

An Olympic Effort



British Olympic Association CCO Hugh Chambers (Photo: Elisabeth Hoff)

As the host city of the 2012 Summer Olympic Games, the eyes of the world are on London. For British Olympic Association (BOA) Chief Commercial Officer Hugh Chambers, the Opening ceremony on July 27 will be a watershed moment; the culmination of almost four years' work. Hugh talks exclusively to IIC Partners Executive Lounge Editor Polly Stewart about what it takes to be a successful CCO.

About the BOA

The BOA is officially appointed as one of 205 National Olympic Committees (NCOs) which are effectively franchise holders of the Switzerland based International Olympic Committee (IOC).

As an independent private corporation, it receives no Government or lottery funding and so is almost entirely dependent on the private sector for sponsorship and individual fund-raising. Its competitors for that money include successful organizations ranging from football club Manchester United, to the Royal Opera House.

It has a most challenging remit – delivering elite athletes from 33 Olympic sports to the 2012 Summer Olympic Games. Add to that one of the world's most visible brands this year, and there are no second chances for what the BOA is expected to deliver. No extended deadlines are possible. And it has millions of vocal stakeholders watching its every move.



A dual agenda

"The London 2012 Olympics are the focal point. But when I was recruited into the role, I was told there was a clear two-part agenda – first London 2012, and then 2013 and beyond," says Hugh, "The challenge for the BOA is to create incremental value both from within the organisation and with its different stakeholders to fund long term legacy delivery.

"Incredible as it sounds, the whole nation is one of our stakeholders and we want to encourage the nation to really connect with these athletes, what we have termed 'Our Greatest Team', with the simple mantra: 500 athletes, 60 million strong."

Hugh says while the BOA's most visible mandate is fielding teams of elite athletes to attend the summer and winter Olympics and other events, what is even more important, and clearly stated in the Olympic Charter, is the promulgation of the Olympic values to leverage the true power of the games and benefit the communities they touch.

"The Olympics are not just a sporting competition. We are seeking to make Olympic sport a beacon of human endeavour and spirit across the country. The games are the start of the journey, the total commitment to excellence shown by the athletes along their journey can help other people to achieve their personal goals in life."

Creating an enduring legacy

In December the *Financial Times* quoted Hugh as saying how SMEs will benefit from the 2012 Olympics, but there has been a tendency historically for host governments to hype up the economic benefits of the event, with few benefiting.

"I can't speak for the previous games, particularly Athens and Beijing, but I am confident that the legacy that will be derived from the London 2012 Olympics will be significant and enduring."

One of the focal points of this legacy has been the regeneration of one of the most neglected parts of urban London.

"Have you ever been to the real East End of London? I had the misfortune to go to the industrial wastelands of old Stratford on one occasion a few years ago when my car got towed away to the pound. It was rough, really rough. It was unloved and forgotten," says Hugh.

"The new Olympic Park is now where my car was sitting. It is at the epicentre of one of the most extraordinary, world-class urban landscapes with open grass areas, magnificent stadia, the Westfield Shopping Centre – all with a direct eight minute rail link into St Pancras [the UK's Euro star hub]. And one physical legacy, the Athletes Village, will be become affordable and private housing - that will then, no doubt, have a positive ripple effect."



The C-suite functions

There are three C-suite roles at the BOA - which has 100 staff currently, a number that will swell to 1500 during the 2012 Olympics. CEO Andy Hunt is primarily focussed on working with the national governing bodies of sports, LOCOG, the UK government, key sports stakeholders, security forces and the organisation's work stream. Director of Sport Sir Clive Woodward, formally the coach of England's 2003 World Cup winning rugby team, oversees sport performance, And Hugh, whose role covers everything commercial, fundraising, events, brand, communications, digital media, corporate partnerships and business development related.

"With just a few months to go, it's a flat out sprint and we have no alternative but to succeed. Everyone who works in this organisation enjoys that challenge. You don't get to do a job like this unless you can handle pressure, and in fact thrive on it."

Hugh's role with the BOA is his first with the title of CCO. But he says his experience as a sales and marketing director in private motorsport organization Prodrive, which had two very different business streams, one pure motorsport (including F1), the other road car engineering, is almost identical to the one he has today with the BOA.

"To some extent I may be viewed as a sports marketing specialist, but I have never accepted this tag of myself," says Hugh. "Although I went from generalist to

specialist no matter what the business subject area is, the same underlying principles apply whether its sports or mainstream commerce and vice versa. Andy Hunt, our CEO, came from a business process outsourcing background in the Financial Services sector and has brought a whole new level of business discipline and excellence to the organisation."

The first CCO as a C-level role job title emerged in 1999, according to the *Harvard Business Review*. Initially a product of the increasingly blurred lines between the sales and marketing functions, brought about by post-crisis pressure on bottom line delivery, the impact of the internet on marketing and sales, and increasing financial and other regulations that the CEO's responsibilities.

Hugh gives his view on this change: "It used to be that marketing and sales, and communications, were held by different posts - sales directors and marketing directors. The CCO position combines those roles under one title, and there is real merit in that if you're able to straddle the fence between the more creative disciplines and the hard-nosed commercial agenda of seeking new business revenues and being innovative in product delivery.

"The lifeblood of business is listening to the customer, creating products and selling them at a profit. A good CCO represents all aspects of this core focus.

"Historically there has been a bit of tension between the three points of marketing, sales and finance. The CEO



would generally come from one of those three skill sets. So with big organisations you often see them swinging between the different polarities, depending on the background of the CEO.

How the CCO role is evolving

"Twenty years ago, the CEO's role was predominately commercial, now just by its nature it is overwhelmed with so many more political and legislative challenges. The CCO is now dealing with areas that used to be the CEO's leadership responsibility.

"So, the partnership of the CEO and CCO is a very important future trend. The CCO sits at the right hand of the CEO and increasingly takes ownership of a broader swathe of a company's portfolio of business needs.

"There needs to be a hierarchy and by definition the CCO position will never usurp the CEO's as that is the primary role in any company. But in terms of stakeholder value, the CCO is fast becoming the most visible generator of that value."

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