

Corporate Involvement in the Paralympics – The Sainsbury’s Case

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■ Overview

In this interview series, people who were involved in creating the legacy of Olympics/Paralympics are featured. This time we deliver our interview to Ms. Jemma Synnott and Ms. Kerry Johnson, Diversity and Inclusion at Sainsbury's Supermarkets Ltd, UK.

■ Brand recognition effectively improved though exclusive Paralympic sponsoring

MURC (M): Generally, the Games sponsoring does not distinguish whether it’s for Olympics or Paralympics. But Sainsbury’s chose to become the first “Paralympic-only” sponsor. What was the intention?

Sainsbury’s (S): We’re sponsored the Paralympics because we believed (and continue to believe) that everyone should have the opportunity to live a healthy, active lifestyle regardless of ability. The sponsorship was a fantastic articulation of our company beliefs and values.

M: How was the decision made to invest Paralympic-related activities?

S: We decided to invest in Paralympic-related activities that we felt best linked up with our existing initiatives, in particular our Active Kids campaign, which enables



Olympic Aquatic Centre, on the day before Sainsbury’s Anniversary Games

customers to collect vouchers in store that can be exchanged by schools across the country for sports equipment. This led to us launching our Paralympic Challenge, where we sent Paralympic sports equipment out to schools and stores to encourage participation (and therefore drive awareness and understanding) of Paralympic sport

M: Can you tell us the achievement and the effectiveness of your activities?

S: We ended up signing up over 2m children to the challenge, from over 7,000 organisations. The end result of this was that Sainsbury's became the brand most associated with the games (spontaneous and prompted) with 18% prompted awareness, and we have driven this leadership position ever since.

■ Ground swell of sponsors towards the success of the Paralympics

M: What was the biggest challenge and how did you overcome it?

S: The biggest challenge was educating our colleagues and customers about the Paralympics, and to drive perception to the same level as the Olympics in terms of the achievement and skill required to be there. This was largely about cultivating respect and admiration for those taking part, as opposed to a charitable or sympathetic view.



Sainsbury's Anniversary Games Volunteers carrying wheelchairs at the Queen Elisabeth Olympic Park

Our communications were always centered around being proud to support the Paralympics, and in this respect, we were very much aligned with the tone of Channel 4's "Superhumans" campaign, which sought to challenge perceptions of the Paralympics in a similar way.

M: What were the most effective programs or activities of Sainsbury's to disseminate Paralympics value and communicate the fun of inclusive sports?

S: As mentioned earlier, the Paralympic Challenge was the most

effective program, whereby we encouraged schools and organisations in our Active Kids network to sign up for free equipment to try a Paralympic sport. We also sent equipment out to all our stores to ensure colleagues were aligned with the activity, and equally encourage to try (and therefore understand more about) Paralympic sport

M: How do you evaluate the impact of London 2012 Paralympics and Sainsbury's

contribution to it?

S: Both the Olympics and Paralympics had a huge impact, both in terms of the rejuvenation of East London, as well as changing attitudes towards Para-athletics. We believe that Sainsbury's did make a sizable contribution to this, in particular through the way we engaged so many colleagues and customers to physically try a Paralympic sport and therefore create more of an emotional connection to those taking part.

M: Why did Sainsbury's believe promoting Paralympics was important for the UK society?

S: Promoting the Paralympics was important to Sainsbury's because the principles behind it link up with our belief to promote a more inclusive society; one that treats people equally regardless of their physical ability.

M: What do you think are the key factors that many people got interested in and supported Paralympics?

S: I think there was a ground-swell from a number of sponsors (including ourselves) that drove a perception change from previous years. The tone of communications was more around admiration and respect for those taking part rather than sympathy and charity, and this I think created a broader emotional connection with the audience, making the Paralympics appeal to more people.



From the left: Ms. Kerry Johnson, Nakamura, Okuno, and Ms. Jemma Synott.

M: Is Sainsbury's still doing something special for further promotion of social inclusion?

J&K: We continue to support GB Paralympics and are working on a follow up to the 2012 Paralympic Challenge, encouraging a new breed of children to try four Paralympic sports in the run up to the Rio Paralympic Games in 2016.

■ Message to the Japanese businesses

M: Any message to Japanese businesses who seek the way to involve in Tokyo 2020 Paralympic games?

S: Supporting the Paralympics is a hugely positive step for your company to take, and a great way of establishing that you value inclusivity on a massive scale. The Paralympics are the most inspiring, most extraordinary example of human achievement, and extols the virtues of triumphing over adversity, not letting anything stand in the way of your dreams, and being the best you can be. Paralympians are amazing, and anything you can do to be associated with these incredible people will have a truly positive impact on both your customers, and the people that work for you.

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