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Agony Rant

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A great opportunity, but a risk

Nikolaus Eberl

AT THE recent 2010 Opportunities Conference held at Emperors Palace in Johannesburg, Fifa marketing



E-Mail article



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communications officer Alexander Koch made it clear that a large percentage of the business opportunities for 2010 will arise from and revolve around the so-called fan festivals.

At last year's World Cup in Germany, the introduction of fan festivals was necessitated by simple arithmetic: out of 2,9-million tickets, less than 24% had been allocated to German fans – in other words, fewer than 700000. Contrast this with 45- million Germans with an interest in watching World Cup soccer, and you quickly understand the German Local Organising Committee (LOC) was hard pressed to reinvent the viewing experience of the World Cup.

Hosting fan festivals was an innovation created four years earlier at the South Korea/Japan World Cup. However obvious this appears in hindsight, at the time the LOC's proposal encountered scepticism and doubt from many stakeholders, including Fifa.

At an average € 2000-€ 3000 per square metre of video screen per week, the financial risk appeared overbearing for many, considering bigger cities such as Berlin would need up to 14 screens to fill up a single fan mile (that is, a strip stretching 1,4km).

There were concerns: heavy rainfalls just days before the opening game led to worries that rain might not only drive spectators away but also ruin the expensive giant screens .

In the end, more than 2000 public viewing events ensured that, in addition to the 2,9-million ticket holders, more than 21- million visitors could experience the games in public, extending the reach of the event and creating a new culture of public viewing. The tremendous success of the fan festivals (which took everybody involved by surprise) created a new culture of experiencing the games – peacefully, celebratory, in a conciliatory manner where even the losers would join the winning side in unseen jubilations.

Franz Beckenbauer summed it up aptly: "Watching the fans celebrate jointly at the fan miles ... this is how the dear Lord wanted the world to be."

Ironically, the huge success of the fan festival concept has created a host of new competitors for 2010: no longer do fan festival venues require the physical games to be held within the borders of their city or country.

Germany has changed the rules of the game in that the third dimension of experiencing soccer — besides the stadiums and on TV – has enhanced the experience, by replacing the elements of altercation and aggression many times found inside the stadiums with the emotions of joyous celebration and peaceful jubilation.

Whereas previously the hosting nation held the keys to attracting World Cup visitors exclusively, now any destination can host fan festivals .

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Since fan festivals typically run throughout the day (and late into the evening), the entertainment aspects are much different from providing 90 minutes of soccer only. Already Switzerland and Austria are working on surpassing the German benchmarks at the Euro 2008 tournament, and S A's venues will have to reinvent the fan festival experience to draw visitors to our shores.

In other words, the fan festivals have become both the greatest opportunity and threat for South African destinations in 2010. No longer do we have a monopoly on visitors by virtue of hosting the World Cup. The rules have changed for good and new competitors are staking their claim on the millions of fans that want to experience the game on the big screen .

The good news is that fan festivals provide a unique form of destination branding: no longer are spectators and TV viewers restricted to views from inside the stadiums which show little more than crowds and advertising billboards, with minimal exposure to the hosting city.

This is a unique opportunity for the hosting destination to choose venues close to tourist attractions (such as the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin).

The implications for SA 2010, and Africa for that matter, are clear: it is no longer enough to entertain visitors with soccer alone.

The fan festival phenomenon is calling for a unique branding of the soccer experience through other dimensions of entertainment such as music, arts and culture – and the natural beauty of the South African landscape.

The backdrop of the majestic Drakensberg or the vineyards along the Garden Route, the beaches of KwaZulu-Natal and the rolling hills of Eastern Cape provide unique touch points that have the potential for turning visiting fans into raving supporters of Brand SA. -

Dr Eberl is the author of Brand-Ovation: How Germany won the World Cup of Internal Branding.

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