

Soccer gets the C

Like many viewers, tire brand Continental believes the World Cup will be gripping stuff. Communications chief SILKE GLIEMANN explains why.

If you think the connection between automobile tires and soccer isn't obvious, Silke Gliemann can set you straight. As communications manager for passenger car tires at German brand Continental, Gliemann oversees the company's sponsorship of the soccer World Cup, which will be held in Germany this summer. "It's all about grip and technique," she says. "These are as important on the pitch as they are on the road."

A SOLID PLATFORM

Gliemann has been with Continental for 13 years, initially entering the company's training program, then working in its bicycle tire department – first in sales and later in marketing. She clearly has a consummate

understanding of the brand, and is undaunted by the prospect of managing a sponsorship deal worth millions of euros (although she politely declines to provide the figure).

"The story began in 2002, when I first joined the marketing department," she recounts. "At that time we were running different campaigns in different countries, which meant that our brand message lacked consistency.

We felt we needed one communications solution and a solid platform to build it on. Looking back at the history of the company, we saw that our brand had the strongest image from 1995 to 1999, when we were a sponsor of the Champions' League [soccer tournament]. So we began to consider sponsoring football again."

Fast facts

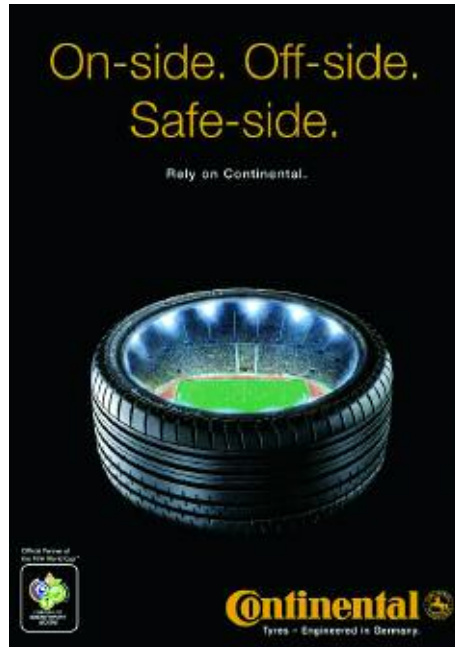
The 2006 FIFA World Cup will be held from June 9 to July 9 in 12 German cities.

The 15 Official Sponsors of the 2006 FIFA World Cup are: Adidas, Anheuser-Busch, Avaya, Coca-Cola, Continental, Deutsche Telecom, Emirates, Fujifilm, Gillette, Hyundai, MasterCard, McDonald's, Philips, Toshiba and Yahoo!

FIFA is currently looking for 8 secondary sponsors



Continental touch



signage in and around the stadium, plus the use of the World Cup and its logo in all of our communications," she says. "In addition, we will have access to a large number of tickets in order to run competitions and promotions and invite favored customers to matches." In addition, Continental has created a print campaign and a TV spot through the agency Change, part of the Lowe Group. Initiative is handling media planning and buying.

As well as guaranteeing media presence, football sponsorship would resonate with Continental's key target market: males aged between 25 and 54. And although Continental places a strong emphasis on engineering and safety, it felt that the motor racing circuit – the most obvious route for a tyre brand – was too overcrowded. "We would not have been number one in the sector and the brand would have had trouble standing out from the crowd," says Gliemann. "However, we are the only tyre manufacturer sponsoring the World Cup." Gliemann worked with a consultant who had strong contacts at FIFA, which was only too pleased to hear the tyre brand's proposal. Surprisingly, Continental is one of only three German sponsors out of a total of 15 – the other two being Adidas and Deutsche Telecom. This was one of the reasons that FIFA was keen to get Continental on board. "The sponsorship covers branding on

"The first thing we did with Initiative was to look at the profile of the brand in each country and set up media guidelines for our advertising. As we're advertising in several markets, it's important to plan effectively. Initiative is closely monitoring the media plan to ensure that our budget is spent as efficiently as possible, making the best use of the sponsorship."

AWARENESS IS RISING IN COUNTRIES WHERE IT HAS BEEN LESS STRONG

The response to Continental's World Cup commitment has already been positive, both internally and externally. "The early indications are that we have a much clearer market profile in Germany, and that awareness of the brand is rising in countries where it has historically been less strong – all without spending as much money as our competitors." In fact, the brand is so pleased with the results that it will continue to support football, having already signed up to sponsor the Euro 2008 tournament. A commitment to the 2010 World Cup is still being debated. It seems a fair bet that Germany will do well in the forthcoming tournament. Although the team has experienced a few setbacks of late, it consistently returns to top form for a grand occasion. Gliemann will of course be watching, although she has the honesty to admit: "Until recently, I've never been a soccer fan." ■