

# An Olympic-Sized Opportunity for Brands

The Paris 2024 Olympic and Paralympic Games offer opportunities for brands to connect with global audiences

By Chuck Kapelke March 29, 2024 5-minute read



The French Air Force aerobatic team Patrouille de France flies next to the Eiffel Tower during the Olympic Games handover ceremony on August 8, 2021 in Paris, France. As the Paris 2024 Olympic (July 26-August 11) and Paralympic (August 28-September 8) Games come into sharper view, brand partners are preparing to woo a global audience of what's expected to be roughly four billion people. This year marks the first time that the Games will run on streaming TV, in addition to traditional media outlets. Aurelien Meunier/Getty Images

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Visa is pumping up its marketing muscle for the upcoming Olympic Games. The credit card king will be one of 14 [global partners](#) for the Olympic and Paralympic Games in Paris this summer, along with brands such as Airbnb, Bridgestone, Coca-Cola, Deloitte, and Samsung. In addition to investing millions in omnichannel advertising before, during, and after the Games, Visa's plans include sponsoring 136 athletes from 68 countries and territories, contributing its expertise to enhance the transit experience in French cities such as Lyon and Marseille with tap-to-pay, and working with its clients and partners in

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French communities to assist small businesses with their digital payment solutions.

"We are utilizing this [Olympic] platform to elevate our marketing efforts, and have done so for more than 27 years," says Andrea Fairchild, SVP of global sponsorships and marketing at ANA member Visa. "The Olympic and Paralympic movement delivers incomparable scale for advertisers, offering a premium environment to reach dedicated and engaged consumers anywhere and everywhere they are. There is undeniable business impact for brands that participate, delivering results through the entire marketing funnel."

For brands like Visa to remain such stalwart supporters of the Olympics is not an accident. "The Olympics have a very different set of values and brand associations than other sporting events," says Terrence Burns, founder of T. Burns Sports Group, who has negotiated sponsorships between brands like Allianz and Samsung and the International Olympic Committee (IOC). "This is not an NFL deal or an NBA or Formula 1 deal. The Olympics are a celebration of humanity."

Beyond the positive association, the scale of the Olympics' audience alone should grab marketers' attention. Roughly four billion people are [expected](#) to tune in to this year's broadcasts between July 26 and August 11.

"The Paris Games is going to be a coming out party for the Olympic movement," says Rob Prazmark, president and CEO of sports marketing agency 21 Marketing and author of *The Olympics Don't Take American Express*.

"The last two Games [in Tokyo and Beijing] were difficult for marketers because COVID restricted the full beauty and grandeur of the Games, in terms of attendance and hospitality, and athletes were restricted from coming out of their dorm rooms," Prazmark adds. "There are a lot of people rooting for these Paris Games, especially because it segues into [Milan in 2026](#) and [Los Angeles in 2028](#)."

## Screening the Messaging

While not all brands have the ad budgets to be global sponsors of the Olympics, companies of all sizes can get involved in this year's Games. In the U.S., for example, NBCUniversal will offer coverage across several channels, including CNBC, E!, Golf Channel, NBC, Telemundo, Universo, and USA. For the first time, every event will be streamed live on the streaming service Peacock.

"We have the ability to customize robust media schedules to suit any brand's needs," says Dan Lovinger, president of Olympic and Paralympic partnerships at ANA member

NBCUniversal. "Digital and streaming destinations include Peacock, NBCOlympics.com, and the NBC Sports app, along with social distribution partners that will provide short-form highlights to engage fans."

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In addition to running ads on TV, brands can sponsor "extensions" such as medal counts on the websites of local affiliates, says Jessica Hagan, president and general manager at KTVB News Group, an NBC affiliate with stations in Boise and Twin Falls, Idaho.

"People will be watching on their biggest screen in primetime, but they might be streaming during the day, or visiting NBC.com or their local TV station's website during the day to get updates on their favorite events," Hagan says. "Sponsoring extensions can help give frequency to go along with the reach."

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**Key takeaway:** When it comes to using the Olympics as a marketing vehicle, brands should invest based on the behaviors of their target audiences. "How people consume the Olympics is vast and fragmented," says Ashley Brantman, SVP and co-head of Jack 39, the sponsorship consultancy division of global brand experience agency and ANA member Jack Morton Worldwide. "What's really important is understanding where that brand's audiences are consuming."

## The Rules of the Game

Brands considering marketing during the Olympics should get a jumpstart on things and take advantage of the months-long buildup that includes time trials and other qualifying events. "It's not just advertising during the Games that makes a difference," Prazmark says. "It's really what you do in terms of creating awareness early on."

While it may be tempting to reach out to athletes to endorse a brand, it can be difficult to know who will qualify or have breakout performances. The Olympics and Paralympics also have strict rules in place to prevent "ambush marketing," which is when companies try to associate themselves with the Games without paying for official sponsorship.

Indeed, the Olympic Charter's [Rule 40](#) requires both athletes and advertisers to adhere to guidelines and enter a contract with organizers.

"Athletes cannot permit the use of their name, likeness, or image during the Games, plus bookends, without the IOC and [USOPC] consent, and that consent is only given if you're working with an official sponsor," says Peter Carlisle, managing director for Olympic and action sports at Octagon, a sports marketing agency that represents athletes such as Simone Biles and Michael Phelps.

**Key takeaway:** Companies should make sure any agreements with athletes are above board and do not jeopardize Olympians' eligibility. For brands that want to support American Olympic athletes, Team USA offers different [tiers of sponsorship](#).

## Light a Flame with Consumers

The best Olympic ad campaigns leverage the inspirational nature of the event. "The Olympics and Paralympics offer an environment full of positivity and hope while promoting diversity and inclusivity," Lovinger says. "It provides advertisers with the perfect canvas for authentic storytelling connecting with audiences in their own brand voices."

For example, Visa is providing tickets for this year's Olympics to help small- and medium-sized businesses take their customers to the Games. The company is also funding the creation of three new sports centers, a mentoring program for girls, and a youth music festival with other sponsors. "Sponsors would do well to use their expertise in ways that make sense for the event," Visa's Fairchild says.

Brands also should not sleep on the [Paralympic Games](#), which run from August 28 to September 8. Although the audiences are smaller, the athletes' stories pack an emotional punch. "Younger consumers today are more inclusive and accepting of [people with disabilities](#)," T. Burns Sports Group's Burns says. "There are some brands that see the Paralympics as a huge opportunity." Official Paralympic partners range from Airbnb to Deloitte to Panasonic.

**Key takeaway:** The Olympics and Paralympics provide a unique opportunity for brands to distinguish themselves from the pack and get a halo effect, but the advertising has to be targeted and the messaging inspiring. "This is a moment for brands to shine, with creative that emphasizes your people and your brand values," KTVB News Group's Hagan says. "You have an opportunity to gain a real lift in awareness and affinity for the brand."