



Ethihad Interview

WINGS AND STALLIONS

In the world of sports sponsorship, being seen is the only measure of success



Michael Johnson has an interesting job. As the manager of F1 Marketing for Etihad Airways, his job is to fly to the 12 races that are held in a country that the airline flies to and promote the brand via its association with Scuderia Ferrari Marlboro. On an average weekend, he meets with an average of 20 guests per day so he actually hangs out a lot at the Paddock Club. Nice work if you can get it.

For those who have somehow missed the heavy advertising that Etihad Airways does, here is a history lesson. They are the national carrier for Abu Dhabi and as such, they're not only an airline business but are also ambassadors of the Emirate. One of their key channels to do this is via sports sponsorship.

Etihad Airways is involved in Premier League Football (Manchester City and Chelsea), Rugby League (Harlequins RFC) and is the new named sponsor for what used to be called the Telstra Dome in Melbourne Australia, just to name a few. This is on top of their main sponsor deal for the Abu Dhabi Grand Prix as well as their long-term commitment as a sponsor to the Ferrari Formula 1 team. Not bad for an airline that has only been in existence for six years.

Of course one doesn't get to have five logos on a Ferrari F10 (including the back of the rear wing) by being cheap but when pressed for a number, Michael coyly replies "we have a great brand fit with Ferrari and the standard ROI for sports sponsorship these days is 4-to-1,

which is being met by this deal." Trust a marketing man to speak in riddles.

In all seriousness though, relating the benefits to every sponsorship deal is important to Etihad. Sports sponsorship is both a business and a science and Michael has to go through reams of information that break down the vital seconds that the Etihad logo is seen on TV as well as how many pictures have appeared in publications that show off the brand.

"Formula 1 is seen by 520 million people each race weekend so it's an enormous opportunity to reach out to a huge potential market. It's tough to get consistent values for each race as you are at the mercy of the TV producers, circuit camera angles, team performance and even the weather. Malaysia is particularly tough as twilight lighting presents its own challenges and if it rains, our logo gets covered up by the spray from the rear wheels," he adds.

Despite the challenges, Formula 1 has been very good to Etihad Airways. The brand association with such a premium brand has meant that fans, guests and owners now have a strong affinity to the airline while there can be no missing the two brightly painted Etihad aircraft used to promote the Abu Dhabi Grand Prix. The partnership with Ferrari has also allowed Etihad the opportunity to offer more exclusive benefits to their customers and there is no doubt that the decision to build the very first Ferrari World at the Yas Marina circuit in Abu Dhabi is linked to the association with Etihad Airways. It's purely a business relationship so despite their links, Ferrari does not get free logistics or even

flights with the airline.

Before the interview ends, Michael goes back into serious marketing mode and says "Etihad Airways now serves 60 destinations worldwide and we are always looking to grow that number. With our involvement in Formula 1 via Scuderia Ferrari, people in countries that we don't even fly to can learn about the brand so it becomes easier to penetrate a market in the future." For Etihad Airways then, partnering the prancing horse will give them even bigger wings to fly. 

