

What Makes Olympic Advertising Work?

Insights from the ABX Sports Impact Index™

Advertising during global sporting events such as the Olympic Games represents one of the most significant investments brands make in media. Olympic broadcasts attract massive audiences, high emotional engagement, and a unique cultural moment that brings viewers together worldwide. For advertisers, this creates a powerful opportunity—but also a high-stakes environment where creative effectiveness matters more than ever.

The latest analysis from the [ABX Sports Impact Index™](#) provides a deeper look into how advertising performed during the [2026 Winter Olympics](#), and what brands can learn from these results.

Sports audiences are among the most valuable audiences available to marketers. Compared with the general population, sports fans tend to be more attentive, more passionately engaged with the content they are watching, and more receptive to advertising messages. When advertising resonates in this environment, it can deliver meaningful lifts across key brand and performance metrics.

Using the ABX Sports Impact Index™, advertising from the 2026 Winter Olympics demonstrated robust performance compared with standard advertising benchmarks among the general population.

The results showed:

- **+17% lift over standard GenPop measures**
- **+43% lift in Brand Reputation**
- **+44% lift in Purchase Intent**
- **+28% lift in Any Action**

These results reinforce findings from other major sporting events, including **Super Bowl 2026**, and align with years of research from [ABX Advertising Benchmark Index™](#) examining how sports environments amplify advertising impact. **The Sports Impact Index™** specifically isolates how the passion and attention of sports audiences translate into measurable improvements in creative effectiveness, brand perception, and potential commercial return.

However, while sports environments provide a powerful advantage, **that advantage is not guaranteed**. The creative itself must still work.

When Olympic Advertising Underperforms

Despite the strong average lifts seen across Olympic advertising, the analysis also revealed a critical insight: **not every ad benefited from the Olympic environment.**

In fact, many of the Olympic ads performed **below the historical averages of the same brands' advertising during the prior 12 months.** This finding mirrors a pattern observed across more than a decade of Super Bowl advertising research, which can be seen here: [*"Super Bowl 2026 Ads Focus on Entertainment Value."*](#)

The takeaway is clear. **Premium media placements alone cannot guarantee robust performance.** Even when brands secure high-visibility placements during major sporting events, creative execution remains the primary driver of advertising effectiveness.

When Olympic creative lacks clarity, fails to connect the brand meaningfully to the event, or prioritizes spectacle over brand storytelling, much of the advantage of the sports audience can be lost.

In other words, brands may invest millions in media placement but still leave a significant amount of performance "on the table" if the creative does not fully capitalize on the moment.

The Creative Patterns Behind Successful Olympic Ads

One of the most interesting findings from the ABX analysis is the degree to which many Olympic advertisers leaned into spectacle.

Ads frequently featured dramatic visuals, inspirational storytelling, elite athletes, celebrities, and cinematic production values. While these elements create emotional appeal and entertainment value, they can sometimes overshadow the brand itself.

The research showed that **the most effective Olympic ads were not necessarily the most cinematic or emotionally dramatic.** Instead, the strongest performers were those that delivered **clear product stories and strong brand connections to the Olympic sponsorship.**

The analysis also found **specific** differences in how athletes interacted with their brands; how their stories were told; and how their linkage to Olympic sponsorship affected their audiences.

Small creative adjustments such as voice overs and visual references can make a measurable difference in how audiences recognize and remember the sponsorship investment.

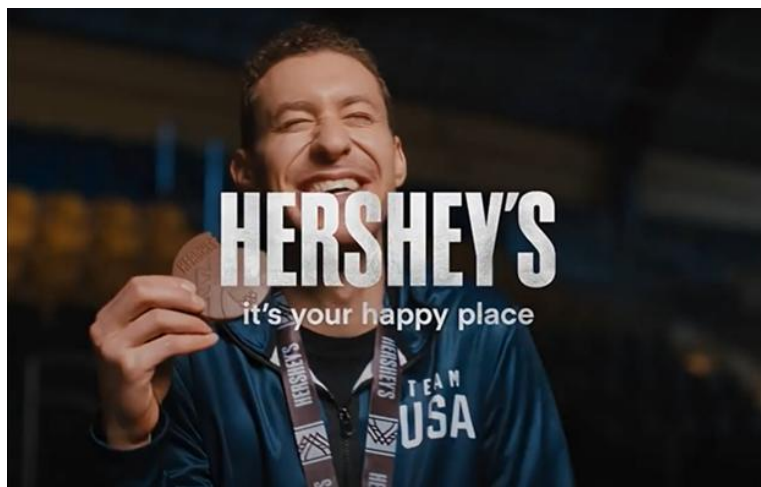
Variables at Play in Successful Olympic Ads

The research categorized Olympic creative into several common types using the Sports Impact Index. For example, some ads used athletes who were not competing while others showed them actively competing in their events, and some were regular ads with no Olympic references at all.

Bottom line, the key principle of sports advertising: **context matters, but clarity matters more.** When the relationship between the brand, the athlete, and the event is clearly communicated, audiences are more likely to remember the brand and respond positively to the message.

To learn more about the details in this research, [contact ABX here.](#)

One Great Ad Example: Hershey's - "Love And Support Bring True Victory"



A standout example was this Hershey's Olympic ad, which told a simple but highly effective product story. In the spot, winning athletes were awarded gold-wrapped chocolate medals, into which they happily bit.

This approach delivered one of the highest ratings for Brand Awareness in the study. The clear story presented by Hershey's is a great example of how to make a brand the hero within a sports environment.

The Strategic Lesson for Olympic Advertisers

The core lesson from the ABX Sports Impact Index™ analysis is simple but powerful.

Sports audiences amplify advertising performance—but only when the creative is strong enough to take advantage of the moment.

Brands that invest in Olympic sponsorships – and any sports media and events - broadcast advertising should ensure their creative:

- Clearly communicates the brand's role or sponsorship
- Connects the product or brand story naturally to the sports context
- Maintains strong brand clarity throughout the ad
- Reinforces sponsorship through both visual and verbal cues

When these elements come together, sports environments like the Olympics can deliver meaningful improvements in brand perception, engagement, and potential sales impact.

How ABX Helps Brands Optimize Sports Advertising

For brands investing in major sports events, the ABX platform provides tools to evaluate and improve creative performance before, during, and after campaigns.

ABX can help brands understand how their advertising performs through:

- **Historical performance benchmarking**
- **Sports-specific creative diagnostics**
- **Audience response analysis**
- **Strategic guidance for upcoming campaigns**

By understanding what works—and what doesn't—brands can ensure their advertising not only appears during the world's biggest sporting events but truly performs within them.

If your brand is investing in sports sponsorships or advertising, ABX can help you understand how your creative compares—and how it can perform even better.

Written by: Angela Jeffrey, VP Brand Management, ABX

For more information: [contact us here](#)