

# Pushing pause on events doesn't mean pushing pause on the fan experience

By [Clint Paterson](#), issued by [Levergy](#)

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As the world continues to reel from the effects of the global pandemic that has left the sporting and entertainment calendar in tatters and along with it, billions of fans devastated, we're also left with many sponsors and rights-holders scrambling for their next move.

For most, this is something that has never been seen or experienced in our lifetimes and with very little clarity on what the future looks like for mass events and gatherings in the short term, it raises questions as to how sponsors and rights-holders should be going about their business for the foreseeable future.

At Levergy, and in conjunction with the M&C Saatchi Sport and Entertainment global strategic team, we've used our time to think about how to simplify the role of sponsoring brands and what questions they need to be asking of themselves and their partners at different junctures on the path towards a return to some form of normalcy.

Our view from the onset has been to approach this pandemic in three distinct phases.

## **Phase one: The moment of impact (coming to an end)**

This being the initial period of panic as events are cancelled or postponed, where the immediate future looks bleak and our lives are turned upside down as what we take for granted is suddenly taken away from us.

During this phase, the role of sponsors should be to use their resources and assets to offer genuine support and assistance to the overall cause and to the fanbases they've been engaging with. To date, there have been some brilliant initiatives from around the globe and by now most would have seen great examples of how sponsors have used their athletes to drive key messaging (e.g. #stayathome, #flattenthecurve etc.) or used their other assets to provide tangible support to those in need.

The good news for our industry is that while there is rightfully still much uncertainty and genuine concern for people's health and safety, people are realising that the world must go on and we seem to be moving into what we believe to be the next phase. Fortunately for brands invested in sponsorship properties, we've had the benefit of a bit more planning here and I'm looking forward to seeing how we take the opportunity to adapt...

## **Phase two: business as 'unusual' (heading into)**

While socialising, working, exercising and many other aspects of life have changed for many, it's important to remember that peoples' passions haven't died and audiences still need entertainment and escapism; arguably more than ever.

Sponsors who have cancelled or reduced activity due to live events being cancelled or postponed should realise that just



*Levergy CEO Clint Paterson*

because there's a pause on events, doesn't mean there needs to be a pause in your leveraging programme and how you engage with those same audiences. The key focus for sponsors during this period should become one of adaption. How can rights and or relationships be reinterpreted, reinvented and reimagined to generate a connection with audiences appropriate to this new normality and how do we continue to give audiences joy, relief and memorable experiences despite the challenges we face? Sponsors who have until now been focussing on engaging with 'remote fans' in addition to live audiences will have a distinct advantage and will likely only need to accelerate or expand on existing ideas and solutions that have been in place.

It's also worth noting that new behaviours, lifestyles and passions are also starting to take root, providing new opportunities for sponsors. Ultimately, the speed with which brands adapt and normalise to this will be a big determinant of their success in the short to medium term.

### **Phase three: The re-start (where we hope to be)**

Unfortunately, no one knows how long the ban on mass gatherings will last but it is safe to say that this will eventually pass. It will be a waiting game but the brands who plan from now to celebrate and reward the fan bases for their perseverance and endeavour in a post-Covid-19 world will be the ones that succeed.

People will be making up for lost time and passions will be extremely high on the agenda. Nothing will symbolise the return to 'normality' like the resumption of our passions. That first trip to a stadium, a music concert or your local bar, these will be emotionally charged like never before. When the time comes, the focus for sponsors should be on finding ways to tap into the emotional fervour in a sensitive and appropriate way, celebrating and rewarding fans for their perseverance and endeavour.

In closing, fans will remember the brands who remembered them, and just because events are on hold or cancelled doesn't mean their passion for them has waned. In fact, quite the opposite, this has proven beyond doubt the importance of sport and entertainment in our lives and the power of bringing people together. The opportunity is now.

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Clint Paterson is the co-founder and CEO of Levergy, part of the M&C Saatchi Sport and Entertainment Group

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