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The Keys to

Success

The social, sporting, economic and communications impact of Barcelona'92

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THE TECHNOLOGICAL IMAGE OF THE BARCELONA OLYMPIC GAMES

Josep Bertran Vall[1]

In our day the technology used in any Olympic Games, or in any other sporting event, is understood not only as a means to inform people of the results as they occur, but as a fundamental element in turning the event into a cultural spectacle, and in this way create solid societal values. In winning medals, athletes do not only consolidate their athletic excellence, but also spread the word concerning the values of the society that they represent.

The technological challenge was considered in these terms. It is not enough to obtain perfection, that is, something finished and beautiful. The COOB '92 tried to obtain excellence, the best, the most advanced. A society that demonstrates that it is able to obtain high sporting and technological levels —and do so in accordance with Olympic values— can at the same time acheive a high level of social welfare, social equality, development and justice.

The technology of the Olympic Games as an economic instrument

The COOB'92 assumed the investments in technology as a necessary expenditure for the development of competitions during the Olympic Games, convinced that in the search for excellence in design, human and technical factors would come into play that would not disappear when the Games ended.

Thus, for example, the work of familiarizing 400 specialists with the most advanced technology assured a qualitative and long-lasting increase of the technological level of the industrial fabric of our society. Two thousand volunteers in

information services, who worked on a innovative and precise computer network, offered a vision of sport as a vehicle for spreading cultural values associated with doing a job well. The gradual increase in services offered by cooperating enterprises assured the creation of entrepreneurial strategies of a national dimension that could be expected to be consolidated beyond the Games.

Consolidating the prestige of technology meant demonstrating to future users the technological level that a group of people was creating. It was key to develop a campaign to sensitize users, especially international ones, so that when arriving in Barcelona a few days before the Olympic Games, they would be willing to accept the information services offered by the Organizing Committee. The technological image of Spain in the time the Games were being prepared was not exactly a factor in its favour. In Atlanta, for example, initially they will have to make less effort to get users to show a willingness to accept the technological proposals of its Organizing Committee, simply because of the preconceived image of American technology in the mind of Americans and non-Americans.

The association of a product with a country means establishing a series of inherent attributes which are automatically converted into commercial arguments. If these coincide with the promotional guidelines they add value to the product. If they do not, they reduce its value.

In Spain, for example, German engineering is not only the description of a product, but an attribute, a commercial argument. It is associated with robustness, precision, durability, and so on. In contrast, Spanish products in developed countries like the United States for example, are perceived as low quality and low cost crafts, rather than high quality technology.

In this context, the objective was to create favourable opinion towards certain high technology services that could not be shown to the users until the first day of real use, the only moment when they were available. Given that the different technological services had to be hired months ahead of time, the state of opinion took on a relevant role. All of the possible elements of judgement of the purchaser of the service, in this case made up the commercial package previous to purchase.

The COOB '92 proposed submitting its technological services to the analytical opinion of professionals in the field, while promoting its activity through the mass media.

Trade shows, symposiums and lectures on technology,

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meeting points for professionals in the field and the specialized press, became the first venues of promotion of the technology available. Upon receiving an invitation for a member of the technological department to explain the state of a given project in a given event, the answer was to send the most qualified specialist in the organization. It was thus necessary to have abundant audiovisual material available that would guarantee a uniform model for presentations. The tasks of technical staff of the COOB '92 became more and more frequent in the contexts here described, becoming more and more uniform as the available material for presentations improved in quality.

Furthermore, a little more than two years before the opening of the Olympic Games, the technological systems began to be tested. To do so it was necessary to develop internal coordination in the setting up of computers, telephones and scoreboards. Paradoxically, the COOB'92 technicians were more numerous than the athletes. Activity was intensified with a double objective in mind: in the first place, to raise quality control; and second, as [a] way of making advances in systems of different communication media better known. The public relations strategy was greatly effective, though it was difficult to make invited people understand that they were not seeing the definitive system, but an unfinished model that was being perfected. Upon occasion, small errors became news items, to the disappointment of the technicians responsible.

The complexity of technology and its echo in society

Systematic and continuous access through the appearance of technical articles in specialized publications in the field, served to create a state of opinion that brought credibility to the technological project. The induced effect, generated by the fact that specialized publications were interested and had analyzed the technological projects developed by the CCOB '92, awakened the interest of the non-specialized press in the social aspects of the projects.

In the mass media the commercial argument had to be set forth in more general, less technical terms, so that it would be attractive and so the social component would stand out —that is, the consideration of how technology is a service to society. Thus for the same news item, one could go from an announcement that read «the technology used in this computer is DS-2» to another type that said «the tech-

nology employed in this Spanish-made computer is the most modern in the world». The first item interested technicians, while the second caught the attention of the general public.

In the same way that the specialized press represented the first step before publication in magazines and newspapers with wider readership, the Spanish press set the stage for the technological news published in international media. The interest for technology that would be used in the Olympic Games, began to create interest in specialized international magazines the more it was referred to in La Vanguardia, El País, El Periodico and other similar media that covered some concrete aspect of it. Given that the closer the opening of the Olympic Games the more intense became the news about them, there was an increasing number of consultations that had to be attented by the technology division that came from outside of Spain: letters, FAXes, and above all visits by journalists.

To explain the technological services in an interesting and intelligible way represented an additional difficulty. There are few professionals in the mass media who are interested in writing articles on technical innovations, as the audience for this type of article is small. Yet journalists in the mass media gather a great deal of information that comes from those responsible for political and social questions (colloquially know as VIPs), whose influence is high and whose opinions are constantly valued by the press.

The method to inform these persons was very efficient in converting technical items into news. If treated as «a job creation method» that would «energize the economy of the city», the explanation by a Barcelona politician, for example, of the technological services of the COOB '92 (though probably over his head), would probably become a news item after one of many press appearances.

The creativity of the Department of Technology in preparing messages was well-received by the VIPs, becoming a powerful way to generate news, so that later some news media would wish to go deeper into the question. Here the networking techniques employed had as their objective the committment of time on the schedule of some well known person to present the service, doing so in a way that benefitted both sides.

On the other hand, the characteristics of the Organizing Committee as a large enterprise, assured a great wealth of contacts. In obtaining the complicity of all of the different departments of the enterprise so that its contacts would

The technological Cobi

speak correctly of the technological projects was one of the objectives of the Department of Technology. In the case of the COOB '92, in analyzing the results with the benefit of time, it was seen how people far from the technology were good propagators of the advantages of the systems.

The technological Cobi

The fundamental difference between a product and a service from the point of view of promotion, is that the service is intangible: it cannot be touched nor seen, it can only be described, explained, and tested. For this reason it was necessary to in some way allow for the identification of the service with an element which would help people to recall it in a way that could make an impression.

In this case, the challenge was to have the Olympic mascot, Cobi, in one of his many facets, imitate the actions of the users of technology. The option was not to use Cobi to create an image, but have him help explain in a drawing some of the technological services that were going to be emblematic of the Organizing Committee.
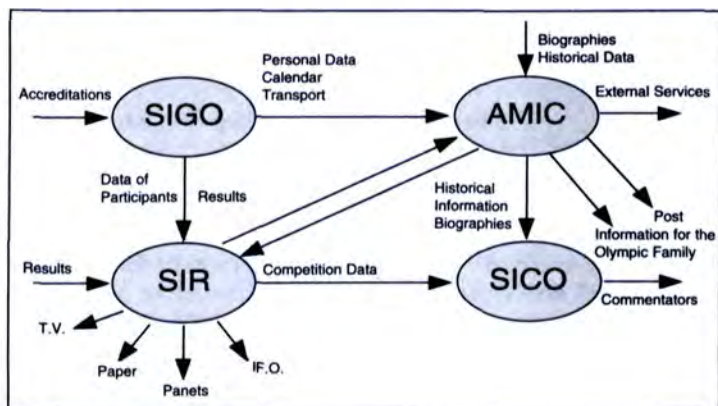
For example, the COOB '92 was the creator of a specific computer program for journalists. The journalist who «bought» it would continue to use the computer, only receiv-

ing more functions and better service. A mascot like Cobi working on a computer, happy to receive the news from the screen, recalled the service in every moment and became an element that contributed to its synthesis.

It was necessary to select the most attractive services from the perspective of communication, that is, those technological services that were set out for the many, those most visible, and those which had a greater capacity to generate news. The projects to supply information of the events during the competitions, were potentially of very high visibility, since all of the athletes were necessarily going to use them. Other services such as electronic security in the faciltiies, implied a great technological operation but had less interest from the point of view of global communication.

The idea of the image campaign consisted in selecting some of the services and giving them a higher profile. If the projection of the «star services» reached the foreseen level, it would generate confidence through an induced effect in the rest of the technological services. Once the star services had been selected, they were christened with names that would come across well in a multicultural context, but which, if they had any meaning, would be in consonance with some value clearly identified with the culture of our country: AMIC, SIR, SIGO.

The material produced within the image parameters indicated (Cobis, brochures, proper names, posters, pins, videos) completed the communications campaign in allowing for the possibility of enriching all types of explanations.

Evaluation of results

The design of the promotional campaign as described here implied having from the very beginning resources, both human and economic, in order that each time a promotional activity took place, its results could be measured and the success of the decisions taken could be checked. There are still no serious studies that have quantified the impact produced by these campaigns on the image of Spansih technology; up until now there are only perceptions of changes made both nationally and internationally. A few significative examples can be cited:

— In Miami various bars with the name Barcelona have opened. They feature high design and technological effects.

— Only technicians from Barcelona were able to solve a problem in the connection of the *Token ring* computer network.

— The brand «Barcelona» applied to various commercial products, adds the value of design and technology.

The analysts of the brand image of the country have established the goal of identifying this change, which must occur on a long term basis. As a provisional opinion, we can say that if indeed it is reasonable to suppose that the image of the city and the country was altered, improving the image of quality of services and capacity of organization, it is also reasonable to acknowledge that there has been a substantial improvement in the perception of the technology the city is able to produce and manage.