

Olympic marketing lessons that can make marketers year-round champs

Article

This year's Olympics were a major opportunity for marketers, both on TV and [connected TV \(CTV\)](#) and on social media. The Games only come around every two years, but the marketing

lessons are applicable long after Paris's crowds have cleared. From a push for generative AI (genAI) to athletes becoming creators in their own rights, here are five takeaways from the Summer Olympics.

1. Big tech ads were everywhere—but be careful about genAI use

[Google](#), [Meta](#), and Microsoft ran ads for their genAI and how it can help users prepare for a marathon, weight train, and help teach their sons to box. Google's most notable ad, "Dear Sydney", which showed a father using Gemini to generate a fan letter from his young daughter to track star Sydney McLaughlin-Levrone, missed the podium. The ad raised consumers' concerns about how genAI diminishes creativity and human interaction.

Instead of highlighting AI, Apple emphasized the iPhone's security in its ad, which had the tagline "Safari. A browser that's actually private." Apple's ad aired after Google announced it no longer plans to [deprecate third-party cookies](#).

What it means: Industry conversations surrounding AI and privacy have gone mainstream. Consumers are thinking about privacy and genAI, so advertisers should be sensitive.

2. Competitors were creators

The Olympics were everywhere on [TikTok](#). Established stars like US gymnasts Simone Biles and Suni Lee posted for their existing audiences, but other athletes also gained traction creating content. TikTok sensations included US rugby's Ilona Maher, who posted about body positivity, Norway swimming's Henrik Christiansen, who became known as the "muffin man" due to his love of the Olympic Village's chocolate muffins, and US artistic swimming's Daniella Ramirez, who posted ASMR aesthetic videos removing her competition hairstyles.

Other Olympians made TikToks showcasing Olympic Village's cardboard beds, trading pins, or showing off their Olympic outfits. Italian gymnast Giorgia Villa even went viral for her 2021 campaign hugging wheels of Parmigiano Reggiano.

What it means: Brands already know the power of [social media](#) as a marketing engine. US [influencer marketing](#) spend will grow 16.0% to reach \$8.14 billion this year. But the Olympians' ability to tell their own stories of the Games reinforces just how valuable working with [creators](#) can be.

3. Brand social bypassed Rule 40

Brands that are not official Olympic partners (i.e., brands that don't have licensing contracts with the International Olympic Committee) are limited in how they can use Olympic content to advertise during the Games. So it can be expensive or impossible for brands to create content featuring athletes. Smart brands skirted these rules during the Olympics by leaning into TikTok trends rather than Olympic content.

[Luggage company Away](#) leveraged a trend where TikTok users mocked their own sub-par athletic abilities. Away made its own version with its bags being thrown into water and having weights dropped on them to showcase their durability. [Duolingo](#) had its iconic owl mascots compete in swimming.

What it means: Creative advertisers will find other ways to participate in trends by leveraging social to nod to current events.

4. Women took center stage

This year marked the first time Team USA women were [guaranteed equal pay to male athletes](#). Some of the Games' biggest winners were women, with medals going to the USA women's soccer, rugby, basketball, and gymnastics teams.

What it means: Women's sports haven't always been seen as equal to men's for advertisers. But with more people tuning into these events and more women's athletes reaching mainstream fame, advertisers should consider the investment.

5. Streaming soared

Predictions that these Olympics would be huge for streaming and CTV rang true. BBC Sport's coverage of the Paris Olympics was streamed more than double the Tokyo Games three years ago, per The Independent. Warner Bros. Discovery boasted 7 billion minutes of Olympics content streamed on Max. And NBCU's offerings, which included a multiscreen view on Peacock and coverage by major NBC names like Kenan Thompson and Colin Jost received widespread praise.

What it means: Live sports will continue to play an important role in the battle for CTV ad dollars. Sports rights will be important for streamers, as will the need to innovate on what

sports viewing means, either through multiview options akin to NFL RedZone or through alternative broadcasts like Paramount's Nickelodeon NFL games.

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