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Sponsor opportunities in Rio much more challenging with Brazil's down economy

By Ben Fischer, Staff Writer

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Nissan Motor Co. became the official automobile sponsor of the Rio 2016 Olympics in 2012, back when Brazil was the next hot thing in the world economy.

Now the Brazilian market for new cars is a different story. But the Japanese auto maker has plowed ahead with showcases in the Barra Olympic Park and the city's refurbished port, along with a hospitality house on Copacabana Beach with a twist, a hotel temporarily renamed for its Kicks model.

"It shows our commitment to Brazil," said Arnaud Charpentier, marketing director of Nissan Brazil, at a launch of its concept car at the port Aug. 4. "It really shows we are here to stay. Whatever the peaks and valleys of the country, we are here for the long term."

Some of the world's largest sports marketers are swarming Olympic fans in Rio this week, but the equation is substantially more challenging than when they first paid eight or nine figures for exclusive rights. The conditions have put a premium on substantive contributions, austerity and careful attention to image, said Momentum Worldwide's president for Brazil, Maria Laura Nicotero.

"They want to provide a service, and prove that they're not just statically here," Nicotero said.



Nissan renamed its Rio hospitality house Hotel Nissan Kicks to feature its Kicks model.

Photo by: BEN FISCHER / STAFF

“They want to engage. That’s different from what we’ve done during the World Cup in Brazil.”

Most companies said they didn’t change their plans as Brazil’s economic problems began to worsen in late 2014, but they are eager to promote and underscore their social contributions. Worldwide Olympics sponsor Omega paid for improvements to 12 community spaces in the city’s favelas, for instance, and Rio 2016 supplier Cisco is emphasizing its programs to develop the IT workforce and help city planners with advanced data analysis.

“The economic conditions have not impacted the activation of our sponsorship of the Rio 2016 Games,” said Maria Dincel, Cisco managing director of global sponsorships. “If anything, it has only heightened the importance of the programs we have implemented.”

Others are counting on a countercyclical boost. Worldwide sponsor Dow Chemical’s Olympics chief, Louis Vega, said his company is using the Games as the “world’s largest trade show” to show industrial customers how its chemical technologies can make their products more environmentally efficient and competitive.

Consumer marketing is lively, with Coca-Cola and Bridgestone blanketing the city’s outdoor advertising spaces with Olympic creative. Visa reports its Games-themed cards are big hits at partner banks.

Rob Prazmark, founder of 21 Sports & Entertainment, said the economic collapse mostly hurt the less obvious signs of sponsor activity, such as hospitality and ticket packages. Also, Nicotero, said, sponsor showcases were moderated, not eliminated.

“The live sights are nice, but it’s not luxurious,” she said, referring to outdoor viewing and gathering areas set up in Rio away from the official venues. “Because it would not fit with the mood of the country.”

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