



SPONSORSHIP: A SUCCESSFUL PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN THE GAA AND GUINNESS

THE IRISH TIMES
Business 2000
MILLENNIUM EDITION

The sport of hurling can be traced as far back as 1272BC. However, it wasn't until 1884, through the formation of the Gaelic Athletic Association that hurling became an organised sport. The sport is now played throughout Ireland at under age level, schools level, club level and at county level.

Guinness Ireland Group is the first ever sponsor of the All Ireland Hurling Championship. It began its sponsorship in 1995. Since then the Guinness sponsorship has become one of the most recognisable of all sports sponsorship in Ireland. This case study examines the factors that brought together two uniquely Irish icons under a sponsorship agreement. It describes the actual sponsorship campaign and highlights some of the successful outcomes that have arisen from that campaign.

HURLING: A SPORT UNIQUE TO IRELAND

Hurling is a sport unique to Ireland and is recognised worldwide as such. It is the fastest field game in the world and requires great skill and stamina together with a high degree of hand-to-eye co-ordination. These ingredients combine to make Hurling an intensely exciting sport to watch.

The Championship have been played for over 100 years. The annual showcase for the sport is the Final of the All Ireland Hurling Championship played in Croke Park in September each year.

Although Hurling has a long-standing history and heritage, by the early 1990s the game was out of favour with sports fans. In fact the ruling body of the GAA was so concerned about its declining popularity that it began to examine the future of the sport.

Hurling's sister sport, Gaelic Football, was at this time enjoying an unprecedented following. This was partially attributable to a highly successful sponsorship arrangement that raised the profile and professional image of the sport among the public. The GAA realised that finding the right sponsor for Hurling would be critical to its future success.



Kilkenny star D. J. Carey being closely watched by Cork's Diarmaid O'Sullivan in the Guinness All-Ireland Senior Hurling Final 1999.

DEFINING SPONSORSHIP

Sponsorship can be defined as an investment in an activity in return for permission to exploit the commercial potential associated with that activity. Sponsorship is one of a number of elements of the *marketing communications mix*. Other elements include advertising, sales promotions (e.g. money off coupons), public relations and personal selling. Sponsorship is in effect a marketing communications tool.

In the past sponsorship was often an underrated element of the marketing communications mix. However, marketers are increasingly recognising its importance and the rewards that can be reaped from a well executed sponsorship campaign. There are examples of successful sponsorship campaigns all around us. Budweiser sponsor the Irish Derby each year; Cadbury's sponsor Coronation Street and Eircom sponsor the People in Need charity. In fact, in 1999 it was estimated that businesses in the UK spent £640m on sponsorship and worldwide the figure is in excess of \$19.2 billion annually.

In general, sports, the arts and the environment are the major areas in which companies invest in sponsorship. However, Guinness is careful that its sponsorship activity does not promote the misuse of alcohol, especially amongst young people. For example, the company does not sponsor individual sporting personalities who might be considered icons for younger supporters. Sponsorship's greatest strength is in creating awareness and enhancing the image of an organisation or its brand. It is also used to enjoy greater media coverage and increase sales and market share for participating organisations. Sponsorship also is an excellent way to overcome language and cultural barriers and, as such, is now considered a global communications medium.

GUINNESS WANTED THE GAA AS PART OF ITS TEAM

Guinness is one of the biggest sponsors in Ireland. The company sponsors a wide range of events. The Guinness Cork Jazz festival is famous all over the world. Guinness also sponsors the Rugby World Cup, Irish Rugby and the Galway Races. This year Guinness created a two day music festival called Witnness, featuring some of the biggest music acts in the world.

In 1995, Guinness was actively looking for a new sponsorship opportunity. It had been interested in sponsoring the All Ireland Hurling Championship for some time. The company saw Guinness and Hurling fitting well together - both are uniquely Irish and are recognised as such the world over.

The GAA was very happy to be involved with Guinness. The GAA membership base of over one million represented almost one third of the Irish population. The Association also had almost 1,000 clubs nationwide with licensed bars. This represented a very important distribution channel for Guinness products.

GUINNESS PROVED A WINNING PLAYER FOR THE GAA

Guinness represented an ideal partner for the GAA in their strategy to improve the image of Hurling in the marketplace. Guinness could provide a significant cash injection to the GAA and the sport of Hurling. In addition, Guinness also represented some of the most creative and innovative marketing expertise in Ireland. The Guinness brand was at the same time enjoying continued success and a high profile image in the marketplace. All of these factors combined to make Guinness the ideal brand with which to form an alliance.

THE MERGING OF TWO UNIQUELY IRISH BRANDS

In May 1995, Guinness Ireland Group and Cumann Luthchleas Gael signed the contract that established Guinness as the first ever sponsor of the All Ireland Hurling Championship.

ARE YOU IRELAND'S TOP FAN OF THE GUINNESS HURLING CHAMPIONSHIP? The search is on for the Fan of the Guinness Hurling Championship 2000. Pictured is model Roberta Rawcett as the local Garda with a motley crew of hurling fans from all walks of life all wearing assorted 'county hats, flags and headbands'.



Under the sponsorship agreement Guinness invests money in the sport in two ways. Firstly, it provides funds which the GAA use to develop the game at all levels. Secondly, and most importantly, Guinness invests funds and its marketing expertise in the actual promotion of Hurling. This sponsorship campaign is instrumental in raising the image and perception of Hurling.

IMPLEMENTING A VICTORIOUS SPONSORSHIP CAMPAIGN

The overall sponsorship campaign focused on a number of core areas including:

- changing the name of the Championship
- implementing a high profile advertising campaign
- formulating a public relations campaign
- introducing a promotional programme regionally and nationally.

CHANGING THE NAME OF THE CHAMPIONSHIP

Under the agreement the official title of this competition was established as *The Guinness Hurling Championship*. In addition, each of the provincial championships were renamed and are now officially known as the Guinness Munster/Leinster/Connacht/Ulster Hurling Championship respectively.

A HIGH PROFILE ADVERTISING CAMPAIGN

At the outset a nationwide advertising campaign was launched involving a major 48-sheet poster and television campaign. Initial advertising captions focused attention on the skill of the game and the players. For example some of the first captions were:

This man can reach speeds of 100 mph

This man can level whole counties in one second flat

This man can break hearts at 70 yards

It is critical that the sponsorship has a consistent image. For this reason, the imagery shown on the posters and television advertisements was extended to tickets, programmes, and all other forms of print advertising.



Scenes from the advertising campaign for the Guinness Hurling Championship 1998.

The campaign was highly creative, filled with imagery and captured the spirit of the game and the imagination of the public. Hurling had never been advertised before in Ireland and the campaign captured the imagination of a new and receptive audience.

THE PUBLIC RELATIONS CAMPAIGN

From the outset, a major public relations campaign to support the sponsorship was put in place. A key target audience was the GAA writers and journalists. At the time even the largest GAA stadiums were without telephone, fax and computer facilities for the media. It was essential that journalists were given the equipment to feed the latest results back to their newspapers and news desks. Therefore significant investment was made to provide office facilities for the media.

In the second year a *Media Guide* was produced for all journalists. This provided up-to-date records of all the competing teams, names and phone numbers of the managers, players, county secretaries and each team's public relations officers. In addition, a weekly media update ensured that journalists were kept informed of key events and provided with all the relevant information.

It was also important for Guinness to feature in the match programmes. Guinness provided branding for the programmes to maintain a strong link with each game.

THE PROMOTIONAL PROGRAMME

Guinness also has an ongoing programme of introducing new promotional events to ensure the sponsorship remains innovative and exciting. Every year Guinness begins the new Hurling season with a high profile launch involving players, managers, officials, GAA and the media.

A series of University Scholarships for young players has also been introduced. These Hurling scholarships have been awarded to the University of Limerick, University College Cork and University College Dublin. The scholarships are worth £3,000 each per annum and are for a three-year period.

A WINNING RESULT FOR BOTH SIDES

Hurling has become extremely popular in the last five years. The Guinness sponsorship has undoubtedly been a major contributing factor to this success.



Cork's star Brian Corcoran bursting out of defence in the Guinness All-Ireland Senior Hurling Final 1999.

Since the sponsorship commenced there has been major progress in attendance, participation and media coverage.

Year	Attendance figures
1994	289,281
1995	305,422
1996	395,572
1997	483,710
1998	587,595
1999	543,335

Participation	
1994 – 1999	Increase of 50% with 67,000 new players

Matches shown live on television	
1994	3
1999	11

Over the five-year period the Guinness sponsorship has become one of the most recognisable of all sports sponsorship in Ireland. In fact, a recent survey conducted by sponsorship research consultants Amárach indicated that the Guinness Hurling Championship is recognised by 46 per cent of sponsorship managers as the "best Irish sport sponsorship". The next best sponsorship received 7 per cent of the votes.

A RE-MATCH IN THE FUTURE

Over the first five years of the sponsorship, Guinness has invested in excess of IR£7 million in Hurling. The Guinness sponsorship has brought Hurling to the attention of new audiences and greatly enhanced the image of the sport. In fact, the sponsorship of the All Ireland Hurling Championship has been so successful that Guinness and the GAA have agreed to extend it for another five years. During this time, Guinness will invest a further IR£10 million in promoting the sponsorship and in the development of the sport, especially at grassroots level.

Visit the Guinness website at www.guinness.com

TASKS AND ACTIVITIES

- List the elements of the marketing communications mix.
 - Examine the role that each of these elements play in promoting the Guinness brand.
- Explain what is meant by the term 'sponsorship'.
 - Describe how companies use sponsorship to communicate messages about their organisation or brand.
- Why did the GAA need a sponsor for the All Ireland Hurling Championship?
 - Why was the Guinness brand a suitable sponsor for the Championship and the sport of Hurling?
- Explain why Guinness chose to sponsor Hurling and the All-Ireland Hurling Championship.
- Outline the objectives of the sponsorship campaign for
 - Guinness Ireland Group
 - The GAA.
 - Describe how the sponsorship campaign achieved the objectives for
 - Guinness Ireland Group
 - The GAA.
- Describe how Guinness set about implementing the sponsorship campaign for the All-Ireland Hurling Championship.
- Make a list of three companies involved in sponsorship programmes.
 - Describe the sponsorship campaign for each of the companies under the following headings:
 - who or what the company is sponsoring
 - why you think they chose to sponsor that activity or organisation
 - the target market they are trying to reach through the sponsorship campaign
 - the elements of the marketing communications mix being used to promote the campaign
 - the different media used to communicate the campaign.
- What lessons can other organisations learn from this business study?



Model Roberta Rawett as the local Garda with a local Rabbi and local Judge promoting the search for the Fan of the Guinness Hurling Championship