not only from a fan engagement perspective but also in positively affecting communities at large.

There is no clear no.2 sport behind football, but the NBA clearly has the fan base and the foundation to make it its own.

I suggest you follow the upcoming Finals to get an idea about the game and the marketing potential that can be delivered around it.

The Finals will feature the best team in the world, the Golden State Warriors, against the best player in the world LeBron James and his Cleveland Cavaliers.

LeBron's determination might carry his team to one win, but the Warriors just have a lot of firepower. I predict Golden State to win the Finals 4-1. Agree?

Disagree? Message me on twitter (@Abouray) and we can discuss in more detail.

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