



The Sponsorship Effect

How sponsorship builds brands,
shapes behaviour, and drives
business growth

Authored by
Rory Natkiel

Contributors
Charlie Dundas, GSIQ
Sarah Kendall, The Football Association
Rebecca Martin, Sport by Global

Foreword by
Tom Roach

Contents

3	About the Authors
4	Foreword
5	Introduction
6	Executive Summary
8	Methodology
12	Key Findings
24	Lessons for Best Practice
27	Limitations of the Evidence
29	Implications for Future Research
31	From Implications to Action
32	Conclusion



Disclaimer

This report has been prepared by the Sponsorship Effectiveness Forum for research and educational purposes. Case study data was sourced from publicly available and subscription platforms to which the Forum's founding members hold licensed access. Findings are presented in aggregate only. All trademarks, case content, and intellectual property remain the rights of their respective owners.

About the Authors



Rory Natkiel

Chair and Co-Founder
Sponsorship Effectiveness Forum

Rory Natkiel is the founding chair of the Sponsorship Effectiveness Forum. His background spans agency strategy roles at Sid Lee Sport and Iris, where he has worked with global brands on projects combining brand planning, sponsorship, creative strategy and measurement. Rory established SEF to address the lack of consistent evidence in sponsorship, drawing on his experience of applying effectiveness principles to partnership activations for a wide range of sponsors and rights holders.



Sarah Kendall

Head of Commercial Partnerships
The Football Association

Sarah Kendall has held roles on both the agency side, including at Fuse, and the rights-holder side, giving her a broad view of how partnerships are developed and evaluated. At The FA, she works across major brand relationships, delivering long-term brand growth and commercial value for partners. Sarah's perspective reflects the importance of rights holders understanding the effectiveness of their work, sharing data and insights, and collaborating closely with sponsors to evaluate success.



Rebecca Martin

Branded Sport Director
Sport by Global

Before her recent move to lead Sport by Global, Rebecca held senior sponsorship roles at Barclays for many years. She worked across one of the UK's most established sponsorship portfolios, focusing on how partnerships support brand positioning and long-term customer outcomes. Rebecca brings experience across sport and community programmes and a strong interest in how sponsorship contributes to brand preference and commercial performance.



Charlie Dundas

Founder
GSIQ

Charlie Dundas is Managing Director at GSIQ and brings long experience in data and analytics, including time at YouGov Sport. His expertise spans econometrics, forecasting and the practical use of exposure and behavioural data to understand marketing impact. His work focuses on methods that give organisations a more confident understanding of how sponsorship contributes to business outcomes, and how data can be used to support better planning and evaluation.



Foreword

Tom Roach, VP of Brand Strategy, Jellyfish

I've spent most of my career thinking about how brands grow, how advertising works, and how to improve marketing and ad effectiveness. So when Rory first talked to me about his work coding sponsorship case studies, I assumed I'd have a pretty good grasp on the topic. But the more we spoke, the clearer it became that sponsorship is a far more specialist discipline than the industry tends to acknowledge, and far less understood.

Most practitioners still think of sponsorship as a channel. A bolt-on. A badge on a shirt. Another line in a media plan that sits somewhere between cinema and CSR. Or worse, something you do because the Chair plays golf or is a lifelong Chelsea fan. But sponsorship isn't a channel at all. It's a complex ecosystem of rights, assets, activation opportunities and cultural meaning. It can operate at every level of the funnel all at once, from building mental availability to shaping behaviour and driving sales. The reality is that it simply doesn't fit inside the neat boxes most of us were trained to use.

That's partly why sponsorship has struggled to be taken seriously by ad effectiveness people. It doesn't look like a conventional media investment. It's harder to isolate, harder to measure. Historically, it hasn't enjoyed the same body of shared knowledge that advertising has developed through organisations like the IPA and WARC. Try and think of a great sponsorship effectiveness case study. Hard isn't it? In the world of effectiveness, sponsorship has been considered an edge case rather than a central discipline.

But that view is increasingly out of date. In an era of extreme media fragmentation, where the monocultural audiences that TV once delivered are splintered across platforms, formats and devices, sponsorship has an ability very few channels enjoy: it still brings people together around moments they actively care about. It generates salience in places where attention is high and where participation is voluntary. That's a scarce commodity.

And as large language models become the places consumers turn to for guidance on what to buy, what to trust, or what to choose, the signals brands convey through culture will matter more, not less. Sponsorship has long been a driving force behind cultural meaning. In a world where meaning is increasingly queried, indexed and retrieved by machines, it may become an even more important driver of how brands are interpreted.

All of this makes the work of the Sponsorship Effectiveness Forum feel both timely and necessary. There is a clear gap for rigorous, shared, cross-industry research that treats sponsorship with the seriousness it deserves. Rory's analysis of 92 case studies is not just a useful taxonomy of what sponsorship currently does; it's a challenge to the industry to raise its standards. To plan with clearer objectives. To measure with more discipline. To stop relying on engagement or exposure as proxies for impact. To understand sponsorship as a system that can deliver brand, behavioural and commercial effects when designed properly.

This first report won't answer every question, and that's not its purpose. Its value lies in creating a foundation that the industry has lacked for too long. A starting point. A baseline. A reason for rights holders, agencies and brands to come together and build something better.

If sponsorship wants a more central role in modern brand building - and it should - then this is the kind of work that will help get it there.



Introduction

Sponsorship is one of marketing's most widely used disciplines, and enjoys continued growth while many legacy channels decline. Despite this, it lacks the rigour of effectiveness research that has shaped advertising for decades. The Ehrenberg Bass Institute, WARC, System1, Analytic Partners and, of course, Binet & Field for the IPA, have transformed how advertisers understand the balance between brand building and sales activation, the importance of budget and channel planning, and the most effective creative approaches. Sponsorship, by contrast, has often been measured in isolation, through media valuation or engagement metrics that do little to connect it with business results or the broader effectiveness discussion.

The Sponsorship Effectiveness Forum was founded to close that gap. Our aim is to bring sponsorship into the same analytical frame as the rest of marketing, so it can be understood and compared using a shared language of effectiveness.

To achieve this, we have deliberately and strictly coded 92 publicly available sport sponsorship case studies in line with IPA conventions and the frameworks established by Binet & Field. Objectives and outcomes are classified into the same categories used in mainstream effectiveness research: business, brand, sales, and behavioural effects. This allows us to use the same terminology and to position sponsorship within the wider evidence base of marketing effectiveness.

This paper is the first step in that process. It presents the clearest statistical profile yet of sponsorship effectiveness (that we are aware of) while also highlighting the limitations of the current dataset. The sample size is modest compared to IPA studies. We lack spend data, so we cannot yet speak to efficiency or ROI. Some outcomes, such as profit, are almost absent, with only two cases reporting them.

Even with these limits, the findings are striking. They suggest that sponsorship is structurally stronger at brand building, but can also deliver sales, behavioural change, and business outcomes when planned with those goals in mind. They indicate that sponsorship may not always align to established effectiveness principles: we found that campaigns with more objectives, not fewer, tend to be more effective, and mid-range channel mixes underperform compared to focused or fully integrated approaches.

Our ambition is to bridge the gap between the conventional effectiveness debate and the world of sponsorship measurement. By aligning sponsorship with the same frameworks that guide the rest of marketing, we can prove that it is not just a communications tactic, but a business growth platform.



Executive Summary

This first analysis from the Sponsorship Effectiveness Forum codes 92 sponsorship case studies drawn from the IPA, WARC, Effie, APG and ESA award databases. Each case was analysed for its objectives, activation channels and outcomes across business, brand, sales, and behavioural effects. Together, they form the clearest dataset yet on sponsorship effectiveness, and a benchmark for the discipline's future measurement and investment standards.



The analysis reveals that sponsorship is not simply a communications tool but a potential business growth platform when designed and measured with intent. Ten findings define what drives that impact.

10 Key Insights

1

Sponsorship is not a channel, but a platform

Its effectiveness depends on the objectives set and the channels used to activate it. The most successful cases reject the binary of “sponsorship versus advertising,” instead combining sponsorship and media to achieve commercial growth.

2

Sponsorship skews to brand building and behaviour change

Brand effects outnumber sales effects five to one, and behavioural effects outnumber sales three to one, showing sponsorship's natural strength in creating brand equity and participation.

3

Sales and business outcomes are achievable with intent

Among the top-performing “Tier 1” cases, 73% delivered sales results and 54% business effects. Sponsorship can sell when it is planned and measured as a commercial platform, not treated as exposure.

4

More objectives correlate with more impact

The most effective campaigns set more objectives (5.6 vs 4.5) and achieved broader effects. This suggests that unlike advertising, where campaigns with fewer objectives have been found to be more effective, sponsorship may reward wider ambition.



10 Key Insights cont.

5

Integration matters more than channel count

Both strong and weak campaigns used around seven channels, but only Tier 1 translated that into breadth of effect. Effectiveness depends on coherence, not volume.

6

Athlete talent drives sales more than brand

The most effective brand-building cases were less likely to use athlete appearances, while the most effective sales-driving ones were more likely. This suggests athlete use should align tightly with commercial, not reputational, goals.

7

Intermediate metrics are weak indicators of success

Only 4% of Tier 1 campaigns relied on engagement or reach metrics, compared with 24% of weaker cases. Exposure remains the industry's most common but least predictive measure.

8

Channel effects are distinct and intentional selection matters

TV and sponsorship together deliver the most universal impact. PR and social build brand fame, experiential drives behaviour, and athlete or influencer channels most often drive sales. The best cases use this mix deliberately, not by default.

9

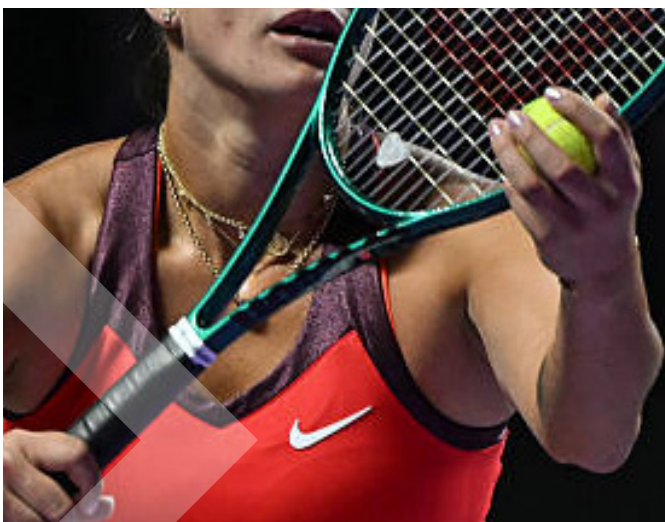
True ROI is rare

Only 21% of cases provided a financial ROI calculation; just 2% quantified the profit generated. Meanwhile the term "ROI" is still widely misused across the sector to mean exposure or engagement, undermining its credibility.

10

The most effective sponsorships sit at the heart of the brand.

In the strongest cases, sponsorship wasn't an activation of the brand, it was the brand campaign. These examples suggest sponsorship's potential to act as the creative platform for brand communication, not a bolt-on.



Taken together, these findings show that sponsorship is neither a soft awareness tactic nor a standalone channel. It is a system of effects capable of building brand equity, changing behaviour and delivering business growth when objectives are commercial, channels are chosen with intent, and measurement is rigorous. This dataset provides the clearest evidence yet that sponsorship, used well, belongs at the strategic centre of modern marketing effectiveness.

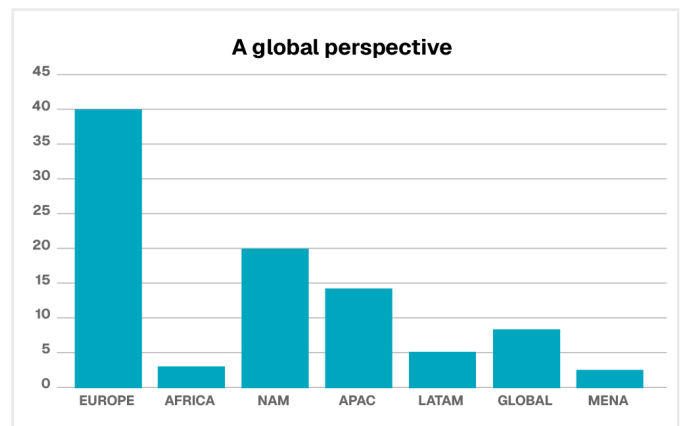


Methodology

The Sponsorship Effectiveness Forum has set out to create the first standardised evidence base for sponsorship effectiveness. To ensure credibility and comparability, all cases in this analysis have been coded in strict alignment with IPA conventions and the frameworks established by Binet & Field.

Case selection

- ◆ The dataset comprises 92 publicly available award entries from the IPA, WARC Effectiveness, Effie, APG Creative Strategy, and ESA awards, in which sport sponsorship was the lead channel.
- ◆ Cases cover a broad range of sectors, rights types, and geographies, though the dataset is not intended to be exhaustive or representative of the entire industry
- ◆ Each case was coded using LLMs, and verified by analysts using a consistent framework.



Coding framework

Objectives and effects were classified into the same categories used in IPA effectiveness studies:

- ◆ **Business effects:** Profit growth, market share growth, penetration, loyalty, price elasticity
- ◆ **Brand effects:** Awareness, fame/salience, preference, brand image
- ◆ **Sales effects:** Sales volume, sales revenue, customer acquisition, customer retention
- ◆ **Behavioural effects:** Behaviour change, consideration, trial, advocacy, participation, downloads, visits.

Where relevant, intermediate outcomes (e.g. social engagement, reach, PR coverage) were noted but not coded as primary effects unless clearly connected to business, brand, sales, or behavioural outcomes. This follows IPA best practice in minimising reliance on “soft” metrics.





Strict inclusion criteria

- ◆ An objective or effect was only coded if it was explicitly stated and supported by evidence in the case study
- ◆ Effects expressed qualitatively were excluded unless accompanied by data (e.g. “awareness increased significantly” was not coded unless a figure or delta was provided)
- ◆ For quantified effects, figures were recorded where available. Where ranges or directional language were used, the effect was coded as present but not quantified
- ◆ “Very large” effects were identified by percentile distribution across the dataset (top third of all reported deltas).

Additional variables

In addition to objectives and effects, each case was coded for:

- ◆ **Campaign duration** (short ≤ 6 months, long > 12 months, per IPA standards)
- ◆ **Number of objectives set**
- ◆ **Number of media channels used**
- ◆ **Channel mix**, with channels grouped into categories (e.g. broadcast, digital, social, experiential, PR, influencer)
- ◆ **Effectiveness Score (ES)**: A derived measure combining breadth of effects with the presence of very large effects.

Consistency checks

- ◆ All coding was conducted against a written protocol, adapted directly from IPA standards
- ◆ Cases were checked twice by separate coders to minimise error
- ◆ Where ambiguity remained, the effect was not coded.

Boundaries of the dataset

- ◆ The dataset does not include rights value meaning ROI and efficiency cannot yet be analysed
- ◆ The majority of cases report outcomes for the sponsor only; rights holder outcomes are not yet captured
- ◆ Effects such as profit are rarely reported (2/92 cases), limiting the ability to generalise about sponsorship's impact on profitability.



Tiering of cases

We identified three Tiers of case studies, which we will refer to throughout

Tier 1 - Upper Tier (first-class effectiveness)

What it is: Robust, causally credible cases that connect sponsorship to commercial outcomes with brand and/or behaviour change, with quantified deltas and solid attribution.

Hallmarks

- ◆ **Breadth:** ≥ 2 effect families hit.
- ◆ **Hard outcomes:** At least one business metric (e.g., sales/ revenue %, market share ppt, penetration ppt, loyalty %, profit, price elasticity)
- ◆ **Deltas, not levels:** Clear pre–post or exposed vs control change; often benchmarked to norms
- ◆ **Attribution:** Econometrics/ROMI or strong quasi-experimental design; clean timeframes
- ◆ Each case was coded using LLMs, and verified by analysts using a consistent framework

To qualify: You can read see numeric change for key KPIs and explain why sponsorship caused it.

Tier 2 - Mid Tier (strong but incomplete)

What it is: Cases with some strong, quantified effects but missing one or more ingredients that prevent full Upper-Tier classification.

Typical profiles

- ◆ **Brand-only** (awareness/consideration/image deltas) without commercial proof, or
- ◆ **Sales/volume** spikes without share/ penetration or attribution, or
- ◆ **Behavioural change** but thin business/brand deltas, or
- ◆ **Breadth is limited** (only 1 family hit) or deltas exist but no control/norms

To upgrade: Add business metrics (share/ penetration/loyalty), pre–post deltas, controls/ benchmarks, or econometric ROMI.



Tier 3 - Lower Tier (activation only)

What it is: Credible activation stories that show outputs but not outcome change.

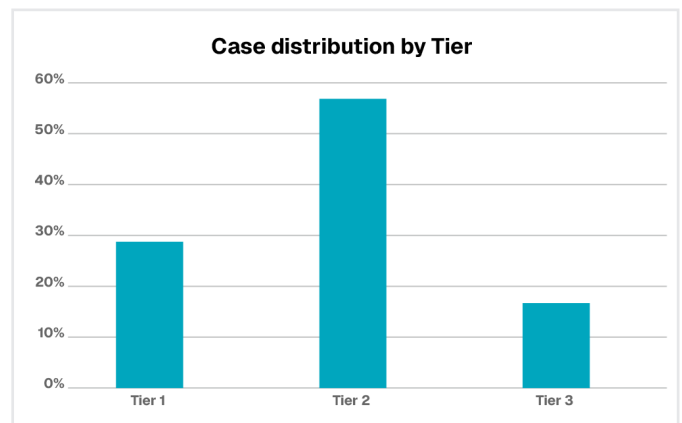
Characteristics

- ◆ **Intermediates inputs dominate:** reach, impressions, views, engagements, social SOV, sentiment levels, media value
- ◆ **No deltas** (or deltas not attributable to sponsorship)
- ◆ **No business metrics** and little/no brand tracking movement
- ◆ **Attribution** weak or absent; time frames unclear.

To upgrade: Convert levels to deltas with baselines/controls; add brand tracking (ppt change) and at least one business KPI; define time-boxed windows; capture ROMI/ econometrics where possible.

Quick diagnostic (rule of thumb)

- ◆ **Tier 1:** Quantified Business/Brand/Sales/ Behaviour effects, in more than 2 effect families, with attribution
- ◆ **Tier 2:** Quantified Business/Brand/Sales/ Behaviour effects but poor attribution/breadth missing
- ◆ **Tier 3:** Inputs/levels only; no business metrics; no codeable deltas.



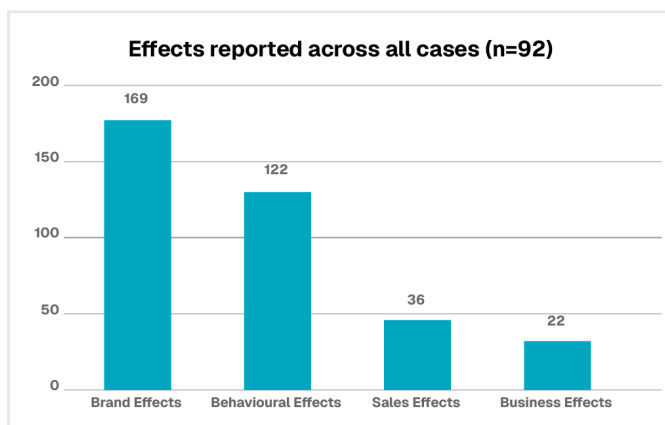


Key Findings

This analysis provides a clear statistical profile of sponsorship effectiveness. While the dataset is modest, consistent coding allows us to identify patterns that challenge assumptions and highlight sponsorship's distinctive strengths.

1. Sponsorship is structurally tilted to brand building

Across the 92 cases analysed, brand effects outnumbered sales effects by five to one, and 56% of campaigns were classified as long-term. These figures show how sponsorship is typically used: as a vehicle for awareness, emotion, and affinity rather than direct response. Yet this is a reflection of practice, not potential.



While sponsorship clearly sits on the “long” side of the effectiveness balance, it is also capable of delivering the “short”. Its combination of cultural reach, fame, and emotional resonance builds the brand equity that later drives sales and profit.

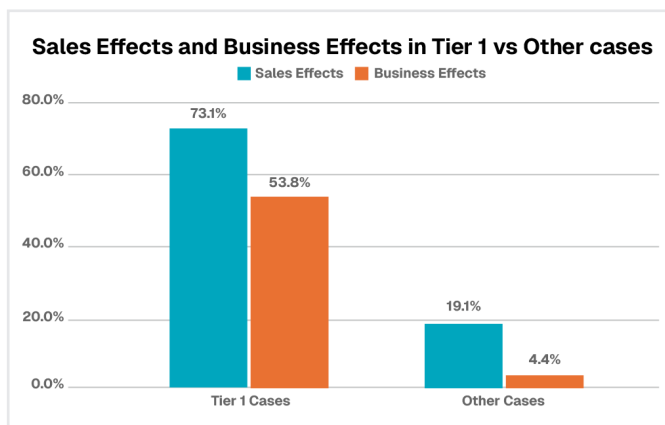
The lesson is to recognise sponsorship's structural advantage toward brand building while designing clear pathways to convert that equity into commercial return.



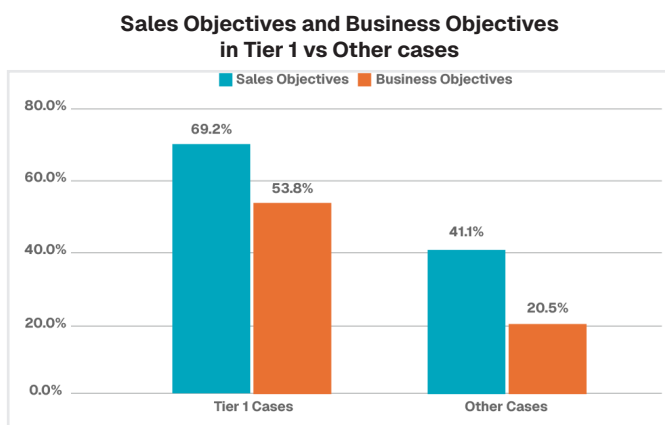


2. Sales and business outcomes are possible

Despite the clear brand-building capabilities of sponsorship, the most effective sponsorships show that sales and business outcomes are possible: 73% of Tier 1 cases delivered sales effects and 54% delivered business effects.



Tier 1 cases were distinguished not only by what they achieved, but by what they set out to do. 69% included sales objectives and 54% business objectives, compared with only 41% and 21% respectively in other tiers. This difference in intent closely mirrors the difference in outcomes.



In other words, the sponsorships that aimed for commercial impact were far more likely to realise it.

This pattern suggests that the questioning of sponsorship's commercial performance in many organisations reflects how it is used, not what it is capable of. When planned as a sales or business lever with clear routes to conversion, retail integration, and defined KPIs, sponsorship behaves like a full-funnel platform. When treated as an exposure exercise, it remains a brand layer.

Only two cases in the entire dataset tracked through to profit, underlining that sponsorship is still some distance from financial accountability. Yet the overall pattern is clear: effectiveness follows design. Sponsorship can create and convert demand, but only if marketers ask it to, build the infrastructure to prove it, and evaluate results beyond awareness or engagement.





Why Integrated Objectives Are the Foundation of Effective Sponsorship

Rory Natkiel, Sponsorship Effectiveness Forum

The most effective sponsorships don't start with measurement, they start with clarity of intent. Our analysis found a strong correlation between setting business objectives and achieving them. When brands plan for commercial outcomes, they deliver them. When they don't, they rarely appear by accident.

That insight exposes a simple but persistent gap in how sponsorship is managed. Too often, objectives sit in isolation. Activation teams often target brand or intermediate effects, while business stakeholders expect commercial growth, but the bridge between them isn't defined. The result is confusion over what success looks like and little chance of proving it.

The strongest cases in our dataset approached sponsorship as a connected system of effects. They set integrated objectives across business, brand, and behavioural levels, recognising that these outcomes are interdependent. Brand strength drives pricing power and demand. Behavioural participation deepens loyalty. Commercial growth follows naturally when each element reinforces the next.

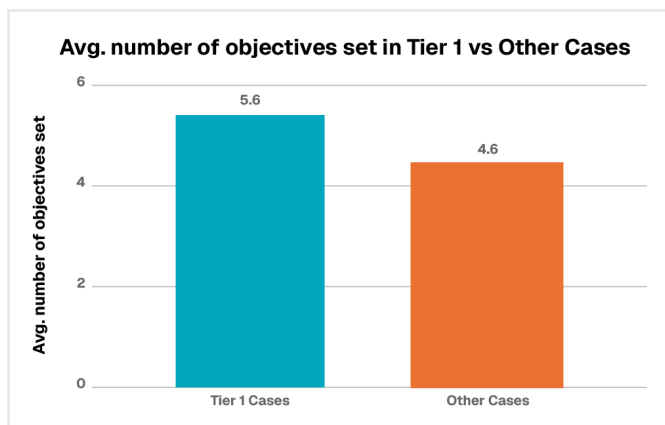
This is the model sponsorship needs to adopt more widely. Integrated objective setting doesn't just improve measurement; it improves effectiveness itself. It forces teams to think about how different outcomes compound over time and how creative and media choices can serve multiple goals simultaneously.

Sponsorship has long been treated as a media channel. It's not - it's a platform where brand and business objectives can and should meet. The data shows that when they do, measurable success follows.



3. More objectives correlate with more impact

Tier campaigns pursued 5.6 objectives on average, compared with 4.5 for other cases (see Figure 3). This contradicts research from the Effie database showing that fewer goals yield stronger results. In sponsorship, breadth may work because of structural complexity: multiple stakeholders, touchpoints, and outcomes. Broader objectives tend to force broader activation – internal engagement, fan participation, partner leverage – which in turn multiplies effect types.

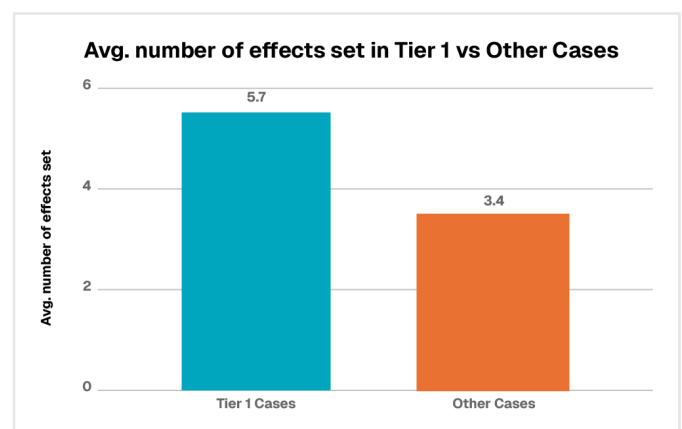


However, the data also warns that quantity without coherence fragments effort. The most effective cases expressed their aims as a hierarchy of objectives, from Business → Brand → Behaviour → Sales, ensuring that every layer reinforced the next. This pattern suggests sponsorship rewards connected ambition rather than single-minded focus. The discipline lies not in narrowing intent but in aligning it.

Sponsors often use sponsorship to chase one narrow target (usually awareness) but the data shows greater impact when objectives are both plural and purposeful. The strongest results arise when sponsorship operates as a shared growth platform across the business, rather than a media silo.

4. Breadth is a hallmark of effectiveness

Tier 1 cases generated 5.8 distinct effects on average, 57% more than the other cases. This breadth is a feature of campaigns large enough, long enough, and integrated enough to move multiple indicators simultaneously: awareness, image, behaviour, and sales.



Breadth, in this sense, is the footprint of scale: when sponsorship operates as an organising brand platform rather than as an isolated activation, multiple metrics shift together.

Such breadth should not be mistaken for busyness. It is not the number of effects that matters but the coherence that produces them. The top cases demonstrate how a unifying idea executed consistently across channels and touchpoints creates systemic impact. Sponsorship is often used to deliver pure reach, but the best activations generate portfolios of change that compound over time.

In other words, when many metrics start to move, they're a signal that a sponsorship has transcended exposure to become an engine of brand and business growth.



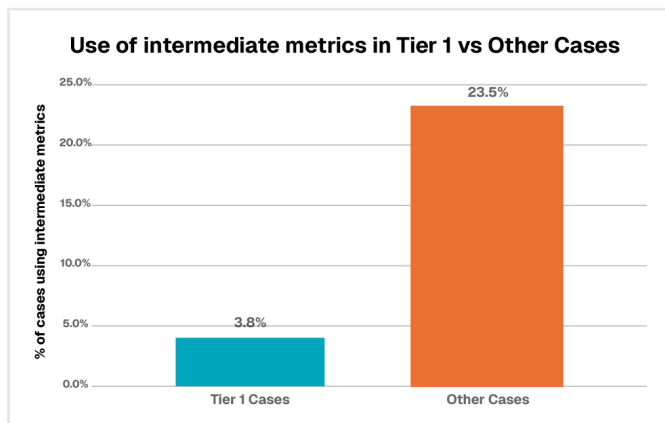
5. Intermediate metrics are a poor guide

Intermediate outcomes such as engagement, impressions or reach appeared as key metrics in 24 percent of weaker cases but in only 4 percent of Tier 1 work. The contrast is stark. Campaigns that judged themselves by exposure or interaction demonstrated substantive commercial results. This suggests that sponsorship is still used too often to chase “vanity metrics” of social engagement rather than meaningful change in consumer behaviour or business performance.

Engagement metrics remain valuable as diagnostics - they show that people noticed or enjoyed the work - but they should never be used as a proxy for impact.

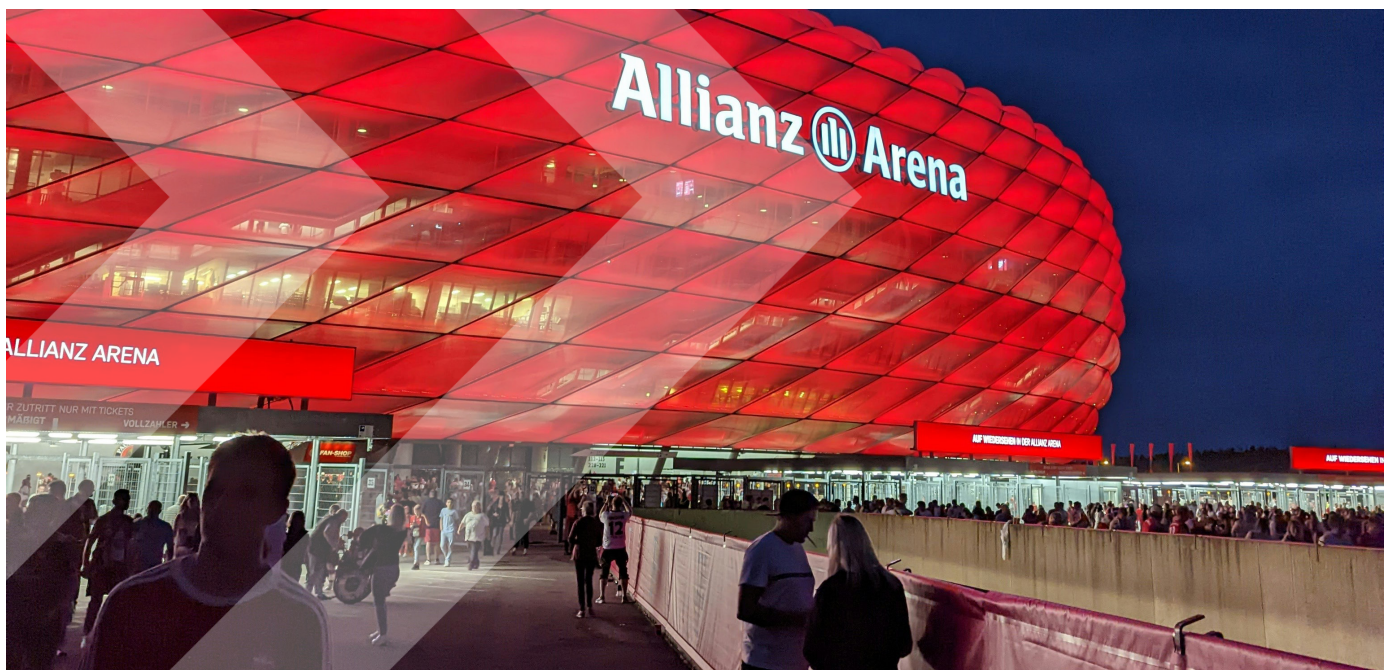
The most effective campaigns elevated their evaluation to brand equity, behavioural shifts, and sales. In doing so, they mirrored the progression seen in advertising effectiveness research: from measuring inputs to proving outcomes.

Sponsors should reorder measurement frameworks so engagement explains success rather than defines it.



% of cases delivering each effect type

Effect Type	Tier 1 (n=26)	Rest (n=68)
Business	53.8%	4.4%
Brand	73.1%	61.8%
Sales	73.1%	19.1%
Behavioural	69.2%	55.9%
Intermediate	3.8%	23.5%





Beyond Intermediate Metrics: Proving Sponsorship's Role in Growth

Rebecca Martin, Sport By Global

For too long, sponsorship has been judged by the wrong scoreboard. Reach, impressions, engagement - these numbers might look reassuring in a post-campaign report, but they rarely convince a CFO. They tell us something happened, not what changed.

If sponsorship is to earn its place at the top table of marketing investment, we have to prove its contribution to business outcomes: profit, market share, price elasticity, loyalty. The data in this report shows this is achievable. The best-performing cases in SEF's study delivered measurable uplifts across exactly those metrics. They weren't accidents. They were campaigns that started with clear commercial objectives, integrated activation through retail or CRM, and tracked results across multiple dimensions.

Intermediate metrics have value as diagnostics. They can help us understand executional performance. But they should never be the final measure of success. The goal should never be to generate engagement; it's to turn that engagement into growth.

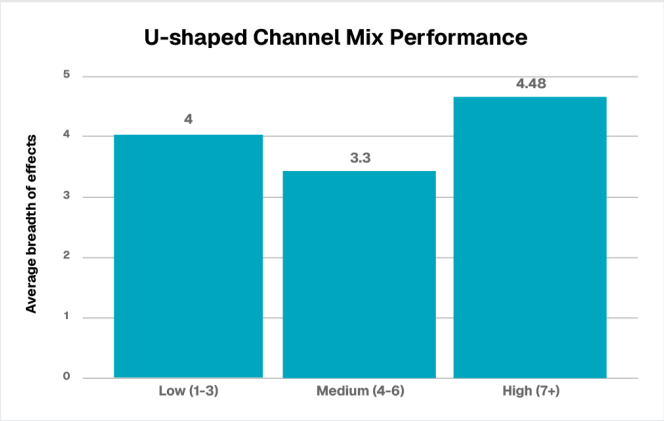
Moving the conversation from "exposure" to "effect" changes behaviour across the board. It forces marketers to plan with the end in mind, encourages creative teams to link ideas to outcomes, and gives finance a reason to keep investing.

The opportunity now is to make this standard practice. If we can consistently prove sponsorship's role in driving profitable growth, it won't just defend budgets, it will expand them.



6. Mid-range channel mixes may underperform

When effectiveness was plotted against channel count, the data followed a U-shaped curve. The highest-performing campaigns employed either very few or very many channels, while those with four to six tended to underdeliver. This is the second divergence from established advertising research: Analytic Partners’ ROI Genome report shows ROI increasing with each channel added to a campaign.



This suggests sponsorship activation may require a different channel planning approach compared to conventional advertising campaigns. Small, focused mixes often signal major brand platforms backed by heavy investment and organisation-wide coordination. The mid-range, by contrast, reflects indecision: enough channels to diffuse effort, too few to achieve ubiquity.

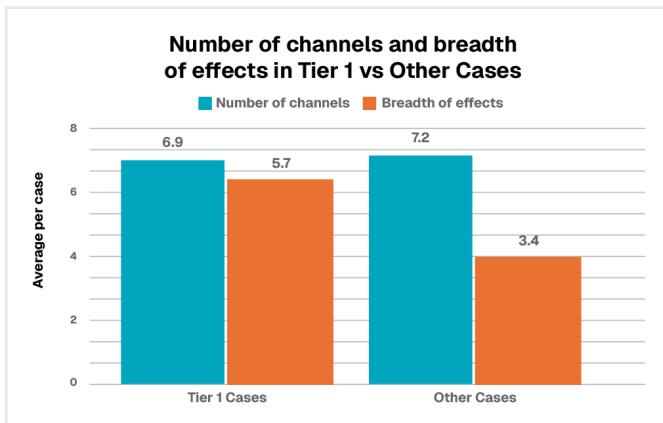
Sponsorship is frequently used as a modest multi-channel extension of advertising, but the data shows its potential may lie at the extremes of depth or orchestration, not dilution.

The strategic implication is to choose deliberately. Either commit to doing a few things brilliantly or build a fully connected ecosystem. The dangerous middle achieve neither.



7. Integration matters more than channel volume

Across the dataset, both high- and low-performing campaigns used an average of seven channels, but the quality of integration separated them. Tier 1 cases aligned every touchpoint around a single brand idea and consistent set of assets, creating coherence across time and media. Less effective campaigns simply coordinated the presence of logos across multiple touchpoints without an organising concept.



Integration in sponsorship functions much like creative commitment in advertising: sustained consistency compounds results. Multi-year activations that build memory structures outperform one-offs that reset annually.

Sponsorship is often activated as a patchwork of executions; however its potential emerges when it acts as one story told in many ways, evolving rather than restarting. Integration is the multiplier that turns exposure into equity. This ensures that every moment of visibility reinforces the same mental associations, allowing sponsorship to behave like the most effective brand campaigns: broad, emotional, and coherent over time.





8. Different channels are suited to different objectives

The evidence shows that sponsorship's impact varies sharply by channel. Television remains the most balanced and universal driver, appearing in nearly every Tier 1 campaign and correlating strongly with both brand and business outcomes (see Figure 8). When sponsorship meaning is amplified through TV's broadcast reach and storytelling scale, effects multiply across every metric.

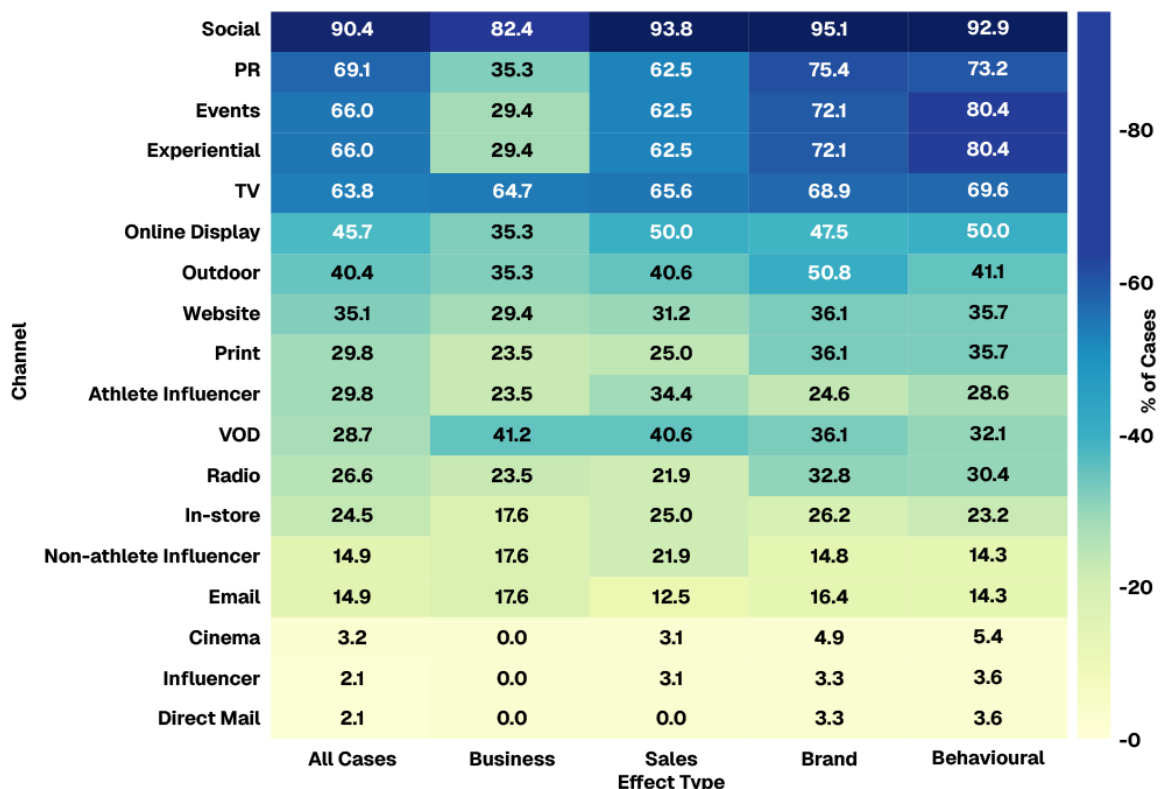
Other channels exhibit clearer specialisation. PR and social media are most effective for brand effects, generating fame, conversation and emotional connection that extend the life of the sponsorship far beyond the venue. Experiential and events are strongest for behavioural outcomes, changing what people do by creating participation and immersion. Athlete and talent-led activations appear most often in

campaigns with sales objectives, indicating that credible human endorsement helps convert affinity into action.

The distinction lies not only in performance but in intentionality. The most effective cases used channels with clear purpose, designed around the effect sought, whereas weaker campaigns defaulted to PR and social. This is because sponsorship is frequently used as a generic exposure platform; its full potential emerges when channels are selected as part of a planned system.

Our findings therefore reframe the choice entirely: the best results come not from the obvious channels, but from choosing the right ones, for the right reasons, in deliberate combination.

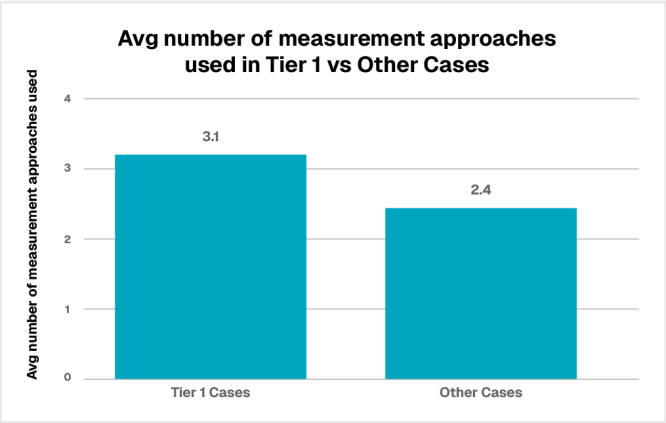
Channel Usage Across All Cases and Effect Types (%)





9. Proving effectiveness requires multiple data sources

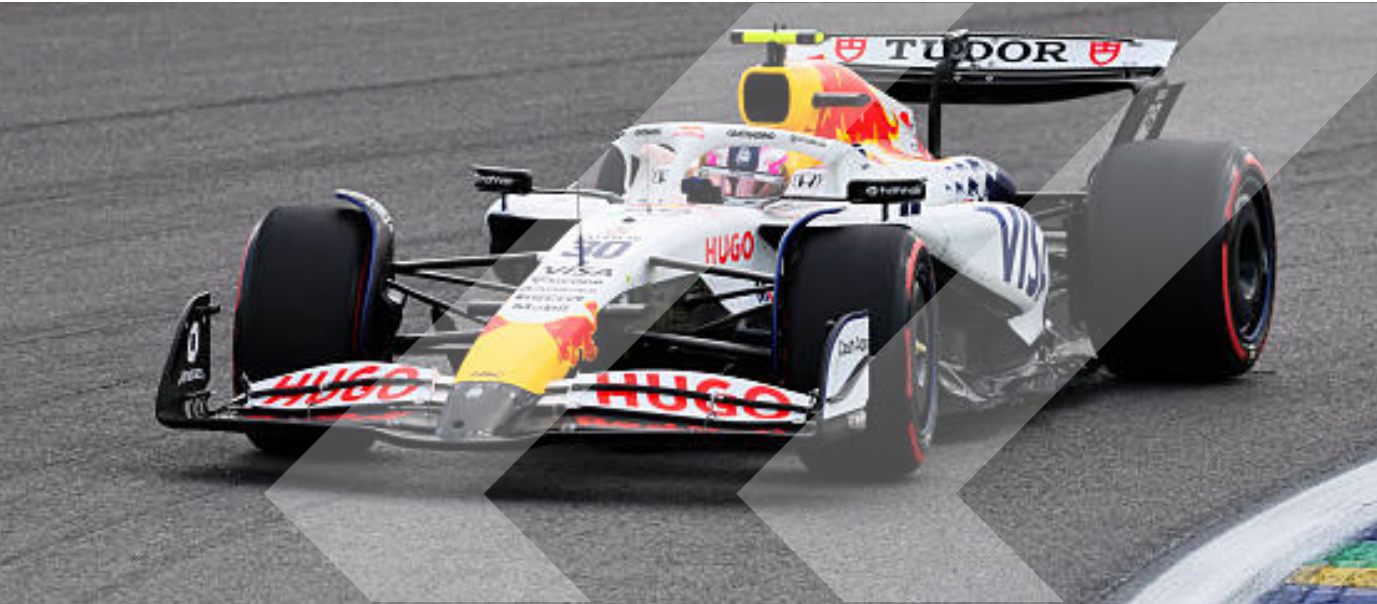
Evaluation sophistication emerged as one of the clearest predictors of success. Tier 1 campaigns used 3.1 measurement approaches on average, compared with 2.4 in other tiers. The strongest cases triangulated across sources, often combining brand tracking, market share data, econometric modelling, and third-party valuation to isolate effects. Weaker cases relied on single data sources, or used several sources but in isolation.



This suggests that sponsorship is often measured too narrowly to reveal its full contribution. Multiple lenses capture both direct and indirect effects, connecting exposure to commercial gain. The lesson mirrors the shift seen in advertising: credibility grows with evidence diversity.

For sponsorship to be recognised as an investment, not a cost, it must demonstrate that its emotional and brand impacts translate into financial outcomes. Triangulation achieves that. A single “ROI dashboard” simplifies at the expense of truth; a balanced evidence portfolio earns belief - and budgets.

% of cases using each measurement approach		
Measurement approach	Tier 1 (%)	Other Cases (%)
Econometrics	11.5	4.4
Market Share	38.5	7.4
Sales Uplift	73.1	27.9
Brand Tracking	88.5	76.5
Self-report (inc social data)	80.8	89.7
Independent Media Valuation	19.2	33.8





Triangulating Data to Unlock Sponsorship's True Impact

Charlie Dundas, GSIQ

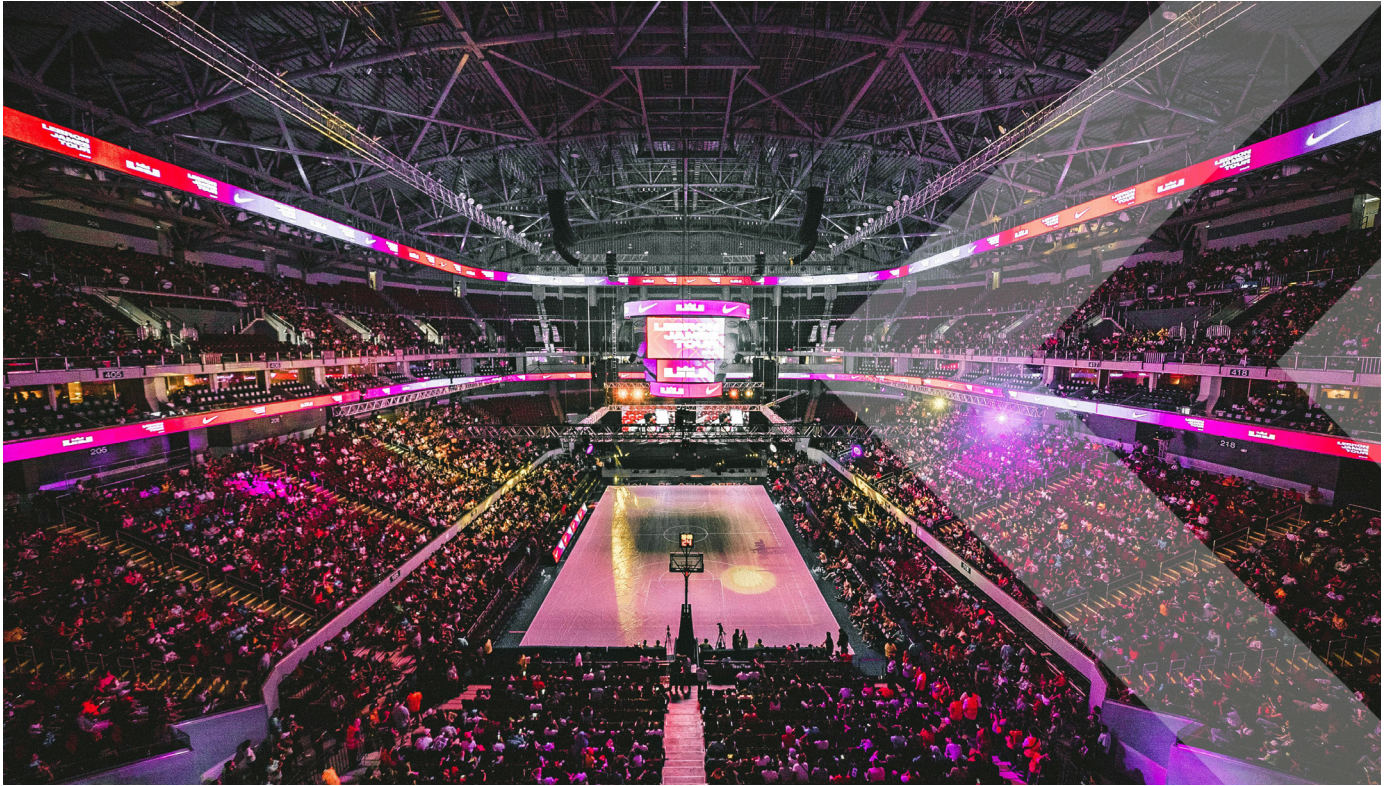
One of the biggest challenges in proving sponsorship effectiveness is that there is no single source of truth. Sponsorship generates so much data - exposure, engagement, perception, sales - that looking at any one dataset in isolation will always produce a partial, sometimes misleading picture.

The way forward is triangulation: combining multiple, independent data sources to build a credible, 360-degree view of impact. That starts with exposure data. It's of course important to understand who actually saw the sponsorship, in what context, and for how long. But on its own, exposure only tells us reach and frequency, and that alone doesn't demonstrate effectiveness.

Exposure data's true power comes when it is paired with brand tracking, which reveals whether that visibility translated into changes in mental availability or preference. If you're able to layer in econometric modelling, you can then quantify sponsorship's contribution to hard commercial outcomes such as sales or market share, alongside other channels in the mix.

Treating sponsorship exposure as a measurable input - just like TV ratings or digital impressions - allows it to enter econometric models cleanly. It's a technical shift with strategic implications: once sponsorship can be compared on equal footing with other media, it becomes easier to isolate its effects, optimise investment, and justify increased investment in future.

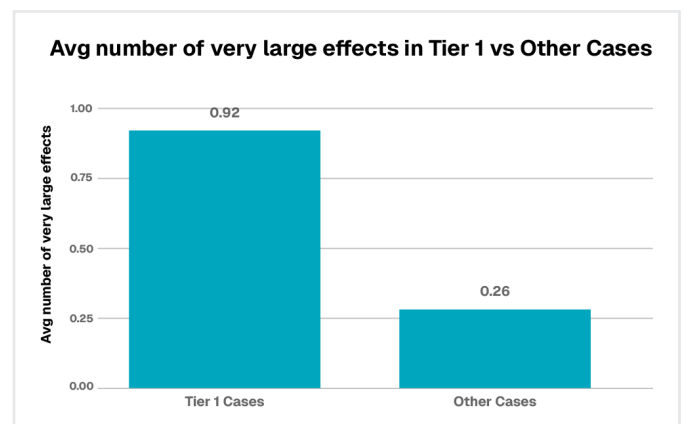
Triangulating data doesn't just validate effectiveness; it also improves future planning. By linking exposure and creative data to commercial outcomes, we can start predicting which activations will deliver the highest return, not just reporting after the fact. Those of us who have worked in sponsorship have always known it's a powerful brand platform, triangulation is how we prove it.



10. Very large effects are rare but possible

Across the 92 cases, Tier 1 campaigns produced 0.9 very large effects on average, compared with 0.3 in other tiers. These step-change results were typically linked to longer duration, stronger integration, and higher creative ambition. Such campaigns treated sponsorship as an enduring brand platform, not a tactical event.

Most sponsorship is used for awareness, keeping the brand visible within a passion territory, but the data shows it can deliver transformation when given time, scale, and courage.



Although only two cases captured profit impact, the pattern across brand, behaviour, and business metrics is unmistakable: big ideas, properly funded and consistently executed, create disproportionate returns. Sponsorship's "big winners" resemble advertising's celebrated cases - emotionally fluent, culturally resonant, and long-term. The implication for marketers is simple but demanding: to unlock sponsorship's full potential, treat it not as an annual spend but as a compound investment in brand and business equity.



Lessons for Best Practice

The Sponsorship Effectiveness Forum exists not simply to collect data, but to convert it into practical guidance for marketers. From the first dataset, ten lessons emerge that together define what effective sponsorship looks like. They show that when planned and measured deliberately, sponsorship can operate as a business growth platform, not merely a media channel.

1. Start with business in mind

In the most effective cases, over half (54%) set business objectives, compared with just 21% in others. Sponsorships that anchor their purpose in commercial outcomes – revenue, penetration, share, or profit – achieve stronger results across the board. Begin with business, and build brand, sales and behavioural goals as the route to it.

2. Don't treat sponsorship as a channel

Every case in the dataset used multiple media to bring rights to life. Effectiveness depended less on exposure than on how those channels were selected, sequenced, and integrated. The most successful sponsorships were not the loudest, but the best orchestrated.

3. Be choiceful in objectives

Sponsorship's natural strengths lie in building brand by shaping behaviour, both of which ultimately create business effects. Sales effects are rarer, but far from impossible. They emerge when the sponsorship is configured deliberately to deliver them: clear sales KPIs, credible endorsers, and connected retail or digital paths to purchase.

4. Be deliberate in channel architecture

The data shows clear patterns by effect type.

- ◆ Brand effects are over-represented in PR, social, outdoor, print, radio, TV, and experiential – broad-reach, fame-building, and emotional channels that create long-term memory
- ◆ Behavioural effects are strongest in events, experiential, and social, where participation and immersion translate ideas into action
- ◆ Sales effects are most associated with influencer, athlete, online display, VOD, and social – channels that drive immediacy and persuasion
- ◆ Business effects show the highest signal from VOD and TV, confirming that broadcast visibility remains essential for top-line growth.

Choose channels for outcomes, not availability. Sponsorship's full power appears when television amplifies its reach, PR and social supply fame, experiential shifts behaviour, and talent converts emotion into sales.



5. Integrate for impact

Channel count alone does not determine effectiveness. Both the best and weakest campaigns used around seven channels; what separated them was integration quality. Results compound when every touchpoint expresses a consistent idea and distinctive brand assets. Integration turns visibility into memory.

6. Invest in amplification

Owning rights is not enough. Without amplification through broadcast, digital, and earned channels, the odds of generating large effects are low. Sponsorship's potential scales with its exposure: the most effective cases treated media as the multiplier, not the afterthought.

7. Measure outputs, not inputs

The most successful campaigns assessed the commercial outputs generated by various inputs (exposure, reach, frequency etc). The sponsorship sector has often conflated these, viewing exposure as an end in itself. This reduces its credibility in the wider media conversation.

8. Triangulate data sources

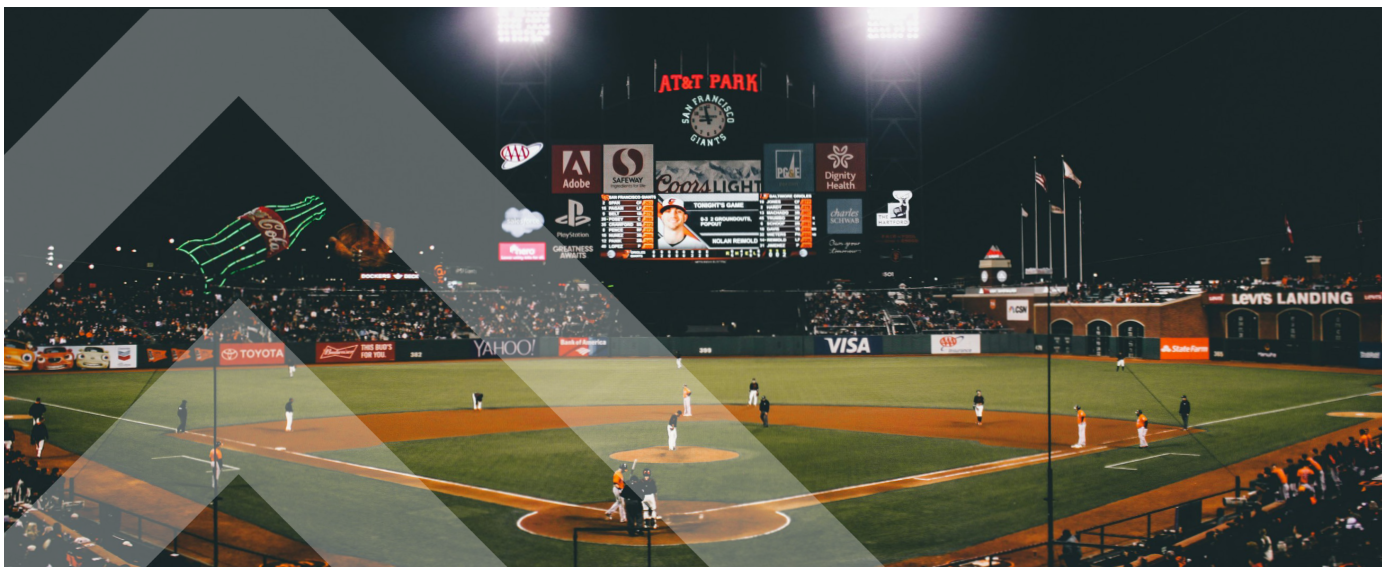
No single tool can reveal the whole story. The most effective cases employed three or more distinct approaches, combining brand tracking, behavioural data, and econometrics. Triangulating data creates a credible chain of evidence that connects sponsorship to business performance. Variety in measurement is a hallmark of maturity.

9. Aim for step-change, not increments

Sponsorship can achieve transformational results. Tier 1 campaigns produced three times more very large effects than others. The lesson is not to moderate ambition but to design for impact: multi-year rights, bold creative ideas, and full-channel amplification. Big effects require big commitment.

10. Treat sponsorship as a growth platform

Across all ten lessons, one principle endures: sponsorship is not a line item in a media plan but a system that builds brand and business in tandem. When objectives are commercial, channels are chosen with intent, and measurement is rigorous, sponsorship becomes a proven growth driver.





Why a Partnership Mindset Unlocks Effectiveness

Sarah Kendall, The Football Association

A major barrier to understanding sponsorship effectiveness is the gap in data sharing between brands and rights holders. Brands often hold back internal performance data, concerned it may be used to justify fee increases in future negotiations. The result is that rights holders lack the evidence needed to understand which assets genuinely drive outcomes or how partnerships should evolve over time.

Moving from a “sponsor and sponsored” relationship to a more collaborative partnership mindset can help overcome this. Agreements built around shared goals and performance-linked mechanisms give both sides more confidence to exchange information and adapt rights packages to what is proven to work.

There is also a broader shift needed in how rights holders think about effectiveness. Becoming more comfortable with the language of objectives, effects and measurement allows rights holders to have more informed conversations about what a sponsor is trying to achieve and how different rights, activations or creative approaches may contribute to that. When both sides understand the outcome being pursued, the partnership becomes easier to shape and optimise.

Data sharing plays a central role in this. When rights holders can see how their assets perform alongside brand tracking, sales data or activation results, they can propose more relevant rights schedules and build packages that reflect where value is genuinely created.

When that is achieved, the dynamic becomes similar to advertising, where the most effective work comes from brands that share data with their agencies. Not because they want to win effectiveness awards, but because it helps produce better outcomes.

The same principle applies in sponsorship. When insight moves in both directions, the work improves, conversations become more grounded, and partners are better equipped to create activity that delivers measurable value for everyone involved.



6. Limitations of the Evidence

This study represents the clearest and most structured dataset yet assembled on sponsorship effectiveness. It provides a solid benchmark from which patterns can be drawn and practice can evolve. But, like all case-based research, it has boundaries that must be understood before the findings are over-interpreted. These limits do not undermine the results, but do suggest frame within which they should be read.

1. Profit effects remain almost absent

Only two of the 92 cases reported profit outcomes, leaving the most important business metric largely invisible. This absence reflects the way cases are written rather than the performance of sponsorship itself. Most submissions report business growth or sales uplift but stop short of calculating profitability. Until more cases trace the link from revenue to profit, sponsorship's true financial contribution cannot be quantified with confidence.

2. Rights fees are missing

Unlike the IPA's advertising databank, this dataset does not record campaign budgets or rights fees. Without that information, we can assess effectiveness but not efficiency i.e. what it delivers per pound spent. ROI, payback, and cost per effect remain out of reach. That gap limits the comparability of sponsorship with other marketing investments.

3. The sample size is still modest

Ninety-two cases are sufficient to reveal patterns but too few to generalise statistically. Compared with the thousands of cases in advertising databases, this evidence base is small. Results should therefore be seen as directional rather than definitive, pending validation across categories, rights types, and markets.





4. The dataset is self-selecting

Most cases were written for award entries or industry publicity, which naturally biases the sample toward success. Underperforming or routine sponsorships are underrepresented, meaning the data likely overstates overall effectiveness levels. This is a universal issue in case-based analysis, but it should temper interpretation.

5. Time horizons are short

Most cases report results over a single season or campaign year. Very few track effects into subsequent years or measure decay rates. This makes it difficult to estimate sponsorship's enduring payback or compounding value - an important omission for understanding the "long" side of its performance curve.

6. The evidence is sponsor-centric

Almost all cases report from the sponsor's perspective. The rights holder's outcomes are rarely captured. As a result, half of the sponsorship equation remains invisible, and the mutual value of partnership is hard to evaluate.



Together, these six limitations define the boundaries of what this analysis can prove. They remind us that this white paper should be read as a foundational benchmark, not a final verdict. Its strength lies in pattern recognition, not precision. The next wave of research should aim to close these gaps by capturing spend levels, profit outcomes, and rights-holder data, building a more balanced and financially accountable picture of sponsorship's true contribution to growth.



7. Implications for Future Research

This white paper provides an initial benchmark for sponsorship effectiveness. But the ambition is larger: to build a body of evidence as robust and influential as the IPA's work on advertising effectiveness. Achieving that requires expanding both the depth and the breadth of data. Six priorities stand out.

1. Capture profit effects

Profit is the missing piece. With only two cases reporting profit outcomes, sponsorship's ultimate business contribution cannot yet be quantified. Future research should work with brands to record profit directly or to model it indirectly through econometric techniques linking revenue, share, and pricing data. Only then can sponsorship prove its return on investment on equal terms with advertising.

2. Link spend to outcomes

The key question of the optimal ratio of rights fee to activation budget remains unanswered. Future research should investigate both rights and activation spend to calculate ROI, cost per effect, and optimal budget allocation. This will enable sponsorship to participate credibly in cross-channel investment planning - the language of the boardroom..

3. Build scale and diversity

A dataset of 92 cases is a powerful start, but it cannot represent the variety of sponsorship practice worldwide. Expanding the sample across sectors, geographies, and rights types is essential to validate which effects generalise and which are context-specific.





4. Measure both sides of the partnership

Sponsorship is unique in having two brands at its core: the sponsor and the rights holder. Current evidence captures only one. Future studies should assess rights-holder outcomes alongside sponsor performance. Understanding value creation for both parties will reveal sponsorship as a mutually reinforcing growth system, not a one-sided exchange.

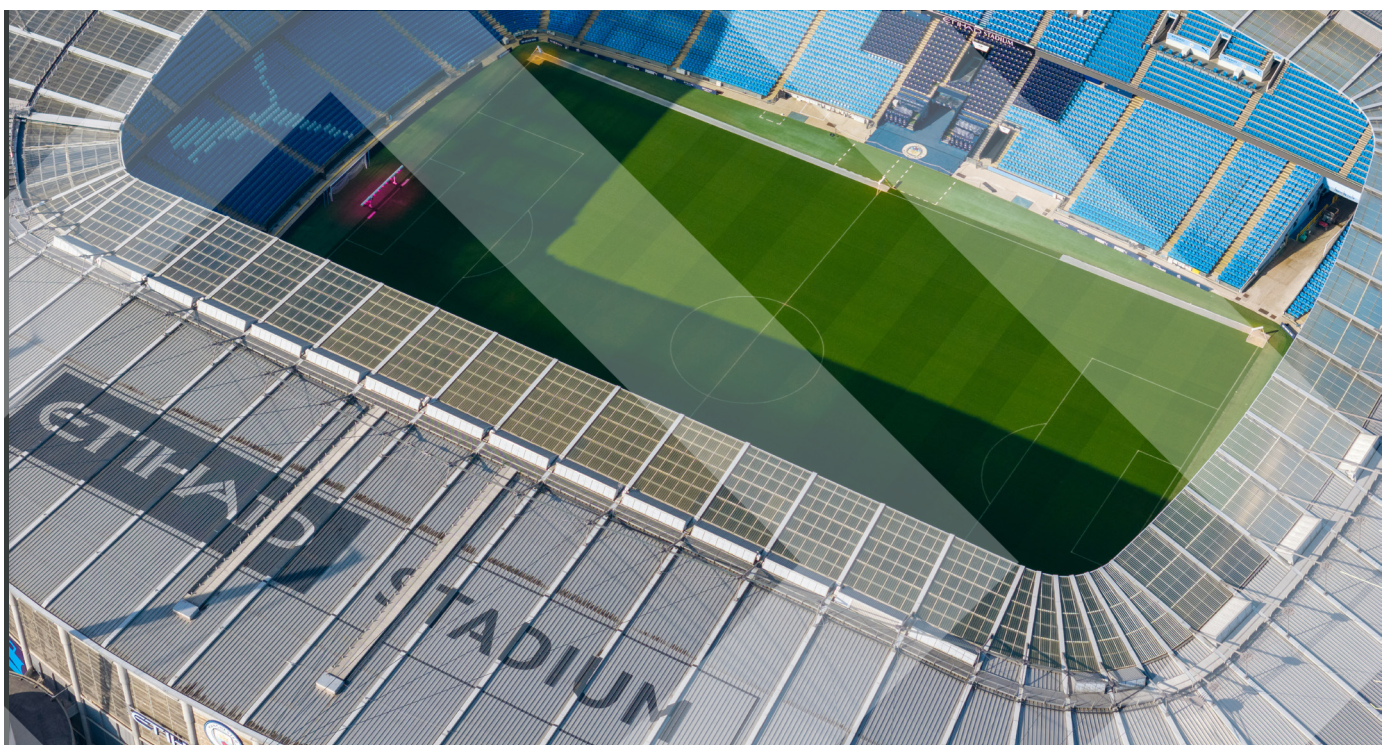
5. Investigate contradictions with existing research

Several findings - notably the positive correlation between the number of objectives and outcomes, and the apparent U-shaped pattern in channel mixes - diverge from established advertising wisdom. These differences may reflect sponsorship's multi-stakeholder complexity or could be artefacts of the small, self-selected sample. Future work should test these anomalies rigorously to determine whether they signal a genuine divergence in how sponsorship operates compared with traditional advertising.

6. Track long-term effects.

Most cases measure impact over a single season or year, leaving the longevity of effects unknown. Longitudinal analysis is required to chart how sponsorship outcomes accumulate, decay, or convert into sustained brand and business growth. This would allow researchers to model sponsorship's full payback curve, understanding not only immediate returns but the compounding value of long-term investment.

These priorities together form the roadmap for the Sponsorship Effectiveness Forum's research agenda. The objective is to move sponsorship evaluation from case-based storytelling to a databank of evidence robust enough to guide strategic investment. This first report provides a foundation; future waves of research will build the proof base that the discipline has long needed: quantifiable, comparable, and credible in the language of business performance.





8. From Implications to Action

The Sponsorship Effectiveness Forum was founded not only to analyse sponsorship, but to transform how it is measured and valued. This first white paper demonstrates what can be learned from a carefully coded dataset. It also shows what is missing: profit effects, spend data, long-term tracking, and rights holder outcomes.

The Sponsorship Effectiveness Awards

To close these gaps, we are launching the Sponsorship Effectiveness Awards. Unlike conventional award schemes, these are designed first and foremost as a data-gathering mechanism. Every entry will be coded to the same IPA-aligned framework used in this report, with important additions:

- ◆ Rights value and activation budget to link investment with outcomes
- ◆ Rights holder effects to capture the full value of partnership
- ◆ Standardised objectives and effects to allow consistent benchmarking
- ◆ Longitudinal tracking where possible, to understand decay and compounding effects.

By combining recognition with rigorous data capture, the Awards will create a Sponsorship Effectiveness Databank that grows year by year in scale and sophistication.

A platform for growth

This databank will allow the industry to:

- ◆ Prove sponsorship's role in driving business outcomes alongside brand and sales
- ◆ Benchmark ROI and efficiency for different categories and rights types
- ◆ Provide evidence-based guidance on planning, channel use, and measurement
- ◆ Demonstrate sponsorship's unique ability to grow both sponsor and rights holder simultaneously.

Call to participate

We invite brands, agencies, and rights holders to enter the Sponsorship Effectiveness Awards. By doing so, you not only showcase great work, but also contribute to the evidence base that will shape the future of the discipline.

Together, we can prove that sponsorship is not just another channel, but a business growth platform.



9. Conclusion

This first white paper marks a turning point. For the first time, sponsorship effectiveness has been analysed using the same frameworks and language that underpin advertising effectiveness. The results are clear: sponsorship is not simply a vehicle for awareness or activation. It is a business growth platform capable of delivering brand, sales, behavioural, and business outcomes when planned with ambition and rigour.

At the same time, the evidence base remains limited. Too few cases report profit effects. No cases link spend to outcomes. Rights holder benefits are largely invisible. This paper should be read not as a final answer, but as a starting benchmark.

The Sponsorship Effectiveness Forum exists to build on that benchmark. Through the Sponsorship Effectiveness Awards, we will grow the industry's first databank of sponsorship effectiveness – one that is consistent, comprehensive, and credible.

We've questioned the assumption that sponsorship can't be compared with advertising and other disciplines in the effectiveness debate. The challenge now is to prove it.

Contact

www.sponsorshipeffect.org

info@sponsorshipeffect.org

[linkedin.com/company/sponsorship-effectiveness-forum/](https://www.linkedin.com/company/sponsorship-effectiveness-forum/)

