

SELLING

Head Of The Charles Expands Inventory To Land New Sponsors

After four years of operating in the red, the Head of the Charles Regatta has turned its ship around with the help of some creative selling that has increased sponsorship revenue 25 percent in the past year.

The "world's largest two-day rowing event" has signed several new partners in '05, including Audi of America, Inc.; Virgin Atlantic Airways Ltd.; and the U.S. Navy (*IEG SR*, July 18, 2005). The property relies on sponsorship revenue and entry fees to fund its operating expenses.

The upswing comes after three years in which the property faced a difficult selling environment as the result of the 9/11 terrorist attacks and a recessionary economy. The event lost Charles Schwab & Co. as its presenting sponsor in '02, a slot that has yet to be filled.

To make matters worse, the acquisition of several Boston companies has shrunk the number of hometown prospects, said Frederick Schoch, HOCR president and executive director.

Championship seasons for the NFL New England Patriots and MLB Boston Red Sox have not made selling regatta sponsorship any easier, Schoch noted. "Boston is a pro sports town. Every time we knock on someone's door the Red Sox, Patriots and (NBA) Celtics have already been there."

Schoch attributes this year's sponsorship success to the property's new sales strategy that puts more focus on customizing packages and creating new inventory to sell against.

Events Within Event Give Sponsors What They Need

HOCR has added supplemental activities to this weekend's traditional schedule of rowing races to attract a larger audience and deliver targeted, proprietary platforms to its corporate partners.

For example, the property has created a 450-meter sprint race for Virgin Atlantic that will take place on Friday. The event, dubbed Row Jet Set Row, plays off of Virgin's Go Jet Set Go marketing campaign and pits two British rowing crews against two U.S. crews.

Virgin took the tie to promote its Boston-to-London service and play up its support of rowing in the U.K., Schoch said.

Last year, HOCR created the Row-A-Palooza concert series as a way to draw college students to the event who were not interested in rowing.

Row-A-Palooza has helped the regatta secure incremental sponsorship revenue: Existing partner VF Corp., which sponsors the regatta on behalf of its Nautica sports-wear and watches, signed presenting status of Row-A-Palooza on behalf of Nautica Jeans Co., a brand that targets a slightly younger demographic than its siblings.

In addition, the U.S. Navy aligned with Row-A-Palooza this year as a platform to recruit candidates for officer training, Schoch said. Returning HOCR sponsor Dunkin' Brands, Inc. will sample new Dunkin' Donuts coffee drinks at the concert events this year.

Satellite Event Meets Audi's Desire For Expanded Impact

Knowing that some potential partners may be more interested in deals that provide broader reach than a two-day event, Schoch prepared to use HOCR's rowing industry knowledge and contacts to help sponsors build a larger presence with the sport.

That strategy helped secure Audi, once Schoch learned of the company's interest in having a bigger footprint. Based on his

WHO

Head of the Charles Regatta

TAKEAWAY

New on-site activities and offer to produce satellite events for sponsors earns property 25 percent revenue increase.

discussions with the company and its representatives about their objectives, Schoch developed a proprietary event for the automaker in the San Francisco Bay Area.

The day-long Audi "Never Follow" Rowing Event was held at the Marin Rowing Assn. and featured testing of rowing equipment and motivational speeches by Steve Gladstone, head rowing coach at the University of California, Berkeley, and Alison Cox, an '04 Olympic silver medalist.

Audi sent invitations to Bay Area contacts in its database, as well as promoted the event in local dealerships. At the event, which attracted 200 people, it ran a sweeps dangling a pair of custom oars and displayed several vehicles, including its new A3.

"We always look for ways to leverage an event throughout the year, and this gave us a chance to establish a dialogue with our target audience beyond the two-day Head of the Charles," said Chuck Tedrick, regional event manager with MVP Collaborative, Audi's event marketing agency. Audi may work with HOCR to expand the program to more markets next year, he said.

Audi will use this weekend's HOCR to display vehicles—including its new Q7 SUV—and entertain customers and prospects. It also will provide vehicles for officials and event staff.

Schoch is trying out another new sales tool at this year's event: whetting the interest of prospects through hospitality programs.

For example, the regatta this year sold a hospitality package to MetLife, Inc. with the intention of upselling the insurer to a larger deal next year. "We're using hospitality to introduce them to the concept of sponsorship," Schoch said.

Other new HOCR sponsors this year include Motorola, Inc. and boating supply retailer West Marine, Inc.

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