EXPERIENCE INTELLIGENCE EMEA

BY **GPJ**

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People are now being much more careful about what they pay attention to, and what they expect to get out of an experience. Whether they want realness, some time offline, or great content to share, they want it to truly matter.



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Host Cities are Becoming the Main Stage



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Loyalty Unlocks a New Level of Fandom



03

Brands Sponsor the Athlete in Everyone

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If you have questions about any of this content, or would like to learn more, please reach out to your GPJ account representative or Heidrun.Scholten@gpj.com

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Host Cities are Becoming the Main Stage

01



Brands are proving product performance against athletic standards.

Post-pandemic demand for live events has pushed ticket prices to new highs, and hosts inside the gates are raising the bar to match. Specialty cocktails and bespoke merch bars have become premium rituals, built for the paying guest and the influencer beside them. As seats grow scarcer and pricier, longtime sponsors are looking past the turnstiles and into the host city.

During the US Open, IBM's **AI Sports Club** took over Madison Square Park, **Grey Goose** set up at Grand Central, and **Evian** hosted a soirée under the bridge. The same playbook unfolded in Milan during the 2026 Winter Olympics, where **Coca-Cola, TCL** and **Samsung** turned landmarks across the host city into immersive brand experiences, bringing product innovation and Olympic spirit to fans beyond the competition venues.

What it means

Brands winning the experiential game at sporting events are expanding the event beyond the arena. With host-city activations, a fan who never bought a ticket feels connected by stumbling onto one on their commute or in their neighborhood, getting the event's energy without paying for a ticket. In turn, brands reach more fans and become part of the city's moment. All while fostering encounters that build awareness, recognition, and goodwill.

Loyalty Unlocks a New Level of Fandom

02



Some fan experiences can't be bought; they're earned by showing up.

Brand loyalty is shifting from transactional points to earned cultural status. At **FC Bayern Munich**, members who have supported the club for 50, 60 or even 70 years are honoured for their decades of devotion. **Tottenham Hotspur** rewards members and season-ticket holders with signed memorabilia, player Q&As and behind-the-scenes access, while **Paris Saint-Germain's MyParis programme** lets fans climb loyalty tiers to unlock increasingly exclusive rewards.

In a culture saturated with pay-to-play access, European sports clubs are turning devotion into currency, rewarding longtime supporters with physical merchandise and premium experiences that signal genuine insider status.

What it means

Investing in your biggest fans can create an outsized return: deeper belonging, stronger communities, and people who carry your brand into the world with a credibility no campaign can match. Brands have the opportunity to make loyalty visible, turning long-term devotion into a status fans can feel, show, and share.

Brands Sponsor the **Athlete in Everyone**

03



Brands are proving product performance against athletic standards.

As more consumers enter their "optimized era," tracking sleep, steps, and heart rate the way athletes track splits, sports sponsorships and activations are shifting away from general awareness plays toward specific product messaging.
Vaseline handed out **nipple covers** at the London Marathon.
Dove sponsored the underarm at several major sporting events, including the **U.S. Open**.
In Munich, Danish sportswear brand **HALO brought runners together** through a pop-up combining product discovery, music, drinks and a community run - turning exercise into a social experience beyond the store.

Brands activating at major sporting events are moving away from “you the fan” positioning and toward “you the athlete” framing, borrowing each event’s athletic connotations and transferring that sense of athleticism to the consumer.

What it means

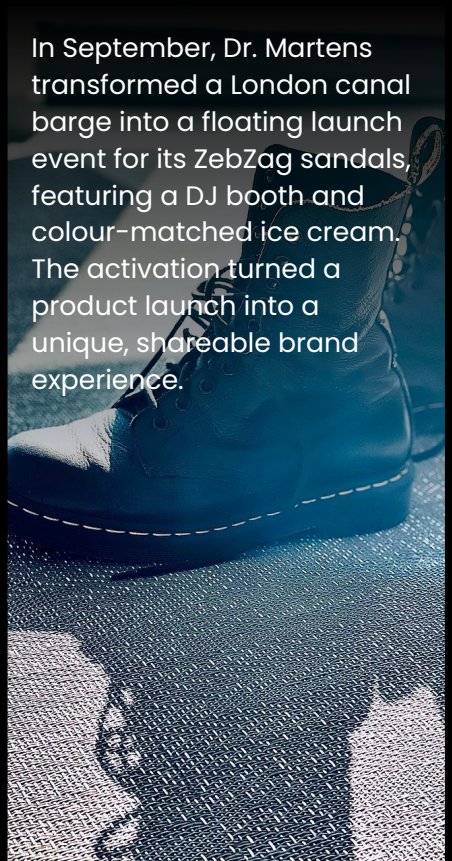
As audiences grow more skeptical of partnerships that feel transactional or disconnected from the athlete, the brands showing up strongest at sporting events are leaning into the athleticism, not just the sponsorship. Relevance now depends on whether a brand can give fans a tangible way to step into their own athletic potential-to perform, dress, or show up like the athletes they admire.

OUT-THERE EXPERIENCES

People, brands and marketers continue to push the boundaries of physical and digital experiences, with new and creative executions popping up across the globe.

Dr. Martens floating brand experience

In September, Dr. Martens transformed a London canal barge into a floating launch event for its ZebZag sandals, featuring a DJ booth and colour-matched ice cream. The activation turned a product launch into a unique, shareable brand experience.



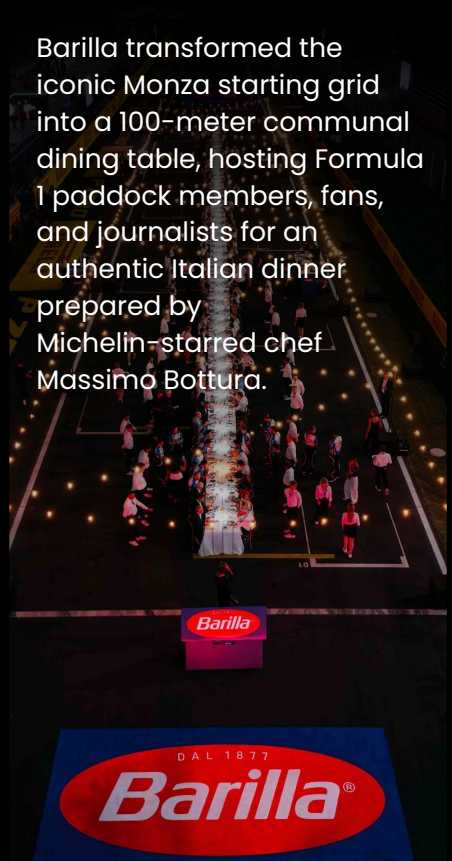
Google Connected Cup

Google's Connected Cup is a temporary café in Brussels running from 21 September to 16 October 2026, featuring AI demos, workshops and talks. The pop-up brings technology, coffee and networking together to connect policymakers, tech professionals and the public.



The Monza Grid Feast

Barilla transformed the iconic Monza starting grid into a 100-meter communal dining table, hosting Formula 1 paddock members, fans, and journalists for an authentic Italian dinner prepared by Michelin-starred chef Massimo Bottura.



The Mountain Monk Test

Puma outfitted 40 monks in performance running gear at Ladakh's ancient Thiksey Monastery, staging a high-altitude photo shoot that linked mindfulness to extreme endurance during the world's highest marathon.

