

Rolling Stones and Piaggio - A case study

In 1982 West Nally 'cut its teeth' in music sponsorship. Never mind practicing on something small - this was straight into the deep end with one of the biggest rock bands of all time - The Rolling Stones.

West Nally and many of its clients/contemporaries in sport were beginning to realise that the charisma of pop idols could be a viable message medium to the young/teens. This particular market sector was largely unapproachable by conventional media - they didn't stay in and watch television, they are not avid readers. Commercial radio spots around pop music programmes was probably the closest you could get.

In public relations terms, there were various product categories which would associate well with a rock tour.... jeans, motor-bikes, audio tapes.

Unlike sport where banners in tv camera view and media coverage give the sponsor its identification - music sponsorship at top rock level is a totally different activity. The rock superstars are not normally willing to be personally associated with the sponsor or its products - the vehicle is The Tour not the individual.

So, a package of rights is negotiated within very strict guidelines for the sponsor/s involved - access to 2/3 photographs, use of a selected video sequence and music sequence - and involvement with the full tour promotional circus in the selected countries - posters, ticket i.d. access to selected items of pop merchandise - etc.

Plus, in the case of The Rolling Stones 1982 European Tour, the right to use the famous Tongue and Lips logo style in advertising and promotional campaigns.

There are routes to securing megastar endorsements of products - but these tend to be for major advertising usage.

For public relations, press involvement, hospitality, sales promotions and hype - the tour route is the effective one.

In 1982, we negotiated with the Italian motor-cycle company - Piaggio - to become the sponsor of the Italian 'leg' of the Rolling Stones Tour. (In France we had Gilera, a sister company to Piaggio; in the UK, Lee Cooper jeans; and TDK - the audio tape company - took the rest of Europe

In understanding this case study - one has to be aware that the Rolling Stones plan to include Italy in their tour was not only a major news item - it virtually paralysed Florence for three months of political problems and debates.

1. The 1982 Rolling Stones Concerts in Italy re-opened the entire Italian market in rock and pop music. It was closed down in 1977 after the leftist wing of the youth audiences threw petrol bombs and stones and almost kidnapped "Santana". Across Italy there were too many riots, too many people not paying for tickets but just ripping off doors/gates and mobbing their way in.

The music industry, quite rightly, turned its back on the country and Italy was no longer featured on the Euro rock tour journey cycle.

2. The 1982 Rolling Stones Concerts in Italy brought to an end the Florence Municipality - which collapsed after 35 years of political stability. The Alliance between the Communist Party (40%) and the Socialists (15%) ended when the Communists decided to vote for acceptance of the Rolling Stones visit and the Socialists stayed with the Cardinals and voted against on an anti drug and sex platform.

3. On July 11 1982 the Rolling Stones staged a concert at 4 pm in Turin with a massive 75,000 audience - just 4 hours before Italy played in the final of the soccer World Cup in Spain. This event has been likened to trying to stage a concert in Miami 3 hours before the Super-Bowl. Unthinkable - but it happened. And Mick Jagger (a football supporter) appeared on stage draped in the Italian flag.

One had to be there to experience the frenzy, the excitement, the pure magic ...which was all fully associated with the Piaggio name.

The Rolling Stones - and particularly Mick Jagger - were and are regarded more as a megastar legend than a rock group. Neither the charisma nor the political importance of the Italian concerts were fully understood or exploited by Piaggio. There were, under the circumstances, many more things which they could and should have done to fully 'exploit' the situation.

Perhaps this is a lesson for anyone in sponsorship of pop music particularly - and some other areas in both sport and art. The opportunities and the situations are volatile. A sponsor company should not regard this activity as a 'minor adjunct to the marketing mix'. A creative and public relations conscious mind can "think on it's feet" and turn a planned programme into a "coup".

In essence, the Rolling Stones in Italy was a project which - in its eventual totality - was just too big for Piaggio to handle. With the full support of marketing and advertising talent and a strong follow-up programme they could have 'milked' the occasion for a strong on-going promotional theme.

That said, the plans made by Piaggio for what might have been (under other circumstances) a normal promotional and public relations exercise, were excellent.

- Piaggio scooters/bikes were made freely available for backstage use. (for the un-initiated, back-stage is a vast area 200 ft square or more, where anything from a screwdriver to a can of Coke can be required at any point at a moments notice)
- Ranges of Piaggio merchandise, including motor-bike jackets, t-shirts, sunglasses, hold-all bags - were made freely available to stage crew, publicity office and band. All got a lot of exposure
- While major signage within the 'vision of the band' was outside the contract - Piaggio were able to achieve the maximum allowed and made good use of entrances and exit areas; pre-event posters; dressing of VIP and back stage areas; dressing of press conference venues

The only major item which breached the 'vision' contract was a massive mock-up of a scooter made of flowers etc on a high pole outside one open air stadium. The pole was so high that the scooter was clearly visible by at least half those inside the stadium

- Setting up of fire-work displays and releasing of masses of balloons as part of the final stages of each concert. Needless to say scooters and the Piaggio event symbol featured heavily in both.
- The Lip and Tongue logo was expertly incorporated into a scooter shaped design which became the official event logo in Italy. Ranges of give-away stickers, key-rings and balloons featuring this design were produced and made only available through Piaggio dealers.
- Competitions for the much coveted concert tickets were also arranged - again making a visit to a Piaggio dealer a necessary ingredient.

Since 1982, West Nally's ideas and concepts on using music tours have developed and we are now very much involved in the total interface between groups and sponsors from the very inception - ensuring a harmonious link between the two.

It is our firm belief that you cannot 'just bolt on' the sponsor once the tour has been set. The total planning, theme/style, has to develop hand in hand.

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