

Grading the Games: The final business report card for London 2012

In his comprehensive review of the Olympic and Paralympic Games, former International Olympic Committee marketing director Michael Payne, writing exclusively for *SportsPro*, dissects London 2012 and rates the sponsors and strategies that shaped it.

By Michael Payne

London 2012 closed to universal acclaim, hailed by many commentators as the greatest summer Olympic Games ever. Such is the acclaim that it is easy to forget that the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and the London organising committee faced a hugely challenging seven-year ride to the opening ceremony. They had to generate the necessary funds during one of the sharpest ever global economic downturns. There was talk of the 'austerity Games', concerns over the logistical challenges of transport and security, as well as worries about public indifference. At times, the outlook was decidedly gloomy.

But it all came together on the night – as it so often does with the Olympics. Doomsday scenarios did not materialise, public support exceeded anything imaginable and the broadcasters and sponsors delivered – financially and operationally – and in most cases got their returns.

So now, as the dust begins to settle, it is time to take a hard look at how the Games performed from a business standpoint. What new initiatives did Locog introduce that will become the model for future organisers? How did Locog work to enhance the Olympic brand and add their British, at times quirky, style into the marketing mix? With London established as one of the marketing and creative capitals of the

world, how did the sponsors perform – what new thinking and creativity did they bring to the Olympic party? What worked and where, if at all, did it go wrong?

What follows is a personal, school-styled report card on the business agenda of the London Olympics. It is written from the perspective of someone who has attended and been intimately involved with 16 Olympic Games (summer and winter) and oversaw the major long-term broadcast negotiations (US and Europe) and most of the Olympic partnership deals for 2012, before standing down as IOC marketing/broadcast director following the 2004 Athens Games.

Where criticism is levied it is done not to rain on London's parade, because they performed superbly, but to offer guidance and insight to future OCOGs, host cities and partners as to how to perform even better. Just like the athletes, it is the responsibility of each Games, and each partner, to challenge themselves to go even further.

The Games

London was the eighth summer Olympic Games I have been fortunate enough to attend and – prejudices notwithstanding, having been born and bought up in London – these were the greatest Olympic Games yet.

Operationally they worked as well as any Games – especially when you consider the Games took place in one of the world's busiest capitals. The sport was brilliant, brought to new heights by an electric crowd atmosphere set against majestic venues. The city was dressed to look Olympic, the broadcast images delivered global record TV audiences, and Sebastian Coe and his team delivered on his original promise to the IOC to inspire a new generation.

The true legacy of the Games may not be fully understood for some years to come. The benefit cannot be calculated over two weeks, as some economists would try and have us believe, but over a decade or more. The venues have been sensibly built with real legacy in mind; the depressed east end of London has been transformed; a new image of Brand Britain has been presented to the world, with the tourist industry set to reap the rewards; and perhaps the biggest benefit of all, a transformation of the national psyche and mood. Since the opening ceremony, the British media has been filled with discussions of what it means to be British and how the Olympics has made the most cynical into optimists with nationalistic pride filling their chests. Suddenly, Britain feels a confident place – and the British are the most surprised of all.

Score: "Greatest Games ever! Few commentators would disagree." 10/10 ▶



Michael Payne

Michael Payne was the International Olympic Committee's first broadcast/marketing director, running the commercial operations of the Olympic movement for nearly 20 years. Before stepping down from the IOC in 2004, he negotiated the long-term main agreements that would fund the 2012 Games, from the NBC and EBU broadcast agreements through to most of the TOP partner renewals.

Payne went on to play a key advisory role in helping Sebastian Coe design the winning bid strategy for London, and subsequently went on to advise on various partner negotiations, including as chairman of Crystal Digital International, the creators of

the 'Olympixel' project for the Olympic ceremonies which turned the 70,000 audience at the Olympic Stadium into a mammoth video screen.

Payne has maintained a close relationship with the Olympic movement, advising on Rio 2016's successful Olympic bid, and the launch of its marketing plan and first major partner agreement, with Bradesco, and broadcast agreement for TV Globo.

Few people know the business side of the Olympic movement better than Michael Payne. His book – *Olympic Turnaround* – detailing the Olympic movement's evolution from bankruptcy to the world's best-known brand, has become a bestseller, with more than one million copies sold across 14 languages.



Payne continues to advise a number of leading corporate and media organisations, including Bernie Ecclestone and the management board of Formula One, Sir Martin Sorrell and WPP, and as an adviser and member of various international corporate boards in China and Brazil.

The Business

Overall Locog delivered, and even exceeded its original financial targets – which, set against the very challenging economic climate the world faced these past few years, is no mean feat. Only one partner – Nortel – had to withdraw, due to bankruptcy, although at the time there was a very real concern that other partners might follow, such as the fragile state of the economy.

Based on all key criteria – the global TV audience, the number of spectators, sponsor programme execution, ambush control and brand presentation – London must be seen as a phenomenal success. It is a tough act for Rio 2016 to follow. Partners are still evaluating the returns from their investment, but most initial results would indicate that the Olympic partnership more than delivered.

Score: “Successful delivery – new benchmark according to virtually any criteria.” 9/10

Broadcasting

The Olympics continues to set the gold standard in broadcast images. In London the IOC’s broadcast company Olympic Broadcasting Services (OBS) once again offered various new camera and presentation innovations from Ultra HD to the development of its Olympic News Channel. OBS were unfairly blamed for a couple of early glitches. These included the transmission of data during the road cycling. This was not actually OBS’s fault. Data provider Omega relied on mobile rather than cable transmission, and sketchy network coverage was drowned out by the crowd tweeting and sending home pictures. And no, I am not sure the IOC or Locog ever did try to tell spectators to stop tweeting!

London set new records with global broadcast audiences – bucking the trend of generally declining audiences with an estimated global audience of 4.5 billion. In Britain, on the BBC, nearly 95 per cent of the population, some 52



The use of new broadcast technology from Olympic Broadcasting Services helped deliver record global audiences at London 2012 across a broader range of media platforms than ever before

million people, tuned in at some point – prompting some commentators to muse on what the other 5 per cent were even doing. For the BBC, the Games was the most successful broadcast in its history, with peak audiences of 28 million beating royal weddings, World Cups and the like.

The Olympics also provided an insight into the future of digital broadcasting with more than 9.5 million people turning each day to the BBC’s online service. The BBC is talking of London 2012 doing for digital broadcasting what the Queen’s Coronation in 1953 did for television. Elsewhere, NBC will have breathed a major sigh of relief to see their ratings hold up, and even exceed their own and their advertisers’ wildest expectations, with the highest Olympic Games ratings since the home Games in Atlanta in 1996, and for a non-US Games since Montreal in 1976.

With NBC’s expanded coverage – nearly 5,000 hours across all platforms – London 2012 became the most watched Olympics ever with 219 million viewers, 12 per cent up on Beijing, and a whopping 26 per cent over Athens. All very impressive.

The Twittersphere brought a new dimension to the ‘live broadcast’ debate. There was criticism of NBC’s decision to delay broadcast of some events to their evening prime time show. Jokes abounded, with one notable news flash – ‘NBC has finally broadcast Jessie Owens’s 1936 Berlin 100 metre race...’ But the ratings and business model say it all – record ratings and an unexpected break-even on NBC’s \$2 billion rights fee. NBC found that most social media, rather than undermining prime time ratings, was helping to drive its record audience levels.

The only real surprising dark spot on the audience ratings was Brazil, the next host country, where the IOC should be reviewing the wisdom of granting the rights to an untested second-tier broadcaster, Record. Media giant Globo was dropped for the sake of a few extra million dollars. Audience numbers for Record crashed, falling over 50 per cent from Beijing, with its unfavourable time zone, and even further when compared to the similar time zone of Athens. The Olympics just did not get the traction that they normally do in sports-loving Brazil. Fortunately Globo has won the rights back for Rio 2016, but unnecessary damage has been done to the Rio Games build-up.

Score for broadcast production: 10/10
Score for global audience levels: “The real bellwether test to health of Olympic Movement.” 9/10

The Partnership Programme

The structure of Locog’s local marketing programme followed the tried and tested model developed by previous OCOGs – but maybe at times it followed the model too closely. There was little fresh thinking on marketing rights development for partners – no packaging of local media assets, or engaging with partners to truly expand the Olympic experiential agenda outside of the immediate Games window. A bigger marketing picture view, integrated into the original launch of the programme, could have driven even stronger financial

returns. The total UK£700 million generated is strong, but you only have to look at what Sochi 2014 and now Rio 2016 are achieving with their partner programmes to fully understand the true potential of the Olympic brand. Rio has generated close to US\$1 billion with just its first three partners.

The overall mindset of the Locog partner programme was one of deal-making, under a tight legal framework. While the process for selecting partners and negotiating deals was excellent, the subsequent servicing of partners lacked the vision to support the partners to fully realise the true potential of the Olympic brand and related marketing assets. On technical matters Locog always scored well – the complicated process of partner ticket and hospitality asset allocation was without doubt the smoothest yet, and all partners were suitably appreciative, especially TOP partners with their long history of Games activation.

But when it came to unlocking the magic, encouraging and supporting sponsors to stretch, Locog often came up short and drowned in complicated, unnecessary and overly bureaucratic approval processes. All too often Locog was more focused on trying to squeeze the last possible pound out of their partners, by selling ad hoc assets or blocking potential initiatives in the social media space, than working in true partnership to unleash the marketing power of the partner brands.

Score: “Successful, but should have pushed the thinking and partnership mindset further.” 7/10

Ambush Marketing

With the level of advertising and creative expertise in London, the fear was that Games were at risk of becoming an ambush marketer’s field day, with sponsors’ exclusive rights being undermined by a barrage of unauthorised Olympic advertising. Equally there was the risk that the streets of London would follow the same disastrous path as Atlanta in 1996, destroying the broader

image of the city.

Yet the ambush invasion did not materialise. There were very few cases of any real attempt to undermine Olympic rights

Locog, though, did not do themselves any favours by taking an overly zealous attitude to control of Olympic marks. After the UK government was persuaded (or obliged, depending on your point of view) to pass some of the most stringent Olympic ambush protection ever seen, Locog should then have taken a balanced approach to its application – focusing on genuine attempts by major brands to ambush the Games. Instead, shopkeepers trying to show their support for the Olympics were threatened with legal action, whether it was florists with their Olympic flower displays or local bakers and their creative interpretation of the Olympic rings. It was a guaranteed way to put the public off – and lose the battle in the bigger, critical debate of protecting brands. Locog were not doing the sponsors any favours, as the media were quick to hold the sponsors responsible for this heavy-handed approach. In Locog’s defence, by Games-time it was the UK Trading Standards officers around the country issuing their trademark infringement tickets rather than Locog driving the agenda. Too many lawyers were allowed to get control – and reason and logic were at times lost. On this front Locog scored an unnecessary own goal and gave the cartoonists a field day.

The only time the IOC’s clean venue policy was ever really challenged was the athletes’ use of the latest and very expensive must-have youth accessory – a set of Dr Dre music headphones – which became ever more popular once athletes learnt that they were being issued free to select Olympians. The IOC wisely ducked and weaved the media on the issue and avoided escalating the issue to the front pages and an unnecessary confrontation with Mr. Phelps and others.

Overall sponsor rights were protected, the IOC’s clean venue policy was as rigidly enforced as any previous games (Dr Dre excepted) and the streets of London were allowed to shine through unencumbered by aggressive advertising campaigns. Indeed, travelling around London the big message around the

city was about the Olympics themselves rather than ads from sponsors.

Nevertheless the IOC must tread carefully on its clean venue policy, as there is the perception of growing product placement and logo creep – whether it is the high profile model Mini car in the main stadium used to collect the javelins, the very dominant Panasonic logo at the swimming, or the Atos logo on the 150,000 accreditation lanyards that used to appear at the back under the collar but has now worked its way into prime camera view. The IOC’s moral authority to control athlete branding is in part due to the fact that there is a real ‘clean venue’.

Score: “Should have been a 10/10 if it was not for the over-zealous own goal.” 8/10

Licensing

The tangible aspect of the London Olympic brand that the public touch, purchase and hopefully cherish. More than 50 licensees produced over 10,000 different products (2,012 of them different Olympic pin designs) that were supposed to generate over UK£1 billion in retail revenues, and some UK£80 million in royalties to Locog.

Expectations for a groundbreaking Olympic licensing programme were high with London’s great energy for design and style. Sadly a proper strategic



Locog’s licensing programme lacked a proper strategic vision and was a missed opportunity

vision, along with design and style, were totally lacking from London's Olympic licensing programme. With a few exceptions, it ended up being a totally uncoordinated collection with the logo slapped on often cheap souvenirs. What was missing was a strategic brand vision, a true presentation of Brand Britain and the Olympic brand in the way that Sydney 2000 or Lillehammer 1994 were able to achieve. The Locog licensing team never understood that the true role of licensing had more to do with creating a great brand for the Games than a quick revenue deal. Create the brand and the coffers will overflow!

Locog had more than enough graphic elements to work with – the logo and look of Games all had great potential to inspire design – but the licensees were clearly not shown the way with a true vision of what the London Olympic brand really stood for, or permitted to play. It was surprising that there were so few true mementos that could become family heirlooms from the Olympic experience – time and again I met Olympic regulars who had hunted around the Olympic stores and found little of true value to take home with them.

Somewhat belatedly, the British Olympic Association (BOA) licensing programme, with its Stella McCartney-inspired Adidas clothing programme, did make up for some of the shortcomings – but visitors really want Games rather than team merchandise. And for all the hype, the BOA scarf programme failed to follow the great success of Vancouver's red mittens, or Sydney's green/gold sock programmes.

The licensing programme was further compromised by what would appear to be a weak distribution structure by the master venue retailer, with such basic shortcomings as a failure to effectively replenish stock from warehouses through to a total failure to capitalise on the torch relay as it went around the country (where it was virtually impossible to find merchandise) and outsourcing to in-venue retailers that were some of the weakest of any recent Games.

Score: "A surprising and very disappointing failure." 3/10



One of the real successes of the Games was the fine turnout of enthusiastic support at full venues such as Eton Dorney for rowing (above). London 2012 attendances broke all previous records.

Ticketing

To so many in the media, this was viewed as perhaps Locog's biggest failing – yet by many measures it was the most successful Olympic ticket programme in history, and not the black eye that the media would have everyone believe. Never before has any previous Games achieved such full venues (over 95 per cent excluding football). More than eight million tickets were sold and there were 1.5 million people lining the streets at unticketed events like the road cycling. Locog did an excellent job with their pricing and their policy of 'Affordability, Availability and Atmosphere'. There was a range of prices and special programmes. The fact that the media had little comment on pricing was probably a validation that Locog got it right.

If there was any criticism to levy, it would be the challenge of managing expectations and not being able to roll out their contingency plan quicker to fill empty Olympic Family seats. On this much talked-about issue it should be noted that most of their empty seats were actually in the media areas. This fact was all too readily ignored by the media – and further aggravated by Olympic minister Jeremy Hunt's ill-placed comments implying that sponsors were the root cause of the problem. Locog had far fewer empty seats in the early stages of a few events than any previous Games but the

television images of a few empty blocks of seats, combined with locked out fans and their families, soon became Locog's biggest PR and operational challenge during the first few days of the Games.

The IOC president has called for an overall review of the ticket distribution process – and future OCOG leaders have promised that with their Games there will be no empty seats. We shall see. The reality is that it is a much more complicated operational exercise than anyone realises and it is not for the lack of trying. The IOC has been endeavouring to fix this problem over the past two decades.

The reality is that people were always going to be disappointed that they could not get the tickets they wanted. There is a limit to how many people can be squeezed into a stadium to watch Usain Bolt. Of course, the organisers could have built even larger venues, but these inevitably would have been white elephants after the Games. And, inevitably, when you set out to sell UK£600 million worth of tickets, you are going to nervously keep your fingers crossed and hype up market demand and scarcity.

The National Olympic Committee (NOC) ticket agent scandal that broke in a Sunday Times exclusive shortly before the Games was a storm in a tea-cup. Many NOCs use their ticket allocation to raise desperately needed funding for their teams. They have been doing so for years. The reality is that there were very few incidents of real scalping for personal



London and Locog established a new standard of branding the host city 'Olympic', with giant rings on show at landmarks across the city, such as Tower Bridge. Following the IOC's struggles with host cities in the past, the strategy has now become an essential part of building local interest in the Games

gain. And is there a single major sports event that does not face this issue? If anything the IOC and London have done far more to control the parallel ticket market than any sports body. Anyway, between the initial empty seats debacle and the NOC distribution protocols, NOCs can expect to see their future role in Olympic ticket programmes under some threat.

One major new initiative that Locog did introduce was 'Prestige Ticketing' – the ability for companies and individuals to buy top-end tickets with in-venue hospitality. With hospitality a key part of any official sponsor's rights, the ability for a non-sponsor to create their own guest programme for a fraction of the cost must raise the question as to whether for some sponsors it was worth paying the premium for full sponsorship rights. The jury is still out whether Prestige Ticketing really delivered on its promised revenue potential to Locog, and was worth all the hassle when set against the distractions it caused.

Score: "A very strong result, empty seats, NOC agent issues, and Prestige Ticketing notwithstanding." 9/10

Brand Image/Look Management

Locog would seem to have had quite a rollercoaster ride with its image management programme. The decision to appoint a single agency to develop the official emblem, rather than stick to the tried and tested protocol of inviting multiple agencies to participate in the design process, was always going to be a high-risk strategy. And when the lawyers took control of the launch and blocked the disclosure of the emblem's full potential, trouble loomed.

Also, I am not sure Locog really helped themselves by deciding to tender their advertising agency requirements to become a tier three supplier – eventually won by McCann. This was another OCOG first for London and there was perhaps a good reason why no OCOG had ever pursued this route in previous Games, namely to ensure that the very best creative team was available for each of the very different and varied Olympic projects. Creative advertising work from ticketing to the licensing programme was generally of a far weaker standard than earlier Locog work when they

were bidding, and not up to the broader standards and vision of the Olympics.

There were eventual moments of brilliance with the treatment of the logo, such as the national flag in fill, but the failure of the licensing team to see its potential compromised the true potential of the logo's presentation to the broader public.

Subsequent graphic elements from the Games typeface through to Games 'look' were all designed to support London's youth vision – and the choice of Games-time colours of purple and pink was no doubt considered brave by many but provided a very different and readily identifiable backdrop from all previous Games. Locog's eventual slogan, 'Inspire a Generation', became an overall design brief for much of the look and image development, and on this Locog delivered.

Perhaps for the first time ever in the host city, the local authorities truly embraced the official visual identity and look of the Games, combining their resources with those of Locog's to create a far bigger and more powerful Olympic 'look' programme. If I recall the battles that we faced at the IOC in Sydney to get a single, giant Olympic rings in play, ►

it is rewarding to now see how everyone now understands the importance of properly branding the host city. From the iconic rings on Tower Bridge, to floating rings on the Thames, flowered rings under the Heathrow flight path and the Olympic-dressed St Pancras station, London was impeccably Olympian in its attire and provided broadcasters with iconic images.

The mayor's decision to set up 100 large artistic mascots through the streets of London also helped to finally give Olympic mascots Mandeville and Wenlock an identity and character.

One surprising miss was the failure to exploit the Games to showcase British fashion. The decision by Locog to replace the traditional female medal bearers with an all-male troupe was an Olympic first but a missed opportunity to showcase British fashion. In the end, it looked as if someone had forgotten that the medal bearers would need a uniform, and had to scramble to get something made up at the last minute.

I subsequently learned that a London design school was commissioned to develop the uniforms – and the designers have been hired by a top design house; clearly the author is not a good judge of modern fashion.

Perhaps the most powerful and impactful brand statement of all was the decision to locate as many of the sports venues as possible against truly historic and iconic backdrops. From the various road races, through to Horse Guards Parade, Greenwich and Hampton Court, the backdrop sporting stage to these Olympics was the most powerful ever seen.

Score: "Even with a couple of misses, still a great result." 9/10

Torch Relay

It has always been the case that once the Olympic flame lands on the shore of the host nation, the country finally gets excited about the Olympic Games. And the UK was no exception, with the relay capturing the nation's imagination and more than



Locog staged the most successful Olympic torch relay ever, particularly in terms of engaging with local communities by ensuring torch bearers were relevant to the areas the flame passed through

15 million lining the streets for a fleeting glimpse of the sacred Olympic flame.

Locog understood from an early stage the importance of making this a community experience and where possible having as many community hero runners as possible carry the torch. Locog pushed the relay sponsors to develop community-related nomination programmes and, as a result, the selection process had a far stronger community feel than any previous Games.

The only mistake was again with the media in managing expectations as to what percentage of runners would be community heroes: it was never going to be all, and it is critically important that business leaders, opinion formers and media also run with the torch, to help raise profile and facilitate funding. The sponsor caravan ahead of the relay is designed to provide some entertainment ahead of the torch, build excitement and crowd interaction. Only Lloyds TSB Bank really brought some new thinking here, with street entertainers engaging with the crowds. The Coca-Cola and Samsung floats of dancing pom-pom girls came across at times as just too commercial when set against the clean, pure presentation of the torch. Coke though did deliver some great end-of-relay entertainment with their Move to

the Beat inspired music shows. Future OCOGs would do well to explore with the IOC how to develop the sponsor entertainment for spectators that accompanies the relay, as it has a key role to play in overall relay presentation that all too often is forgotten.

The BBC's live webcast of all runners was another true first and became addictive viewing as millions of people followed each runner online as the torch made its way around the country.

Now for one of the Games' biggest misses: the Olympic cauldron, the most powerful, iconic symbol of the Olympic Games. Locog developed a moving and inspirational story of how the cauldron came together, with a piece representing each country – but then the bigger vision was lost with the decision to keep it inside the main stadium. This meant that for the first time in modern Olympic history the cauldron was not seen by anyone for the first week of the Games. After the magic inspiration of the national torch relay the cauldron should have been there for all to see – inspiring athletes and spectators and lighting up the whole city. Mittal's Orbit could have finally served some legitimate purpose in the park; there were surely enough cables, winches and helicopters around to have transferred the cauldron to where all could see. ▶



London 2012 was widely referred to as the first ever 'digital Games', with mobile technologies such as smartphones and the use of social media transforming the way the Olympics were watched and the way in which athletes, fans and the media communicated with each other throughout

Locog have argued that they wanted to bring a halt to the 'Olympic arms race' of ever bigger and more dramatic cauldrons – and return to something of a more human scale. Agreed; a human scale cauldron – but one that can be seen. The fact that Locog was never able to find a sponsor for the gas (always a surprisingly expensive budget line item) and cover the costs was perhaps the real reason. Pity.

The winter Olympics accepts multiple cauldrons through the Olympic city – and so should the summer Games in future.

Score: "Best Olympic relay ever." 10/10 (Score for placement of Olympic cauldron: 1/10)

Social Media

One of the legacies of the London Games was always going to be the digital agenda. From the outset, these were going to be the first truly digital Olympics, with social media coming into its own as a key additional platform through which people consumed the Games.

As the Olympics only come around every four years they can provide a fascinating marker to follow progress of marketing and technology. Four years ago in Beijing, Twitter was in its infancy and had little impact, and smartphones were still a novelty. In London Twitter became a key tool for the media to follow facts and rumours, for athletes to connect with their fans or be sent home for inappropriate tweeting, for opinion formers to immediately set an agenda with the media, and for those desperately searching for tickets to have one last try. There were a reported 150 million tweets about the Games. Such was the traffic that it caused Twitter to crash on more than one occasion. It peaked at 80,000 tweets per minute (tpm) during Usain Bolt's 200 metre final win and rose to 116,000 tpm for the Spice Girls' closing ceremony reunion.

The ubiquitous nature of smartphones also made these the first truly mobile Olympics, with broadcasters developing companion apps to enable people to follow their coverage. The BBC's Olympic app was downloaded 1.9 million times, with its Olympic website containing 2.8 petabytes – the equivalent of more than

500 million copies of the complete works of Shakespeare!

YouTube streamed over 231 million clips to 500,000 Olympic fans across Asia and Africa where the IOC opened up broadcasting rights, unencumbered by major rights deals. NBC streamed 159 million clips and generated an additional US\$60 million in advertising through its Olympic site.

The full impact of social media on the Olympics will probably only be fully understood in a few years' time, when people look back and recognise that London 2012 was a defining moment: the arrival of social media as a major media platform for the big event. It is interesting to note how 64 years before at the 1948 London Games, a little-known decision would go on to have one of the greatest impacts ever on world sport, when the BBC reluctantly agreed to pay the organising committee a 1,000 guinea rights fee to broadcast the Olympics. At the time, no one realised the impact that this decision would have on the future of sport.

Score: "Difficult to judge, as no benchmark to set against, but went far further than anyone envisaged." 9/10



Locog drew praise for its repurposing of iconic venues throughout the British capital for unexpected sports, such as the use of Horse Guards Parade for beach volleyball (above) and Lord's cricket ground for archery, creating striking images that promoted an Olympic host city like never before

Spectator Experience / Venue Atmosphere

IOC President Jacques Rogge in his closing speech clearly identified just what made the London Games so special – the in-venue atmosphere, Rogge referring to how the spectators 'had become the soundtrack to these Olympics'.

No Olympics has ever had such a magical atmosphere inside the venues. The performance of the British team certainly helped but Locog and the IOC's decision to treat the spectator as a specific customer group for the first time, in the same way as athletes, media etc had their own specific support strategies, provided the platform to bring the venues alive.

The IOC had been looking for some time for OCOGs to engage the spectator base, with clearer in-venue briefing of each sports' rules so the subtleties were not lost on the fanbase. Locog embraced the challenge and made in-venue spectator presentation and entertainment a key pillar of their overall Games presentation.

No Games has ever before used music to create and control atmosphere

inside venues – and the official song by Muse, played before the start of each competition, was set to possibly the best ever piece of editing of sports images. Truly brilliant.

Each venue had its own producer with a kit of parts from sports video briefings, through to lighting, music and in-venue acts. They were given a simple brief – have fun and develop a mood suitable for each sport. The magical atmosphere created in each venue also helped to translate into magical television images, driving global audiences – people realising that this was different, this was special, this was the Olympics.

From an early stage, Locog also understood the importance of creating live sites and, with the BBC and various sponsors, created more than 60 sites around the country that served as great community gatherings for the public to share the Olympic spirit. These were attended by over five million fans

Venue atmosphere, combined with a friendly, fun volunteer team all helped to deliver a new benchmark in Olympic presentation.

Score: "One of the biggest new innovations delivered by Locog." 10/10

Add all these scores together and it is clear that for me, and many others, London 2012 was a triumph. Of course, it wasn't perfect. No event on the scale of the Olympic Games could be. There is still room for improvement in a number of areas. The baton has been passed and Rio 2016 is just around the corner to build on London's great success.

If the Olympics exceeded everyone's expectations, then Locog established a whole new reference level for the Paralympics. These were not just the greatest Paralympics ever – but by many, many miles. The public just did not want to let go of their Olympic party, and turned up in ever larger numbers to the park, with the Paralympians being treated as the true athletes that they were. Although TV audiences in Britain continued to set records, with Paralympic coverage even beating football audiences, there is still a way to go at getting the rest of the world's media to truly engage with the event. The International Paralympic Committee (IPC) must look to see how it can genuinely expand global coverage, hopefully now with the support of several sponsors who have now begun to see and appreciate the tremendous marketing value that exists with associating with the Paralympic brand. ▶

And from the sponsor / commercial perspective

The following is a list of my personal hits and misses – those campaigns that stood out and those that did not. Each partner has, or should have, their own set of clear strategic objectives and only they will know how their programmes truly performed and delivered to strategy.



Coca-Cola's 'Move to the Beat' combined sport and music to connect with a new generation

Best sponsor campaign

To be fair, this should not be judged until all the results have come in – and how can you compare a business to business strategy of say an Atos, General Electric or Nielson with high profile public campaigns of a Coke, Visa

or Samsung?

One thing that is absolutely clear: the results, success and impact of any campaign is far more than the usual grossly over-simplistic view promoted by some agencies and media focusing solely on sponsor name recall.

Longstanding sponsors Coke and McDonald's tried a new approach in the execution of their programmes, Coke going after the youth agenda with a programme linking sport to music, and their 'Move to the Beat' campaign. McDonald's took a leadership position in supporting the volunteer programme and telling the unique stories of the volunteer Games Makers. They would have also been well served, though, to have told the story of the breadth of their menu and how they had introduced salads and other healthier meal options as a result of previous editions of the Olympics and avoided some of the unnecessary hammering they took in the media on the obesity agenda.

Lloyds activated over perhaps the longest period of any partner, driving local community programmes around the nation for the four years leading up to the Games, culminating in perhaps the strongest performance of any of the sponsors in their torch relay activation: programmes from local heroes to taking a leading role to educate small businesses on the Olympics connected with the communities perhaps far more than any high-profile advertising campaign – well and diplomatically executed, against a difficult backdrop for the banking community.

British Airways must win the prize for the message that ran counter to all marketers' instincts – telling their customers to stay home, don't fly and support Team GB. Cheeky, but it seemed to cut through the clutter and resonate in its quirky way with British humour.

Although technically not a sponsor, unless you count the British government – the biggest sponsor of them all – full credit must go to the UK tourism board and their programme to fully capitalise on being the Olympic host. Their 'Great' Britain campaign, and how it exploited the Olympic opportunity, will probably deliver the best results of all.

Best TV commercial

For the first time ever, the Olympics were broadcast in the host country on a non-commercial channel, the BBC. This had a major impact on the development of sponsor Olympic-themed commercials, with many sponsors deciding it was not worth the effort to produce special spots for the Games – they were right, as commercial broadcasters ITV and Channel 4 might as well have closed down for the Games period given the limited audiences they were able to achieve.

Two international campaigns nevertheless stood out: Proctor & Gamble with their 'Mums' campaign and Visa's 'Go World'.

Both campaigns focused on telling moving stories of Olympic endeavour. It never ceases to amaze me how it is so often the new sponsor who comes up with the simple, powerful idea that past partners have been struggling to find – in this case, paying respect to the families, and in particular Mums for their support in creating Olympians. The P&G spots, some so powerful, so emotional that you were often moved to tears, resulted in over a billion YouTube views and 370 million Twitter mentions. The result? A five per cent to 20 per cent uplift in sales – from Egypt to the US where stores activated Olympic programmes – and this in an industry where you fight for a one to two per cent uplift.

Visa's campaign, powerfully told by actor Morgan Freeman, told the story of athletes' journeys to the Olympics and the majesty of the human effort brilliantly and emotionally, with stunning cinematography.

One further partner worthy of mention, although it was for Paralympic rather than Olympic advertising, was BT with their initial launch ad for the Paralympics – a powerful, moving piece set to music showcasing the phenomenal human and sporting effort of Paralympians. Samsung continued the trend of great Paralympic advertising with their 'coach' campaign, for the first time in over a decade of Olympic advertising properly understanding and integrating the brand values into a campaign. ▶



Crystal Digital's 'Olympixel' human video screen was a genuine innovation inside the Olympic Stadium. Its use during the opening and closing ceremonies created some of the most thrilling displays seen at any Games and hinted at a new possibilities for venue presentation at future events

Best showcasing

The gold medal here probably needs to go to Mini for their iconic javelin collectors in the middle of the stadium. Quite how BMW got through the IOC's clean venue rules is perhaps a story for another day, but they provided a fun showcase for an iconic British symbol (even if now owned by Germans). The only symbol that might have been even stronger would have been a series of London taxis, but then they did get their starring role in the closing ceremony.

Crystal CG's 'Olympixel' project, where they turned 70,000 spectators into a human video screen, introduced the world to a form of in-venue entertainment and presentation never before seen, and with screen partner Tait Technologies launched a whole new industry for major event and concert promoters and stadium owners. Lord Coe noted that London's closing ceremony, with its pixel lights, was the

most technically advanced show there has ever been in Games history. Pop concerts will no longer be the same without the dramatic video backdrop.

Overall, sponsor showcasing in the Olympic Park was at a significantly reduced level from Beijing four years previously, where each sponsor competed to create ever larger expo-styled displays, paying homage to the Chinese government with the Olympics marking China's coming out party on to the world stage. But it seemed that Locog never really embraced the role that the sponsors could play in the park as part of the broader spectator experience, with signage to many pavilions being very limited and many spectators just unaware of the free entertainment offerings being provided by the partners. The two exceptions to this were BA's big screen live site that became the place to be, and the world's largest McDonald's, which was impossible to miss; for some bizarre reason people were willing to queue up just to say they had been to the world's

largest McDonald's.

Outside the Park, BP's partnership with the Olympic Museum at the Royal Opera House provided one of the best temporary exhibitions of Olympic history and EDF's Olympic popular public support tracker with lights on the London Eye was a great idea – but one that soon became mute as public support rocketed above 95 per cent with no further room to grow.

Best hospitality party

I did not have time to attend many – and my invitation to many others was clearly lost in the post – but one event that stood out was BT's live operation at Hyde Park; open to all, it bought the magical Olympic atmosphere to many who were unable to get into the park.

Universally, though, all sponsors spoke of how their Games hospitality programmes were performing above all



BT's fan festival played a key role in expanding the spectator experience across the host city

expectations – delivering new levels of customer loyalty, business contacts, and staff morale. The challenge now for many partners will be what next, as no future corporate invitation will ever feel the same.

Best PR

The British media were always going to be a challenge for the sponsors as they looked to profile every real and perceived shortcoming of each partner. As much as the Olympics provides a world stage to launch new products, new thinking, new technologies, they also provide the oxygen for every possible cause to be debated extensively through the media. Dow Chemical was the first partner to be challenged as a result of the links to Union Carbide and the Bhopal tragedy. It did not matter that Dow only purchased Union Carbide years after the tragedy, and after all cases had been settled. Local Indian politicians were quickly able to get the issue back in the media to serve their own local political agenda, and Dow faced a rough hard few months under the media spotlight. But the focus ended up actually giving Dow the platform to properly debate the issue for the first time and, perhaps even to their own surprise, they saw the positive brand attributes actually



The G4S debacle became a blessing in disguise for Locog as army reinforcements stepped in to cover shortfalls at security checkpoints, providing a friendly service and improving efficiency

increase by the end of the Games.

Coke, McDonald's, Cadbury and Heineken were all challenged as to whether it was appropriate for their products to be Olympic sponsors, set against the obesity agenda – with, once again, various local politicians grandstanding with headline-grabbing statements yet little constructive debate or appreciation of what these companies are doing to support sport and educate kids. With government long having given up their responsibilities in this space, they should be far more intelligent regarding statements designed to dry up one of the few funding sources left to sport. And if you were to follow their lead and drop these categories then where do you stop – ban automobile and airline sponsorship due to issues with the environment?

Clearly the biggest corporate PR own goal related to G4S and their failure to provide the required number of security guards. What had the potential to turn into a major PR disaster for the London organisers was quickly turned around and perhaps ended up as a blessing in disguise, as the addition of troops ended up providing a far friendlier and perhaps more secure venue access control.

G4S will be clearly tarnished following their shortcomings in meeting government's last-minute demands to increase personnel levels – the subsequent

inquiry post-Games may shed some light on to why the issue came to the fore so late in the day, but with G4S still benefitting from billion-dollar government contracts, don't expect them to finger point at their paymaster – just bend over, grit your teeth and accept the punishment.

BMW were lucky to not get hammered for their custom-made GPS system, which rarely worked, causing most guests entitled to use the hospitality car fleet to politely request the driver to switch off the GPS before setting off. Fortunately the Games were going so well by day three or four that the media no longer had the appetite to go after negative stories, even if the car transport system remained challenged through to the end with an overly complicated, poorly programmed GPS system that should have been properly tested well before the Games.

For many, a successful PR programme was staying out of the media – as Atos (although Atos subsequently got clobbered for different reasons in view of their government disability contracts), BT and other key technology partners knew that they were only going to start getting major headlines should things go wrong. Fortunately, unlike IBM in Atlanta 1996, everything worked smoothly and in this case media silence was golden, allowing each partner to discreetly trumpet their success to their key customers. ■