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GRASSROOTS SPONSORSHIP RETAINS A FIRM HOLD

Grassroots sponsorship is holding its own within the industry despite the high-profile sports and events which continue to grab the headlines. In an industry worth €9bn¹, the bulk of investment continues to go into the top end of the sponsorship market, but the benefits of grassroots and community sponsorship are increasingly visible and The European Sponsorship Association is convinced that investment in this area is not only here to stay, but will continue to increase in the future.

Understandably in the current economic climate, football and cricket clubs, orchestras and arts associations, amongst others, are already reported to be feeling the credit crunch. However, sponsorship is firmly established as a valuable marketing tool and one which enables meaningful relationships to be built with consumers – something in which both businesses and brands increasingly need to invest to ensure their future prosperity.

This explains why, for every sponsorship loss announcement, there have been ten more confirming new or continued sponsorships. There is also a noticeable trend that substantial sponsorship announcements include an element of community as an integral part of the marketing plan.

Witness the recent announcement in the UK by British Gas of its €16.8 million investment in swimming - a sponsorship which will “support every level of swimming, from learners and grassroots to elite athletes”.

Global insurance giant Aviva supports athletics in the UK “from playground to podium”. Tanya Veingard, Head of Sponsorship at Aviva UK says, “We dedicate one third of our total sponsorship fees (approximately €3.3million per year) to grassroots athletics. This funding is essential as it gives every child in the UK the opportunity to get active through our grassroots athletics programme, helping create a long-term legacy for the sport”.

In 2006, utilities company npower, which has been involved in sponsoring elite cricket in England since 2001, sought to extend its association with the sport and show a commitment to grassroots cricket. The result was the creation of a new game, urban cricket, developed in conjunction with the England & Wales Cricket Board (ECB) and designed to be played within deprived inner city communities.

Gary Doig, Community Investment Manager, npower says that the urban cricket initiative was a natural progression and has been fully integrated into every aspect of the business’ marketing programme. “This has helped to



convey effectively our message to both customers and the communities where urban cricket is played that we are firmly committed to grassroots sports”, he said.

ESA member, Sponsorium, is witnessing amongst their marketing and sponsorship managers’ workshop attendees and subscribers an increasing trend towards brands investing in grassroots sports sponsorship.

In France, SFR developed the Rando-Raid series to promote the brand’s values of liberty and mobility. They deliberately targeted those sports with the most participants – hiking, mountain biking and canoeing. Ten years on there are 25 SFR Rando-Raid events, attracting an average of 260 teams per day, 26,000 participants. In a version extended to universities for 5 years, a further 19,200 students participate.

In Germany, the Sparkasse Finance Group is an Olympic partner committing some €78million each year. The Group sees an important part of its involvement being support for the German Sports Badge scheme. The Group draws upon its close regional proximity and its contacts within various associations, schools, universities and the regional economy in order to motivate more people to gain the German Sports Badge, which is a grassroots scheme run in collaboration with the German Olympic Sports Confederation.

The conclusion is that whilst there will always continue to be grassroots projects crying out for additional funding, there is an increasing recognition from businesses and brands that grassroots and community projects can provide real dividends in building lasting consumer relationships.

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Note to the Editor:

The European Sponsorship Association (ESA) represents the interests of the sponsorship industry in Europe, covering all sectors from sports and the arts to entertainment, media and corporate responsibility.

As a membership organisation, ESA’s members comprise sponsors, rights holders, agencies, professional advisors and suppliers who operate at a global, pan-European and national level across Europe. ESA’s 250 members include an impressive list of brands including Coca-Cola, Visa, McDonalds, Diageo and Castrol and rights holders involved in the major events.



The Association works to raise standards within the industry through its education programmes and its policy activities which help to promote and protect the industry at national and European level.

Source:

1. €9 billion – IEG