

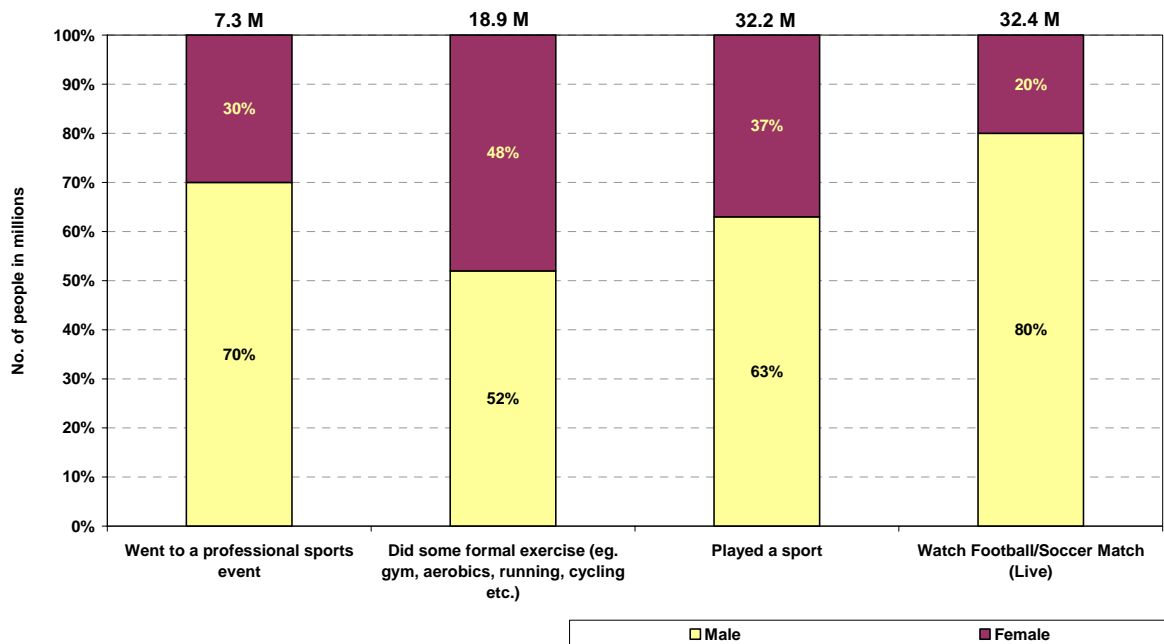
Building sports can build brands. If you play by the rules.

Sport is good for health, helps build character. Sporting heroes make good role models for children. They can also make millions, or should I say billions, for corporate sponsors. Nobody would argue with that, with evidence from around the world. In Indonesia however, it’s a different story altogether. For a large country, it has less to be proud of in sporting terms today than it perhaps did a decade ago. Ask anyone for an explanation and all the usual arguments are trotted out. Not a sporting people. It’s too hot. The sun is bad for the complexion. Not enough money is put behind sports. There are too many pressing issues to worry about. But today’s China contradicts these views.

The inescapable fact is that not many Indonesians are into sports or formal exercise, in contrast for example to their sporting neighbours in Australia. That’s true in terms of percentage, but not in absolute numbers. Of all Indonesians above the age of 14, only 8 million exercise regularly. 33 million have played a sport recently but only 7 million have been to see any sport at a stadium. But from the comfort of the couch, 33 million have recently watched the country’s favourite sport soccer, ‘live’ on TV. That’s a very large number, by any standard. Unfortunately, most of the soccer watched is international tournaments, not local. Yet, over 80 per cent would like to buy products made in Indonesia.

These observations are based on Roy Morgan Single Source, the country’s largest syndicated survey with over 27,000 Indonesian respondents annually, projected to reflect 90% of the population over the age of 14. That is a universe of 140 million people. The results are updated every 90 days.

SPORTS: PARTICIPATION & VIEWERSHIP



The simplistic conclusion for marketers looking to associate their brands with sports is to sponsor a program like *Liga Italia* on local television. Other than achieving visibility in yet another forum, shallow association of this nature would achieve little else. Very little goodwill would transfer to the brand. In a country where over Rp 12 trillion in 2006 was spent by brands advertising on TV alone, creating awareness isn't a challenge. For most of the Top 100 brands advertised, awareness is likely to be at near-saturation levels, with the same over-exposed commercial appearing ad nauseum. Building brand equity is another dimension altogether, with very few marketers equipped to measure it much less monitor conversion to the brand on a regular basis.

Imagine the power of Rp 1 trillion, a fraction of last year's expenditure on television, channelled into the development of sport. That's probably less than the wastage via over-exposure of advertisements. Such is the power of Big Business to act as good corporate citizens, collectively. Even a small fraction from the annual marketing budget of a major brand would go a long way for a club. Supporting sports is not an act of charity either; it is an essential step for business at large to benefit from. The only way to develop soccer, to take just one sport as an example, is to put serious time, effort and money behind it. It needs to be a collective effort, and it will take time to deliver results.

Creating a tournament just for the naming rights, then advertising the tournament till it is burnt into every viewer's retina does little to build real relationships with brands. On the soccer pitch, players need to have the skills and abilities to draw the crowds. That requires training and commitment. Unfortunately, like most aspects of life, there are no short-cuts to success. To try and con all of the people all of the time by advertising a trophy that isn't worth winning, fought for by ill-equipped and sub-standard players, is at best a shallow and foolish pursuit.

On the other hand, sponsoring and supporting a local soccer club, putting real effort and money behind it, would pay rich dividends for a brand continuously and over time. If just eight non-competitive brands worked together with the national soccer association, a meaningful contribution to the sport will have been made by supporting at least eight clubs, consistently. Run professionally, each of these clubs would be able to foster the development of 20 professionals each, all adding up to the improvement of national standards in the world's favourite game. The PR and promotional opportunities for each brand are limited only by our imagination.

If this sounds like the exclusive domain of Big Business, nothing could be further than the truth. There are innumerable ways smaller brands and businesses can contribute. Roy Morgan Single Source can monitor conversion of consumers to sponsoring brands, quantifying the extent of return on investment in each club, on a quarterly basis. That contribution to the game of soccer would help turn sports sponsorship into a science, to the advantage of both the sponsor and the sponsored. With adequate support, a meaningful league would emerge, the dividends measured in both material and emotional terms.

Replicating such a success with other sports and other brands would be that much easier. Would the owners of the first eight brands please stand up?

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