



## Image recovery from negative media coverage of a sport event: Destination, venue, and event considerations



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### ABSTRACT

The successful hosting of test events in the lead-up to a major event is not only a useful logistical tool and systems evaluation, but also signals to the world that the host city is ready and competent to host the main event. With the intense scrutiny of the media on all aspects of the venue, the city, and the competition, test events offer the potential for a city to establish (or enhance) its reputation as an event host, or to create doubt in its ability to host major events. The case follows the media coverage of the 2014 Pan Pacific Swimming Championships held on the Gold Coast Queensland, Australia, which served as a test event for the newly renovated Gold Coast Aquatics Centre in the lead-up to the 2018 Commonwealth Games. The case considers the implications and impacts of negative media coverage of an international event on the destination image of the host city. The case highlights the need for image recovery strategies for stakeholders within the destination who are concerned with the city's ability to host international sport events.

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### Teaching note and overview for use in class

Set on the Gold Coast, Queensland, Australia, the case follows the disastrous coverage of the 2014 Pan Pacific Swimming Championships, which served as a test event for the newly renovated Gold Coast Aquatics Centre. Test events are an increasingly common method of verifying the readiness of a new or renovated facility in the lead up to a major or mega event (Broudehoux, 2007). Often used prior to a major or mega event, the successful hosting of a test event is a useful logistical tool and systems evaluation. But most importantly, it signals to the world that the host city is ready and competent to host the main event. Often as major events themselves, test events attract significant media attention, which can be magnified by their joint status as a warm-up to an even larger mega-event. With the intense scrutiny of the media on all aspects of the venue, the city, and the competition, test events offer the potential for a city to establish, enhance, or in some unfortunate cases, diminish its reputation as a viable event host. As students progress through the case questions, they will have an opportunity to address issues that arise from a test event that goes badly.

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The case is presented from the perspective of Lisa Smith who has been called in as a crisis consultant by Tourism and Events Queensland (TEQ), and Gold Coast Tourism – the state and local bodies responsible for tourism in the city of the Gold Coast. TEQ's vision is “to leverage the Gold Coast Commonwealth Games to generate overnight visitor expenditure, enhance the brand image of the Gold Coast and Queensland globally and leave a marketing legacy for other future major events” (TEQ, 2015, para 5). As the crisis consultant, Lisa has been tasked with protecting the brand image of the Gold Coast as a world-class sport event destination. In the wake of a cold, rainy, miserable Pan Pacific Swimming Championships (a Commonwealth Games test event), Lisa must determine a strategy to blunt the negative perceptions of the Gold Coast arising from the test event, and to assist the Gold Coast in its vision “to be globally recognized by 2016 as a world-class leisure and business events destination famous for its unrivalled variety of entertainment, excitement and fun” (TEQ, 2015, para 5). Issues associated with the role of events in destination branding, and ways to recover from negative exposure in domestic and international broadcast and social media are covered in this case study. Further, students have the opportunity to consider the views of various stakeholders in the process. The case is multifaceted in that it encourages students to consider the immediate questions at hand and allows for further development of strategic event plans and is suitable for both undergraduate and postgraduate courses.

## 1. Events in destination branding

Destinations often bid for and host large international events with the intention to help shape the image and profile of the city (Xing & Chalip, 2006). Destination image is, “the sum of beliefs, ideas, and impressions that a person has of a destination” (Crompton, 1979, p. 18). How visitors perceive the destination contributes to the location's ability to attract tourists and maintain competitiveness. Hosting large international sport events such as the Commonwealth Games provides increased media exposure and attention to the host city and country (Green, 2002). Destinations often utilize events in their destination marketing efforts to increase both direct, which includes visitor expenditure during the actual event, and indirect tourism that focuses on the effects the media coverage of the event has on brand awareness and recognition of the destination as an attractive location to tourists (Chalip, Green, & Hill, 2003; Getz & Fairley, 2004).

Likewise, the event also seeks to create a strong brand image. Keller (1993) defined brand image as consumer-held perceptions as determined by brand associations. These associations are linked in memory and create meaning of the brand for the consumer (Keller, 1993). Events provide these linkages between the brand image of the host community and the events it hosts (Chalip, 2004). Due to these linkages, potentially reciprocal effects and transfer of image of event to destination and destination to event through strategic marketing initiatives could possibly be expected (Brown, Chalip, Jago, & Mules, 2004). Xing and Chalip (2006) suggested that events seem to have a bigger impact on the destination's image than vice versa, with size and status of the event as key determinants of sport event image (Gwinner, 1997). Thus, it is useful for students to consider the role of events in destination branding.

The instructor can include an activity that requires students to consider the role of events in destination branding and the destination in event branding. Tybout and Sternthal (2005) described brand positioning as, “the specific, intended meaning for a brand in consumers' minds” (p. 11). Competitive positioning requires that marketers identify an appropriate frame of reference so consumers know what to expect of the brand while also establishing associated points of parity and difference (Keller, Sternthal, & Tybout, 2002). Understanding how the brand meets consumers' goals is key and can be explored by asking: (1) who should be targeted? (2) what goals does the brand allow the target to achieve?, and (3) why would the brand be chosen over others (Tybout & Sternthal, 2005). Once determined, students can develop a positioning statement to ensure a clear vision of the brand. Lastly, it may be useful to have students identify frames of reference by discussing what expectations they perceive visitors to the Gold Coast will experience based on how GCT has positioned itself. Likewise, the same can be accomplished with the Commonwealth Games. Following this activity, students can consider the relationship between the 2018 Commonwealth Games and Gold Coast brand through the following exercises:

1. Describe the current brand positioning for Gold Coast Tourism.
2. Describe the brand positioning for the 2018 Commonwealth Games.
3. Discuss the ways in which these two brands support (or do not support) one another to attract tourists to the Gold Coast.
4. List each element of the desired/sought after brand image of the 2018 Commonwealth Games held on the Gold Coast, Queensland, Australia.
5. Analyze the stories, social media, and media coverage of the 2014 Pan Pacific Swimming Championships. Place each element/comment from your analysis into one or more of the categories you listed in question 4. Note whether the comment (a) supports the brand image, or (b) detracts from the brand image. While select quotes from media have been included in the case, the instructor may choose to ask the students to conduct a more complete search of media coverage of the event from media databases such as Factiva. Note to instructors: we understand that one can interpret 'social media' a number of ways. Therefore, instructors should clearly outline parameters for the social media analysis based on the needs of your course. Specifically, the instructor should outline what sources should be searched, specific platforms for the search, a date range, and whether word searches and/or hashtags should be employed. Instructors could either define these parameters within an instruction prompt or use this as a class activity and have students generate ideas and create their own parameters. By facilitating the activity, instructors can prevent wild interpretations while using student-led learning.

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