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MARKETING/ SPONSORSHIP

Sprint close to adding deal with the USTA



THE LEFTON
REPORT
TERRY LEFTON

We await the conclusion of the NFL's mega-sponsorship deal with Sprint-Nextel, which should set the market in the wireless category. But it turns out there is another developing sponsorship for the newly merged telecom company that is stuck at the "awaiting signoff by the lawyers" level.

The U.S. Tennis Association has all but completed a two-year relationship plus a one-year option with Sprint, part of a three-pronged marketing attack that will see the company relaunch in September, powered by NASCAR, the NFL and the U.S. Open.

A USTA source confirmed the deal was close to completion, but pricing could not be determined. The source added that it "won't be the only new media deal we sign before the Open."

The deal with Sprint is the USTA's largest telecom deal in some time and its first deal with a cellular provider. The USTA had signed Nextel to a small supplier deal last year that allowed limited marketing rights, hospitality and demos of the "Direct Connect" built-in walkie-talkie product on site at the Open.

Sprint is expected to receive limited wireless content rights under the deal. Given the September timing of the brand relaunch, the deal does not include rights to the recently launched U.S. Open Series.

IPG's Octagon handles the telecom giant's sports marketing programs.



The deal will be part of a three-pronged marketing attack that will see the company relaunch in September, powered by NASCAR, the NFL and the U.S. Open.

The timing of the U.S. Open fits into marketing plans for the postmerger Sprint.

BEAR-LY MARKETING: Staples has added the Chicago Bears to its NFL roster, as the company has now collected nine local club sponsorships since walking away from a leaguewide deal before last season.

With Staples entering the Chicago market this year and growing to around 25 stores by the end of the year, the Bears are the office product retailer's biggest NFL sponsorship to date.

Activation is impressive, including a custom publication piece from Jigsaw Media, of Stamford, Conn., that will be distributed polybagged with a Sharpie (which also has an ad in the publication) at the Bears' Bourbonnais, Ill., training camp and at Chicago-area Staples stores as a gift with purchase. Staples already is the title sponsor of training camp, which is called Staples Bears Training Camp, Presented by Chase.

A Staples sweepstakes will use Bears defensive end Alex Brown as its spokesman and will award a \$2,500 shopping spree, a trip for four to the Pro Bowl in Hawaii and provide various local meets and greets.

Along with signs at Soldier Field, Staples will have a seat upgrade program at all home games and a radio promotion in which the Bears equipment manager offers tips on how to "shape up" your business.

The 20th anniversary of the Bears' 1985 Super Bowl team has also been integrated into many of Staples' NFL promos.

"When you enter a market with competition, you need to differentiate right away, and we felt the Bears were a great way to do that," said Sue Develin, Staples' sports and partnership marketing manager.

Staples replaces OfficeMax as a Bears sponsor, albeit at a considerably higher level.

The Bears join the company's other NFL markets: Atlanta, Dallas, New

England, New York (Jets), Philadelphia, San Francisco, Seattle and Washington. For the coming season, the retailer will reprise its "Game of Your Life" sweepstakes from last year that awarded unprecedented access, which in some markets included game-day NFL seats in recliners at field level. "As we moved from a price and selection promise to our 'That Was Easy' [corporate] positioning, it was important to be more connected locally, and our network of [NFL] teams has definitely delivered there," said Marci Grebstein, Staples vice president of media and consumer marketing.

GLORY DAYS: With star slugger Barry Bonds still on the disabled list and the San Francisco Giants playing sub-.500 baseball, the team is relying on star power from the past to carry an upcoming premium promotion with Chevron, which has been a Giants sponsor since 1957.

From Aug. 1-Sept. 15, Chevron will offer a different baseball bearing the likeness of legendary players in team history, including Orlando Cepeda, Juan Marichal, Willie Mays, Willie McCovey and Gaylord Perry. The balls go for \$4.99 with any purchase or \$5.99 without purchase at stations in central and Northern California and Nevada. An accompanying "Giants Legends Sweepstakes" offers prizes that include an autographed "Legends" set, a trip to the Giants' 2006 spring training, the use of a suite at SBC Park to watch a 2006 Giants game with a legend and a Giants "Dug-out Store" gift certificate.

Ostern Sports Marketing Group, Simsbury, Conn., handles on behalf of Chevron.

PUPPET LOVE: In the industry's search for the next bobblehead, K2 Licensed Products is offering the back-to-basics approach of a puppet. Pro Puppets, which so far has only an MLB license, is

expected to garner other league deals shortly. K2 LP President Scott Dickey said he expects to have the puppets used as giveaways in at least a handful of MLB ballparks next season. If they are a success as a promotional giveaway, the puppets will also be available at retail, priced at \$12.99 at stadium and arena pro shops and slightly less at retailers outside sporting venues.

HERE & THERE: Home Depot has consolidated its sports marketing activities with Octagon. The home improvement retailer had split the duties between Velocity Sports & Entertainment Marketing and Octagon for the last two years. ... Veteran sports marketer Howe Burch has quietly joined



Burch

Reebok as vice president of North American marketing, reporting to Bob Monroe, who is senior vice president and general manager of Reebok North America. Burch was with Fila in various sports marketing jobs for

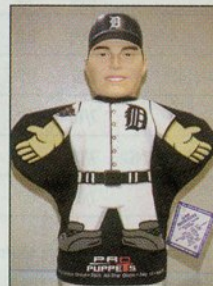
11 years, most recently as senior vice president of global communications and sports marketing. Burch left Fila in early 2004 to run his own consultancy.

... Dan Ballister has joined the NBA as senior director of interactive marketing and sales. He was at Findwhat.com (now Miva.com) for the last three years. ...

Sean Gahagan has signed as the Baseball Hall of Fame's first vice president of marketing, with a charter to grow the Cooperstown, N.Y., organization's sponsorship and licensing businesses. Gahagan had been working in marketing for some fashion and performance eyewear companies. ...

Mary Beck has been promoted at MLB from marketing director to director of advertising and marketing. She's been at MLB for four years. ... Former Washington Capitals communications vice president and University of Massachusetts sports communications professor Andy McGowan has joined banner/events company XL Color, Granby, Conn., as vice president and general manager.

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Will puppets provide a hand at the gate?

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