



THE OPTIMA OPEN

Belgian financial planning firm Optima asked independent consultancy VAAV Communication to develop a brand sponsorship programme for the company. The result was the Optima Open, a new tournament on the ATP (Association of Tennis Professionals) Champions Tour.

The Objectives

A list of sponsorship objectives were set out against which various properties were matched. The criteria the property was to deliver were as follows:

- Live television exposure both in the northern Dutch-speaking region and the southern French-speaking region of Belgium
- Press coverage in the lifestyle and business press
- A platform to meet Belgian decision-makers and provide PR support for the brand
- A sales platform focusing primarily on client retention.

After analysing various candidate properties, Optima decided on becoming the owner and title sponsor of a new tournament on the ATP Champions Tour, the official circuit for former tennis champions such as John McEnroe, Bjorn Borg and Boris Becker.

The sponsorship offered Optima an excellent fit with its objectives for the following reasons:

1. A survey showed that tennis was the sport most watched by Belgians on TV in 2009
2. Whilst ATP Champions Tour tennis remains a competitive sport, the interest from the lifestyle and business press in the "after career" of players is considerable
3. The players and the concept would appeal to Belgian opinion/business leaders
4. The age of the players (40-to-55) was the exact age range of the typical Optima client and therefore offered an interesting platform for client entertainment and retention.

The first Optima Open took place at the Royal Zoute Tennis Club in Knokke-Heist last year from August 20-22. Optima owned

the event and hired VAAV to manage the sponsorship and run the tournament on its behalf.

The Execution

Given that the sponsorship contract with the ATP Champions Tour was signed in April 2010, this left just four months to organise and promote the event. Optima and the organisers decided that it was crucial to the success of the event that a top-name player was signed in order to lead the communication and Bjorn Borg, 11-time grand slam winner, signed as the event's chief player. The impact of signing Borg immediately led to a buzz amongst both Optima employees and clients.

The considerable interest in the event throughout Belgium enabled organisers to sign up multiple media sponsorships - press, TV, magazine and outdoor - to a value of €500,000. The impact of the promotional plan meant that pre-event ticket sales were high and that Optima's sponsorship was communicated at a national level.

In addition to the pre-event media plan, two free-to-air television channels agreed to show the tournament: RTL in southern Belgium and Exqi Sport in the north. Both aired the semi-finals and final live, providing excellent national television exposure for Optima.

During the tournament the event website received 12,000 unique visitors and over a 100,000 page views. Unique daily visitors to Optima's corporate website tripled during the week of the event.

As the owner and promoter of the event, Optima was able to make maximum use of its network of business partners and

relationships. Within a short period of time, both the sponsorship and the VIP offerings were sold-out. Lombard, Porsche, BESIX and Bjorn Borg Clothing all signed up as major co-sponsors and many companies bought smaller packages or VIP tables. Optima invited 400 guests per day, 1,200 in total, filling the VIP space to the maximum.

A PR agency was hired and a press conference organised in June 2010. Exclusive interviews with Bjorn Borg and Goran Ivanišević were offered to key publications. The business and lifestyle press took a great interest, achieving one of the goals of Optima. The event generated 45 articles in national newspapers and magazines as well as 81 online and local articles. Optima was named in every article.

Extra PR was generated by hiring media personality Sabine Appelmans, a former tennis player and Belgian Fed Cup captain. Sabine's presence at press events and during the tournament added interest and credibility to the project. The coastal town of Knokke-Heist put its communication assets behind the project by offering the tournament free advertising throughout the summer.

Of each ticket sold, €1 was donated to the Belgian Kids Fund charity, raising €6,000 in total.

The Results

Alongside the €500,000 media plan and live television coverage, two independent qualitative surveys were carried out: an on-site survey amongst the visitors and a survey amongst Optima's staff. Here were some of the key results:

OPTIMA
OPEN

OPTIMA

CHAMPION
TOUR

BESIX

AFRICAN
AIRWAYS

radio 2

nuwsblad.be

E N
EXPANRING
TOUR

SPONSORSHIP WORKS

On-site survey

- 84 per cent of visitors were not clients of Optima
- Most people had heard of the tournament through the city advertising or word of mouth
- Former French professional player Henri Leconte was the most popular player
- 99 per cent of visitors were aware, unaided, of Optima's sponsorship
- 53 per cent of visitors had not heard of Optima before their visit
- 77 per cent thought that the sponsorship was a good or excellent fit for Optima
- 60 per cent said that the sponsorship improved their image of Optima considerably.

Optima staff survey

- 100 per cent thought the event was excellent or good
- 98 per cent thought the event was excellent or good for client entertainment
- 97 per cent found the organisation of the event excellent or good
- 89 per cent thought the pre-event communication was excellent or good
- 100 per cent thought the event branding was excellent or good
- 94 per cent found the media attention during the event excellent or good.

Conclusion

The Optima Open was considered an all-round success by all stakeholders: sponsors,

the ATP Champions Tour, players, the city and visitors.

Optima has extended its sponsorship with the Tour through to 2012 with expanded facilities on-site for the 2011 event, held

last month. With the event guaranteed until 2012 Optima, the city and organisers have been able to make medium-term agreements to increase the awareness of the sponsorship considerably.



Jeroen Piqueur
CEO, Optima

"We are delighted with the first Optima Open. When we agreed to do the project we had no idea how much impact the sponsorship could have on our brand and on our employees. From day one, the project was greeted with enthusiasm by so many people and we are looking forward to a great future."

FACTBOX

Optima is one of Belgium's leading family-owned financial planning companies, primarily active in the northern Flemish part of the country. With headquarters in Ghent, the company has about 13,000 clients and 400 employees and generates an annual turnover of approximately €100 million.

Optima has experienced considerable growth in the last few years and has opened offices in Brussels, Waterloo and Madrid. In 2009-10, to support the company's growth pattern, Optima invested in its first above-the-line advertising campaign. Optima's client base is typically wealthy independent entrepreneurs with multiple financial interests, generally aged over 45.

Optima had been an active sponsor of sport, investing mainly in local initiatives based near company headquarters. The highest profile of these was Ghent football club, one of Belgium's leading teams and winners of the Belgian Cup in 2009-10.

Sponsorship Works is the essential casebook for brands, agencies and rights holders. Now in its seventh edition, Sponsorship Works 2011 brings you 20 brand-new case studies from sports marketing around the world and across different sports. Each case study contains details of the strategy behind the sponsorship, what the brand set out to achieve and why the property was chosen. It provides an anatomy of the deal and focuses on how it was activated.

Sponsorship Works gives a rare behind-the-scenes look and shows what each sponsorship achieved, bringing the complete package from the planning stage to measurement and evaluation. Highlights of Sponsorship Works include case studies from sailing, tennis, athletics, snooker, football, rugby, American football and swimming.

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