

LIKE BEES TO HONEY



In the months leading up to the Cricket World Cup in the Caribbean the West Indian public was introduced to a concept strange to us known as “ambush marketing”.

For many of us me included, the only previous familiarity with the word “ambush”, was in the context of a John Wayne western movie or the like.

Simply put ambush marketing is an attempt by people, who have not paid for the privilege, to associate themselves with an event and in the process enjoy the benefit of the goodwill of the event for free.

It was necessary to sensitize people in the West Indies to the concept because it relates directly to the way in which mega events like the Cricket World Cup are structured and financed. Events of that sort are impossible without huge financial commitments on the part of sponsors and it is therefore necessary for countries hosting events to provide certain types and levels of protection to those sponsors who supported us. As the host that was our obligation.

The Olympic Games probably represents the most heavily sponsored and watched event ever and those watching or following the games will see logos and advertisements from the twelve worldwide Olympic partners who are reported to have paid something like One Hundred Million Dollar US (US\$100M) for their rights. This explains why you will only see names like McDonalds, Kodak, Coca Cola, Visa, General Electric and Johnson & Johnson in the official coverage of the Olympics.

The ambushes come in subtle and not so subtle forms as advertisers are drawn to the occasion like bees are drawn to honey. Advertisements which claim Olympic this or Olympic that are designed to create the impression of an association with the Olympic Games and to trade off the goodwill. We all see them but we may not think about them as ambushes.

One of the beer sponsors of the Olympic Games is Budweiser. A well known competing brand which is not one of the official beer sponsors has managed to set up “a beer world” some five hundred meters away from Budweiser’s beer tent. The intention is fairly obvious.

In most countries the matter of ambush marketing is controlled only by legislation and usually the kind of “sunset legislation” which was passed in the Caribbean for the purposes of the Cricket World Cup. It is interesting to note therefore that the whole issue of ambush marketing is a worldwide phenomenon and we simply got an earlier taste of it than the people who are the wannabess of the Olympic Games.

It is only fair to put the other side of the coin. There are few if any countries in the world where ambush marketing is controlled other than by legislation. The United Kingdom has already passed the legislation it will use to manage the Olympics when they are held there in 2012. South Africa passed legislation for the 2003 Cricket World Cup and of course the countries of the West Indies did so for the 2007 Cricket World Cup.

So here is a question to ask on the other side – if there is no legislation which makes it illegal, why should a business not seek to trade on the goodwill? One might frown at the practice but if it is not illegal, it is not illegal. I suppose each to his own way of doing things.

I will share with you a famous method of seeking to convey the impression that someone is associated with an event or a person and thus derive benefits from the association. Look out for the advertisements congratulating our athletes which are sure to appear in the days and weeks to come. You will need to judge for yourself whether the object of the laudatory expressions are for the good of the athletes or the advertisers. Also it may be interesting to see which of them actually deserve to be associated with the athletes because of actual support given over the years, or whether they are just jumping on the first band wagon which was passing.

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