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Effects of brand image in acquiring sponsors

Case: Floorball club Espoon Oilers

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Effects of brand image in acquiring sponsors
Case: Floorball club Espoon Oilers

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The purpose of this thesis is to research the brand image of a Finnish floorball club Espoon Oilers, what it should be, how it operates its marketing communications, and how these factors affect the sponsorship relations of the club. The primary objective is to receive information and results that the organization of Espoon Oilers can utilize in its future operations.

The theoretical structure of this study consists of information from various book sources and some Internet references. The theory section of this study defines the concepts marketing communication, branding, sponsorship and basic elements of sports marketing.

The empirical section of this study consists of investigation of the case organization Espoon Oilers. Information for this section is gathered by interviewing an employee of Espoon Oilers, received material from Espoon Oilers, some book sources, Internet sources and by conducting a quantitative research to companies currently sponsoring Espoon Oilers. The results of this research are investigated and analyzed by using a statistical package for the social science programme (SPSS). Also a similar questionnaire was sent to companies that previously have sponsored Espoon Oilers but are no longer in co - operation with the club. The results of these questionnaires are investigated and analysed by using qualitative methods.

The results and the case section of this study also include own thoughts and ideas for improvement from Authors of this thesis. These own thoughts and ideas are based on many years of experience of being a part of Espoon Oilers and on experiences received during the work of this thesis.

Key words Marketing communications, branding, sponsorship, sports marketing, Espoon Oilers

Wardi, Oliver, Wardi, Patrick

Brändi - imagon vaikutus sponsoreiden hankinnassa Case: Salibandyseura Espoon Oilers

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Opinnäytetyön tarkoituksena on tutkia millainen brändi - imago suomalaisella salibandyseurala, Espoon Oilersilla on, millainen sen pitäisi olla, kuinka seura hoitaa markkinointiviestintäänsä sekä kuinka nämä asiat vaikuttavat seuran sponsorointiyhteistöihin. Pää tavoitteena on opinnäytetyön avulla selvittää informaatiota ja saada tuloksia, joita Espoon Oilers voi organisaationa hyödyntää toiminnoissaan tulevaisuudessa.

Opinnäytetyön teoreettinen osuus tehtiin hyödyntämällä useita eri kirjallisuuden lähteitä sekä joitakin internet - lähteitä. Työn teoriaosuudessa käydään läpi käsitteet markkinointiviestintä, brändäys, sponsorointi sekä urheilumarkkinoinnin peruselementit.

Opinnäytetyön empiirisessä osuudessa tutkitaan case - organisaatio, Espoon Oilersia. Empiriaosuuden informaatio on kerätty haastattelemalla Espoon Oilersin työntekijää, käyttämällä Espoon Oilersilta saatua lähdemateriaalia, kirjallisuuden lähteitä, internet - lähteitä sekä analysoimalla kvantitatiivisen tutkimuskyselyn avulla saatuja tuloksia. Tämä tutkimuskysely lähetettiin Espoon Oilersia sillä hetkellä sponsoroiville yrityksille. Tämän tutkimuskyselyn vastaukset tutkittiin ja läpikäytiin käyttämällä ohjelmaa nimeltä SPSS. Edellä mainitun tapainen tutkimuskysely lähetettiin myös yrityksille jotka ovat aiemmin olleet sponsorointiyhteistyössä Espoon Oilersin kanssa, mutta yhteistyö on siihen hetkeen mennessä loppunut. Tämän tutkimuskyselyn tulokset analysoidaan käyttämällä kvalitatiivista tutkimusmenetelmää.

Työn lopussa esitettävissä työn tuloksissa sekä case - osuudessa tullaan esittämään työn tulokset sekä opinnäytetyön kirjoittajien omia kehitysehdotuksia jotka perustuvat monivuotiseen kokemukseen case - organisaatiosta sekä työn aikana saaduista kokemuksista.

Avainsanat Markkinointiviestintä, brändäys, sponsorointi, urheilumarkkinointi, Espoon Oilers

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1 Introduction

Floorball is a game which is played indoors with clubs and a small plastic ball that contains 26 holes. It is not like ice-hockey, all that a player needs to play the game is a pair of indoor shoes, a club and a ball. It is played in a rink that is 40 meters long and 20 meters wide, custom-made carpet or parquet is used as the gaming platform. Both teams start with five field players and a goalkeeper so the maximum number of people on the field is 12 in addition to two referees.

Espoon Oilers is a Finnish floorball club. The club's men's team plays in the national league of Finland (Salibandyliiga). Floorball is a young growing sport, with potential and objectives set to be the leading indoor team sport in Finland. The objective of this thesis is to investigate marketing communications, especially brand image and how it can be utilized in sponsorship co - operations of floorball club Espoon Oilers.

Finland is the defending world champion of floorball and this is one factor that has increased interest from both media and public. Also the 2010 Floorball World Championships are held in December in Finland. This is expected to create a lot of interest, with objectives to set new attendance record of more than 100 000 spectators during the tournament and more than 300 media representatives are expected.

If this tournament creates an increase of interest towards floorball as expected, it should also attract people to attend the games of the Finnish league. This is a good opportunity for clubs to attract more people to audiences by right promoting and advertising.

Floorball is a sport with only hundreds of spectators in the games and this is one reason why it is difficult for teams to attract companies' interest in sponsoring them. Floorball is a relatively young sport which needs the financial support of companies to be able to cope in the competitive sports environment.

1.1 The objective and purpose of the thesis

The objective for this thesis occurred because of the lack of money in floorball clubs. The players are not professional players but some earn money by playing floorball to cover traveling expenses. With fewer spectators than wished the teams have to work hard to earn money. Basically all incoming money is spent for expenses immediately.

The need and input for such a thesis came from Espoon Oilers. The subject is interesting to us because both of us have played in Espoon Oilers from a young age and now have played in the men's team for years.

The first objective of the thesis is to define the concepts sponsorship and brand image as a part of the marketing communications mix. The second objective is to create a case study for the floorball club Espoon Oilers, by using a theoretical study as a framework. For this study questionnaires will be sent to companies that sponsor or in the past have sponsored Espoon Oilers. The results of this questionnaire should reveal what the brand image of Espoon Oilers is from the perspective of the sponsoring companies.

The purpose of the thesis is to investigate the brand image of Espoon Oilers and what actions the club should take to improve its brand image to acquire more sponsoring companies.

1.2 Structure of the work

This thesis is divided into two main sections, the theoretical section and the case - section. In the theoretical section four main topics are explained more in detail, marketing communications, branding, sponsoring and sports marketing. The case section will discuss the empirical section of the study. What research methods have been used, how the information used has been discovered and finally the case organization Espoon Oilers will be introduced in detail. Suggestions for improvement in the operations of Espoon Oilers are introduced and also the results of questionnaires sent to sponsoring companies are presented.

1.3 Theoretical framework



Figure 1: Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework consists of marketing communication with an emphasis on sponsoring and branding. The research will be executed by sending surveys to companies and by interviewing carefully selected sponsors of Espoon Oilers. The research results will be analyzed by using both quantitative and qualitative methods. (See Figure 1)

2 Marketing communications

Marketing communications has a role in the world's business environment. Companies and organizations have to develop their marketing communication skills and communicate with potential stakeholders and also the general public. A company's overall marketing communications mix consists of five different categories: advertising, sales promotion, public relations, personal selling and direct marketing. (Kotler 2000, 550)

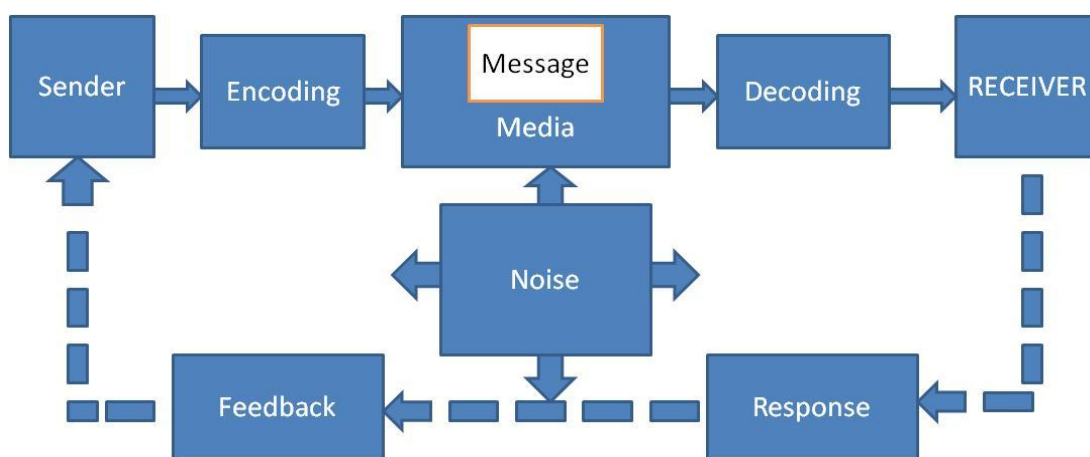


Figure 2: Elements in the communication process (adapted after Kotler 2000, 551)

In figure 2 can be seen the communication model with nine elements. Two of the elements symbolize the two biggest factors of communication, the sender and the receiver, two represent the two big communication tools, message and media. Encoding, decoding, response and feedback are the four major communications functions. The last element is noise, which represents the "random and competing messages that may interfere with the intended communication." (Kotler 2000, 550 - 551)

Marketing communications explains how the organization informs its customers about its products, services and other necessary issues concerning them. Ways to use marketing communications are engaging, informing, advertising, public relations, personal selling and sales promotion. There are many ways to utilize marketing communications, but the results are more important and how it guarantees the success of the objectives set. (Alaja 2000, 25)

2.1 Human minds as recipients of marketing communication

When the amount of information supplied multiplies, it does not result in growth of the capacity of the human mind. Consumers often select products or services that are most convenient for themselves. This increases the challenge for marketers.

The main rule is that to be able to internalize new information, one has to understand it. If the information is not logical or understandable, the probability for the consumers to understand it are relatively low. The human mind tends to refuse the most complicated issues, but on the contrary accepts information that is familiar from the past. The purpose of information is to produce understanding, not confusion. To remember a specific experience, it has to be connected with an emotion. The human mind remembers information that effects on emotions in the body. People are capable of remembering happenings from 20 years ago, but cannot remember happenings that occurred two years ago. (Laakso 2001, 63-65)

Confusing matters are easier to forget, because they hurt the mind. Automatically people try to withdraw from the awkwardness that confusion causes. In marketing it is essential to reinforce an existing vision rather than to educate the customer with new data which they cannot relate to. The competitiveness of a product is more advanced if the information provided to the receiver is short and simple rather than long and complicated. One word can create an advantage if the company is the only one advertising it in that area of business. (Laakso 2001, 66)

Erkki Alaja (2000, 22) states that consumer behavior can be divided into three individual factor groups. These factor groups are financial factors, psychological factors and sociological factors. These groups will shortly be discussed below.

The first factor is the financial factor. Consumers live in an everyday financial environment. Behaviors depend on available incomes, the financial cycle and product prices. The amount of financial resources the consumer can use affects the entire thinking process, which the consumer has to analyze before every individual purchase.

The second factor is the psychological factor where every person is an individual that differs from all others. Needs, observations and personality features guide their behavior. Different situations and life situation in general define every purchase process and the consumer does not recognize all of the needs. Observation and learning are essential psychological phenomena in consumer behaviors. There is competition for consumer attention.

The third factor is the sociological factor. Product qualities and reference groups have an effect on consumers' decision making process, what products and which brands they choose.

Consumers make their decisions based on what product messages they have experienced among all consumers. Sometimes the messages are delivered directly from advertisers to consumers.

2.2 People's behavior affects marketing

When investigating closely people's basic qualities, it can be seen that a human being is fundamentally lazy, greedy, comfort-seeking, selfish, envious, willing to apply, curious, safety-oriented and has the need for cohesion. Some of these qualities will shortly be investigated in the following. (Rope & Pyykkö 2003, 50)

The fact that a person is lazy means that in marketing, it is good for a company to offer ready packages where all content is a whole. An example are travels abroad where flights, transportation and dining are arranged in a package so that people do not need to make the effort of arranging each factor themselves. (Rope & Pyykkö 2003, 50) In Espoon Oilers' case the sponsoring companies are so important to the club that the sponsorship packages are customizable in order to reach an agreement that satisfies both parties. (Karjalainen, interview 03 Sep 2010)

Selfishness is a quality that people are not usually ready to admit. People claim they are not selfish, but they do not want the other selfish people to have an advantage against them. In business life this is seen as utilizing benefits. (Rope & Pyykkö 2003, 50)

Envy is a natural reaction if a neighbour makes a purchase of a new car. Then the other person wants the same car or a better one, because otherwise the person will become unnoticed in the neighbourhood. (Rope & Pyykkö 2003, 51)

A human desires to be part of a group, society, family or workplace. This is used in product selling and it gives a human a feeling of belonging to a group which is respected. (Rope & Pyykkö 2003, 51)

People are curious and interested in something new. Companies can sell products as specialty products to raise customer attention. Customers want new experiences and they are ready to pay money for them. Curiousness is a human feature that the company can take advantage of when marketing. If there is a possibility to inform that there is something that the people have never seen before, it is a way to attract people's attention. (Rope & Pyykkö 2003, 51)

People want to be safe after they have experienced something that has put them in danger. Health becomes an issue after being seriously ill. Security locks are bought after people hear that there have been burglaries in the adjacent areas. (Rope & Pyykkö 2003, 51)

2.3 Advertising

Advertising is a globally used activity. Advertising is a business activity that can exploit the rapid technological growth of multimedia. (Wright 2000, 2)

Wright quotes Daniel Starch in the book Advertising (2000, 3): "The simplest definition of advertising, and the one that will probably meet the test of critical examination, is that advertising is selling in print."

People see advertisements in their everyday life. People notice advertising while they are working, eating or enjoying their holiday. Advertisements attract people's attention in many places and directions. Basically advertising is everywhere. (Wright 2000, 3)

2.3.1 Advertising on the radio

Nowadays more organizations are interested in radio advertising as it has become more cost-effective than television advertising. Radio accounts for a third of all media consumption. Radio can reach people in places where television is not able to, at work, in shopping malls and especially in cars. 90% of people driving to work listen to their radios and that is an effective time to reach the customers' attention. Commercials on radio are repeated several times every day so the advertisements are heard many times. (Wright 2000, 224)

Espoon Oilers has utilized radio advertising once in the year 2010. The objective was to market an event which took place in the ice hockey hall Barona Arena. It was an attempt to make a new audience record and that is why additional marketing was made ahead of the event. No fact - based conclusions can be made on how many people attended the event when hearing the advertisement on the radio. However the amount of conversations it created among people was surprisingly large. People started to talk about the advertisement and asked if others had heard it. People were not used hearing advertisements of floorball on the radio and that is one reason why they paid extra attention when hearing it. (Karjalainen, Interview 3 Sep 2010)

2.3.2 Advertising on the Internet

Organizations creating and maintaining a website should concentrate on certain issues. The website should have an outlook that the visitor will enjoy watching. For the visitor to stay on the website it needs to be simple to use and it has to have enough information. Visitors want to receive new information on the website and these factors affect the visitors' decisions to come back. Awareness of competition is important and it should be investigated to make websites better. (Wright 2000, 227) There are several advantages of advertising on the web,

for example Three billion people have access to the web and it can be accessed almost from everywhere. The web is expanding and the advertising possibilities are unlimited. Some disadvantages also occur, for example the reaction from the audience is uncertain, measurement methods and value for money are uncertain and confusions might occur between conventional advertising and sponsoring. (Wright 2000, 228)

Espoon Oilers has invested a lot effort in maintaining its website. The main objective for Oilers has been the offering of updated information. Oilers wants to provide viewers with updated news concerning all teams. The focus is on the men's team, but also junior teams announce their latest news on the site. Viewers can see the schedule of upcoming games as well as game previews and post - match reports. Distribution of information is an important factor in publicity and it informs everyone that Oilers is operating in a professional way. 3 729 857 people have visited Oilers' website since January 17th 2006. The sites were created however before this. (Espoon Oilers)

In addition Oilers has a large billboard placed in a very visible location announcing Oilers' men's team's next home game. It is placed next to a road where many cars pass on a daily basis.

2.4 Direct marketing

Direct marketing is the selling process from the manufacturer directly to the final customer. (Kotler 2000, 650) The most prominent ways to execute direct marketing are face-to-face selling, direct mail, catalog marketing, telemarketing, television, kiosk marketing and on-line channels. (Kotler 2000, 656)

Direct marketing contains all the marketing which has the purpose to form an instant interaction with the customer. The objective is to receive an order, a purchase or request for additional information. It will either start a new customer relationship or deepen the one existing. (Lahtinen&Isoviita 2001, 188)

Direct marketing is a method of interaction directing an individual, with the objective being a response or counteraction. (Blomqvist, Dahl, Haeger 1993, 99)

2.5 Public Relations and press releases

Public Relations, (PR) is a continuous and designed activity with an objective to create and develop co-operation between the company and its stakeholders. Companies pursue PR to receive understanding and respect towards their operations. (Lahtinen&Isoviita 2001, 205)

With the help of PR a company tries to improve and strengthen the company image. Financial benefits are not the primary objective, but they become relevant later. Every staff member takes part in the execution of PR. Public Relations can be separated into internal and external PR. The target group of internal PR is the company's own personnel. (Lahtinen&Isoviita 2001, 205)

Lahtinen&Isoviita (2001, 205) explained external PR by using Philip Kotler (2001, 561-571) as an example: external PR focuses on improving the company image in the eyes of the stakeholders. Different ways of utilizing external PR are information, sponsoring, publicity, charity and organizing of different events.

Lobbying is an effective way to get issues into the consideration of decision-makers. In lobbying a group communicates with another group, which contains political decision-makers and officials. It is a demanding way of marketing, because it is linked with expectations and publicity. (Lahtinen&Isoviita 2001, 205)

The way an organization operates its communication activities in media has effects on forming the brand image. Negative information releases can be easily understood so that the company is not doing well. Financially thinking it is also an effective way to express news about the company. It is important to recognize that the company has news and information which are valuable in order to be successful in the procedure. Otherwise it is better to rely on the paid advertisement. (Von Herten 2006, 192)

2.6 Personal selling

Jobber quotes Robert Louis Stevenson in his book: "Everyone lives by selling something". Personal selling is a type of marketing where the contact with the customer is made face-to-face. It gives parties, the buyer and the seller, the opportunity to have a direct contact. The advantage of two-way communication is that problems or specific needs of the buyer can be noticed immediately by the seller and the sales presentation can be tailored to match the needs. Personal selling includes mandatory costs such as car expenses, travel expenses and overall the annual expenses of a field salesperson can be twice the level of salary. In industrial marketing effort is committed into the sales force. Its share of the entire marketing budget is usually more than 70 percent. It helps to maintain good personal relationships between selling and buying organizations. (Jobber 1998, 352)

The organization of Espoon Oilers could consider using the players of the men's team in personal selling. The reputation of the players could be utilized and the name of the club could be made more known among consumers. Espoon Oilers should consider arranging promotion stands in crowded places such as malls and advertising and selling season tickets or single

tickets to the home games. At the same time people would have the possibility to meet the players. Meeting the players has proven to be an effective way of reaching young children who have idols and thus create a good image for the club.

Discovering the right contact person often requires research in advance. Big organizations usually have an employee who is responsible for sponsoring co-operations with the company. These employees might be working under the title chief of marketing, chief of marketing communications, chief of information or chief of advertising. These are potentially the right persons to approach or at least they will know how to advance the potential co - operation. (Alaja 2000, 125)

In smaller organizations the chief executive officer of the company takes care also of sponsorship matters, but in bigger organizations, with several product lines, the responsibility of taking care of sponsorship is given to certain persons or then the product lines may have their right to decide their own sponsorship co-operatives. It is important not to ignore the company's chain of command. Ignoring the right contact person and immediately contacting upper level managers is a mistake and will most likely lead to a negative response. In bigger projects where the amount of money can increase to millions of Euros, it is recommended to contact directly the upper managers. They are usually the people who make the big financial decisions and it is advisable to demonstrate the issue to them first. Friends and relatives can be used to a certain extent in the process of discovering the right contact person. (Alaja 2000, 125)

The next phase is a telephone conversation or a face-to-face meeting. Intercourse with a familiar person is easier, because it eliminates some of the tension and the presenting the subject becomes more fluent. The contact persons are often busy and do not have unlimited time to negotiate. Therefore the presentation of the subject should be rehearsed several times in advance. One has to memorize the most important issues such as self-presentation and the essential qualities and facts of the service or product package in question. In a short period of time the counterparty should be familiarized with the issue. (Alaja 2000, 126)

The main objective in a telephone conversation should be receiving a personal audience. The contact persons might immediately announce that they are not interested at all or they want the presentation to be sent via e-mail, fax or mail. When requesting an audience, it is good to highlight the value of the matter for the company and that it will enable opportunities. It is an achievement to gain a personal audience, because that in itself is already an accomplishment. It requires special skills to conduct a short successful sales conversation and the managers can have a bad attitude from the beginning. In a personal audience the seller can impress with own personality and create interest in the manager and this way the seller sees

what type of people they would be working with in the future if the possible contract would be realized. Perception of the whole is always easier to execute personally rather than via telephone calls. (Alaja 2000, 126)

3 Branding

According to Lahtinen & Isoviita (2001, 107), De Chernatony and McDonald state that a brand is an identifiable product, service, person or place, which emphasizes when the buyer or user notice, unique additional values, which in the best way correspond to their demands. According to Shank (2002, 265) branding is a design, symbol, name or a combination of these that a sports organization applies to be able to differentiate its own products from the competitors. Three important branding concepts are trademarks, brand marks and the brand name. Lahtinen&Isoviita (2001, 107) add that brand name is the essential element in the process of developing a brand. It is even more important than the shape of the package or the advertisement of it. More than 90% of people in the world recognize the name Coca-Cola. Extra caution is required when creating an international brand name, so that the word or words do not have another negative meaning in other languages.

Current business environment is often encounters new changes, improvement of technology, alternating customer behavior and encounter unstable economical situation. Branding is the key issue in executing the company's product strategy. Developing a well-organized brand requires a large amount of long-term investment in specific areas such as advertising, promotion and packaging. It is common to subcontract manufacturing to other companies. For example in Taiwan there are many manufacturers producing clothing and electronics, but they are not working under Taiwanese brand names. Eventually manufacturers will learn where the potential market is located and will utilize it with building their own brand. Manufacturers sacrifice resources to develop their brand and eventually learn market power. Globally successful brands (Nike, Sony, Coca-Cola) possess customer loyalty, which guarantees large international sales numbers even if manufacturing in their homelands would not be affordable. (Kotler 2000, 404)

3.1 Branding process

The branding process (see Figure 3) starts with establishing brand awareness. Brand awareness means that the brand name is remembered and recognized by the consumers in the target market. After this the brand image should be developed and managed. Brand image is the consumer faith in a brand that later modifies attitudes. The next part of the branding process is brand equity, which is the added value of a brand to a product in a marketplace. This means in economic terms: "the difference of having a branded product versus its generic equivalent." The last part of the branding process is brand loyalty. (Shank 2002, 268 - 269)



Figure 3: The Branding process (adapted after Shank 2002, 269)

3.2 Defining a brand

Philip Kotler (2000, 404-406) defines the term brand as follows “A brand is a name, term, sign, symbol or design, or a combination of them, intended to identify the goods or services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competitors”. A brand represents the company’s image and values and contains certain promises of features and benefits that the buyer will receive after making the purchase. Achieving a globally well-known brand requires a long-term high - quality brand management. A brand such as Mercedes gives the customer a message of high technology, performance and success. Mercedes has built a good brand image over the years and it has to keep those values when planning brand strategy.

The term brand has been defined in different ways in Pirjo Von Hertzen’s book (2006, 16): Brand is a visualization based on a product mark among consumers (Aula ja Heinonen, Mainemestystekijä). Customer if anyone is capable to create a brand. A marketer can only create beneficial circumstances for the brand to develop in customers’ minds (Grönroos, palvelujen markkinointi ja johtaminen- teos. The term brand means everything that a company produces, what it is and what it does. (Marmelin ja Hakala, Yhdessä-viestinnän ja markkinoinnin integraatio.

3.3 Building a brand

Brand planning is a big part of a company strategy and it should be made properly from the beginning. The biggest challenges are how to make the brand known and distinctive with its competitors. (Von Hertzen 2006, 123)

Building a brand means building a business. Long-term brand building and development includes numerous strategic decisions, which are made by the head board of the company. Brand knowledge does not mean only physical products or services. A brand can also be identified as a company, an event, an athlete, a politician or another media. Big brands are often attached to a famous sport person, who appears in the media constantly. Viewers relate to their idols and recognize what the idol is wearing. Tennis star Björn Borg for example was the figurehead for Lacoste. Nowadays only few people remember precisely what he achieved, but most remember the logo with the crocodile. The brand has become known among people. (Laakso 2001, 22-23)

Building a brand is a process of many phases. In Figure 4 can be seen by the help of simple element how brand building should happen. (Rope& Methner 2001, 182)

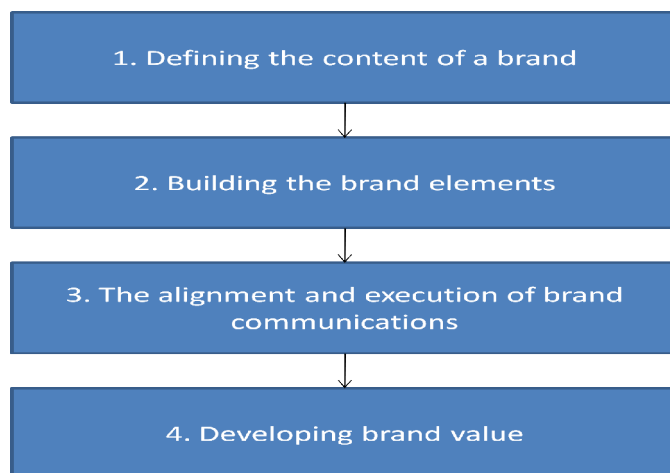


Figure 4: Building process of a brand (Adapted after Rope& Methner 2001, 182)

Gustav Hafren explained the term brand accordingly "Brand is the added value, which the consumer is willing to pay for that particular well-known product compared to an unknown product, even if it satisfies the needs likewise. An anonymous product is only a commodity for the customer. When a brand cannot offer better assets for the consumer than its competitors, it transforms into a commodity" (Laakso 2001, 23)

3.4 Brand strategy

Philip Kotler quotes Juck Peddis in his book Brand Management (2006, 168) that "the key to increasing the valuation of your company is in your ability to competitively brand it in the market."

Brand strategy is built on brand positioning, brand mission, brand value proposition, brand promise and brand architecture. Chuck Pettis from Technobrand (1994) states: "If people do not remember your brand name, how are they going to find you and buy your product? In effective branding the first step has to contain the perfect understanding what your customers want from you and then to give it to them." Pettis adds that it is important to understand the feelings that people have after successfully using the product. If a company is able to attach this to their strategy, they have taken the right actions. (Kotler 2006, 168)

Branding is not only deciding on the brand architecture. It involves a precise and compressed understanding of the result of the preceding brand analysis. When deciding on the direction of the brand strategy, the company should find out what they can afford and what is achiev-

able. Kotler emphasizes that without a supportive management, it is impossible to get the best strategic results. (Kotler 2006, 169)

“The brand strategy is always based on the brand core, its values and associations.” The products and services are a natural part of the brand. The importance of these two parts is likely to change over time and they are guided by the management and the decisions it makes. The biggest challenges of brand strategy building are the ability to maintain a stabilized status and to have a future perspective. Market environment is continuously giving pressure and challenging the adaptation ability of the company. (Kotler 2006, 169)

Mercedes-Benz is an example of what can happen if a company progresses without paying attention to customers. Mercedes-Benz, being a well - known brand, the company had to take serious actions in 1992 retain the position it had before. Mercedes engineering dominated the automobile market in the 1980's. 1990 was a year when customers demanded smaller, more practical cars. Unfortunately Mercedes was concentrated on developing even bigger cars before they achieved to create the successful S-Class of 1992. The operations began to develop, when a new CEO started a product initiative for doubling the number of products, but more importantly started to pay attention to customers. The result was a brand that emphasized the brand core. Later it became the most valuable achievement of the company. People started to refer to Mercedes as “The Future of the Automobile”. (Kotler 2006, 169-170)

Co-branding is stated to be the performance of two or more brands together in marketing communications. Occasionally it can be discovered already in the product or packing itself and it has been found to extend to business-to-business marketing. Co-branding is an efficient way for a smaller brand to achieve visibility. Co - branding presents the opportunity for a smaller brand to appear together with a bigger and more famous brand. Obstacles occur when customers do not want to be forced to use specific subcontractors, but to change them if necessary. (Von Herten 2006, 82-84)

3.5 Developing brand value

Brand value can be classified into two categories: brand awareness and the goodness and respect of the brand image that has been achieved in the markets and wideness of the market area that has been covered with brand management. (Rope & Mether 2001, 205)

The extent of the brand is composed of different factors. One is the number of products available and the volume they can achieve in the markets. Another factor is the market share that has been accomplished with the brand. In the process of developing brand value, the purpose is not to make big changes and change the whole concept. By doing that, the company creates a totally new brand. The most essential factors are improving reputation and the

level of goodness. The first mentioned is more crucial for brands which are new in the market. With the help of a wide marketing campaign, it is possible to reach a bigger and known reputation. The real question is if the brand can continue the marketing and good awareness among the people. A well-known brand and a good reputation in the nation is often a result of long-term systematic marketing. (Rope& Methner 2001, 206)

Reputation has also other positive influences. A brand with a good reputation is considered a reliable brand. This is one of the most significant factors in a relationship between a customer and the product. People appreciate reliability and want to invest in brands they trust completely. A brand licensed with a well-known reputation has an advantage on a brand which is not familiar to the big consumer groups. With a consistency in improving the reputation and visibility, it is possible to achieve a better goodness value for the brand. (Rope& Methner 2001, 206)

Improvement of brand value does not usually include changing the brand name, but in some situations two companies merge and create a new brand name. This can be positive, because it can give a signal to the public that there has happened large development inside the company. The company can use this in its bulletins in the future. (Rope& Methner 2001, 207-208)

3.6 Formation of the brand

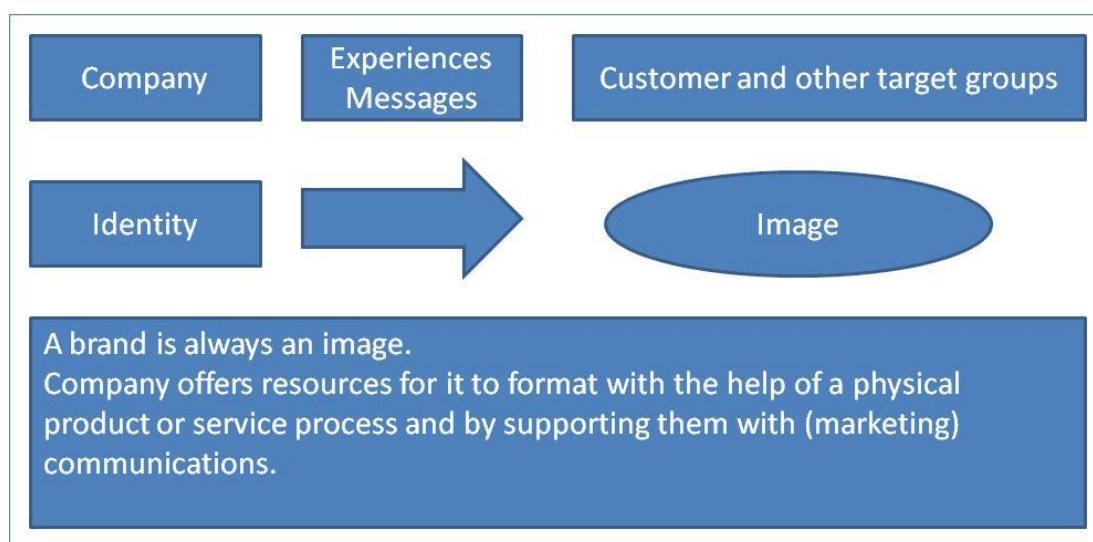


Figure 5: Formation of a brand (adapted after Von Herten 2006, 92)

Building of an own company brand is a way to differentiate from other competitors and thus necessary. Only monopolies are not required to do so, because they do not have competitors. People form their own opinions of different brands and that is why brands receive different feedback. (Von Herten 2006, 91)

Brand is an image that grows in people's minds. Different factors affect the process of building a brand image. The company can with its own operations and communications affect the information people receive and experience. The company should focus on combining the brand image with its identity and objectives. (See Figure 5)

The company's homeland has a slight impact on customers' reactions. This is a matter that companies cannot change in a big way. The company's homeland can have negative influences. Earlier Asian countries such as Japan and Korea had an image as producers of cheap products and this was an assumption among American and European markets, which had a decreasing impact on export industry of countries in these continents. (Von Herten 2006, 92)

It is important to recognize the image of an old company whose history is well-known globally. It informs that the company has a positive continuousness and has earned the respect of consumers. It is still relevant for an old company to constantly make efforts into marketing communications. (Von Herten 2006, 94)

3.7 Brand loyalty

For sports marketers, one of the most important factors is brand loyalty. Brand loyalty refers to a consequent favoring and purchasing of a particular brand rather than any else in a certain product category. (Shank 2002, 272)

In sports marketing a good example of loyalty is represented by sports teams. Often the term "loyal fans" is mentioned. A "loyal fan" accepts all the success and failures of the team and still a supporter will not start to support any other team. (Shank 2002, 274)

Shank writes (2002, 274) that according to the psychologist Robert Passikoff "the interaction of four factors creates fan loyalty." These factors are entertainment value, authenticity of the game, fan bonding, which means to what degree fans identify themselves with the players, the history and tradition of the team.

When customers make their purchases or invest in a service, they form a positive or a negative conception. After seeing the advertisement, the consumer has an expectation level of the bought good. If the expectations are high and the consumer feels that the promises were bigger than the actions, the consumer will have a negative feeling. But if the consumer is not expecting much and receives a surprisingly satisfying experience, the consumer has a positive experience. (Von Herten 2006, 96)

3.8 Logo

A company's or a product's logo consists either of a combination of a mark and a name logo or only a logo. Generally speaking the word logo is used and it is the company's or product's personal way to distinguish the particular logo visibly from others. The best remembered logos are the ones which contain an organic character, an animal or a familiar plant. (Von Herten 2006, 107 - 108)

Effort should be put in designing the logo, because it will not only give visibility for the name, but it will also be the factor that connects the customer to a long-lasting relationship with the brand. People are more open towards images than other factors. (Kotler 2006, 99)

Salibandylehti, a Finnish floorball magazine, organized a survey among three persons in the advertising and design business. These people were asked to assess and rate all the logos of the teams in the Salibandyliiga. The panel rated the logos with grades from 4 to 10 with 10 being the best. They also gave some positive and negative comments about each logo. Espoon Oilers received a grade 7+, which was the 4th best of all the fourteen teams. The positive comment that was given was that the implementation of the logo was very smooth and the negative comment was that the logo appears boring as it is only one - coloured. (Salibandylehti 3/2010, 34 - 35) See picture 23 (Espoon Oilers logos)

The brand of a sports club consists of many factors. One of the important factors is how the club appears to external people. The visual image for a sports club is important and one of the most important factors is the logo. (Suni, 2010 34 - 35)

When analysing the grades given by the panel, it seems that the panel considers the simplicity and clarity in the outlook of the logos. The panel also thinks that one of the most important qualities of a logo of a sports club is that it separates from other logos. The logo should also then reflect the values the club represents and show the personality of the club. When analysing the situation as a whole, amateurism can be seen in the logos of the Salibandyliiga teams. (Suni, 2010 34 - 35)

4 Sponsoring

Sponsoring is a way to communicate to a wanted target group by using the positive image of the target sponsored. The target sponsored can be an athlete, an artist, an event, an organization, a TV show, a movie or something comparable. Sponsoring is a part of a company's marketing communications and it is impossible to separate it from the company's marketing communications as a whole. Sponsoring must benefit both the sponsoring company and the target sponsored. (Lipponen 1999, 8), Vuokko (2004, 217) adds that sponsoring is renting and

exploitation of an individual, group, occasion or image of some other activity for predefined purposes of marketing communications. For companies, sponsoring is a channel to signal their own aspirations, attractions or own services and products, by linking them to some target with the same interests, for example a person, an event or activity.

The modern sponsoring is viewed to have started approximately 40 years ago when commercial sponsorship programs started in the United States of America. In Europe sponsoring became popular approximately a decade later in comparison to the American market. (Alaja 2000, 103)

The word sponsoring has for a long time been used to describe the marketing co - operation between companies and especially sports and culture. There are also negative aspects involved in the usage of the word. Sponsoring is traditionally considered a form of supporting where there is no concrete financial benefit for the company . Even in the Finnish dictionary the word sponsoring is described by the words financier, financial supporter and warrantor. (Alaja 2000, 104)

4.1 Basic elements of sponsoring

Sponsoring is co - operation between a company and a target sponsored. Sponsoring can also be considered a part of a company's target - oriented marketing communications to a certain target group. The targets of sponsoring represent mainly culture and sports but can be something else as well. The sponsoring company's objective is to use the positive image of the target sponsored. In general sponsoring is linked to all forms of a company's marketing communications. The sponsorship co - operation has to benefit both the sponsoring company and the target sponsored. (Alaja 2000, 105)

4.2 Objectives of sponsoring

The sponsoring target that is searching for a sponsor is usually the initiator of the co - operation. Big companies receive many co - operation proposals daily. The investigation of the proposals, the company's normal process of analyzing them, making decisions and informing all involved parties, is a long process. (Alaja 2000, 111)

Companies that regularly practise sponsoring seek for targets to sponsor as well. Some companies want to be involved in larger projects and some companies include smaller sponsoring targets that require smaller input in their sponsorship program. Some companies are involved in national projects, when only regional visibility is decisive for some. Some companies support short - term projects and some believe that only a several year co - operation brings results. Some companies want to support youth and some might try to avoid sponsoring dan-

gerous sports or environmentally unfriendly projects. Policies like this give a company a clear basis for choosing sponsorship targets. (Alaja 2000, 111-112)

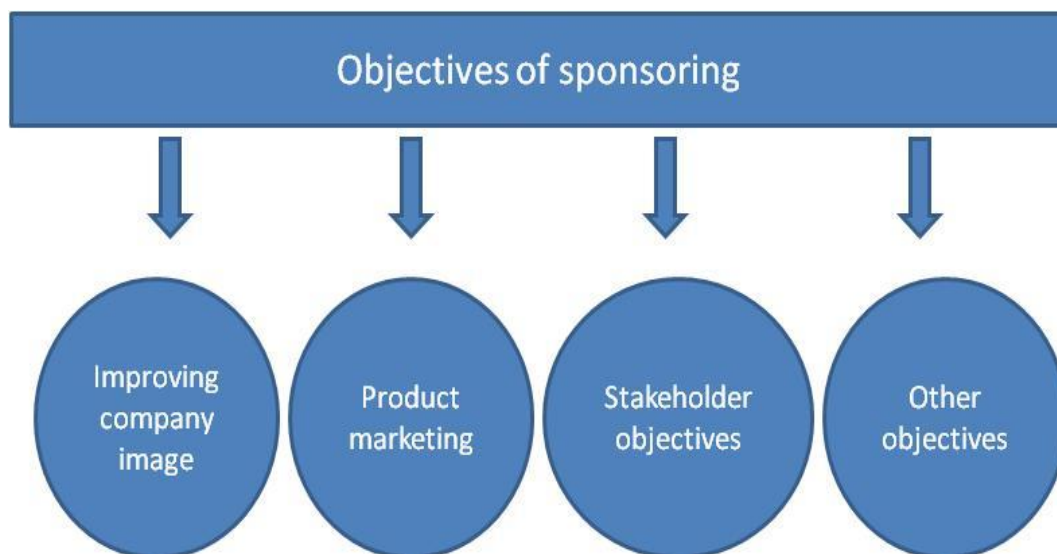


Figure 6: Objectives of sponsoring from the company perspective (adapted after Alaja 2000, 111)

As seen in figure 6 the objectives of sponsoring from the company perspective are multidimensional. The four main objectives include improving the company image, marketing of the product/products, stakeholder objectives and other objectives. (Alaja 2000, 110)

4.3 Factors how sponsorship targets are chosen

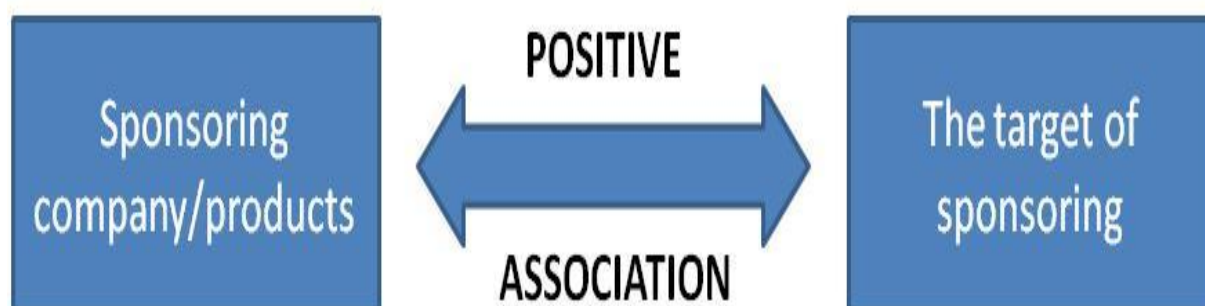


Figure 7: Basic starting point of the process of choosing a sponsoring target (adapted after Alaja 2000, 112)

In decision - making there are reasons behind the decision, some acknowledged and some unacknowledged. Some companies may have made a checklist to ease the choice making. The importance of the selection criterion depends completely on the objectives set for sponsor-

ing. Sponsors emphasize the selection criteria to meet own company needs. The more the sponsorship target possesses these factors the more likely it is that a sponsorship co - operation will be executed. (Alaja 2000, 112) (See figure 7)

When a company searches for possible sponsoring targets the criteria are that the agreement will meet with the objectives set. The sponsoring target should provide the sponsoring company with visibility and media visibility. The target should offer a possibility for a long - term sponsorship co - operation. Companies consider it necessary that the target has a good image and that it does not create negative thoughts among people. The target needs to attract the focus group that the sponsoring company is seeking for. (Vuokko 2004, 218) Alaja (2000, 112 - 113) adds that the target should also be able to convince the sponsoring company with high quality events and with well managed VIP - services. This gives a possibility for high quality public relations. Sponsoring companies also analyze the contribution benefit factor and is it even profitable to start a sponsorship agreement with the target.

Vuokko (2004, 218) claims that the first criterion, meeting the objectives, is the most important factor. The target has to be such that by sponsoring it for example the objectives of a company image can be reached. In case this criterion is not met all the other criteria become irrelevant. The sponsoring target can be unique, interest the focus group and receive publicity but the first factor is always that the objectives must be reached. The main question in this is how well the objectives are set.

Inside a big company, sponsorship co - operation should be processed in a separate department, meaning that it requires company's own clear operating principles, which help the company make its final decision in selecting the right co-operation targets. It is dependent on the objectives set to be achieved in the result of the co-operation. Small companies could target bigger projects than their resources can operate with, in hopes of receiving nationwide visibility and succeed to expand nationwide. Some companies want to build a co-operation which lasts for years as some are seeking a short relationship, perhaps one or several events in a year. The position of a head sponsor can be a mandatory requirement and all the company approves. (Alaja 2001, 26)

4.4 Measurement of the effects of sponsoring

Isolating the effects of sponsoring from the overall marketing of a company is not straightforward or easy. Sponsorship input can be compared to the overall input of marketing communications to receive a truthful basis of comparison. Many factors affect if the sponsorship input is successful, for example the inputs of competitors, other marketing operations, utilizing the factors affecting the input of sponsorship, the basis of the image of the company and also the conduct of the co - operation in practice. (Alaja 2000, 115)

Researching the results of the sponsorship co - operation requires precise objectives and defining precisely what the focus group is. Some specific methods have been developed for researching sponsoring, which can be applied in the measured projects. These measurement preliminary methods are investigations which contain the implementation of qualitative and quantitative researches. Measurement of visibility measures the amount and quality of visibility in the media and attendance both on the premises and via media. Researches can be tracked, for example to analyze the changes in reputation levels, image levels and the sponsor's connection to the target. Tracking of sales figure is important in order to compare the achieved results to the set objectives. (Alaja 2000, 115)

The importance of measurable objectives increases in the analyzing of results. For example when analyzing how a set budget was met, special attention should be paid to the biggest deviations. If there are big deviations, the reasons and sources for them might be difficult to notice. After the results and objectives are analyzed, the thought process should be continued to the analysis of what was successful or unsuccessful and the reasons for it. (See Figure 8) (Alaja 2000, 253)

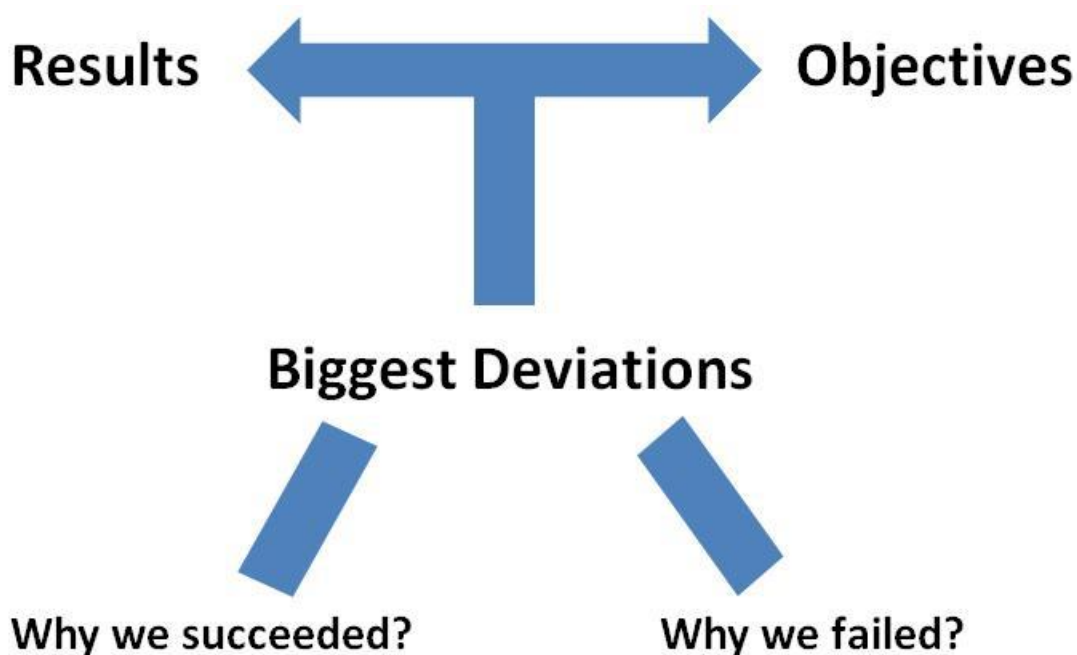


Figure 8: Analyzing results (adapted after Alaja 2000, 253)

The effects of sponsoring can be measured by analysing four different factors. These factors are visibility, feedback provided by the focus group, impacts of conspicuousness and image and development in sales and market share.

Factors relating to visibility are for example the number of people taking part in the event, what people were reached, how many and how the media reported the event. From the feedback of the focus group can be seen for example how successful the sponsorship target was as

a public relations opportunity and in developing focus group relations. More important factors to evaluate in sponsoring though are the effects of conspicuousness, image and sales because they are the main objectives of sponsoring. (Vuokko 2002, 320-321)

There are also ethical issues involved in sponsoring a sport that need to be considered. A need for an athlete to have a sponsor might lead the athlete to use false methods in reaching success in the sport. Sports that are in the favor of sponsoring companies might affect what sports small children decide to choose as their hobby. This might also be a reason for some sports becoming less popular. A sponsor naturally is not the only reason for ethical questions to occur. The sponsoring target's own objectives and, motives and public's expectations and demands can affect it as well. (Vuokko 2002, 321)

"In today's environment, the conclusion of a sponsorship program is likely to be marked by an assessment of its impact." There are many ways to implement evaluation after an event, but they are usually measured based on predetermined outcomes such as increase in sales during the period of sponsorship co - operation. Because the sponsors are mainly interested in results that can be measured, the sponsors probably evaluate the price according to the return on the sponsorship investment. (Fullerton 2010, 156)

4.5 Ways to utilize sponsorship co - operation

Benefits of utilizing sponsorship co - operation are received due to contract as counterparts and the sponsoring target is responsible in executing them in general. Depending on the activity of the sponsoring company, how extensively the company wants to use contractual rights in benefiting the company's own marketing communications. Utilizing of sponsoring can be divided into commercial, informative and functional relationship operations. (Alaja 2000, 114-115)

A sponsor can appear, for example on targets outfits, posters, banners, field wings, promotions, screenings, contests and exhibitions. The sponsoring company can take themes towards their own advertising. The players from a particular club can be used as figureheads when arranging promotions or distributing concrete products. A good way to advertise the sponsoring target is to provide the media photo and text material and to familiarize them with the project. It is important to try to invite representatives of the media to attend the games and other events. Utilizing celebrities as an attraction can increase the awareness of a single event. Maintaining good functional relationships is valuable. The target should invite stakeholders to occasions and events and combine business and leisure in an interesting way. A sufficient aftercare can make the relationship even closer and it needs to be executed carefully. (Alaja 2000, 114-115)

4.6 Sponsorship co - operation between companies and non-profit organizations.

Non - profit organization seldom survive without sponsoring. Sports clubs and other associations for example sell tickets to their home games or sell advertisement space in their yearly publications. The purpose of these actions, especially in small private non - profit organizations, is to raise money to fund the operation. These are examples how small non - profit organizations execute business activity. They also might gather financial support from private citizens to fund their operations. (Vuokko 2004, 215)

Sports clubs can also seek funding from companies. The co - operation between companies and non - profit organizations can be very loose. A co - operation can also be a very exactly defined co - operation where rights and obligations of both parties are agreed in a contract. (Vuokko 2004, 216)

4.7 Sponsor's motives and needs

From the sponsor's point of view the objectives of sponsoring a non - profit organization can be to induce media publicity and visibility, to increase knowledge of the company or its products or to change and improve the image and reputation of the company or its products. The objectives can also be to increase sales and market share or to nurture stakeholder relationships and society relationships. (Vuokko 2004, 217)

4.8 Motives and needs of the sponsorship target

The most important reason for different organizations and events being able to acquire sponsors is that they can offer companies a focus group that the sponsor can affect. The sponsorship target also needs to offer visibility, added value in image and business relationship possibilities that the companies consider they need. (Vuokko 2004, 219-220)

The target can hope and expect also more than only financial support. One objective of the sponsorship co - operation can also be the possibility of being able to offer the end user services and products which otherwise could not be offered. (Vuokko 2004, 220)

Sponsoring has also a positive effect on the staff of the organization. The staff of the organization might sense that the sponsoring company believes in them, trusts them and appreciates their efforts. When both the parties share the same values and principles it is easier to avoid confrontations. (Vuokko 2004, 220-221)

A sponsor has certain criteria which a possible sponsorship target needs to meet, but at the same time the target needs to consider what the important factors are when considering starting co - operation. (Vuokko 2004, 222)

4.9 Sponsoring as a way of communications

Sponsoring can be executed and exploited in several ways. Events, phenomenon, programs and people can be sponsored. (See Figure 9)

For example sports championships can be sponsored. In this case the sponsoring happens only for a limited time, but it is hoped that it attracts the particular focus groups and good publicity. This means that the company has to time its communicational methods to that particular, possibly very short - time frame. Customer events, media publicity attempts, advertising and promotions associated with the company have to be timed and resourced by the target's schedule. (Vuokko 2002, 311-312)

Companies consider that one of the biggest challenges associated with sponsoring is how sponsorship projects can be exploited: how to gain publicity and visibility for the company's own sponsoring, the supporting advertising that is needed, how sponsoring can be utilized in own public relations and customer relationships or how sponsoring supports sales and sales promotions. Exploiting means also that money is required. So the costs do not consist only of the actual input put to support the sponsorship target but also of the costs that come from utilizing the sponsorship co - operation. (Vuokko 2002, 318)

According to a sponsorship research made by the Association of Finnish Advertisers (Mainostajien Liitto) in 2002, sponsorship costs of the companies taking part in the research were on average 270 000 Euros and their costs of utilizing the sponsorship co - operation were on average 140 000 Euros. (Vuokko 2002, 318)

Sponsoring is more or less indirect communications where a company's financial input in sponsoring is usually targeted to a different focus group than the one the company expects remuneration from. For example for a company sponsoring an ice hockey team it is not satisfying that the members of the team only buy the products and have a positive attitude about it. (Vuokko 2002, 318)

Sponsoring companies try to affect a focus group that relates positively towards the sponsorship target, which is interested in it and its operations or considers the matter it represents is important. When sponsoring an ice hockey team the eventual focus group is the people who are interested in the sport. (Vuokko 2002, 318)

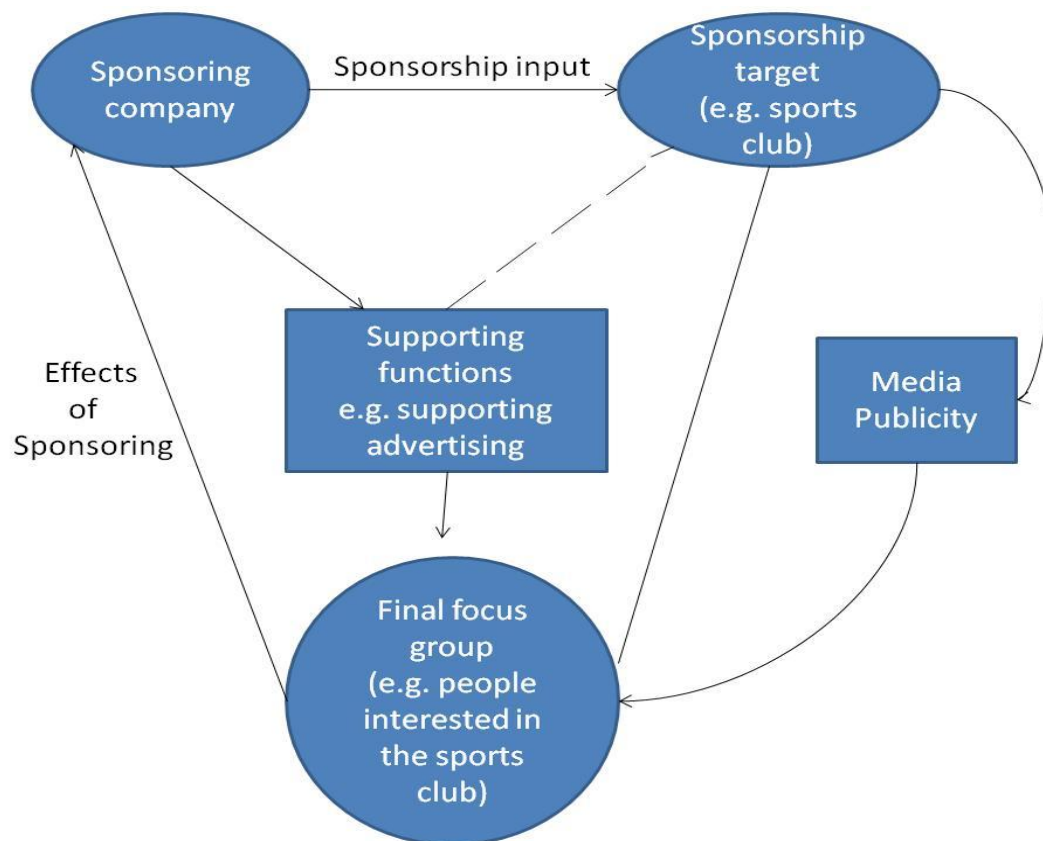


Figure 9: Sponsoring as a way of communications (Adapted after Vuokko 2002, 319)

If a company wants to create to itself an even more dynamic and on - going image, the company should know the factors that meet these criteria according to the focus group. It can be a sport, a scientific research or some form of culture. If a company wants to emphasize social responsibility, the company should consider ways to indicate it to the focus group. It could be supporting war veterans, environmental matters etc. Sponsoring the company indicates to the focus group its values and is interested in the same matters as the focus group is. To be able to do this the company needs to have knowledge of the focus group and its interests. (Vuokko 2002, 320)

4.10 Ways to discover the right company

There are several steps towards a successful co-operating relationship. After fully understanding the selling product, the potential co-operating companies should be recognized. This process requires assessment, analyzing, knowledge and fortune. It is necessary to understand the general attitudes the company has towards sponsorships and in which direction they are directed. Creative thinking and brave actions can lead into good results and create an advantage on competitors. The bigger the knowledge of the business world and future is, the bigger the probability is to target right parties in right methods. Using friends, relatives and other contacts is an effective way to approach potential partners. (Alaja 2000, 124)

4.11 Event sponsorship

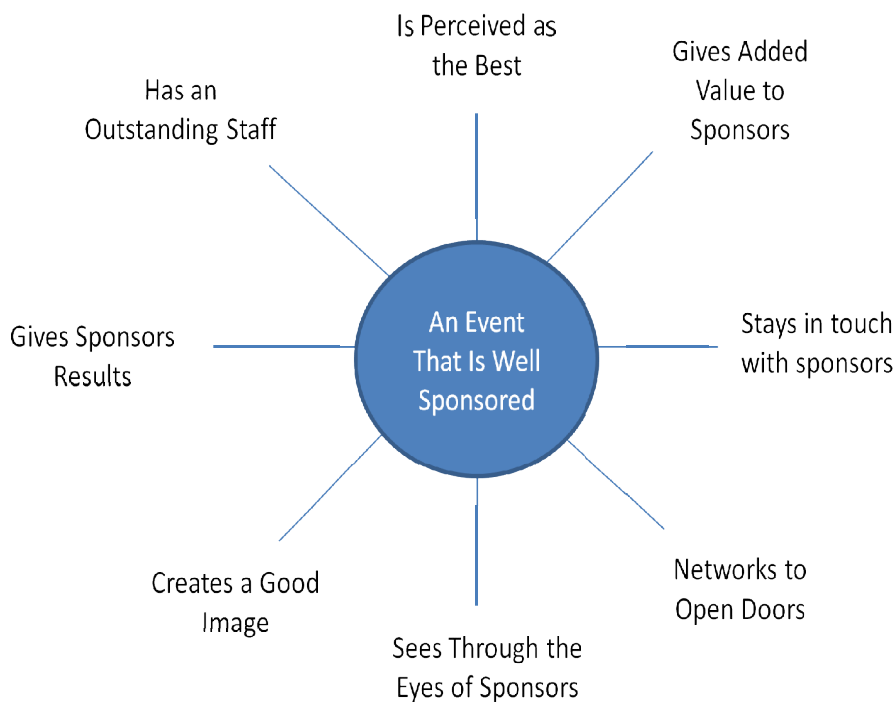


Figure 10: Guidelines for successful event sponsorship (adapted after Skinner&Rukavina 2003, xi)

Skinner&Rukavina define sponsorship in the following way: " it is an activity that puts buyers and sellers together, with both receiving certain benefits" (Skinner&Rukavina 2003, 2)

There are different ways of creating a strong event, but they are dependent on the resources and the budget. Effective ways are to bring the event into people's awareness and to try to attract the members of the community to advertise the event to friends and relatives. It is important to create ideas and execute them in a way that no one else is able to. If the event is annual, it is important to improve the event each year and increase the level. Other events can be a good learning environment. Adapting them to the current situation will produce a better result. (Skinner&Rukavina 2003, 17-18)

A successful event requires a well - organized marketing plan, but before doing that it is good for the event manager to analyze sponsorship from the sponsor's perspective. The International Events Group (IEG) listed ten reasons why companies sponsor different events. Some of these reasons are increasing visibility, shaping consumer attitudes providing incentives for retailers, dealers and distributors, entertaining clients, recruiting and retaining employees. Creating merchandising opportunities, showcasing product attributes and differentiating company's own products from the products of competitors are considered important. (Skinner& Rukavina 2003, 22)

A full understanding of the mentioned reasons will help the management make a better marketing plan. When planning, the event needs to be divided to as many units as possible. Every unit can have a sponsor. Nothing should be sold based on how much it will cost the organizers, but everything should be sold based on its value. (Skinner&Rukavina 2003, 31)

4.12 Barter agreement

According to Sylvia Allen's ninth article in a 10 - part article series on sponsorship development, the objective in sponsorship co - operation is to earn money, the value offered to the sponsor and benefits the sponsorship target gains. Another type of sponsoring, which also is an important part of the sponsorship mix, is bartering that is a good way to diminish expenses, especially in areas of media and promotion. (Allen)

Allen explains that according to Webster's dictionary barter is "to trade (e.g., goods, services) without the exchange of money." A barter relationship is similar to other sponsorship deals. The agreement in a barter contract is negotiated the same way as any other sponsorship with the exception that no cash is involved in the exchange. Sponsorship contracts can also be made by creating agreements where part of the trade is made in cash and a certain percentage is exchanged as goods. (Allen)

The barter partner should be taken care of in the same way as the other sponsorship partners. In the contractual agreement of the barter agreement the responsibilities and benefits should be made clear. Confidentiality should be maintained and also all promised responsibilities should be followed. Finally the same analysis of the contract that would be provided to a cash sponsor should be provided to the barter partner as well. This partnership has helped reduce item expenses and has added value to offered products and/or services. The proper conduct is also important to be able to negotiate the same relationships in the future. (Allen)

Many of the sponsorship co - operations that Espoon Oilers has with companies are barter relationships. For example co - operations with companies that provide equipment such as floorball sticks, balls, shoes, training kits and playing jerseys are executed as barter agreements. (Karjalainen, interview 03 Sep 2010)

4.13 Aftercare

A well - organized sponsorship co-operation contains constant reporting about current matter. Both parties have to be aware of occurred problems in order to solve them and develop. If the timing of the reporting has not been agreed in the contract, it is good to report regularly orally or in writing. Reporting has a major effect on the successfulness and functioning of the

relationship. After the contract year, the co-operative company should be provided with an annual summary, which contains statistics and the content of the contract, but also in addition photographs, news clips and television broadcasts. (Alaja 2000, 132)

5 Sports marketing

Alaja (2001, 16) quotes a definition by Bergström and Leppänen (1997) that marketing is a customer-oriented way of operating, where a competitive advantage for a company is created, goods are taken to market to create a willingness to purchase and a customer relationship is guaranteed by customer satisfaction. Shank (2002, 2) adds: sports marketing is “the specific application of marketing principles and processes to sport products and to the marketing of nonsports products through association with sport.”

According to Alaja (2001, 15) the decisive moment of success in sports marketing in Finland happened in the 1990s. Marketing did not become the solution that solved all problems, but Alaja adds that marketing became an instrument that helped sports to maintain its competitiveness in changing environments.

Sports marketing can be usually divided into two sectors, marketing towards people involved with the sport and marketing towards spectators of the sport. In marketing towards people involved with the sport the objective is to attract a consumer become an active person involved with the sport, for example in a sports club or fitness gym. With marketing towards spectators of the sport the objective is to activate the consumers to go to sports events as spectators. (Alaja 2001, 15)

5.1 Elements of sports marketing

A coordinated set of elements that sports organizations apply to reach their marketing objectives and satisfaction of customers is the sports marketing mix. The elements of the marketing mix are product, price, promotion and distribution. When these factors are combined they form a marketing program. (Shank 2002, 30)

Sports marketing can be separated into five basic elements (see Figure 11)

5.1.1 Marketing starts from customer needs (see Figure 11)

The customer is the basis for all activity. The customer can be a spectator in a sporting event or a representative of a co - operative company. The customer can be considered as an employer of an organization. Without satisfied customers it is impossible to be successful in the

markets. A sports organization has to know its customers and has to be able to recognize their needs, wishes and motives for their behavior. (Alaja 2001, 16)

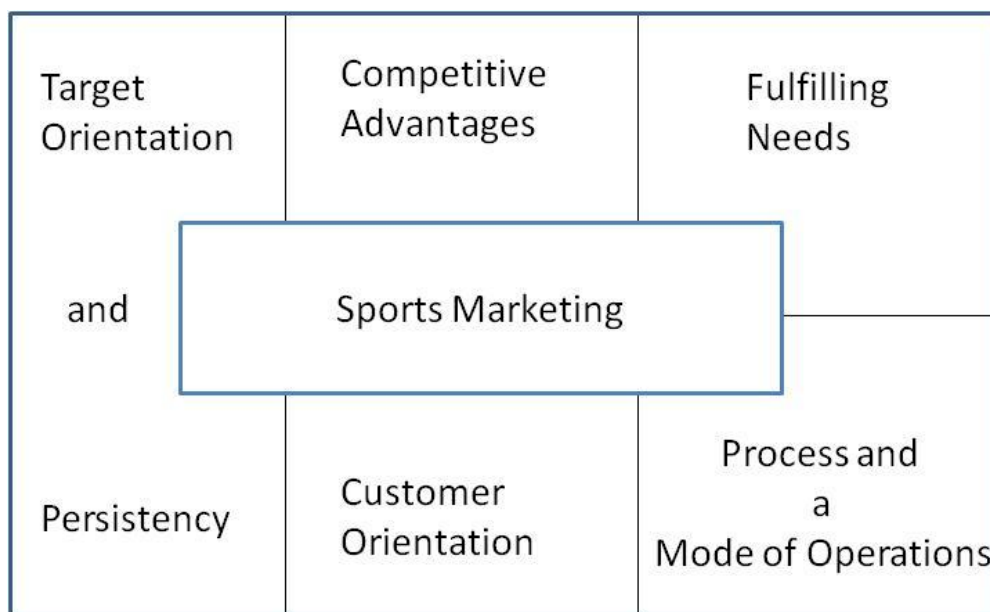


Figure 11: Basic elements of sports marketing, (Adapted after Alaja 2001, 17)

5.1.2 Marketing is a process and a mode of operation (see Figure 11)

Marketing is involved in all sporting activity, whether it is product development, pricing, organizing availability or marketing communicational operations. All outgoing operations of a company can be considered marketing. Marketing tasks are the responsibility of a sports organization, but more and more the people in charge of marketing are the ones specialized in it. (Alaja 2001, 16)

5.1.3 Marketing is a target - oriented and persistent activity (see Figure 11)

There are clear objectives in marketing. Target - orientation is as important in marketing as in all other sporting activities. Only in this way the operations remain persistent. Marketing is a long - term operation. In marketing it is very important to plan, develop and create new ideas. (Alaja 2001, 16)

5.1.4 Marketing creates a competitive advantage (see Figure 11)

An objective in marketing is to build a competitive advantage. An athlete seeks to develop his own strengths and advantages compared to competitors it is crucial for a sports marketer to be able to create competitive advantages for the product marketed. A competitive advantage can be financial, operational or in the image. (Alaja 2001, 16)

5.1.5 Marketing satisfies customer needs by offering benefits (see Figure 11)

Once the customer needs are identified, marketing is used to discover the ways to satisfy them. Marketing offers clear solutions, benefits and versatile possibilities. Once a sports marketer for example notices that elderly people need guided veteran exercise, he develops a service to fulfill needs in this customer - area. (Alaja 2001, 16)

Probably the biggest and most important reason for sponsorship in sports is to either maintain or to build an image. For the sponsoring company and the sports club, image building is a process that benefits both parties. The sponsoring company tries to connect itself with positive images that a sporting event can produce. (Shank 2002, 418)

5.2 Competitive methods of sports marketing

The competitive methods of sports marketing are product, price, availability, marketing communications and sponsorship co - operation. The methods of competing are actions with a sports organization trying to influence demand and satisfy it. A combination of these methods can be described as a marketing guideline. (See Figure 12) (Alaja 2001, 17)

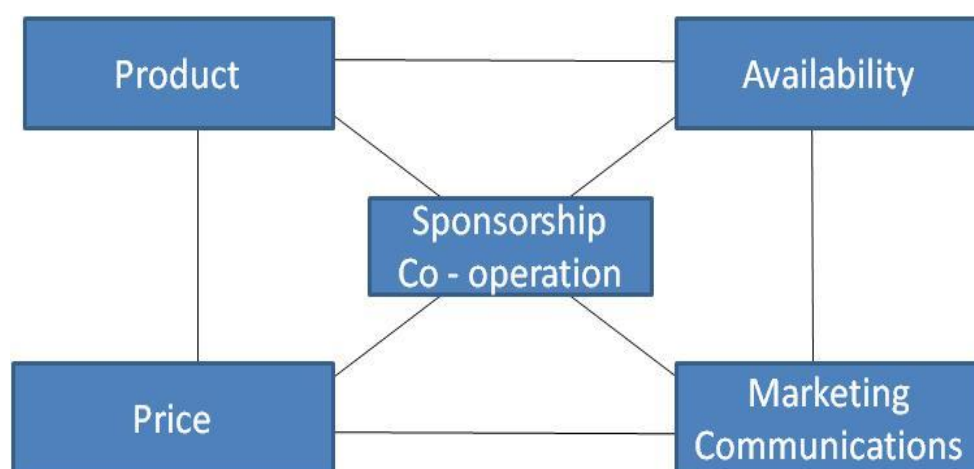


Figure 12: Competitive methods of sports marketing (Adapted after Alaja 2001, 17)

A product is what the sports organization offers its customers, it is a basic method of competition in sports marketing. All the other methods are based on it. The customers buy the material product and concrete solutions for their needs, for example an entrance ticket to a sporting event. A sports organization offers its products and services based on a price that is the total of price, discounts and payment conditions. For example a season ticket to league matches has normally a cheaper price per game than tickets that are bought separately for each game. The season ticket can usually be paid in several payment installments. Availabili-

ty means how the availability of products and services is organized. It means removing the obstacles between the product and the customer, meaning that the purchase process is made as easy as possible for the customer. The methods of marketing communications are engaging, informing, advertising, relationship activities, personal selling and sales promotions. The sports marketer is demanded to have knowledge and skills to utilize all these ways to generate optimal results and timing. A sports club sets a price for what it offers products and services. A price as a competitive method consists of the price itself, discounts and payment conditions. For example buying a season ticket to the games of a sports organization becomes usually cheaper than buying single tickets to each game. The season ticket can also often be paid in several installments. A sponsorship co - operation's objective is to gain a clear competitive edge for a sports product. This provides additional resources for developing the product, more effort can be invested in marketing communications and the economical risk can be reduced. The sponsorship co - operation has also an important effect on co - operation with the partnering companies. The sports marketer offers the partnering company benefits on image, marketing communications and even business operations. At its best a sponsorship co - operation is an activity that benefits the partnering company's operations significantly. (See Figures 12 & 13) (Alaja 2001, 17-18)

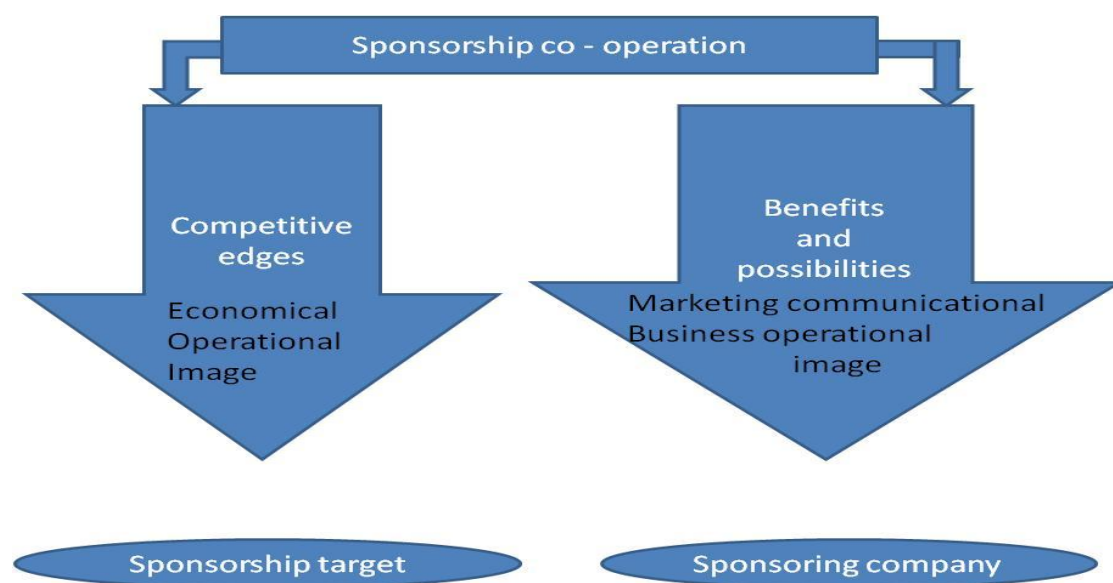


Figure 13: Dimensions of sponsorship co - operation (adapted after Alaja 2001, 18)

5.3 Pricing a product

When creating a sponsorship plan for companies one factor that has to be taken into consideration is pricing. This is one of the most problematic parts in the sponsorship proposition. (Grey, Skildum - Reid 2003, 94)

Price is the only competitive method of marketing that adds money directly to the company's accounts. Price as a competitive method consists of the choice of pricing policy, pricing technique, the price and different ways of using price as a way of marketing, such as discounts and payment conditions. (Alaja 2000, 89)

Price determines the value of the product. If the desire is to create an image of a high quality product it should be seen in the price. If the price is low it might prevent competitors from entering the same market if they can't compete with the same price level. When the price is too high it might prevent the sales of the product. The price also affects the profitability of the provided service. Raising the price adds profitability if the added price does not reduce the sales. With a lower price the volume of sales might increase but meanwhile the profitability might decrease. The price should be accepted by the target group. Both a too high and too low price might decrease the sales of the product. (Alaja 2000, 89)



Figure 14: Factors affecting the price of a product (adapted after Alaja 2000, 90)

Different factors affect pricing and different factors have to be taken into consideration when pricing a product or a service. Different markets may have a different price level. The price level is affected by competition and the ratio of supply and demand. It is also important to know how the competitors do their pricing. The government officials regulate the pricing of products by different kinds of taxes or the prices have to be approved by some government offices. The objectives of an organization create a basis for pricing. Objectives of image must be considered. Other influencing factors are also the pursuit of market share and sales and profitability objectives. When pricing the product the actual product must be taken into consideration. The target group and how it is placed in relation to the competitors should be investigated. The costs define the low point of the price of the product. Both the costs de-

financed by the product and by the organization should be calculated. In forced situations a product can be sold under the cost point but this loss must be covered somehow else. (See Figure 14) (Alaja 2000, 89-90)

The theoretical section of this study included the primary facts about marketing communications, branding, sponsorship and sports marketing. The objective was to learn about the factors mentioned above and to provide the readers information of the facts needed to understand this thesis, what its content and objectives are.

6 Empirical Study

The next paragraph will contain the research methodology of the study, results and purpose of the research as well as the theoretical framework.

6.1 Designing the questionnaire

The visual appearance of a questionnaire is important. A well-organized structure and a polite and clear introduction will make the questionnaire more pleasant for the respondent. The respondent should not need to read the instructions several times in order to understand them. It is important to announce the form of questionnaire and that all the answers will be analyzed confidentially. This gives the respondent a secure feeling and awareness of what the person going to conduct. (Sekaran 2003, 245)

Before the questionnaire was sent to the respondents, it needed to be tested by some other persons and the thesis instructor. The thesis was given for inspection to the Head of Junior Management of Espoon Oilers, Markku Karjalainen. After reading the questionnaires, he gave advice on how to improve the questionnaire. After this the questionnaire was validated once more with the thesis instructor for final modifications before it was ready to be sent

Effort was put into the planning of the questionnaire. Finalized versions were improved several times and many attempts were needed before the questionnaire was ready to be sent to organizations. The questions may appear similar, but still have a different meaning, so the formation had to be perfectly executed. The questionnaire contained multiple - choice questions and at the end an open question with a blank area where the respondents could express their own thoughts concerning the main topic. It was positively surprising to notice that some of the respondents had the time to write their opinions on this matter. Some of the respondents are executives in their organizations and that is why it is valuable and highly appreciated to receive free professional comments from these people.

The questionnaire was sent to companies who are sponsoring Espoon Oilers and to companies who have sponsored Oilers in the past, but are no longer in co-operation with the club. The questionnaire was sent by e-mail to the contact persons of each company. The contacts from these persons were received from Espoon Oilers.

6.2 Research methods

A research can be executed by using quantitative and /or qualitative research methods depending on the research. In a qualitative research there might be a smaller number of respondents who share information. However the amount of information received from these few respondents is valuable. Interviews are a good example of a qualitative research. The data received will be analyzed and organized and put into a form where it can be explained, instead of putting the data into complicated mathematical forms. Data, procedures and written reports are the three main components of a qualitative research. (Strauss & Corbin 1998, 11-12)

Quantitative research is used more when decisions are made based on evidence. In order to execute an effective quantitative research, the researcher must collect numerical data, store it and finally investigate it. In this research method the results are analyzed with software programs. Excel and Lotus are two alternatives, but Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) has proven to be the most versatile and easy to use software. (Adams, Khan, Rae-side&White 2007, 170)

6.3 Research methodology

Uma Sekaran defines research in the following way: "it is the process of finding solutions to a problem after a thorough study and analysis of the situational factors". Managers in the current business world make constantly important decisions. There are good and bad decisions, but the research can and often will make the decision-making process easier. It is important to recognize the problem, to find the information and to use it properly. (Sekaran 2003, 4)

The reason why we did a quantitative research was to learn about the overall opinion of the companies on sponsorship co-operation with Espoon Oilers. The questionnaire was sent to companies who are sponsoring Espoon Oilers. The questionnaire was sent by e-mail to the contact persons of each company.

A questionnaire was sent to companies who have sponsored Oilers in the past, but are no longer in co-operation with the club. These results were analyzed by using qualitative methods. The questionnaire was sent by e-mail to the contact persons of each company.

6.4 Reliability and validity of the study

When analysing research results it is essential to evaluate the data, design methods and the overall accuracy of the results. It is possible to recognize these factors by making a reliability and validity evaluation of the results. (Adams, Khan, Raeside, White 2007, 235)

Measuring reliability in a research means how the measuring instruments measure the whole package and if the results are consistent. One way to measure reliability is to conduct a test - retest reliability. A questionnaire is sent to certain respondents once and then again for example after six months. The more the results are alike, the more efficient the test-retest reliability is. (Sekaran 2003, 204)

Validity means that the right factors have been measured in the study. In order for the questionnaire to be valid it needs to be well-organized and structured. A large quantity of respondents guarantees a more valid study result and it will lack errors. (Sekaran 2003, 206)

7 Case: Espoon Oilers

7.1 Espoon Oilers Introduction

Espoon Oilers is one of the biggest floorball clubs in Finland with about 900 members. Oilers was founded in 1990. All together in the club there are 32 teams playing in men's, women's, boy's and girl's series. Oilers also has other functions. The club operates in co-operation with the hospital, Jorvi, offering floorball guidance to people with mental problems. Also Oilers organizes yearly an international youth tournament, Oilers Junior Games, after school "day-care" for children and floorball camps in the summer for children and youth. (See appendix 7, figure 28)

Espoon Oilers has been a Nuori Suomi (Young Finland Association) sinettiseura since 2001. (See appendix 7, figure 28) It is rewarded to sports clubs as recognition of good quality work in children's and youth sports club work. To be able to receive the award a sports club has to meet the quality criteria that includes nine steps of ethical and educational principles, quality of practice and quality of organization in the sports club. (Nuori Suomi - Sinettikriteerit)

Espoon Oilers is probably best known for its men's team that plays in the Finnish national floorball league (Salibandyliiga) and is one of the most successful teams in floorball worldwide. The team has won 4 Finnish championships, three silver medals and 2 bronze medals. In the European cup Oilers has won three bronze medals and one silver medal. (Miehet - Espoon Oilers)

As can be seen in table 2 (See Appendix 11, table 2), in the season 08 - 09 Oilers had the third - best regular season average attendance in the Finnish Floorball League. Just before the end of the season 09 - 10 Oilers was the second - best team to attract spectators to their home games. The growth on average had been 226 spectators from the previous season.

7.2 Next Generation & Oil Pipe

The process where a junior player develops from a player playing in a team of the youngest juniors, to become a player in the men's team of Espoon Oilers one day, is called the Oil Pipe. This is one of the main goals for Espoon Oilers as a floorball club. In the Oil Pipe the first phase is between the age of 6 - 13. In this phase the most important factor is that a child has a hobby, enjoys playing floorball and develops in it. The second phase is called the Next Generation. It is created for young players from the age of 14 to 20 who play floorball with an intention to play in the men's league in the future. The Next Generation has become well - known in Finland. In the season 2009 -2010 in the men's team of Espoon Oilers twelve players had been involved in the Oil Pipe. The third phase of the Oil Pipe is when a player becomes a member of the men's league team. (Karjalainen, interview 03 Sep 2010)

In the interview with Markku Karjalainen (03 Sep 2010) occurred that Espoon Oilers has five main factors that reflect the values of the club. One factor is that Espoon Oilers has an objective to be a sports club in Espoo that is specialized in floorball, with an intention to provide young people a possibility to a guided floorball hobby. Another factor is to develop players through the Oil Pipe. Espoon Oilers also considers it is important take care of the society. For example the club organizes floorball practices in co - operation with Jorvi hospital's mental department. The club also values education in sports and in other activities important.

7.3 Yearly Barona Arena game

Since year Espoon Oilers has been in co-operation with Barona Arena (previously Länsiauto - arena), which is located only 50 meters from Espoon Oilers' home ground. Barona Arena is an ice hockey hall where the Finnish national ice hockey league team Espoon Blues play their home games. The capacity of the arena is 6820 and it is a beautiful and modern facility to host sporting events. (Areenan tekniset tiedot)

The co-operation has allowed Espoon Oilers to organize one or two events per year in Espoon Blues' premises. These events require big organizing and effort. It is a potential opportunity each year to promote Espoon Oilers as a club to consumers, companies and especially the media. Oilers has a marketing team which is doing valuable work for the club in order to organize a successful event. (Karjalainen, interview 03 Sep 2010)

Most of the people working for the event are voluntary workers who do not receive any financial compensation for their work. The events are usually regular season games with additional entertainment. For example Espoon Oilers celebrated its 20th year in operation in 2010. Two special events were organised because of this celebration at Barona Arena. Before one of these games there was a well - known Finnish singer, Pete Parkkonen, performing. In this game a new attendance record of 3214 spectators for a regular season game in Finnish floorball league was made. The second anniversary event gathered 2671 spectators to the stands. (Miehet - Espoon Oilers)

Barona Arena offers also a good environment for the visibility of the sponsoring companies. There is space to set up flags and other advertisements. Sponsoring companies are important to Espoon Oilers and that is why Oilers wants to take full advantage of this occasion. The suites in the arena are sold to employees of the sponsoring companies and so they can come and watch a floorball game and enjoy the event in an environment of luxury. Another objective of these events is to break the audience record of the regular season in Finland. Breaking the attendance record is a good accomplishment when the average attendance for the home games of Espoon Oilers in regular season games was 622 in the season 2008 - 2009.

The Barona Arena games are also an opportunity to gather all the junior players of the organization into the same place. Organizing of the event is started so early that all the junior teams are informed in time and they can replace their practice with attending the game. Several hundreds of young Oilers players attended the games. "When entering the arena, one can really feel that Espoon Oilers is one big family and that is an important value for the club." (Karjalainen, interview 03 Sep 2010)

7.4 Floorball in media

During the short history of the sport, the media coverage has increased constantly. In newspapers floorball is competing for space equivalently with sports such as basketball and volleyball. The biggest newspaper in Finland, Helsingin Sanomat, has lately been writing more about floorball. (Kulju, Sundqvist 2002, 67)

Contrary to common belief, reasonable media coverage is relatively easy to achieve. According to Kulju and Sundqvist (2002, 68) the public relations of a floorball club should be divided in two main sections, informing about the games and club briefing. Kulju and Sundqvist add that the most important factor in informing about the games is the understanding, that it is the media that makes the event public and this is why the media representatives are important for the clubs. One negative announcement in the media may cause a negative image for

years, even though operations would be executed well in the future. (Kulju, Sundqvist 2002, 68)

Every team should be able to provide the press a good place in the spectator stands where it is possible to follow the game as well as possible. In case there are representatives of radio or television their special needs should be fulfilled. (Kulju, Sundqvist 2002, 68 - 69)

After the games the home team should arrange a press conference in a quiet place. The press conference should have a good host who is in charge of operations progressing. The media representatives should be provided with all necessary information such as copies of the records of the game. (Kulju, Sundqvist 2002, 69)

Every floorball club that is seen in public should have a public relations plan, according to which it takes care of its relations with the media. The needs of each club are different but certain factors concerning the media are always the same and they should be respected in public relations plans. (Kulju, Sundqvist 2002, 70)

When a sports club operates with the media there are several factors that have to be taken into consideration. The club should understand the value of a good image of publicity. The club also should have a person responsible for public relations and have contact with the media representatives. A good sports club shares information equally to all media and is honest in all information, also in negative news. A sports club understands that reporters are only doing their jobs. If the club makes a mistake, it first tries to solve the problem internally before accusing the media for being too critical. A sports club also should have functioning and up - to - date homepage in the Internet. (Kulju, Sundqvist 2002, 70)

7.5 Espoon Oilers and the media

Urheilukanava, a Finnish sports channel, owns the rights to the Salibandyliiga games. The finals are shown in co - operation with the national television channel YLE. The own media channels of Espoon Oilers are member mailings and the home page, www.espoonoilers.fi.

Other forms of marketing communication appear mainly in Länsiväylä, Vartti - magazine, Finnish floorball magazine, by handing out flyers and leaflets and through text messages and e-mail channels. (See appendix 9, figure 34)

7.6 Espoon Oilers product package

The collaboration models can be tailored according to the wishes and objectives of the sponsoring partner. The options for collaboration are for example traditional sponsorship co - op-

eration, possibilities of digital media, usage of players in the events of the company or in recreational happenings for the employees of the company. (See appendix 8, figure 29)

The partners of Espoon Oilers are divided into three categories:

1. Main co -operational partners
2. Co - operational partners
3. Suppliers of goods

(See appendix 8, figure 29)

Exclusive main co - operational partnership, (Platinum - Partner) is the largest type of co - operation that Espoon Oilers provides. It is formed for a minimum of two years for an undisclosed amount per season including bonuses according to success and visibility.

The visibility the main partner would receive in minimum is one advertisement in the front of the playing jersey, two advertisements in the floorball rink in every home game, one big banner on the homepage of Espoon Oilers, www.espoonoilers.fi. In addition the main partner would receive one single page advertisement in the game leaflets in every home game. Six VIP season tickets + purgatory amount of single tickets to Oilers home games for recreational purposes of the company, one game hostmanship in regular season home game and 1 pc. in a playoff home game, 3 - 6 audio advertisements in every home game and one representative youth team. (See appendix 8, figure 30)

The second biggest type of co - operation is a Gold partner agreement which is approximately half of everything offered in the main co - operational partnership. The more popular forms of partnership are silver, bronze and basic partnership. All of these agreements include advertisements on the video screen in home games, audio advertisements in home games, VIP and single tickets and a representative player. These differ from each other in price and quantity. The most expensive of these more popular forms of co - operation, silver partnership, also includes an advertisement on the sleeve of the playing jersey and advertisements in the floorball rink. (See appendix 8, figures 31, 32 and 33)

7.7 Co - operation with other teams

Most of the clubs in Salibandyliiga are limited in cash for marketing purposes, the supporter bases are relatively small and acquiring sponsors and supporters is challenging. One way to reduce costs and possibly attract more people to the games is by co - operating with other teams. (Karjalainen, interview 03 Sep 2010)

7.7.1 Co - marketing

Co - marketing can be executed together with teams from the Helsinki area. The distance to these away games is often not more than 30 kilometers. With the right informing and marketing the people who attend the home games of Espoon Oilers might be able to be attracted to attend the away games as well. (Karjalainen, interview 03 Sep 2010)

7.7.2 Joint ticket sales

Special events that could be held every season and are marketed beforehand are a good possibility to attract more people to the games than normally. Joint ticket sales could be organized to these events for example, so that if the game is played in the home arena of Espoon Oilers, the away team for that game also sells tickets and receives a certain percentage of their sales. (Karjalainen, interview 03 Sep 2010)

7.7.3 Espoo Blues co - operation

Since the start of the season 2009 - 2010 Espoon Oilers has had a marketing co - operation contract with the ice hockey club Espoo Blues. This means that the teams help each other with marketing and ticket sales and are able to receive a share of their own sales in the games of the other team. (Karjalainen, interview 03 Sep 2010)

7.8 International floorball

Floorball is a young sport if compared to the other popular sports in Finland. The International Floorball Federation (IFF) was founded only in 1986 by the floorball associations of Finland, Sweden and Switzerland. (IFF)

Already before that in 1985 the first international match was played in Sollentuna between the host team Sweden and Finland. (Järvinen, Sipilä 1997, 7)

Ten years later in 1996 the first Men's World Championships were held in Sweden. Already then the potential of the sport becoming popular among the public was seen when all tickets for the final between Finland and Sweden were sold. Over 15 000 spectators witnessed the final in the Stockholm Globe Arena. Sweden won the five first World Championships and in 2008 Finland finally succeeded to become world champions after winning a medal in each previous World Championships. (IFF)

In June 2010 the international Floorball Federation has 52 member associations from each continent in the world. Worldwide there are almost 4000 registered clubs and more than

277 000 registered players. The International Floorball Federation also has the provisional recognition by the International Olympic Committee (IOC). (IFF)

The 2008 World Championship matches were broadcasted in seven countries and were shown on the television channel Eurosport. An average of 400 000 viewers in Sweden and approximately 300 000 in Finland were watching the final. (windows3.salibandy.net)

The IFF General Assembly defined in their vision statement in 2008 among other subjects, "World Floorball Championships will be played with participants from five continents, based on the qualifications and being on the program of the Universiades, the World Games and/or the Olympic Games until 2020." (windows3.salibandy.net)

7.9 Floorball in Finland

According to the Finnish Floorball Federation's (SSBL) 2008 annual report, the federation had 835 member clubs. By the end of 2008 there were 42 225 licensed players in Finland, which was a rise of 3.25% compared to the previous season. (See Figure 15)

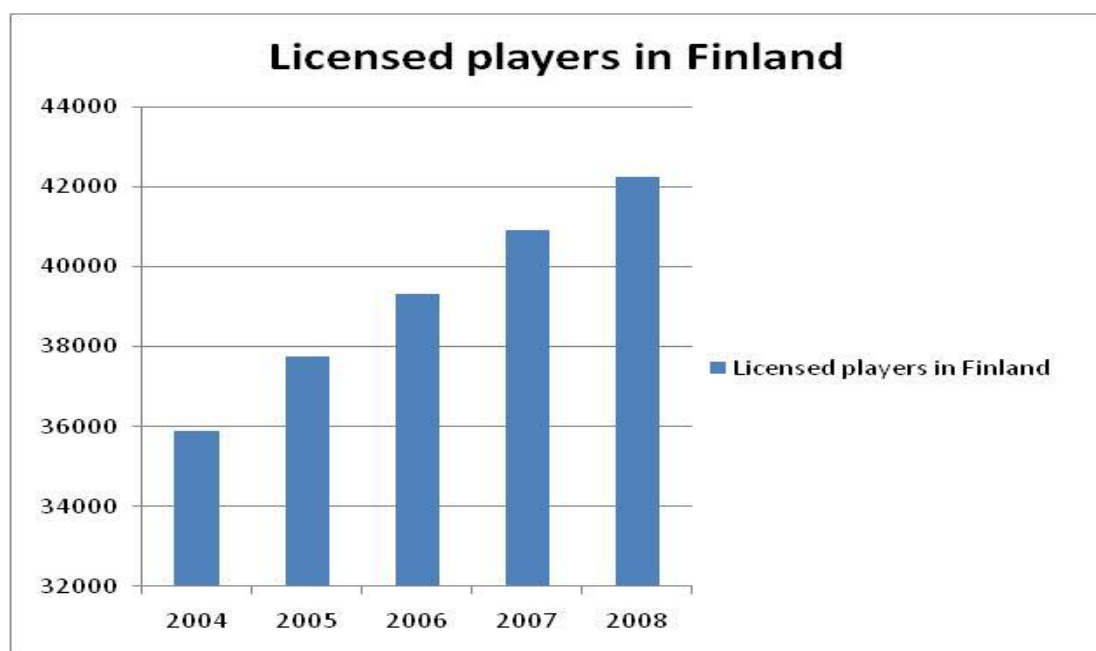


Figure 15: Number of licensed players in Finland (Adapted after SSBL 2008 Annual report)

7.10 Suggestions for improvements of sponsorship co - operation

There is an opportunity to make the brand Espoon Oilers better from the company perspective. The most important product of Espoon Oilers is the actual game event. The better the game is and the better all the peripheral services are, the better the spectators enjoy them-

selves. This attracts the people come to the games again and potentially makes companies more interested in co - operation.

7.10.1 Game event

Purchasing hostmanship for a single game is a good way for a company to gain additional visibility in the game events. This would not require a big input from the company. The game would be promoted and advertised differently. For example a game between Espoon Oilers and SSV Helsinki that will be played for example on the first of October in Tapiola Sports Hall. In this game a selected sponsoring company would be the host. Free samples or products of this particular company could be dealt for example for the first 100 people to arrive, this activity could be used in the promotion of the game.

The company could promote its products in the game and/or give samples to the spectators. Also a representative of the company could take part in the event by giving for example products of the company as prizes for the best players of the game. This would also be mentioned by the announcer of the game. The announcer would also regularly advertise the company and/or its products. The host company could also be shown on the screen in the hall.

Many Oilers men's team players are sponsored by a company and represent the company name. This means that whenever a company's representative player scores a goal or an assist, it is mentioned by the announcer. For example: A goal was scored by the representative company's player number 10 and assisted by the player number 38 who is a representative player for another company. The representative players and their host company are mentioned in the presentation of each player before the game.

A good way to increase spectator enjoyment in the games is to use more the screen in the hall. This could be done by showing a highlight video of the best moments of Oilers before the introduction of the team and during the intermissions between periods. Seeing the highlights and success of Oilers, spectators would become more enthusiastic and could get a feeling it is easier to relate to the team.

One factor that is quite controversial is arranging happenings during the intermissions between periods. In earlier seasons there have been arranged different competitions such as goal scoring competitions where spectators can attend or exhibition matches between the youngest junior teams of Espoon Oilers. The problem is that when people stay in their seats and watch the program during the intermissions, they do not use the services in the hallway. As a consequence catering services are not used and Oilers loses potential income.

For consumers this means that when a person buys a season ticket to Espoo Blues, this ticket can be used for free entrance to every regular season game of Espoo Oilers. When a person buys a season ticket to Espoo Oilers, this ticket can be used twice a season for two optional regular season games of Espoo Blues. (Karjalainen, interview 03 Sep 2010)

The term “fan” in this thesis describes a spectator who is loyal towards the club and supports the club in every game more visibly than an average spectator. An average spectator might come to the games just to follow a certain sport for its entertainment value, but does not consider supporting the club as important as a fan does. Fans create atmosphere in the games. An audience of 500 people can make noise in the hall, but if there are 500 people added with 10 loud spectators, the noise will be much louder. Many sports teams have their own fan clubs. They come and see each game, sing and cheer for their own team and possibly inspire the rest of the audience to cheer more. Sometimes they also have selling booths in the hallways where people can buy different fan products such as clothing, jerseys, flags, scarves as examples. In bigger organizations this is normal standard. Fan clubs and the management of the organization keep contact and try to improve the operations of the fans and the atmosphere in the games. Both parties try to form an agreement which meets both needs. It is a valuable asset for the team to have an organized fan club. (Karjalainen, interview 03 Sep 2010)

Espoo Oilers does not have an organized fan culture. One of the reasons is that floorball as a sport has not the same long traditions as for example ice hockey and football. It is difficult to attract people who would be willing to commit to these activities. Hiring people would be financially too expensive. The Oilers management tries to succeed to motivate the approximately 900 junior members of the club to come and see the games. Recently only a small percentage of them come and see the games even though the percentage should be much higher. Some of the young children are very excited to see and cheer their idols towards winning so they are motivated to make noise. The youngest players might bring at least one of their parents to see the game and this would automatically increase the number of spectators. Improvement of the fan culture would increase the atmosphere and that would improve the reputation of the games. At best it would attract even more people to attend the games, because people would know that a game event would be an exciting experience. (Karjalainen, interview 03 Sep 2010)

During the season 2009 - 2010 the fans had the opportunity to enrol on the website of Espoo Oilers to win a visit to the men’s locker room. The visitors met the players and took photographs with one of the players. (Karjalainen, interview 03 Sep 2010)

7.10.2 The Internet

The Internet is a good way for a floorball club to execute marketing. Because the money available for marketing purposes is limited the Internet is the best way to reach people. Most of the people who go to floorball games are between 10 - 40 years and are familiar with websites such as Facebook and Youtube. (Karjalainen, interview 03 Sep 2010)

Recently in 2010 Espoon Oilers had an own group in Facebook where all the pictures, videos and news of what is happening in the club can be added. Also links of every preview and post - match report was added to this group's "wall", which can be considered as a bulletin board. This way all the above mentioned reach hundreds of people quickly and for free. Facebook is probably the best way to reach the target group of Espoon Oilers since the users are according to a study made by www.facebakers.com 85% of Finnish Facebook users are between the age of 13 and 44. (See Figure 16) (Finland Facebook Statistics - Socialbakers)

User Age Distribution - Facebook Finland

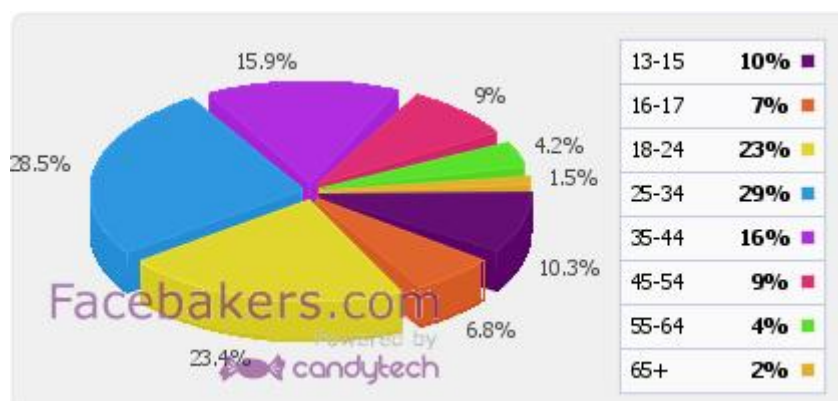


Figure 16: (Finland Facebook Statistics - Socialbakers)

In the season 2009 - 2010 Espoon Oilers created an own page on the website Youtube where the club can add self-made videos. On this page players are interviewed about various issues. In the future this website can be utilized also in for example promoting upcoming games. Links of all the videos added to this blog are put on the homepage of Espoon Oilers and on the Facebook "wall" of the club. (Karjalainen, interview 03 Sep 2010)

Another way to promote games to end users is to create an E - mail "network". In general this means that e - mail addresses from members of the club, their friends and families are added to a list. The objective would be to increase the number of potential people in this list that could be interested to see floorball games. The e - mails sent would include an advertisement and match preview of the upcoming game as well as possibly an offer to receive cheaper tickets to the games. For example when buying one ticket, a consumer would receive another ticket for free. Every person added to this list would also have the possibility to refuse of

being a recipient of these e - mails. This should then happen easily by for example clicking a link on the e - mails received. (Karjalainen, interview 03 Sep 2010)

7.10.3 Oilers Junior Games (OJG)

Since 2003 Espoon Oilers has been arranging an international junior floorball tournament. Since foundation of this tournament there have been teams participating from Finland and Sweden. In 2010 more than 100 teams participated in the tournament. The games are played during one weekend and the whole Ratiopharm Arena is reserved for this tournament. (www.oilersjuniorgames.com/fi) Oilers Junior Games are a good way of advertising the club and it improves the brand image of Espoon Oilers when people see that Oilers has also other happenings besides regular games. Co-operating companies can also sponsor only the tournament, if they are not willing to sponsor the men's team, but only want to be related with youth sports. (Karjalainen, interview 03 Sep 2010)

7.10.4 Schools Cup

During the previous few seasons Espoon Oilers has been arranging a small tournament called the Schools Cup. It is a tournament where different schools from Espoo compete against each other. The games are played during the intermissions of the men's team's games. The games are played during the season and the tournament culminates in the finals where the best school is awarded. The winning team will receive prizes provided by the sponsoring companies of Espoon Oilers.

Before the season, a person from the management and a player of the men's team visit different schools and market the event. The schools will form teams and other students of the particular school are encouraged to come and cheer for their own school. All interested students will receive free tickets to the games and hopefully take their friends and relatives with them, so that also paying spectators are attracted through this campaign.

The Schools Cup games create added value to the Oilers men's team's game events and is also an effective way to advertise the club. It is important to attract more people to attend the games, but also to inspire young children to become more enthusiastic about the sport and become members of Espoon Oilers. (Karjalainen, interview 03 Sep 2010)

7.10.5 Men's team's players as representatives for junior teams

Each junior team has its own representative player who plays in the men's team. The objective is that the representative would attend the junior team's practice or games two to three times during the season. The feedback from this course of action has been positive and the

young players have been satisfied. In these few meetings the players are able to ask questions and advice from their representative player. (Karjalainen, interview 03 Sep 2010)

7.11 Espoon Oilers Day

In December 2009 Espoon Oilers organized a Christmas party for all the members. All the members played together and the juniors had an opportunity to meet the players from the first league. Small refreshments were offered and the main purpose was to gather as many members as possible to spend an evening together.

There was still need for improvement, but considering that it was the first time the occasion was arranged, it was a successful event.

The event could be improved by inviting representatives of co-operating companies to attend as well. Discussions could take place about whether it is possible to obtain a variety of products for distribution to spectators. This could attract even more people to come to the event. The objective is to create an event where all the members gather in the same place and at the same time to show the representatives that Espoon Oilers is a united organization. The organizers could consider whether it would make more sense to organize the event during the weekend, when people are not busy. This is also a possibility for the young spectators to meet and talk with their favorite players. (Karjalainen, interview 03 Sep 2010)

7.12 Post-marketing

When signing sponsorship agreements it is important to remember the sponsors also afterwards. Signing sponsorship agreements is important, but it is also important to pay attention to relationships between the parties. This is an area where Espoon Oilers should make some improvement. One necessary improvement should be to invite even more often the representatives of the co-operating companies to come and see the games. They would sit with the representatives of Espoon Oilers and they would be guests in the VIP area. In addition one or two players of the men's team would meet the representatives and talk about the upcoming game. After the game the players would discuss the happenings of the game and thank the representatives for attending the game. This is a good way of improving the image of Espoon Oilers.

7.13 Oilers Floorball Seminar

A good way of post - marketing would be to organize a floorball seminar where Espoon Oilers could invite representatives of sponsoring companies, media representatives and people involved in floorball. Arranging the seminar in co - operation with the Finnish Floorball Federa-

tion would bring added value to the event and would probably interest people more if it was arranged close to the Floorball World Championships in Helsinki. The objective of the seminar would be to create conversations about the positive and negative issues that are characteristic for floorball and Espoon Oilers. Other objectives would be to increase knowledge of the sports, improve the profile of floorball, reach more spectators, improve the Espoon Oilers home games as events, the conversations about objectives and visions of the future and especially increase media interest.

It would be important to have good speakers at the seminar such as: Tero Tiitu (World champion 2008). Other interesting speakers could be for example Petteri Nykky (Finnish national team head coach), a person from the Finnish Floorball Federation, a media representative and players from Espoon Oilers.

The seminar should be arranged combined with an Espoon Oilers home game and the guests would be VIP guests. It is important that is that the guests would leave the game with a positive feeling about Espoon Oilers, its operations and professionalism.

7.14 SWOT analysis

David Jobber defines SWOT analysis in the following way "It is a structured approach to evaluating the strategic position of a business by identifying its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats" (Jobber 1998, 37)

In a SWOT analysis internal strengths and weaknesses are collected and related to external opportunities and threats. There are some guidelines that have to be obeyed in order to complete a useful SWOT for a company's usage. At first the strengths and weaknesses should be determined and explored. These qualities have to be decided so that the company can compete in the market. The evaluation process of the strengths and weaknesses and those resources or capabilities should be included that are valued by the customer. Opportunities and threats should be listed as upcoming events or trends outside the business, which may have some effect on the performance. A company should make a SWOT analysis in order to recognize the areas on which to put more focus on and recognize the factors that give the company the possibility to gain competitive advantage in the market. (Jobber 1998, 37-38)

According to Karjalainen (See Table 1) the strengths of Espoon Oilers are the large number of own junior players and activities organized for them. Espoon Oilers has received an acknowledgement from the Young Finland Association for being a Nuori Suomi - Sinettiseura since 2001. Espoon Oilers is a big club and has achieved medals in several different age groups. The men's team has also won medals in the European Championships. Espoon Oilers is well-known for its success.

Lack of money is considered a weakness and it is a problem for Espoon Oilers. Floorball is a young amateur sport, which is gaining more publicity in the media, but compared to other ball sports the visibility it is gaining is still low. (See Table 1)

In the opportunities section economic improvement is an important issue. Success in different leagues, but especially in the men's league, would bring more visibility in the media and would attract the interest of more companies, which would bring more money to the club. Floorball is a growing sport and it is expanding continuously in Finland and in the rest of the world. More interest in the public would bring more viewers to the games. This also brings more money for the club. Karjalainen sees a good opportunity in the objective set to become the biggest floorball club in Finland. This would further improve the image of Espoon Oilers. Overall more visibility in the media is needed to develop the sport even bigger. (See Table 1)

Karjalainen sees as threat, the weak success of Espoon Oilers. Sponsorship agreements are important to Espoon Oilers and the primary income, so it is important that Oilers maintains its traditions as being one of the most successful floorball teams in Finland. Karjalainen also mentions the situation of not enough halls to play floorball in. There are hundreds of young players who need a place to practice. Currently the situation is weak. There are not enough halls. Also many of the halls built are privately owned which means higher costs for renting the rinks for practising purposes compared to halls owned by the city of Espoo. This means higher seasonal costs for youth teams. The threat is that the seasonal fees for individual players will become too high. (See Table 1)

S = Strengths				W = Weaknesses			
A big club				Lack of money			
Number of junior players				Floorball is an amateur sport			
Good junior activities				Floorball is a young sport			
Nuori Suomi - sinettiseura				Media is not interested enough			
Finnish championships won in the							
Earlier years in all age groups							
O = opportunities				T = Threats			
Success				Not enough success			
Economic improvement				Economy			
Floorball is a growing sport				Hall situation in Espoo			
Growing to be the biggest							
Floorball club in Finland							

Table 1: Espoon Oilers SWOT - analysis (Karjalainen, interview 03 Sep 2010)

8 Research data from the empirical study

8.1 Results of the questionnaires sent to the companies currently sponsoring Espoon Oilers (See appendix 4)

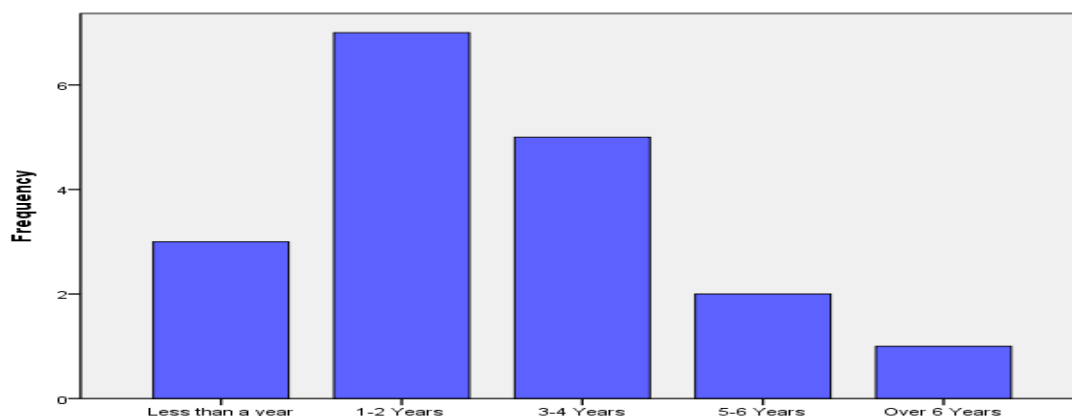


Figure 17: Length of co - operation with Espoon Oilers

2/3 of the respondents have been sponsoring Espoon Oilers from one to four years. Only one of the responding companies has been in co - operation with Oilers for less than 1 year. (See Figure 17)

It seems that the co - operation with Espoon Oilers and most of the companies last for less than six years. From the five companies that previously had been in co - operation with Espoon Oilers but are not anymore, only one company answered to this same question that their company had been in co - operation for 5 - 6 years. The other four companies had been in co - operation with the club from one to four years. This statement cannot be made with a total reliability because the companies currently in sponsorship co - operation with Espoon Oilers might stay in co - operation for more years to come.

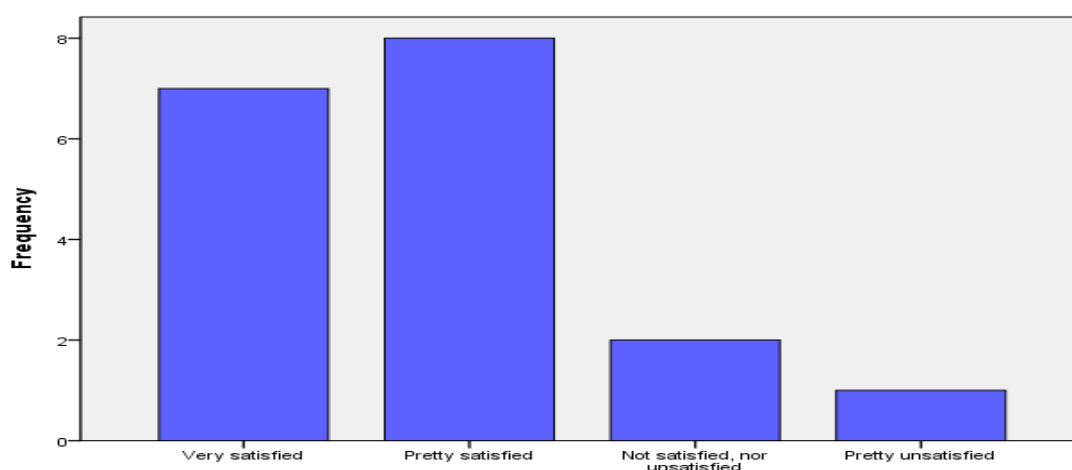


Figure 18: Satisfaction of co - operation with Espoon Oilers

83.3 % of the eighteen companies that responded to the questionnaire are either relatively satisfied or very satisfied with the co - operation with Espoon Oilers. Only one company is unsatisfied with the co - operation with Oilers. (See Figure 18)

The objective has to be that all companies would be satisfied with the co - operation. It seems that the overall satisfaction level of co - operation with Espoon Oilers is good. Espoon Oilers should put effort in making the unsatisfied parties satisfied. It should be investigated what the problem is and start improving the relationship with this particular company/companies.

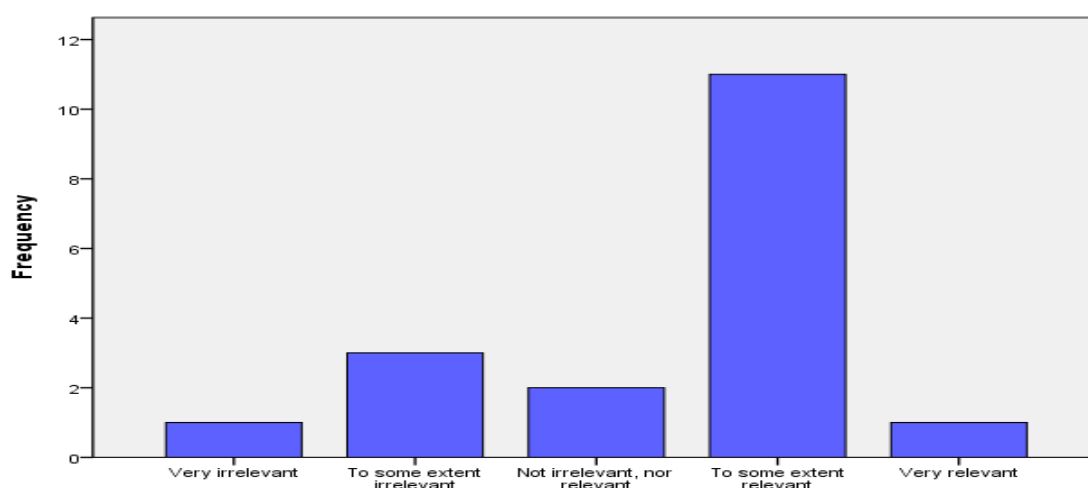


Figure 19: Relevance of success on continuation of co - operation with Espoon Oilers

Eleven of the responding companies that are in a sponsorship co - operation with Espoon Oilers think that the relevance of competitive success of the team is to some extent relevant to the continuation of co - operation with the club. Four of the companies believe that it is very irrelevant or to some extent irrelevant. (See Figure 19)

Success brings more visibility to the club and expands the organization so it can be assumed that these are the reasons why success of the team is important to the companies. The more successful a team is, the more it receives visibility in the media. For example the final games of the Finnish floorball league are shown on television. If a company can assume before making the co - operation contract that Espoon Oilers will probably play in the final games, the company might be more interested in being involved with Espoon Oilers.

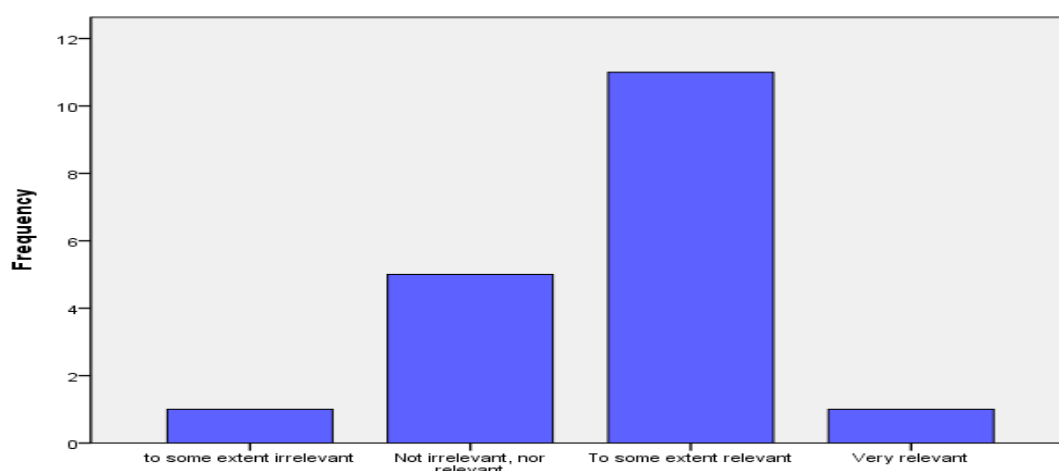


Figure 20: Importance of being linked to youth sports

2/3 of the responding companies believe that the importance of their company being linked to youth sports is either to some extent relevant or very relevant. One of eighteen respondents thinks that being linked to youth sports is irrelevant. 1/3 of the responding companies consider it as irrelevant. (See Figure 20)

It seems that the majority thinks that it is important that people see that their company is supporting youth sports and participating in youth's actions. Based on these results a conclusion could be made that Oilers should emphasize the fact that floorball is popular among young people and that Oilers has one of the biggest numbers of youth players among Finnish floorball clubs. To companies believing that being linked to youth sports is important, a possibility to be a co-operative partner in Oilers Junior Games tournament should also be offered.

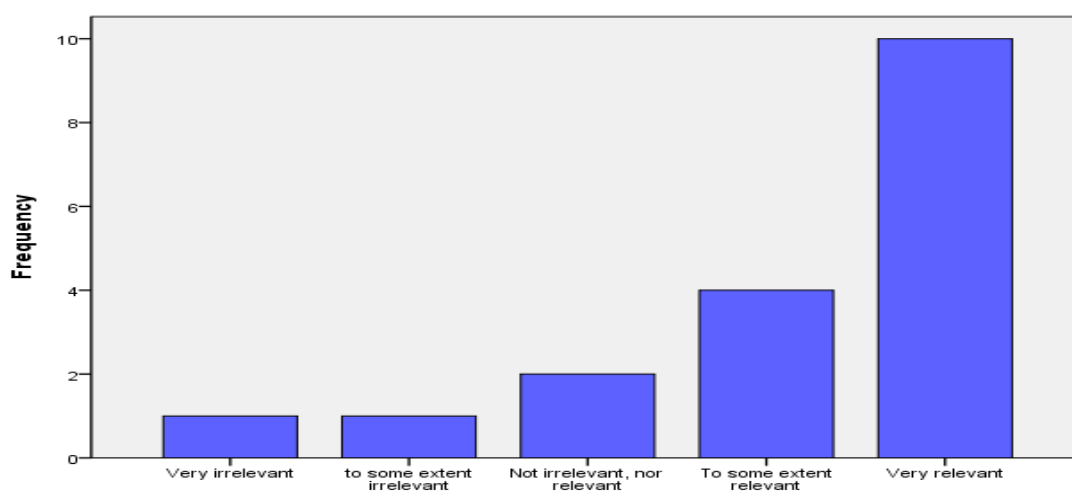


Figure 21: Importance of receiving visibility

77.8% of the responding companies believe that receiving visibility from a sponsorship co - operation is either to some extent relevant or very relevant. 5.6% of the respondents think that it is either very irrelevant or to some extent irrelevant. (See Figure 21)

The majority of the respondents believe that it is important to receive visibility from the sponsorship co - operation for the company or its products. For Espoon Oilers to be able to provide the required visibility, the club should increase the spectator numbers of the home games and be able to appear more in newspapers and television. (See Figure 21)

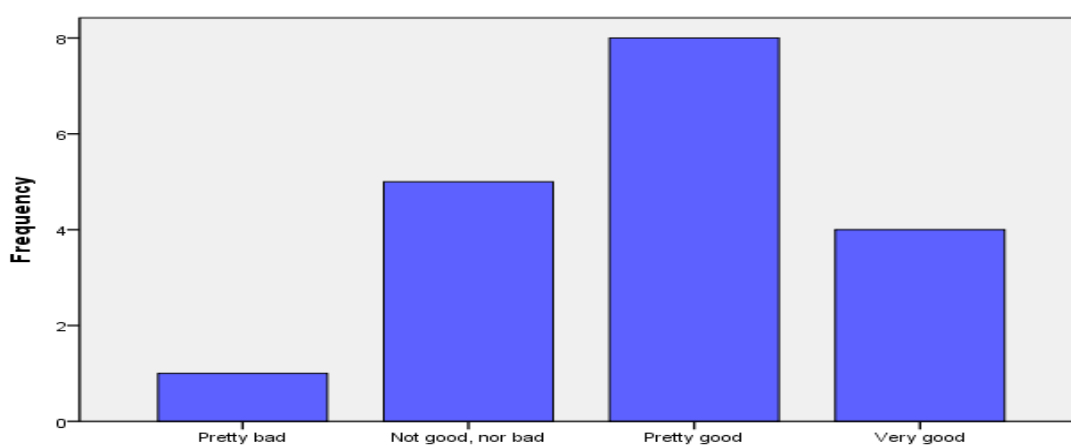


Figure 22: The image of floorball to provide the needed visibility to co - operative partners

According to 2/3 of the companies the image of floorball to provide the needed visibility to co - operative partners is either relatively good or very good. Only one respondent believes that the image of floorball is relatively bad. (See Figure 22)

As can be seen in Figure 22, most respondents think that receiving visibility from the sponsorship co - operation is important. Most of the respondents also believe that the image of floorball as a sport is good to provide the companies the needed visibility. In negotiations considering possible sponsorship co - operation contracts, Espoon Oilers should present some facts and numbers of how often it appears in different media. Also the number of spectators in home games compared to other floorball teams should be shown. If there are enough spectators from the club's point of view, the company representatives might have the same opinion.

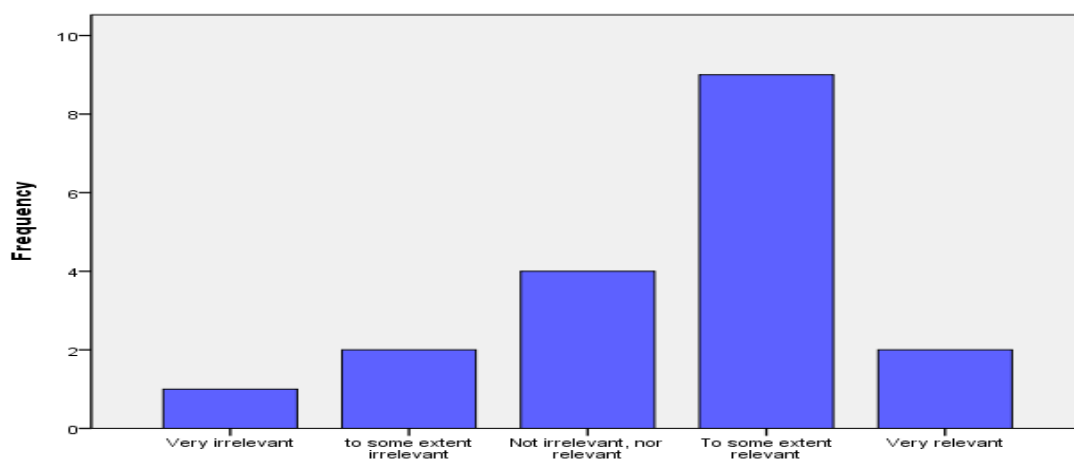


Figure 23: Importance of communication between parties of sponsorship co - operation

61.1% of the eighteen responding companies believe that the importance of communication between parties in a sponsorship co - operation is either to some extent relevant or very relevant. 16.7% think it is irrelevant. (See Figure 23)

As can be seen in Figure 23, more than half of the respondents believe that it is important that also after signing the sponsorship co - operation contract it is important that the communication between the parties continues. This is one important factor of post - marketing. It is important to inform the companies of what is happening at the club. This also might give the companies an appearance that Espoon Oilers cares about them being involved and that the club is not only interested in financial support. Also if the company considers being a part of the operations and possible success of Espoon Oilers it might improve the position of the club in possible negotiations for contract extension.

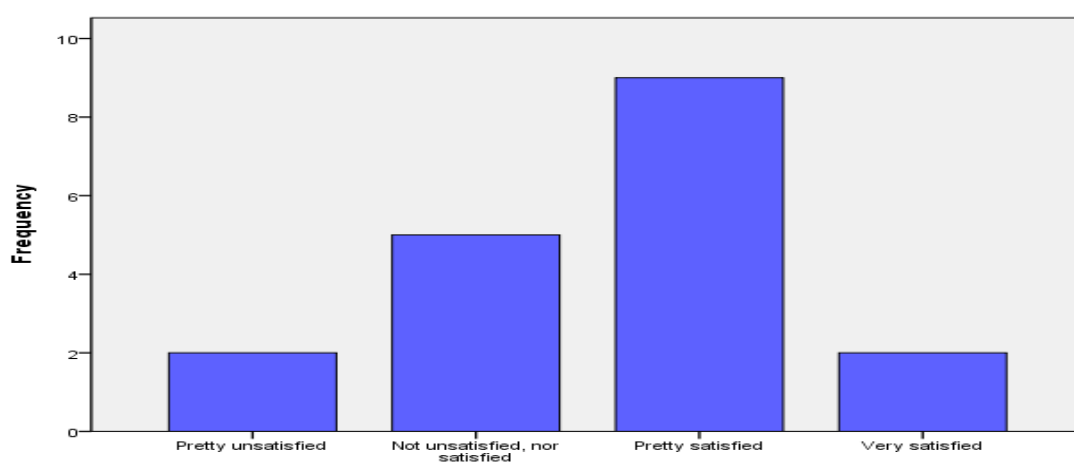


Figure 24: Satisfaction of contribution - benefit relations with Espoon Oilers

Eleven of the eighteen responding companies are either relatively satisfied or very satisfied with the contribution - benefit relations in the co - operation with Espoon Oilers. Two of the companies are not satisfied with the contribution - benefit relations. (See Figure 24)

From Figure 24 it can be seen that 38.8% of the responding companies were not satisfied with the contribution - benefit relations with Espoon Oilers. This number is definitely too high. Probably those companies that are not satisfied with the contribution - benefit relations will end the sponsorship co - operations after the contract expires and are probably not going to agree to a contract extension. To avoid these situations Oilers should communicate with its co - operative partners to discover if they are satisfied with the partnership. If not, the club should try to improve on what the company believes is not good enough. In this way it is most likely easier for Oilers to start contract extension negotiations when the other party has been satisfied with what they gained from the previous contractual season.

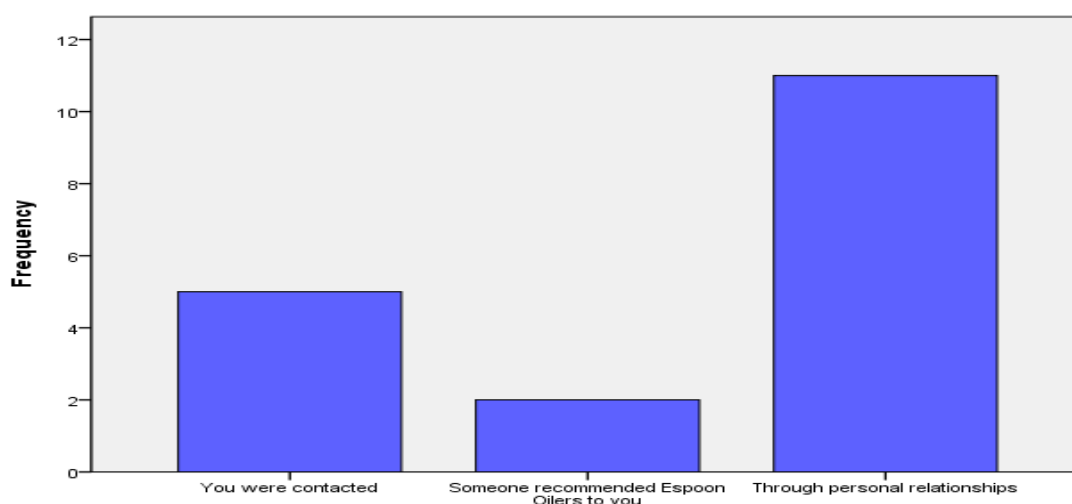


Figure 25: Ways of ending up in co - operation with Espoon Oilers

11 of the eighteen responding companies said that the co - operation started through personal relationships. Five companies said that they were contacted and two said that someone recommended Espoon Oilers to them. (See Figure 25)

As can be seen in Figure 25, it seems that most of the co - operations were created through personal relationships and it is important to utilize all available contacts. It seems also that companies do not contact Espoon Oilers, but Espoon Oilers needs to contact companies in order to create sponsorship co - operation. Espoon Oilers should contact as many companies as possible because most probably not every company will agree to start a co - operation.

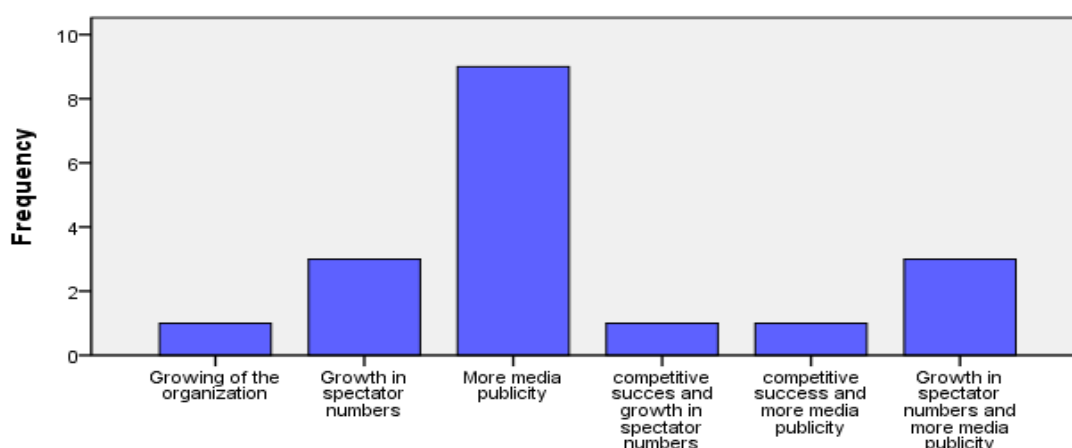


Figure 26: Factors Espoon Oilers should improve so that the co - operation would become more profitable to the co - operative company

Thirteen of the responding companies think that Espoon Oilers should improve the media publicity it receives so that the co - operation would become more profitable to them. One of these thirteen companies also believes Oilers should increase competitive success and three of these thirteen companies believe Oilers should achieve growth in the number of spectator. Three of the other five companies believe that Oilers should at least be able to achieve growth in spectator numbers to make the co - operation more profitable to them. (See Figure 26)

This result (See Figure 26) shows that the companies seem to believe that the most important factor Espoon Oilers should improve in its operations to provide more added value to the co - operative companies is to receive more media publicity. Although being more successful was one of the options, only two companies highlighted it as being important. Then again, often the more successful a team is the more the media recognizes it. Oilers also should be more active towards the media. Inform the media about interesting players, upcoming games or special activities that are happening at the club. Even making articles for newspapers might ease the process of increasing the visibility of the club. The reporters might not have time to write about Oilers, so it could be imagined that they would be glad to use professionally written articles.

Some representatives of the companies currently sponsoring Espoon Oilers also answered to the open question in the questionnaire they received. In the open question they were asked to present any comments or suggestions for improvement concerning co - operation with Espoon Oilers. Representatives of four out of the eighteen companies that replied to the survey also commented on this open question.

It was highly appreciated that Espoon Oilers is trying to have the reputation of a big family. More specifically companies value that Espoon Oilers has a large number of juniors. It is seen as a good factor that a club works by teaching and developing its own juniors beginning from a young age so that later they hopefully would play for the men's team.

It was seen as important that one or two big events per year are organized. These events would be the highlight events of the year and more marketing and effort would be made when organizing them. Big events are a good way to increase visibility as seen in the Barona Arena games arranged in earlier years.

Information was received concerning improvement in post - marketing. It was suggested that a comprehensive report of the season would be sent to the sponsoring companies. These reports would include the number of spectators that have visited the games, the amount of media visibility that the club received in the past year and some statistics about the team and its players. Also it would include information about how much the particular company was used for example in intermission competitions, lotteries and recruitments. It was mentioned also that image material would be welcomed. This image material could be shown within the company to present the company's involvement and also for own marketing purposes. It was commented that the level of post - marketing is currently low and that might be one of the reasons why the co - operative partners do not want to extend the contract. When negotiating, the situation should maybe be approached more from the customer's perspective, meaning that it could be asked from the partnering company what it wants and "tailor" a package that fulfills the needs of both parties. After this it would be easier to concentrate on the right matters in order to maintain satisfaction between parties. It was recognizable that companies do not want to believe they act only as financial supporters.

One respondent said that the company is satisfied with the co - operation and the needs were successfully fulfilled. This company was given the opportunity to bring customers, co - operates and even friends to the games and spend time together. In these cases an own seat, refreshments and a possibility for discussion with the manager or coach become important. The company is convinced that the future co - operation will be successful and special wishes will be fulfilled. Guests enjoy at exciting games and in their opinion this is the best feedback for the sponsor. This respondent also said that the co - operation with Espoo Blues will open more channels and bring more possibilities to sponsoring. The respondent added that the biggest challenge is to make Floorball as a sport bigger and more known. To make this happen, the input of all clubs and individuals is needed.

8.2 Conclusions of questionnaires sent to companies that have previously sponsored Espoon Oilers (See appendix 5)

Questionnaires were sent to companies that have been in co - operation with Espoon Oilers before, but are not anymore. Eleven multiple - choice questions and two open questions were included in the questionnaire that was sent to previously sponsoring companies. Replies from only five previously sponsoring companies were received which made it difficult to create a quantitative research of their answers, instead these answers will be analyzed qualitatively.

The companies that answered the questionnaire were in a co - operation with Espoon Oilers for 1 - 4 years. From the companies which responded, two answered that the most important reason for finishing the co - operation were economic reasons, one said that the contribution - benefit relations did not meet the expectations. One company said that it did not meet their company's new business policies to be in co - operation with a sports club and one company said there was a break in communication with Espoon Oilers.

40% of the companies that answered the questionnaire were in co - operation with at least one ice hockey club and 60% were not in co - operation with other ball sports teams.

3/ 5 companies were pretty satisfied with the co - operation with Espoon Oilers, when 2/5 companies were not unsatisfied, nor satisfied.

The economic recession did not seem to have a clear impact on the willingness of companies be in co - operation with Espoon Oilers. Two companies thought the economic recession was to some extent significant to the continuation of the co - operation, two thought it was to some extent insignificant and one thought it had no impact at all on their decision to continue the co - operation.

The companies which responded gave a signal that the most important reasons why they started a co - operation with a sports club are the values the sports club represents and the media visibility that can be gained. The reasons why the companies that responded started a co - operation with Espoon Oilers were geographical reasons, the values Oilers represents and one company started the co - operation because of personal relations.

60% of the companies thought that the benefit of the co - operation with Oilers was an improvement in the company image and 40% thought that the benefit was an increased visibility of the company.

According to the answers of the companies it seems that the way companies want to be contacted by a sports club is either personally or by receiving an invitation to an event arranged by the club.

Two companies thought that a future co - operation with Espoon Oilers would be pretty possible and three companies considered it to be pretty impossible. No companies absolutely excluded the possibility for a future co - operation.

The companies that earlier had been in co - operation with Espoon Oilers thought that the club should mostly improve in marketing communications, competitive success and the game event should also be improved.

The companies were given a possibility to freely comment on anything about sponsorship co - operation and what Espoon Oilers should develop in its co -operation. Below are the comments received from three companies:

Companies which previously had been in a sponsorship co-operation with Espoon Oilers were asked what they thought Espoon Oilers should improve in its sponsorship co-operations. This was an open question. Three of five respondents replied with short answers. Two out of three said that Espoon Oilers should pay more attention to post - marketing. It was mentioned that communication between parties during the co-operation was low. Also Espoon Oilers should invite more often representatives of the companies to the games and to meet some players after the game. In this way the players could tell about the game and the representatives would have the opportunity to meet the players.

This is an important part of post - marketing, because the representatives are well taken care of and they are given the feeling that they are part of Espoon Oilers. A successful experience in a game event gives a close image of the operational methods and might be the key factor to inspire the company to continue co-operations with Espoon Oilers in the future.

One of three responding companies was not satisfied with the contribution - benefit relations of Espoon Oilers. It was mentioned that sponsoring should be 1/3 of the total effort and 2/3 should go in exploitation. That is the basis when the respondent's company is planning new relationships in the future.

It can be concluded that previously mentioned issues might have been the reason for the ending of the co-operation with these companies.

The questionnaire to the companies currently in a sponsorship co - operation with Espoon Oilers was sent to all the 22 companies whose contact information was received from Espoon Oilers. From these 22 companies 81.8 % responded to the questionnaire. In this sense a conclusion can be made that the research is reliable because more than four out of five compa-

nies responded. Eighteen respondents is quite a small sample to be making statistical analyses. In this sense it can be argued whether the research is reliable or not. Based on Espoon Oilers' information there were not many more companies that could have been contacted.

Most probably the answers for this questionnaire were given by one person, but he or she is responding on behalf of the company he or she is representing. The researchers have to rely on their responses. The results are indicative, but with a small doubt a conclusion can be made that even though the sample would be bigger the results of the questionnaire would not differ much from the current one. It is not possible to have a full reliability towards the results.

The objective was to receive information from companies on different important factors concerning sponsorship co - operation between Espoon Oilers and the sponsoring companies. The objective was also to learn about the attitude of the companies towards sponsorship co - operation in general.

Taking these things into consideration it can be believed the research is valid. The wanted information was received and it helped in making conclusions about what was relevant and what was not.

Four out of eighteen currently sponsoring companies answered the open question for free thought about sponsorship co - operation. According to this, reliable conclusions could not be made, but good information and thoughts were received and they were also analysed as individual opinions.

Five companies out of the eight companies that have earlier been in a sponsorship co - operation with Espoon Oilers were sent a questionnaire that is different than the one sent to the companies currently sponsoring Espoon Oilers. Although 62.5 % of the companies that received the questionnaire also responded, it such a small sample that a reliable quantitative research could not be made. Because of this these answers were analyzed by using qualitative methods.

Also three companies out of the five responding answered to the open question on what they thought Espoon Oilers should improve in its sponsorship co - operation. Also they were given a possibility to give any comments or thoughts concerning the subject. These answers were analysed, but no reliable conclusions about these can be made. The answers must be considered as individual thoughts.

9 Conclusion

Acquisition of sponsorship partners for a sports club is a difficult and challenging task and it requires a good club image, good management and different contacts. The objective was to create a comprehensive plan on how to improve the brand image of Espoon Oilers and to plan concrete ideas for Espoon Oilers on how to improve its operations in order to create even more interest in companies and in this way ease the process of forming new sponsorship co-operation. In this thesis the theory of marketing communications, branding, sponsorship co-operation and sports marketing were investigated. With the help of the theoretical section it was possible to receive a wider overview of executing the objectives. Plans for improving game events and other operations of Espoon Oilers are suggestions for the management of Espoon Oilers to use as guidelines. These plans are based also on the writer's own experiences.

The assignment for this thesis was received from the organization of Espoon Oilers in March 2010. Help was received from the head of junior management of Espoon Oilers Markku Karjalainen.

Another objective was to complete a theoretical section, which would help the reader to receive a better knowledge of the most important issues of the thesis. After the theoretical section the general situation of floorball and Espoon Oilers was analysed followed by development proposals.

The companies that are currently sponsoring Espoon Oilers were mostly satisfied with the sponsorship co-operation with Espoon Oilers. This is good feedback for the club and shows that the club is executing its operations well. Some companies think that competitive success is a very important factor from their perspective, when some companies believed that being linked to youth sports is important. The club should consider beforehand what the possible co-operative partner might be interested in when presenting suggestions for the sponsorship "package". A majority of the respondents thought that receiving visibility from a sponsorship co-operation is important and also a majority believes that floorball as a sport is good to provide the visibility needed for them. This is a factor where Espoon Oilers must work on. The thought process of what factors affect how the visibility provided can be increased must be considered. The same applies to media coverage which is the most important factor according to the responding companies.

The actual game event is very important. The game has to be entertaining so that the spectators at the games and television viewers enjoy the game and would like to see a floorball game again in the future. Also the ancillaries in the game events should be arranged so that the spectator's experience can be improved.

The number of floorball players is increasing annually in Finland and around the world. Floorball has potential of becoming the biggest indoor ball sport in Finland when compared in spectator numbers. Floorball is a fast and exciting game which attracts a lot of young and also older people. Espoon Oilers being one of the biggest floorball clubs in Finland and with objectives set to be the biggest club in Finland. When acquiring more sponsorship partners Oilers could have better resources to do more marketing and grow to become an even bigger club in all ways measured.

Sponsoring is a big part of the operations of Espoon Oilers and it was told that a research concerning this matter would be kept as valuable. In this thesis we worked with areas that have been current in our studies and most probably will be current in our future jobs. It was also a great possibility to do a project, which could help Espoon Oilers. We believe that the thesis has been executed in a good order and the objectives set were achieved.

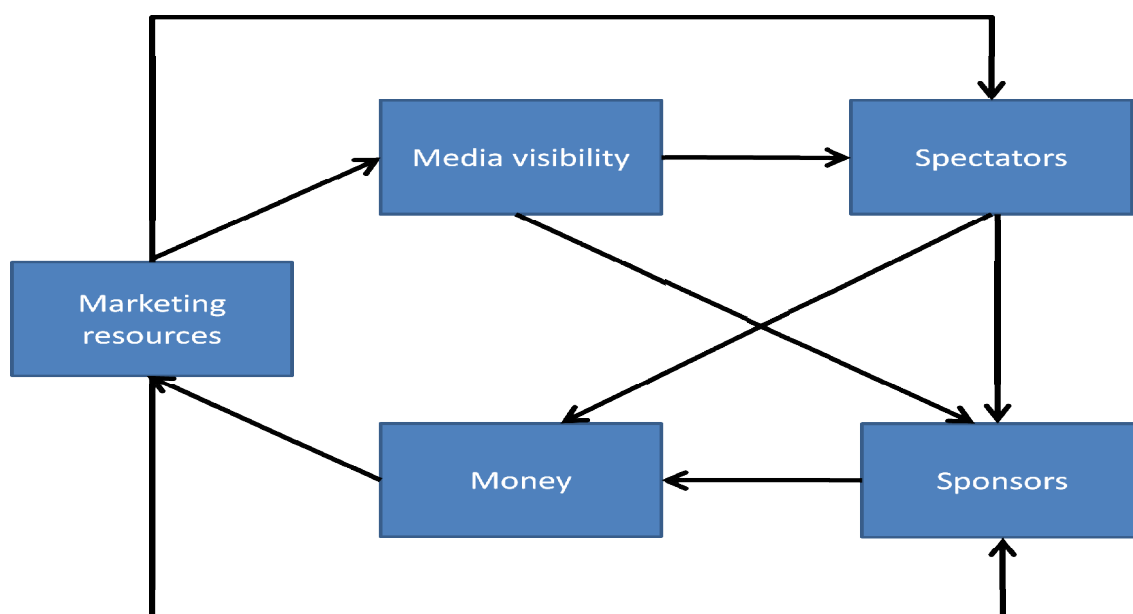


Figure 27: Key factors leading to financial success of a floorball club

Figure 27 explains the different key factors that lead to financial success of a floorball club. Good marketing resources can be used to create media interest and to attract more potential spectators to the games. More media visibility brings more spectators to the games. When the club is seen in different media and people go to see the games, it makes it easier to attract company interest towards sponsorship co-operation with the club. The more a club has sponsors, the more financial resources are available for marketing purposes.

Without a functional process of the factors above, it is very difficult for a floorball club to remain competitive and develop its operations on any level.

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Appendix 1: Letter about the idea to Espoon Oilers

Hi Markku,

Our idea is to make a marketing plan and / or marketing strategy for Espoon Oilers. The thesis would be made about either concerning the whole club or then about the men's team.

The aim is to create an even bigger floorball club out of Oilers. It would be nice if we could discuss if our project covers the entire organization or only the men's team. Based on the results of our meeting we will be able to set targets that our project could aim to achieve, such as:

- Membership growth in volumes (most members of Finland)
- Audience growth (biggest audience average in Finland)
- Oilers to have the largest budget in the Finnish floorball league
- Enhancing the general visibility and increasing people's consciousness about operations of Espoon Oilers
- Compete equally with other sports clubs in Espoo

These are ideas our project could be trying to achieve. We are only at the very beginning of our work and our meaning is to get things rolling properly. The idea would be that the work would not only benefit us two, but we would get a work done that would also be useful for Espoon Oilers.

Sincerely,

oliver

Oliver
oliver.wardi@laurea.fi
0400-280 187

Patrick
patrick.wardi@laurea.fi
0400-33 11 31

Appendix 2: E - mail to companies currently sponsoring Espoon Oilers

Hello,

We study at the Laurea University of Applied Sciences and are currently doing our thesis on the subject of marketing communications. On the field of marketing Communications we will focus on how to create brand image and on sponsorship, as well as on how the club's brand image of influences company interest. Our work will deal with these issues in general, and how these sectors could be developed at the floorball club Espoo Oilers. Espoon Oilers is our project's Case Company.

We are approaching you about your company's co - operation with the floorball club Espoon Oilers.

We would be very grateful if you could answer the attached questionnaire.
Answering the questionnaire will only take a few minutes.

All responses will be dealt confidentially and no personal information will be showed to third parties.

Thank you in advance,

Oliver Wardi
Patrick Wardi

The replies can be sent to:
patrick.wardi@laurea.fi

Appendix 3: E - mail to companies that have earlier sponsored Espoon Oilers

Hello,

We study at the Laurea University of Applied Sciences and are currently doing our thesis on the subject of marketing communications. On the field of marketing Communications we will focus on how to create brand image and on sponsorship, as well as on how the club's brand image influences company interest. Our work will deal with these issues in general, and how these sectors could be developed at the floorball club Espoon Oilers. Espoon Oilers is our project's Case Company.

We are approaching you about your company's earlier co - operation with the floorball club Espoon Oilers.

We would be very grateful if you could answer the attached questionnaire.
Answering the questionnaire will only take a few minutes.

All responses will be dealt confidentially and no personal information will be showed to third parties.

Thank you in advance,

Oliver Wardi
Patrick Wardi

The replies can be sent to:
patrick.wardi@laurea.fi

Appendix 4: Questionnaire to companies currently sponsoring Espoon Oilers

Instructions

In multiple choice questions mark your choice to the lines in front of the questions.

In open questions please answer to the open space underneath the question.

- 1) _____ How long has your company been in co – operation with Espoon Oilers?
 - a. Less than a year
 - b. 1-2 Years
 - c. 3-4 Years
 - d. 5-6 Years
 - e. Over 6 Years

- 2) _____ Does your company support any other sports teams at the moment?
 - a. 0 Teams
 - b. 1 Team
 - c. 2-3 Teams
 - d. 4 Teams
 - e. Over 5 Teams

- 3) _____ Does your company support any other ball sports teams at the moment?
 - a. No other teams
 - b. Football
 - c. Ice Hockey
 - d. Basketball
 - e. Some other, what? _____

- 4) _____ Have you been satisfied with the co – operation with Espoon Oilers?
 - a. Very satisfied
 - b. Pretty satisfied
 - c. Not satisfied , nor unsatisfied
 - d. Pretty unsatisfied
 - e. Very unsatisfied

- 5) _____ How relevant is the success of Espoon Oilers to the continuation of co – operation?
 - a. Very irrelevant

- b. To some extent irrelevant
- c. Not irrelevant, nor relevant
- d. To some extent relevant
- e. Very relevant

6) _____ How relevant is it that your company is linked to competitive sports?

- a. Very irrelevant
- b. To some extent irrelevant
- c. Not irrelevant, nor relevant
- d. To some extent relevant
- e. Very relevant

7) _____ How important is it, that your company is linked with floorball that is known as a youth sport?

- a. Very irrelevant
- b. To some extent irrelevant
- c. Not irrelevant, nor relevant
- d. To some extent relevant
- e. Very relevant

8)

How important do feel the following factors are in the sponsorship co – operation with Espoon Oilers?(Mark your answers to the lines behind the options)

(1. Totally irrelevant 2. Pretty irrelevant 3. Not irrelevant, nor relevant 4. Pretty relevant 5. very relevant)

- a. Getting visibility 1 2 3 4 5 _____
- b. Being linked to competitive sports 1 2 3 4 5 _____
- c. Being linked to youth activities 1 2 3 4 5 _____
- d. Supporting Espoon Oilers financially 1 2 3 4 5 _____
- e. Communication between both parties 1 2 3 4 5 _____
- f. Developing co – operation during the years to come 1 2 3 4 5 _____

9)

_____ In your opinion, how good is the image of floorball to provide the needed visibility to its co – operative partners?

- a. Very bad
- b. Pretty bad
- c. Not good, nor bad
- d. Pretty good

e. Very good

- 10) _____ Have you been happy with the contribution – benefit relations with Espoon Oilers?
- a. Very unsatisfied
 - b. Pretty unsatisfied
 - c. Not unsatisfied, nor satisfied
 - d. Pretty satisfied
 - e. Very satisfied
- 11) _____ How did you end up in co – operation with Espoon Oilers?
- a. You were contacted
 - b. You contacted the club
 - c. Someone recommended Espoon Oilers to you
 - d. Through personal relationships
 - e. Some other way, what?
-
- 12) _____ What should Espoon Oilers improve so that the co – operation would become more profitable to you?
- a. Competitive success
 - b. Growing of the organization
 - c. Better spectator numbers
 - d. More media publicity
 - e. Something else what?
-
- 13) _____ How has the economic recession influenced your company's sponsorship co - operations?
- a. Very little
 - b. Pretty little
 - c. Not little, nor much
 - d. Pretty much
 - e. Very much
- 14) _____ In what way would you want a sports club to approach you?

- a. Personally
 - b. By phone
 - c. By e - mail
 - d. By inviting you to be a guest in an event arranged by the club
 - e. Something else, what?
-

15) We would be very thankful if you could make some suggestions for improvement?
Omia vetuolain seuran puolesta yleisellä tasolla kaikkien ajotteksien varhempainen
(Kirjallisuus) workshop co – operations with Espoon Oilers.

Appendix 5: Questionnaire to companies that have previously sponsored Espoon Oilers

Instructions

In multiple choice questions mark your choice to the lines in front of the questions.

In open questions please answer to the open space underneath the question.

1) _____ How long was your company in a co – operation with Espoon Oilers?

- a. Less than a year
- b. 1-2 Years
- c. 3-4 Years
- d. 5-6 Years
- e. Over 6 Years

2) _____ What was the most important reason for the co – operation with Espoon Oilers to end?

- a. Economical reasons
- b. A more interesting co – operative partner than Espoon Oilers was found
- c. The competitive success of Espoon Oilers did not meet the expectations
- d. Contribution – benefit relations did not meet the expectations
- e. Some other, what? _____

3) _____ Was your company in co – operation with other ball sports clubs at the same time when with Espoon Oilers?

- a. No
- b. Football
- c. Ice hockey
- d. Basketball
- e. Some other, what? _____

4) _____ How satisfied were you in the co – operation with Espoon Oilers?

- a. Very unsatisfied
- b. Pretty unsatisfied
- c. Not unsatisfied, nor satisfied
- d. Pretty satisfied
- e. Very satisfied

5) _____ What kind of a relevance did the economic recession have on your willingness on co-operation with Espoon Oilers?

- a. Very irrelevant
- b. To some extent irrelevant
- c. Not irrelevant, nor relevant
- d. To some extent relevant
- e. Very relevant

6) _____ What are the most important factors that make your company start a co – operative partnership with a sports club?

- a. Media coverage
 - b. Economic benefits
 - c. The values of the sports club
 - d. Geographical reasons
 - e. Some other, what?
-

7) _____ What was the biggest reason for your company to go in a sponsorship co – operation with Espoon Oilers in particular?

- a. The values Espoon Oilers represents
 - b. The image of Espoon Oilers as a successful sports club interested
 - c. Geographical reasons
 - d. Cheap contribution-benefit relation
 - e. Some other, what?
-

8) _____ What benefits were there in the co – operation with Espoon Oilers for your company?

- a. Visibility in the operations of a successful sports club
 - b. Visibility in floorball
 - c. Economical benefits
 - d. Improvement of your company image
 - e. Some other, what?
-

9) _____ What are the ways you wish a sports club would approach you?

- a. Personally
- b. By phone
- c. By e-mail
- d. By inviting you to be a guest in an event arranged by the club
- e. Some other, what? _____

10) _____ How possible do you feel a co – operation with Espoon Oilers in the future could be?

- a. Very possible
- b. Pretty possible
- c. Not possible, nor impossible
- d. Pretty impossible
- e. Totally impossible

11) _____ What factors should Espoon Oilers develop the most in its operations?

- a. The game event
- b. Marketing communications
- c. Brand image
- d. Competitive success
- e. Some other, what? _____

12) _____ What factors should Espoon Oilers in your opinion develop in its co – operative relations? (Written answer)

13) _____ We would be very thankful of all your comments and suggestions for improving our sponsorship co – operations with Espoon Oilers.
(Kirjallinen vastaus)

Appendix 6: Contract example of a sponsorship co - operation

1. Contracting parties:

Espoon Oilers ry (Later Oilers)
Koivu-Mankkaan tie 5
02200 Espoo

Company Oy Ab (Later Company)
Address

2. Purpose and duration of the contract:

The purpose of the contract is to define the marketing co - operation between Company and Oilers.

Contractual season is 01.08.2010-.31-07.2011

3. The visibility of the contractual agreement

Men's team

Game uniform

Company's representative players in the season 2009 - 2010 are player 1 and player 2. To the game jerseys of the representative players will be printed the company logo of Company, size being the maximum 150 x 150 mm.

The Company of the representative players will be mentioned in the game leaflet, introduction of the team and when the representative player scores a goal or provides an assist.

Company gets a logo, the size of 3 x 3 meters to the video screen in the home games of Espoon Oilers. The logo will appear approximately every two minutes as long as the game goes on. Company gets two advertisements on the floorball rink, both sized 50cm x 200cm.

Company gets an advertisement sheet of the size of 200cm x 200cm, located behind the goal in every home game. Company gets four VIP - season tickets for their own use and the maximum of 200 single tickets to the regular season home games of Espoon Oilers.

4. Price and payments

1 Price

xxxx Euros(VAT 0 %) / season (2010-2011)

2 Payments

The payments will be done in one installment against an invoice sent in August.

5. The cost of implementing and supply of materials

1 Oilers takes responsibility of the following costs and supplies

Setting up the advertisements, maintenance and cleanliness of the advertisements and storing the advertisements.

2 Company takes responsibility of the following costs and supplies

The costs of producing the advertisements. Company provides the wanted logo in a digital shape.

6. Restrictions

Both parties are obligated to get the printed material approved by the other party before execution.

7. The parties' rights and obligations

The information in this contract is confidential and cannot be shown to a third party without the approval of the other party. The contract cannot be transferred to a third party without a written approval of the other party.

8. Disagreements

The both parties engage to operate according to principles of good co - operation. Possible disagreements or disputes that occur of this contract should be settled between the two parties. In case of no understanding, possible disagreements or disputes will be handled in Espoo District Court.

9. Signatures

This contract is done and signed in two (2) similar copies, one for each party.

In Espoo 02.08.2010

Company Oy Ab

First name Last name

Espoon Oilers ry

Timo Kekkonen
Chairman of the board

Appendix 7: Information about Espoon Oilers

9/23/2010 2

OILERS LYHYESTI JA OSANA YHTEISKUNTAA



- Perustettu vuonna 1990
- Suomen suurimpia salibandyn erikoisseuroja n. 900 jäsentä
- 32 joukkuetta
 - Juniorit, aikuisten harrastajaseurat ja edustusjoukkueet
 - Muu salibandytoiminta
- Varsinaisen seuratoiminnan ohella runsaasti toimintoja:
 - Mielenterveyssähly yhteistyössä Jorvin sairaalan kanssa
 - Kansainvälinen junioriturnaus Oilers Juniorgames
 - Lasten iltapäiväkerhot – yli 200 kerholaista
 - Lasten ja nuorten salibandyleirit
 - Nuori Suomi sinettiseura vuodesta 2001 alkaen




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Figure 28: Oilers in short (Material from Espoon Oilers)

Appendix 8: Co - operation possibilities for companies

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YHTEISTYÖ



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- Seuraavassa esitellään erilaisia yhteistyömahdollisuuksia.
- Paketit ovat suuntaa antavia ja niitä voidaan asiakkaan toiveista räätälöidä. Suuremmat emoseuraa koskevat yhteistyömallit räätälöidään aina yksilöllisesti.
- Yhteistyökumppanit jaetaan kolmeen eri kategoriaan:
 - Pääyhteistyökumppanit (partner-status)
 - Yhteistyökumppanit (joissain partner-status)
 - Tavarantoimittajat

Figure 29: Types of co - operation offered by Espoon Oilers (Material from Espoon Oilers)

9/23/2010

6

PLATINUM-PARTNER



Oilersin yksinoikeus pääyhteistyökumppani kantaa nimeä Platinum-Partner.
Yhteistyökumppanin kattava näkyvyys koko seurassa ja ennen kaikkea miesten edustusjoukkueessa ei jää keneltäkään huomaamatta.

- **Hinta:** XX.XXX€ / kausi (min. Kahden vuoden sopimus) + bonukset sidottuna menestykseen ja näkyvyyteen
- **Näkyvyys:**
 - 1 kpl Peliasun rintamainos
 - 2 kpl Kaukalonlaitamainos
 - 1 kpl Video-screen mainos 20 x 5 sekuntia
 - 1 kpl Kiinteä suuri banneripaikka Oilersin kotisivulla
 - 1 kpl 1/1-sivun mainos Otteluohjelmassa
 - 6 kpl Vip-kausikortteja + sovittava määrä irtolippuja henkilökunnan virkistystoimintaan.
 - 1 kpl Otteluisännöisyys runkosarjassa ja yksi pudotuspeleissä
 - 3-6 kpl Äänimainos ottelussa
 - 1 kpl Nimikko juniorijoukkue

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Figure 30: Offer for potential Platinum - Partners (Material from Espoon Oilers)

9/23/2010

7

GOLD-PARTNER


Oilersin pääyhteistyökumppanit kantavat nimeä Gold-Partner.
Yhteistyökumppanin kattava näkyvyys koko seurassa ja ennen kaikkea miesten edustusjoukkueessa ei jää keneltäkään huomaamatta.

- **Hinta:** XX.XXX€ / kausi (min. Kahden vuoden sopimus) + bonukset sidottuna menestykseen ja näkyvyyteen
- **Näkyvyys:**
 - 1 kpl Peliasumainos joko paidan takaosassa tai housun takamuksessa tai etumuksessa.
 - 1 kpl Video-screen mainos 20 x 5 sekuntia
 - 2 kpl Kaukalonlaitamainos
 - 1 kpl Kiinteä pieni banneripaikka Oilersin kotisivulla
 - 1 kpl 1/2-sivun mainos Otteluohjelmassa
 - 4 kpl Vip-kausikortteja + sovittava määrä kausikortteja ja yksittäislippuja
 - 1 kpl Otteluisännöisyys runkosarjassa
 - 2-4 kpl Äänimainos ottelussa


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Figure 31: Offer for potential Gold - Partners (Material from Espoon Oilers)

9/23/2010

8

SILVER-PARTNER



Oilersin suurimmat yhteistyökumppanit kantavat nimeä Silver-Partner. Näiden yhteistyökumppaneiden saama näkyvyys yhteistyöstä on nykypäivän helpointa ja tehokkainta urheilumarkkinointia.

- **Hinta:** .XX.XXX€ / kausi + bonukset sidottuna menestykseen ja näkyvyyteen
- **Näkyvyys:**
 - 1 kpl Peliasumainos paidan hihassa
 - 2 kpl Kaukalonlaitamainos
 - 1 kpl Video-screen mainos 20 x 5 sekuntia
 - 1 kpl 1/4-sivun mainos Otteluohjelmassa
 - 2 kpl Vip-kausikortteja
 - 2 kpl Äänimainos ottelussa

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Figure 32: Offer for potential Silver - Partners (Material from Espoon Oilers)

9/23/2010

10

KUMPPANI



- **Hinta:** X.XXX – X.XXX€
- **Näkyvyys:**
 - 1 kpl Video-screen mainos 20 x 5 sekuntia
 - 1 kpl Maininta otteluohjelmassa ja kotisivuilla
 - 2 kpl Vip-kausikortteja
 - 50 kpl irtolippuja


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Figure 33: Offer for potential Partners (Material from Espoon Oilers)

Appendix 9: The media applied by Espoon Oilers

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SEURAN MEDIAT



TV-pääyhteistyökanava:

- Urheilukanava, suora liigaottelu viikoittain pelikauden aikana.
- Finaalit yhteistyössä lisäksi YLE:n kanssa.

Seuran omat mediat:

- Internet-sivu (www.espoonoilers.fi)
- Jäsenpostitukset

Muut:

- Länsiväylä
- Vartti-lehti / 13 x ¼ sivun mainos
- Salibandylehti
- Julisteet ja lentolehtiset
- Tekstiviestikanava
- Sähköpostisuora

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Figure 34: The media of Espoon Oilers (Material from Espoon Oilers)

Appendix 10: Different logos of Espoon Oilers



Espoon Oilers club logo



Espoon Oilers club logo



Espoon Oilers Men's team logo



Oilers Junior Games (OJG) logo

Figure 35: Espoon Oilers logos (<http://www.espoonoilers.fi/>)

Appendix 11: Spectator numbers

Club	Average 08-09		average 12.02.2010	Position	Difference from previous season
Classic	1003	1.	1189	1.	(+186)
Oilers	622	3.	848	2.	(+226)
SPV	734	2.	608	3.	(-126)
Koovee	564	4.	524	4.	(-40)
Happee	323	12.	495	5.	(+172)
Nokia KrP	360	10.	468	6.	(+108)
Josba	534	5.	462	7.	(-72)
Trackers	508	7.	455	8.	(-53)
Ols			452	9.	
Erä	351	11.	436	10.	(+85)
NST	388	8.	373	11.	(-15)
TPS	527	6.	346	12.	(-181)
AC HaKi	380	9.	308	13.	(-72)
SSV	283	13.	272	14.	(-11)
Salibandyliiga	509		517		(+8)

Table 2: Spectator numbers in the Finnish Floorball League
(Material received from Espoon Oilers)