SEF

Sponsorship Measurement

A BEST PRACTICE GUIDE

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Rory co-founded the Sponsorship Effectiveness Forum in 2025. He authored its first published research, The Sponsorship Effect, in November 2025, bringing sponsorship into the same analytical frame as advertising for the first time. He has spent the last 18 years in senior strategy roles at agencies including Iris and Sid Lee Sport, leading global sponsorship activations for brands including Tommy Hilfiger, adidas, and Lidl. In January 2026 he launched the sponsorship effectiveness consultancy Box Count to help brands, agencies and rights holders apply marketing effectiveness to sponsorship.

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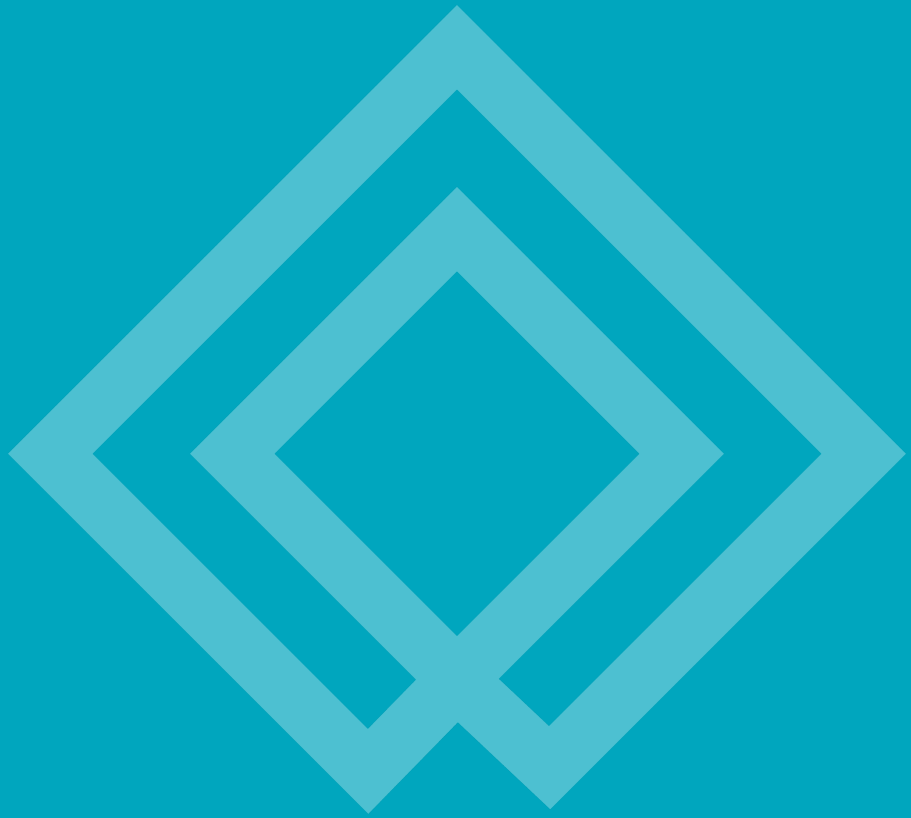
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With previous roles in MMM consultancy and client-side effectiveness teams, Billy is committed to strengthening the business case for advertising and making marketing effectiveness more accessible, actionable, and influential at board level.

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Foundations



Purpose

This guide sets out how the Sponsorship Effectiveness Forum recommends brands, rights holders and agencies measure the effect of a sponsorship.

It is written for the people who plan, buy and evaluate partnerships: brand-side sponsorship and marketing leads, agency strategists, rights holder commercial teams, and the finance functions that approve the investment.

The core measurement process is a sequence of seven stages, from setting objectives to calculating return. Each stage states what to do, what good looks like, and common failures to avoid. The stages are cumulative, with each one depending on the one before.

How sponsorship produces business outcomes

To understand how to measure sponsorship, we first need to define how sponsorship produces business outcomes.

Due to sponsorship's structural advantage as a broad reach investment, much of the exposure generated through its activation acts on memory first. It builds and/or refreshes what people remember about a brand. Those memory structures in turn change how people behave in buying situations, which then changes if and how they purchase, which in turn creates new memory structures for the brand.

The combination of those effects leads to incremental gains in revenue, profit or market share for the business. ROI is downstream of those business effects, and not the primary goal. Individual activations or sponsorships may have the objective of achieving one type of effect, rather than always achieving all three.

The flow chart that follows shows that sponsorship works through this sequence of effects. As with much of SEF's guidance, it is really a model of how advertising works, with adaptations for the nuances of sponsorship. E.g. we use Activation, rather than Creative, as a label for the second of the two inputs.

The cycle builds on three core pillars of marketing effectiveness: from Orlando Wood and Andrew Tindall's research for System1, we emphasise the importance of the distinctiveness and emotional intensity of creative execution in any sponsorship activation.

Secondly, we use the taxonomy of brand, behavioural, sales and business effects established by Les Binet & Peter Field and used in The Sponsorship Effect.

Finally, we use memory to describe how brand effects work, reflecting the work of Ehrenberg-Bass around mental availability (we also find memory is a more concrete concept for non-marketers to grasp than feelings or emotions towards a brand).

The SEF model builds on this to address key issues that repeatedly arise in the sponsorship sector. In particular:

- The reporting of exposure as an effect, rather than an input
- A reliance on formulaic approaches to creative execution
- A perception that brand metrics, such as awareness, are an inevitable result of exposure and of little commercial value
- The use of the term ROI to mean anything other than a ratio of profit to cost.

How sponsorship produces business outcomes

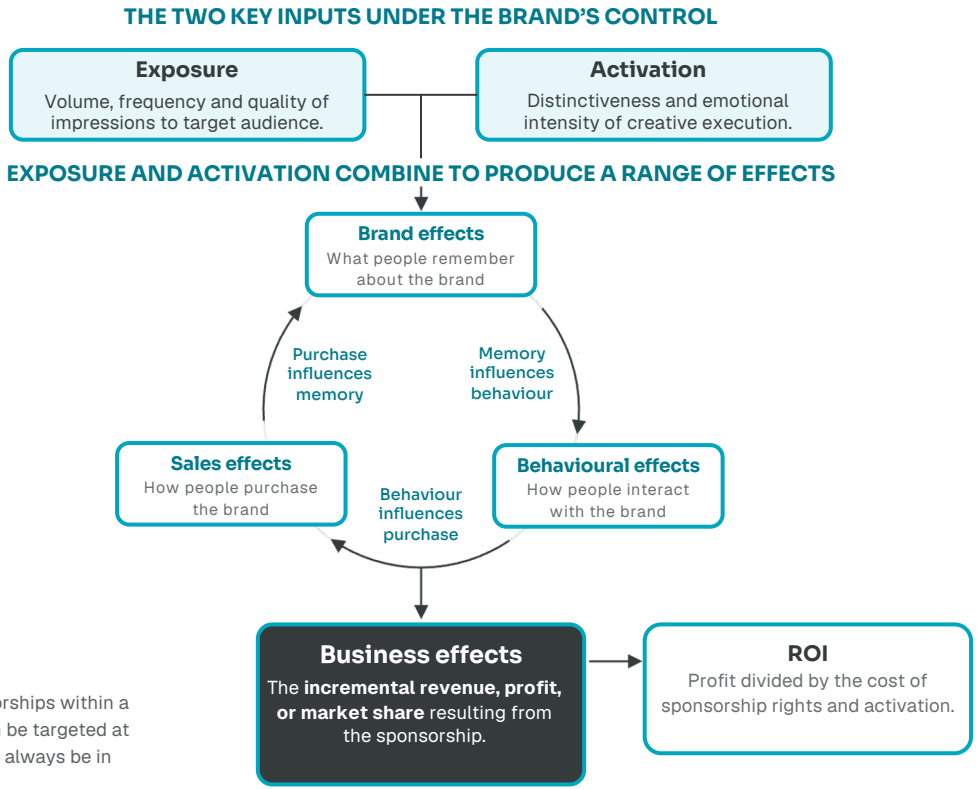


Figure 1: The SEF Effects Cycle. Individual sponsorships within a portfolio, or activations within a sponsorship, can be targeted at one brand, behavioural or sales effect, but should always be in service of business effects.

Five key principles

Having defined how sponsorship produces business outcomes through a range of effects, we can begin to build a measurement framework that is fit for purpose. Sponsorships create complex systems of touchpoints and interactions that mean simple, direct attribution is rarely possible. At the same time, SEF is keen to promote the idea that effectiveness can be applied by anybody regardless of organisational size and resources. To that end we have five key principles that apply to the measurement of any sponsorship.

1

Measurement should begin at the start of the deal, not the end

An effectiveness mindset means measurement is considered at every stage of the sponsorship lifecycle.

2

Objectives come before metrics

What is measured should follow from what the sponsorship is meant to change, not from what data is easiest to collect.

3

No single metric or method is sufficient

Every tool has its flaws, which is why credible evaluation triangulates data across independent sources.

4

Profit is the goal, ROI is a measure of effort

All sponsorship should ultimately be aimed towards generating profit for the sponsor. ROI is simply a ratio that shows how efficiently the profit was gained.

5

Consistent and good enough beats occasional and perfect

A modest set of measures applied to every partnership is worth more than a sophisticated exercise run once.

SEF's seven-stage sponsorship measurement process

NO.	STAGE	WHAT IT DELIVERS	THE COMMON FAILURE
01	**Set integrated objectives**	Clearly stated business objectives, a defined audience, and brand, behavioural and sales objectives that ladder into it.	Setting objectives at the media-input layer without a definition of the desired commercial outcome.
02	**Identify the KPIs**	At least one KPI per objective, each marked leading or lagging, each with a measurement window.	Treating reach, impressions and engagement as the measure of success.
03	**Select your tools and establish a baseline**	A documented pre-activation baseline, and a defined set of tools mapped to each KPI, sized to the budget.	Beginning to measure after signing, which reduces evaluation to assertion.
04	**Build in incrementality tests**	At least one pre-designed test with a defined control or counterfactual.	Presenting correlation, sales rising during the activation, as proof of cause.
05	**Triangulate the data**	A balanced portfolio of independent sources, anchored by incrementality testing.	Depending on one data source or using several in isolation without reconciling them.
06	**Build the chain of evidence**	An evidenced, incremental chain from exposure to incremental contribution.	Asserting the endpoints without evidencing the steps in between.
07	**Calculate profit, then ROI**	An ROI figure derived from isolated, margin-adjusted profit net of the full cost, read against the business objective.	Reporting an "ROI" built from anything other than profit and cost.

Table 1: SEF's seven-stage measurement process.

STAGE ONE

01

Set integrated objectives



Set integrated objectives

Any marketing activity should begin with a clear statement of what it is meant to achieve. That they often don't isn't specific to sponsorship: Better Briefs and The IPA have highlighted the same issue in the advertising sector. SEF's guidance is that sponsorship should always ladder back to a business objective, ordinarily to grow revenue, increase profit, or increase market share. In some cases, not-for-profits may set societal or environmental outcomes as business goals. Beneath the business objective sit three families of marketing objectives.

Brand	Changes in memory and predisposition: awareness, salience, associations, trust etc. Leading measures which signal future changes in behaviour or sales.
Behavioural	How people act towards the brand: search, site visits, participation and word-of-mouth advocacy. Lagging measures that can only be tracked once they have happened.
Sales	How people purchase the brand: new customers, repeat customers, frequency, basket size. Also lagging measures that can only be tracked retrospectively.

These objectives are the intended outputs of the sponsorship; the ***effects.*** To achieve the outputs requires inputs, namely exposure with sufficient reach and frequency through owned, earned, or paid channels. While the inputs are vital to the sponsorship's commercial success, they should never be confused with its objectives.

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Set integrated objectives (continued)

OBJECTIVES SHOULD BE INTEGRATED

When we talk about integrated objectives, we are talking about a set of connected goals that are based on evidence and observation about the behaviour of the target customers. A basic example might be a brand that enters a sponsorship because its research shows that an increase in awareness (brand) typically leads to an increase in web visits (behaviour) which delivers an increase in purchases (sales) and new customers (sales). The resulting growth in market share (business) can be quantified in revenue and profit.

When viewed in this way, the objectives are a ***theory*** of how the sponsorship will deliver growth for the business. As with any theory, it should be grounded in evidence of what has happened before and validated with evidence once it is available.

EVERY OBJECTIVE NEEDS AN AUDIENCE

An objective is incomplete without an audience, and it should be clearly stated who the target is. The scale of the audience for sponsorship varies enormously, from everybody in the world, if the brand is Coca-Cola and the property is the Olympics, to the parents in a single postcode if the sponsor is a high street estate agent sponsoring a local amateur football team. An often-overlooked feature of sponsorship is that the brand doesn't only reach the fans or spectators of the sponsored team. Everyone that follows the league sees the brand too; a shirt sponsor of one club is exposed to the supporters of every club it plays that season, as Sean McCallion of Brand Finance demonstrated in a case study showing increased consideration for Deutsche Telekom amongst all Bundesliga fans because of its Bayern Munich sponsorship. This concept widens the addressable audience, and it often means the audience a sponsorship targets and the audience a sponsorship reaches are different things. They should both be defined and measured, rather than assumed to be the same group.

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In practice

WHAT TO DO

1. State the business objective the sponsorship serves
2. Define the audience the sponsorship is meant to affect, and its scale, noting that the sponsorship will also reach the wider league or event audience beyond the sponsored team's own followers
3. Identify the brand, behavioural and sales objectives that, taken together, would deliver the business objective for that audience
4. Define the media inputs required to achieve those
5. Remove objectives until only those that credibly move the business goal remain.

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE

A clear link from the sponsorship activation, to the brand, behavioural and sales objectives, to the business outcome, with a defined audience attached.

> "Tier 1 cases spanned more objective families per case than the rest, had a 30 per cent increase in breadth of objectives, and were ten times more likely to span at least four families."
>
> RORY NATKIEL, THE POWER OF INTEGRATED SPONSORSHIP OBJECTIVES

Effie research finds that fewer objectives correlate with effectiveness, and that holds where the issue is focus. Integration is a different concept. A small number of objectives that ladder into one another is more effective than a long list that does not.

COMMON FAILURE

Setting objectives at the media-input layer, in reach, impressions and engagement, and reporting results there. Those figures describe inputs rather than outputs.

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SEF's sponsorship objective framework

BUSINESS OBJECTIVES

Revenue	Profit	Market share

BRAND OBJECTIVES

Awareness "I've heard of [brand]"	Consideration "I might buy [brand]"	Preference "I'd choose [brand]"	Perception "I think [brand] is [x]"	Affinity "I like [brand]"	Trust "I trust [brand]"

BEHAVIOURAL OBJECTIVES

Price sensitivity	Footfall	Advocacy
Web visits	Downloads	Participation

SALES OBJECTIVES

Penetration	Category growth	Average Order Value
Basket size	Frequency	Loyalty

MEDIA INPUTS

Reach	Impressions	Frequency	TVRs	SOV	Coverage

EFFICIENCY INDICATORS

CTR	CPC	CPA	Conv Rate	ROI	ROAS

Table 2: The SEF sponsorship objective framework.

While not exhaustive, most sponsorship objectives sit in one of these cells. SEF's framework reflects the hierarchy of objectives and, again, it is applicable to other marketing activities. It shows how everything flows down from business objectives, indicates how they integrate with each other, and distinguishes objectives from Media Inputs (bottom left) and Efficiency Indicators (bottom right). The user can distinguish between primary and secondary; primary being the intended goal of the sponsorship activation, secondary being the predicted consequences of achieving the primary.

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Introducing Forma

A worked example runs through the rest of this guide. Forma is a fictional women's fashion brand that has sponsored a WSL team, and it is used to show each stage applied to a single sponsorship decision.

WHAT WE SELL

Premium, ethical women's fashion rooted in football, music, and urban culture.

WHERE WE OPERATE

Sold D2C online only; a drop model with limited releases and no mass retail. Paid media to date has been tightly targeted performance marketing.

TARGET CUSTOMER

Premium Conscious women's fashion buyers, 18–35: higher-income professionals and eco-minded buyers focused on "buying better".

BRAND POSITIONING

Uncompromising, ethical, city-born. Not trying to reach everyone: depth of connection beats breadth of awareness.

BUSINESS CHALLENGE

Forma has low market share, due to low penetration. Brand tracking highlights low levels of perception as an ethical brand compared to competitors as a key issue.

SPONSORSHIP STRATEGY

Forma has secured a front of shirt partnership with a WSL team due to both the league and the team fanbases having high overlap with its target audience. A limited-edition capsule collection is part of the deal.

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Forma's objective framework

BUSINESS OBJECTIVES

Revenue	Profit	**Market share** of 1.93m Premium Conscious women's fashion buyers

BRAND OBJECTIVES

Awareness "I've heard of Forma"	**Consideration** "I might buy Forma"	**Preference** "I'd choose Forma"	**Perception** "I think Forma is ethical"	**Affinity** "People like me wear Forma"	**Trust** "I trust Forma"

BEHAVIOURAL OBJECTIVES

Price sensitivity	Footfall	**Advocacy**
Web visits	Downloads	Participation

SALES OBJECTIVES

Penetration	Category growth	Average Order Value
Basket size	Frequency	Loyalty

MEDIA INPUTS

Reach	Impressions	Frequency	TVRs	SOV	Coverage

EFFICIENCY INDICATORS

CTR	CPC	CPA	Conv Rate	ROI	ROAS

Table 3: Forma's objective framework. Filled cells are primary objectives; outlined cells are secondary objectives.

Forma's business objective is to increase market share. Perception as an ethical brand and brand affinity are the primary barriers to new customer acquisition. Social proof is key amongst this audience, so advocacy through social sharing, commenting etc is a primary behavioural objective. If those are achieved, the brand believes traffic to its website will rise, leading to the sales goal of market penetration i.e. new customer growth, which are therefore marked as secondary objectives. That all requires significant reach and exposure from the paid media campaign, and press coverage from the PR campaign. Because Forma will also be promoting a partnership product range, it includes the full suite of performance-marketing efficiency indicators.

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Effective Objectives

BRUCE COOK
FOUNDER & MD, SPONSORLAB



The SEF Objective Framework provides an excellent overview of the categories and structure that sponsorship objectives typically fall into. To be sure you make the most of this framework and the broader sponsorship measurement process, what follows is some further guidance on how to make sure your objectives effectively do the work they are designed to do.

Sponsorship objectives serve a dual purpose. In addition to establishing the basis against which you are going to measure performance, your objectives also play a critical role in messaging to stakeholders what you are hoping to achieve. Articulated effectively, the agreed objectives are a rallying cry to your team and the supporting cast as to your ambition and the mission before you all. Your objectives should get you all enthusiastically on the same page.

For this to work, there are five principles I recommend employing.

1. **Directional.** No sponsorship is intended to just keep things as they are. A sponsorship investment aims to drive improvement, so the objectives should reflect that. Use the directional adjectives that best describe the desired result, e.g. “increase brand awareness”, “improve brand perception”, or “decrease customer attrition”.

2. **Numberless.** Yes, your objectives must be measurable, but the measures should NOT be included in your stated objectives. The measurement comes later in the (directly linked) KPIs. Trying to include numbers at this stage adds a risk of distraction that you can do without. Be patient, the measurement will come.

3. **Mutually exclusive.** You should never have two objectives that say the same thing, in whole or in part. If in your first draft, your objectives overlap, try again. If you want your measurement framework to be effective, you must be able to track each KPI on a direct line back through a single sponsorship objective and ultimately back to the business objective. If your sponsorship objectives overlap, it all gets a bit messy.

Effective Objectives (continued)

BRUCE COOK
FOUNDER & MD, SPONSORLAB



4. **Clear & simple.** Communicated well, your objectives become part of your stakeholder narrative. Almost a mantra of sorts. To this end, the wording of your objectives must make them crystal clear and easy to understand, recall and repeat. Don't over-complicate your objectives for the sake of sounding clever.

5. **Weighted.** Whether or not you factor this one into your performance scoring system, your objectives (and the team delivering them) will always be more effective if you've gone through the process of assigning a priority weight to each objective. The total must equal 100%, and the time you'll spend on the process of arriving at these 'priority indicator' figures can be one of the most valuable strategic investments you'll make. This is why we've embedded weighting into the SponsorLab framework and scoring process. It makes performance scoring more meaningful, and it drives critical strategic conversations. All objectives are not equal, and everyone must know and agree precisely how unequal they are.

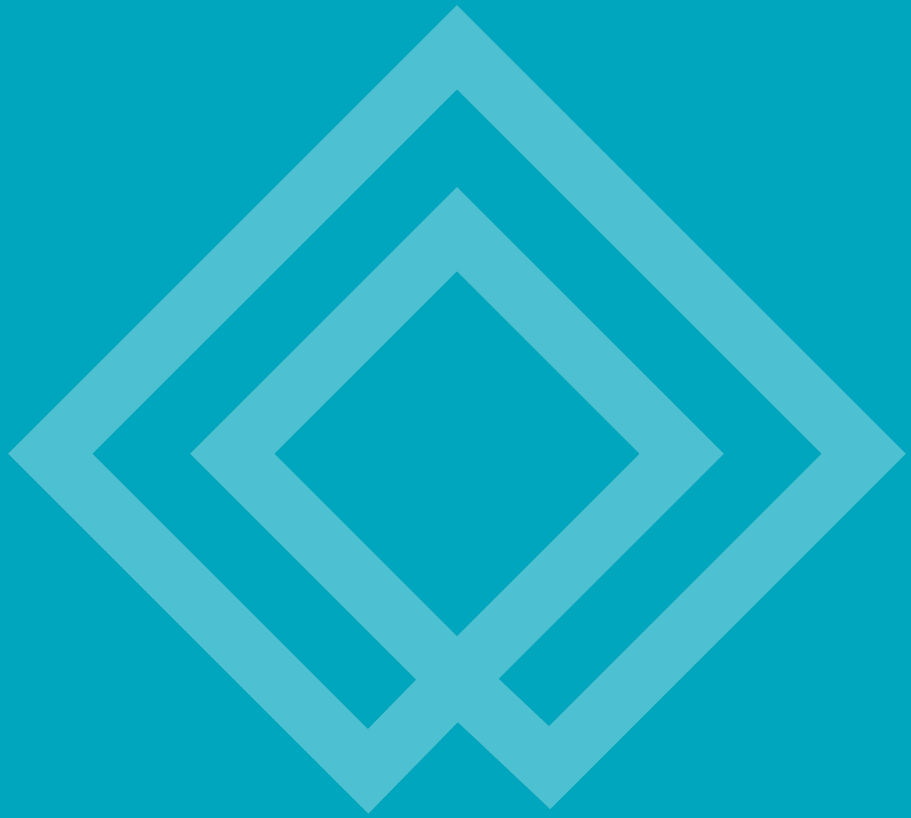
Individually, these principles may seem obvious and easy to achieve. However, in practice, getting full stakeholder agreement on a set of sponsorship objectives that fully meet these criteria can be challenging. Clear and Simple is not always a simple task.

The key is not to give up. Do not compromise and accept an objective set that most agree on and mostly meets the criteria. Stick with it. Keep working. Discuss and debate again, and again. You'll eventually get it right, and your sponsorship and your business will be the beneficiary of that grand effort.

STAGE TWO

02

Identify the KPIs



Match KPIs to the objective families

With objectives set the next step is to translate each objective into specific, measurable KPIs. Every objective should have at least one, and the choice of KPI determines what is tracked and over what period.

OBJECTIVE FAMILY	TYPE	MEASURED BY
Brand	Leading	Awareness, salience, image and association attributes, consideration, trust, and Share of Search
Behavioural	Lagging	Search, site traffic, footfall, participation, sign-ups, advocacy/word-of-mouth. Price sensitivity also sits here.
Sales	Lagging	Customer acquisition, sales volume, revenue, average order value, purchase frequency, retention / loyalty
Business objective	Outcome	Top line revenue, profit margin, market penetration, market share
Media inputs and Efficiency Indicators	Supporting	Reach and frequency, and, for activation, click-through rate, cost per click, cost per acquisition, conversion rate and ROI

Table 4: KPI type by objective family.

SET THE WINDOW IN ADVANCE
Brand KPIs should be measured over at least six months. More direct sales effects should be measured within the activation window.

KEEP MEDIA METRICS IN A SUPPORTING ROLE
Media and efficiency KPIs are evidence of how inputs delivered the brand, behavioural and sales KPIs, rather than the primary measure of success.

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In practice

WHAT TO DO

1. For each objective set in stage 1, define at least one KPI that would show whether it has moved
2. Record whether each KPI is leading or lagging, and set the window over which it will be read
3. Set a direction or target for each KPI, to be measured against the baseline established in stage 3, and among the audience defined in stage 1
4. Keep media and efficiency KPIs in a supporting role, as evidence of how inputs delivered the brand, behavioural and sales KPIs, rather than as the primary measure of success.

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE

Every objective carries at least one KPI, each KPI has a defined measurement window, the KPIs span the brand, behavioural and sales families the sponsorship is designed to affect, and each is read among the defined audience.

COMMON FAILURE

Choosing KPIs that do not map to a stated objective, or treating media and efficiency KPIs, reach, impressions and engagement, as the measure of success in their own right.

> "Only 4 per cent of Tier 1 campaigns relied on engagement or reach metrics, compared with 24 per cent of less effective cases."
>
> **THE SPONSORSHIP EFFECT, 2025**

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Forma's KPIs

FAMILY	OBJECTIVE	KPI
Business	Increase market share of Premium Conscious women's fashion buyers (c.1.9m)	Market share
Brand	Increase perception as an ethical brand	% who think Forma is ethical
Brand	Increase brand affinity	% who think Forma is "a brand for people like me"
Behavioural	Increase word-of-mouth advocacy	Social shares and comments
Behavioural	Increase website traffic	Website traffic
Sales	Increase market penetration	Market penetration - New accounts

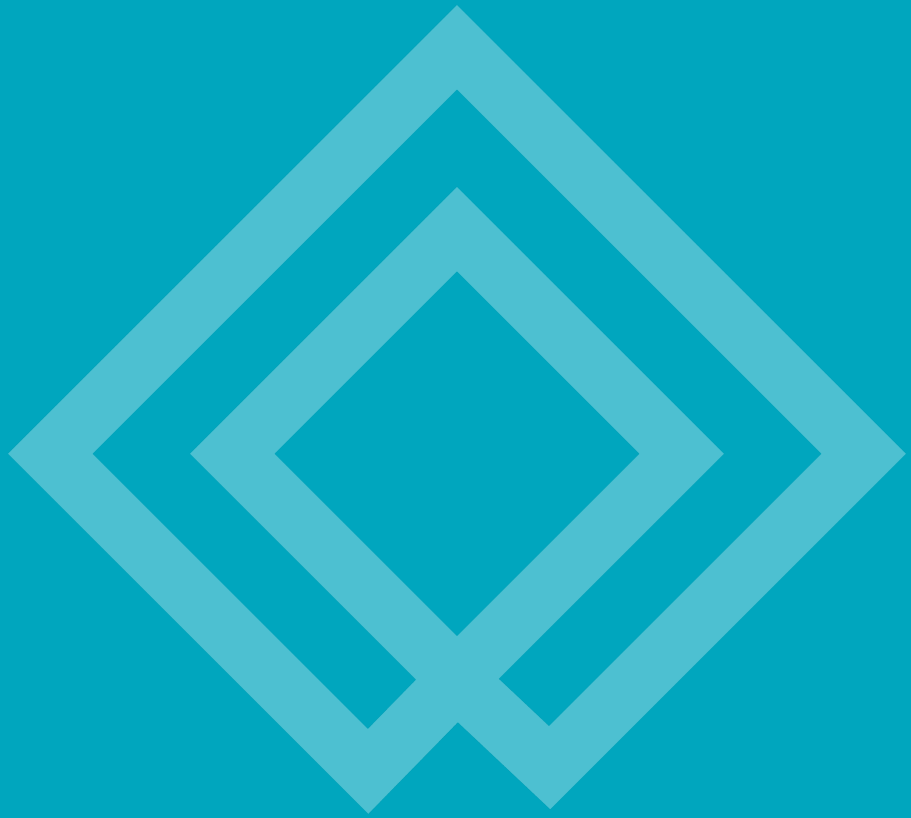
Table 5: Forma's objectives and KPIs, each carrying a specific, measurable KPI.

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STAGE THREE

03

Select your tools and establish a baseline



Set the baseline before you start

Once you have your KPIs in place, the next step is to ensure you have the tools in place to measure. The following pages show a range of tools to measure all the effects discussed so far for a range of business sizes from Micro (essentially free or very low-cost tools) to Large (global, enterprise level). The lists are indicative rather than exhaustive.

This exercise will also highlight any gaps, which may require the set up or purchase of a new measurement tool.

After tool selection, it is important to measure the baseline as the true size of any effect can't be measured without one. That baseline should be measured before the sponsorship activates or as close to the launch date as possible. This is an important operational step, and one that is often missed, because many sponsorship teams are in such a scramble to launch the activation they only begin measuring it after it begins.

Establishing a baseline needn't be expensive; in many cases the data will already exist within the business.

Going back to our 5th principle that consistent and good enough beats occasional and perfect, a benchmarking exercise could incorporate the following.

1. Run a brand survey covering the objectives, among the defined audience, before activation
2. Record Share of Search through Google Trends
3. Pull the relevant sales and analytics benchmarks for the pre-activation period.

WHAT TO DO

1. Map each KPI to at least one tool from the appropriate tier
2. Build/buy the tools required to fill any gaps in the KPI framework
3. Establish and document the pre-activation baseline, measured among the defined audience before activation, not after.

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Set the baseline before you start (cont.)

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE

A documented pre-period baseline, and a defined set of tools mapped to each KPI.

COMMON FAILURE

Beginning to measure after signing, which leaves no baseline and reduces evaluation to assertion.

> Constraints change up the tiers rather than disappearing. For a micro business, the task is often to begin at all. For a medium business, more tools are affordable but the difficulty is connecting them into a single picture. For a large business, the infrastructure often exists but the difficulty is isolating the effects of the sponsorship amongst all the other marketing the brand is doing.

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Business measurement tools

COMPANY SIZE	MARKET SHARE	PROFIT	PENETRATION	LOYALTY
Micro Under ~£1m	◇ Share of Search via Google Trends	◇ GA4 revenue tracking ◇ POS and accounting software (Xero, QuickBooks)	◇ GA4 new versus returning users	◇ POS and accounting software ◇ Basic repeat purchase rate from accounting data
Small ~£1m–£50m	◇ Retailer data ◇ Distributor reports ◇ Report syndicators (Statista)	◇ Sales uplift tracking against a control period	◇ Basic attribution in GA4 ◇ CRM new customer rate	◇ Biannual survey ◇ CRM repeat purchase rate
Medium £50m–£500m	◇ Syndicated category data (Mintel, Euromonitor)	◇ Lightweight MMM (Meridian, Robyn) , or via a media agency	◇ CRM cohort analysis	◇ Monthly survey panel ◇ Experience management platform
Large ~£0.5bn+	◇ Continuous market share analysis (Nielsen, Kantar, GfK)	◇ Bespoke MMM (Analytic Partners, data2decisions)	◇ Consumer panel (Kantar Brand Footprint, Nielsen Homescan) ◇ Continuous customer panel	◇ Customer lifetime value modelling

Table 6: Business measurement tools, by effect and company size. Suppliers are for example purposes only and do not constitute commercial endorsement.

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Brand measurement tools

STAGE THREE

COMPANY SIZE	AWARENESS	SALIENCE	PREFERENCE	IMAGE
Micro Under ~£1m	◇ DIY survey (Google Forms, Typeform) ◇ Google Trends or branded search as proxy	◇ DIY survey (Google Forms)	◇ DIY survey (Google Forms)	◇ DIY survey (Google Forms, Typeform)
Small ~£1m–£50m	◇ Self-serve brand tracker (Appinio, Attest, Bounce) ◇ Platform-led brand lift studies, if running paid social	◇ Self-serve CEP analysis (Appinio, Attest, Bounce)	◇ Brand preference question added to brand tracker survey	◇ Image and attribute section added to brand tracker survey
Medium £50m–£500m	◇ Quarterly brand tracker (Savanta, Tracksuit, Attest)	◇ CEP research via quant research platform (Appinio, Attest, Bounce)	◇ Max-Diff or conjoint study (Conjointly)	◇ Image section in brand tracker ◇ Mid-market social listening (Brand24, Mention)
Large ~£0.5bn+	◇ Continuous brand tracker (Kantar, Ipsos, YouGov)	◇ Bespoke Category Entry Point analysis (Ehrenberg-Bass, Morning Consult)	◇ Continuous tracker, conjoint or Max-Diff (Qualtrics, Kantar)	◇ Continuous image and attribute tracker with social listening at scale (Brandwatch, Pulsar)

Table 7: Brand measurement tools, by effect and company size. Suppliers are for example purposes only and do not constitute commercial endorsement.

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Behavioural measurement tools

COMPANY SIZE	TRIAL	ADVOCACY	PARTICIPATION	DIGITAL BEHAVIOUR
Micro Under ~£1m	◇ GA4 free trial or demo goal tracking	◇ Google Forms NPS ◇ Google Alerts ◇ Manual referral code tracking	◇ Google Forms registration ◇ Manual headcount and attendance logs	◇ GA4 and Google Search Console ◇ Google Trends as a directional proxy ◇ Social platform analytics
Small ~£1m–£50m	◇ GA4 goal completions for trial sign-ups	◇ Delighted free tier ◇ Brand24 or Mention ◇ Promo code tracking	◇ Eventbrite, free up to the per-ticket fee threshold ◇ Manual CRM attendance logging	◇ GA4 with configured goals and UTM parameters ◇ Firebase free tier ◇ Google Search Console
Medium £50m–£500m	◇ Quarterly tracker with a trial question (Savanta, Tracksuit, Attest) ◇ CRM trial-to-conversion rate	◇ Delighted Pro or Qualtrics starter ◇ Brandwatch Essentials ◇ Referral tracking via CRM	◇ Eventbrite Professional ◇ CRM programme attendance tracking ◇ Post-event survey (Typeform)	◇ GA4 with Firebase ◇ Hotjar paid tier ◇ UTM-disciplined campaign tracking
Large ~£0.5bn+	◇ Continuous tracker with a consideration and intent module (Kantar, Ipsos) ◇ Trial redemption tracking via CRM or retail audit	◇ NPS at scale (Qualtrics, Medallia) ◇ Enterprise social listening (Brandwatch, Sprinklr) ◇ CRM referral programme tracking	◇ Cvent or Eventbrite Enterprise ◇ CRM participation tracking ◇ Ticketing data partnerships (AXS, Ticketmaster) ◇ Experiential data capture (Meshh)	◇ Web and app analytics (Adobe, GA4 360, Firebase) ◇ UX tracking (Hotjar, FullStory) ◇ Enterprise social listening (Brandwatch, Sprinklr)

Table 8: Behavioural measurement tools, by effect and company size. Suppliers are for example purposes only and do not constitute commercial endorsement.

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Sales measurement tools

COMPANY SIZE	VOLUME	REVENUE	ACQUISITION	RETENTION
Micro Under ~£1m	◇ Built-in sales reporting (Shopify, Square, Xero, QuickBooks)	◇ Built-in revenue reporting (Xero, QuickBooks) ◇ Shopify free analytics ◇ GA4	◇ GA4 new users by source and medium ◇ UTM parameters via Campaign URL Builder	◇ GA4 returning users report ◇ Mailchimp open and click data ◇ Manual repeat purchase rate from accounting exports
Small ~£1m–£50m	◇ Key account EPOS extracts ◇ Distributor and wholesaler volume reports	◇ Ecommerce order data ◇ GA4 ecommerce tracking ◇ HubSpot Starter	◇ Shopify analytics ◇ GA4 acquisition reporting ◇ CRM new customer records	◇ CRM repeat purchase rate ◇ Email platform analytics for retention comms (Klaviyo) ◇ GA4 cohort exploration
Medium £50m–£500m	◇ Retailer EPOS data via direct data-share agreements ◇ Distributor volume reports	◇ CRM revenue dashboards (Salesforce, HubSpot Professional) ◇ GA4 enhanced ecommerce	◇ Mid-market multi-touch attribution (Northbeam, Triple Whale) ◇ CRM new contact tracking with source attribution	◇ CRM repeat purchase and churn analysis ◇ Klaviyo or Braze retention campaign tracking
Large ~£0.5bn+	◇ Continuous EPOS tracking (Circana, Nielsen) ◇ Aggregated retailer sell-out data (Dunnhumby or equivalent)	◇ Finance system integration (SAP, Salesforce Revenue Cloud) ◇ MMM for revenue attribution by channel	◇ Multi-touch attribution (Northbeam, Rockerbox) ◇ CDP or DMP new customer segmentation	◇ CDP-based lifetime-value modelling and churn prediction (Segment, Salesforce Data Cloud, Braze) ◇ Continuous cohort analysis

Table 9: Sales measurement tools, by effect and company size. Suppliers are for example purposes only and do not constitute commercial endorsement.

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Forma's tools and KPIs

FAMILY	OBJECTIVE & KPI	TOOLS
Business	Increase market share in the 18–35 segment KPI: Market share	Syndicated category data (Mintel, Euromonitor); distributor reports
Brand	Increase perception as ethical KPI: % who think Forma is ethical	Quarterly brand tracker
Brand	Increase brand affinity KPI: % who think Forma is "for people like me"	Same quarterly brand tracker
Behavioural	Increase advocacy KPI: Social shares and comments	Social listening; social platform analytics
Behavioural	Increase website traffic KPI: Website traffic	Web and app analytics; UTM-disciplined campaign tracking
Sales	Increase market penetration KPI: Market penetration - New accounts	Multi-touch attribution; econometrics/MMM; CRM new-contact tracking with source attribution

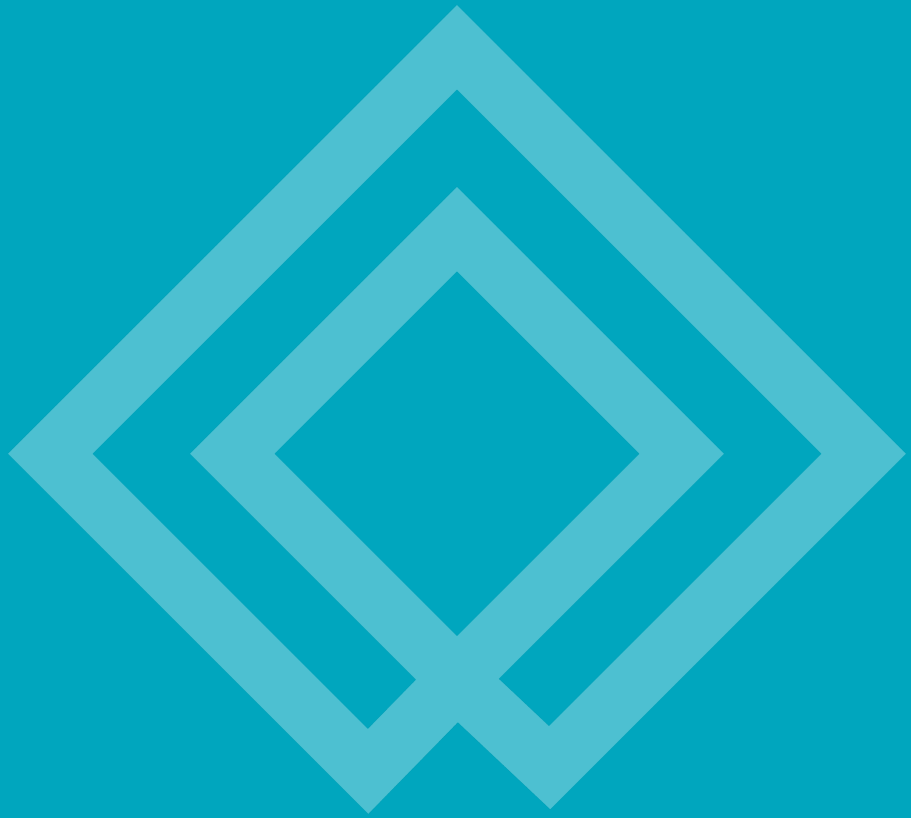
Table 10: Forma's KPIs mapped to tools, drawn from Tables 6 to 9.

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STAGE FOUR

04

Build in incrementality tests



Correlation is not cause

A baseline helps to identify how big a change is achieved. It does not, on its own, show what the sponsorship caused. Sales may rise over an activation window, but it's hard to credibly attribute that to the sponsorship if prices changed, a new distributor came online, and the brand was running other advertising at the same time.

The dangers of misattributing effects to the wrong channel are obvious: if you believe something is performing far better or worse than it really is, your decisions about where to allocate your budget will be based on bad information.

Incrementality testing is the solution to this question, and is a step that is frequently overlooked in sponsorship evaluation. Tests isolate the sponsorship's contribution by comparing what happened in groups that aren't exposed to it, allowing us to estimate what would have happened without it.

> "This is a problem as old as marketing itself. Sales rise just after a campaign, but was this caused by the marketing or was it just correlated, and actually caused by something else?"
>
> **GOOGLE, MEASURING EFFECTIVENESS: THREE GRAND CHALLENGES**

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Correlation is not cause (continued)

WHAT TO DO

1. Before activation, state what would have to be true for the sponsorship to have worked, and how it would be evidenced
2. Design at least one incrementality test with a defined control group
3. Ideally put the test in place before launch; holdout groups, if required, cannot be reconstructed afterwards.

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE

At least one pre-designed test that compares the sponsorship against a control, sized to what the budget allows.

COMMON FAILURE

Presenting correlation, sales rising during the activation, as proof of cause.

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Design a test proportionate to the budget

STAGE FOUR

Micro

Run the sponsorship creative for a set period, then pause it for a comparable period. Compare branded search in Google Trends and new sessions from social in GA4.

The result is directional, but still more useful than none.

Small

Issue a unique discount code through the rights holder's channels only. Track redemptions, average order value and repeat rate.

A clean read on behaviour. Only captures direct sales, but revenue is clear.

Medium

Identify a credible control group: target customers that aren't exposed to the activation. Test differences in brand attitudes, behaviour and purchase.

The closest approximation to a controlled experiment available without an MMM.

Large

Use geo-split testing, matched-market analysis and incrementality testing across paid channels.

Infrastructure exists but isolating effects becomes harder and more time-intensive.

Figure 2: Incrementality test designs by company size.

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Evaluating incremental gains



Here we can see a difference between the exposed WSL audience and an unexposed audience, both larger than a standard ±5% margin of error in brand trackers. These are the incremental gains in brand measures that can be attributed to the sponsorship.

Even a negative result can demonstrate value. If perception of Forma as "an ethical brand" had declined among the unexposed group over the season, while the exposed group held steady, the sponsorship prevented a decline within the WSL audience.

Figure 3: Forma, exposed versus unexposed audience, post-season.

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Controlled experiments for Forma

A proportion of performance marketing activity is bought against two cohorts, each big enough to ensure statistical significance.

Cohort A

People who display WSL signals: interests, follows, purchases and subscriptions.

MATCHED AS CLOSELY AS POSSIBLE FOR DEMOGRAPHICS AND GEOGRAPHY

Cohort B

People who do not display WSL signals.

The difference in outcomes, in traffic, sales, CTR and CPA, is the estimated effect of the sponsorship.

Figure 4: Forma's matched-cohort test design.

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Incrementality: different routes to the same goal

BILLY RYAN
HEAD OF ANALYTICS & EFFECTIVENESS, THE7STARS



The central measurement question for any sponsorship is simple: what happened that would not otherwise have happened?

Answering it, of course, is considerably harder.

Controlled experiments can provide exceptionally strong evidence where a credible control can be constructed. But sponsorships are often particularly resistant to clean experimental design. A national property cannot simply be switched off in selected regions. rights holder activity may sit outside the sponsor's control. Audience exposure is rarely random.

And deliberately withholding activation can sometimes mean sacrificing the very value the partnership was bought to create.

Econometrics brings different strengths and weaknesses. Where sufficient variation exists, it can isolate sponsorship alongside other drivers of demand, capture effects over longer periods and translate incremental outcomes into commercial value. But long-running, always-on sponsorships can also provide models with very little variation from which to identify a reliable effect.

The answer is not to lower the evidential standard, but to separate incrementality from any single methodology. Start with the decision behind the sponsorship and the question that needs to be answered. Then identify the strongest feasible way of answering the counterfactual: what would have happened if we'd never run this?

That might be a controlled experiment, econometric modelling, a synthetic-control approach, a natural experiment, or a combination of methods. Brand tracking, behavioural signals and attribution can provide further evidence of how the effect occurred.

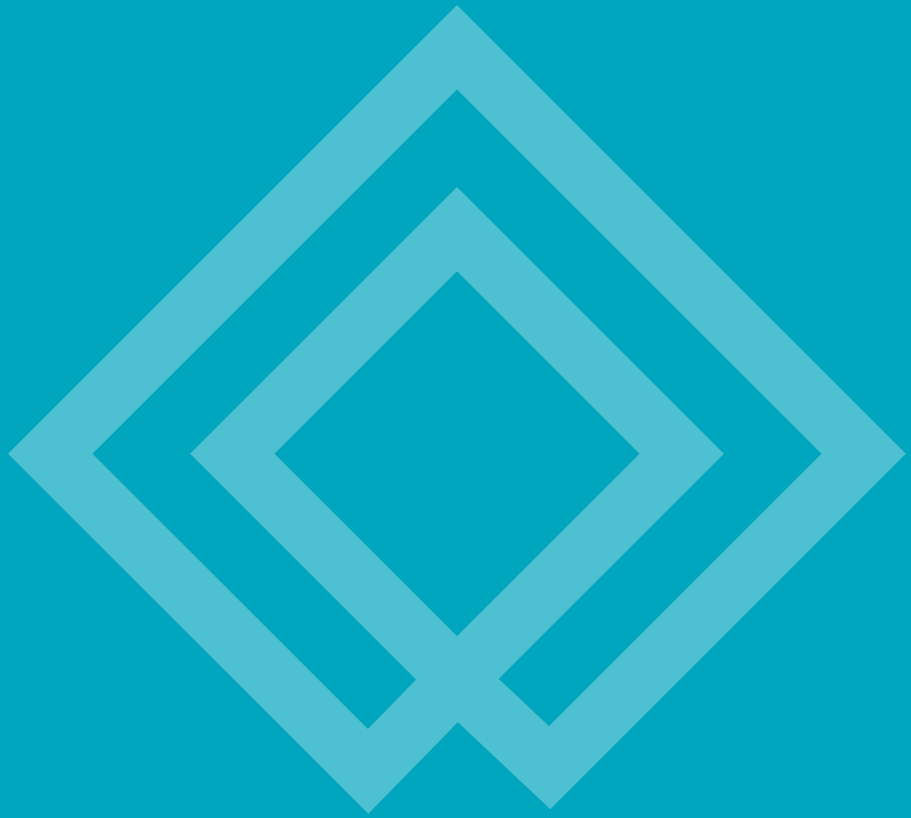
The goal should be convergence, not methodological perfection. Multiple independent methods, with different weaknesses, pointing towards the same conclusion can provide greater confidence than stretching one theoretically superior methodology beyond what the sponsorship or data can support.

Good sponsorship measurement is therefore not about applying the same measurement stack to every partnership. It is about building evidence proportionate to the decision, and strong enough to change what happens next.

STAGE FIVE

05

Triangulate the data



The trilemma of evaluation

No single method establishes incremental effect on its own. Each of the serious approaches carries a structural weakness that the others do not, which Les Binet and Will Davis called a ‘trilemma’ in 2026’s Go Big or Go Home.

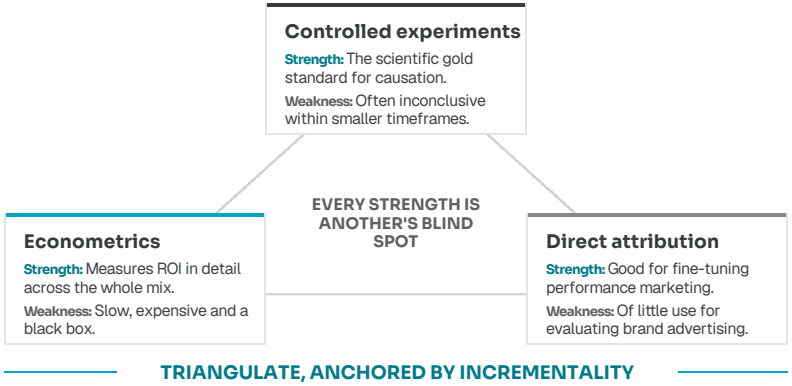


Figure 5: The trilemma of evaluation. Source: Binet and Davis, Go Big or Go Home, IPA, 2026.

Relying on any one method means inheriting its blind spot. Attribution over-credits the last click and cannot see brand building, which is most of what a sponsorship does. Econometrics can evaluate the whole media mix but is costly, slow and hard to interrogate. Controlled experiments answer causation directly, but a single activation rarely provides the sample or the time to produce a clean read.

SEF’s position is that controlled experiments, in which the brand deliberately withholds exposure from a comparable group, are the gold standard for establishing incremental gains in any metric, including sales, because they rule out the other explanations most directly.

However, the nature of sponsorship often makes them hard to run. Where they aren't practical, brands should use the next most rigorous approach available: natural experiments that exploit variation in exposure the brand didn't choose, such as regional broadcast differences, or surveys comparing people exposed to the sponsorship with those who weren't, tracked across waves and benchmarked against competitor brands.

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In practice

WHAT TO DO

1. Combine at least two independent sources spanning exposure, brand tracking and sales or econometric data
2. Identify where the different data sources point to the same answers
3. Offset the data sources against one another to rule out causes other than the sponsorship.

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE

A balanced portfolio of evidence rather than a single dashboard, with each source checking the others.

COMMON FAILURE

Depending on one data source, or using several sources in isolation without reconciling them.

3.1

measurement approaches used by Tier 1 cases, on average

2.4

approaches used by the rest of the dataset

The strongest cases combined brand tracking, market share data, econometric modelling and third-party valuation to isolate the effect.

> "There is no single source of truth in sponsorship, and exposure data can be of greatest value when paired with brand tracking and, where possible, econometrics."
>
> **CHARLIE DUNDAS - GSIQ**

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Five imperfect sources, one answer

No single source in Forma's stack is good enough to demonstrate effectiveness on its own. Read together, they point the same way, and between them they rule out the other explanations for the year's growth.

SOURCE	WHAT IT SAYS	ITS WEAKNESS	WHAT IT RULES OUT
Brand tracker, exposed WSL fans vs. unexposed	+15pp "Forma is ethical" and +7pp "for people like me", against a flat pre-season baseline.	Self-reported. The exposed group may differ from the unexposed group in ways the matching missed.	A category-wide shift in attitudes: the unexposed group did not move.
Matched-cohort paid test	Cohort A converted at a higher rate and a lower CPA on identical creative and spend.	WSL signals are a proxy for exposure, not a record of it. Sample sized for significance, but a single season.	Creative or media quality as the cause: both cohorts saw the same ads.
UTM-tagged traffic and orders	150,000 visits and 4,800 orders from WSL-tagged links, 92% from new customers.	Only counts people who clicked. Misses everyone the sponsorship reached who came direct or via search.	Harvesting existing customers: the new-customer share is far above Forma's base rate.
Marketing mix model	10,800 orders and 6,430 new customers attributed to WSL activity after controlling for other media, price and seasonality.	The sponsorship was always-on for the season, so the model has limited variation to identify from. Wide confidence interval.	Other media, price changes and seasonality: all are included in the model.
Social listening	500,000 comments and 300,000 shares on partnership content, with "ethical" and "conscious" among the top terms.	Volume is not sentiment, and a loud minority can dominate.	A purely paid-media effect: the earned conversation is disproportionate to the media spend.

Table 11: Forma's five evidence sources.

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Five imperfect sources, one answer

WHERE THEY CONVERGE

Each source has a different weakness, but they converge to indicate the sponsorship is having its intended effects.

Forma can be confident in saying:

1. Brand scores rose above the baseline among fans who saw the sponsorship
2. Advocacy grew through social comments and sharing
3. Website traffic increased and transactions increased
4. 3,220 new customers were tracked directly through WSL links, plus an additional 6,430 estimated by the MMM
5. The MMM leaves out tracked sessions, so the two groups do not overlap, giving 9,650 in total.

RULING OUT THE OTHER EXPLANATIONS

Price: no promotional discounting in the window, so the uplift was not bought with margin.

Distribution: D2C only, no new channel opened.

Other media: performance spend held at the prior year's level and was controlled for in the MMM.

Category: the unexposed group and the non-WSL performance marketing cohort don't show similar uplifts, so this is not the market rising.

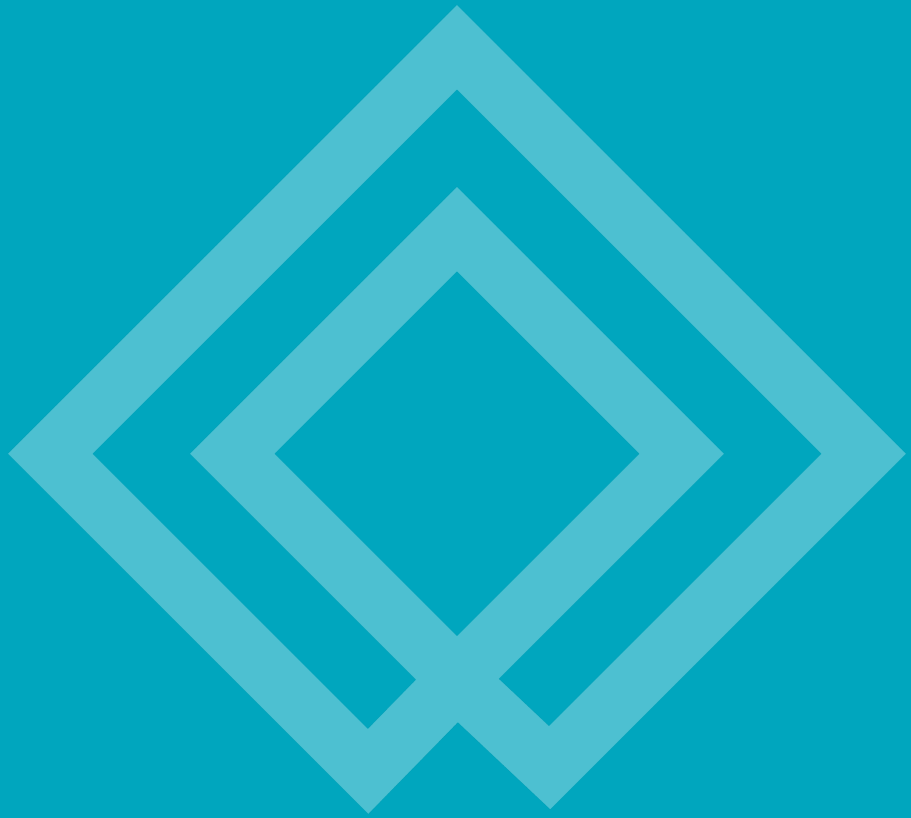
What remains is the sponsorship.

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STAGE SIX

06

Build the chain of evidence



The chain has five links

A chain of evidence is a narrative about how the sponsorship created its effects. It leaves little room for argument, is easier to understand than a dashboards with hundreds of metrics, whilst also being more credible to a CEO or CFO than one single measure.

1

Size and quality of exposure

Who saw the sponsorship, in what context, and for how long. Not reach alone, but attention and relevance to the defined audience.

→

2

Incremental gains in brand

The movement in brand KPIs, awareness, salience, associations, consideration and trust, above the baseline, among the audience exposed.

→

3

Behaviour change

The change in search, visits, participation and advocacy attributable to the sponsorship, isolated by the incrementality work in stage 4.

→

4

Sales uplift above base

The incremental sales, over the base rate that would have occurred anyway, that the behaviour produced.

→

5

Incremental contribution

The revenue from that uplift, less the cost of making and selling those items. Stage 7 deducts the sponsorship cost to give profit.

A WEAK LINK BREAKS THE CHAIN Exposure with no brand movement, brand movement with no behavioural change, behaviour with no sales, or sales with no margin, makes the evidence less credible.

Figure 6: The chain of evidence. Each link must be incremental: the gain over the base or control, rather than the gross level.

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In practice

WHAT TO DO

1. Lay out the five links for the sponsorship, from exposure to value
2. Attach the evidence for each link, drawn from the triangulated sources in stage 5
3. Confirm each link is incremental, the gain over the base or control, rather than the gross level
4. Identify the weakest link, since that is where the case for effect is most exposed.

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE

An evidenced, incremental chain from exposure to value, with no unsupported jump between links.

COMMON FAILURE

Asserting the endpoints, exposure at one end and sales at the other, without evidencing the steps in between, which leaves the causal claim unproven.

> The purpose of the chain is to show not only that outcomes occurred, but that the sponsorship caused them, one step at a time.

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Building the chain of evidence for Forma

1

Size and quality of exposure

- 45m broadcast impressions
- 40m paid media impressions
- 10m organic social impressions
- 70% reach of target audience
- 8 average frequency across season
- 100 press articles

2

Incremental gains in brand

- +15pp "Forma is ethical"
- +7pp "for people like me"
- WSL fans vs non-WSL fans

3

Behaviour change

- 500k comments and 300k shares on social media
- 150,000 visits from WSL-tagged links and capsule collection paid media campaign
- 400,000 YoY incremental users attributed to WSL activity after accounting for all other media activity.

Table 12: Forma's chain, year one (links 1 to 3). All figures illustrative.

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Building the chain of evidence for Forma

4

Sales uplift

4,800 sales of partnership product range, from 3,500 users arriving direct from WSL-tagged activity, of which 3,220 new (92%). Total revenue £432,000.

10,800 incremental sales from 8,350 users because of WSL activity via MMM, of which 6,430 new (77%). Total revenue £918,000.

9,650 total new customers because of WSL activity.

+0.5ppt market penetration after year 1.

5

Incremental contribution

Top line revenue
£1,350,000

Gross margin (70% after cost of goods)
£945,000

Contribution margin (45% after cost to serve)
£607,500 realised in year 1

Forecast: future contribution from 9,650 new customers, years 2 to 4, at Forma's base lifetime value (LTV) of £492 × 45%
£221.40 per customer, £2,136,510 total

Total realised £607,500 + forecast £2,136,510 = £2,744,010

FUTURE CONTRIBUTION

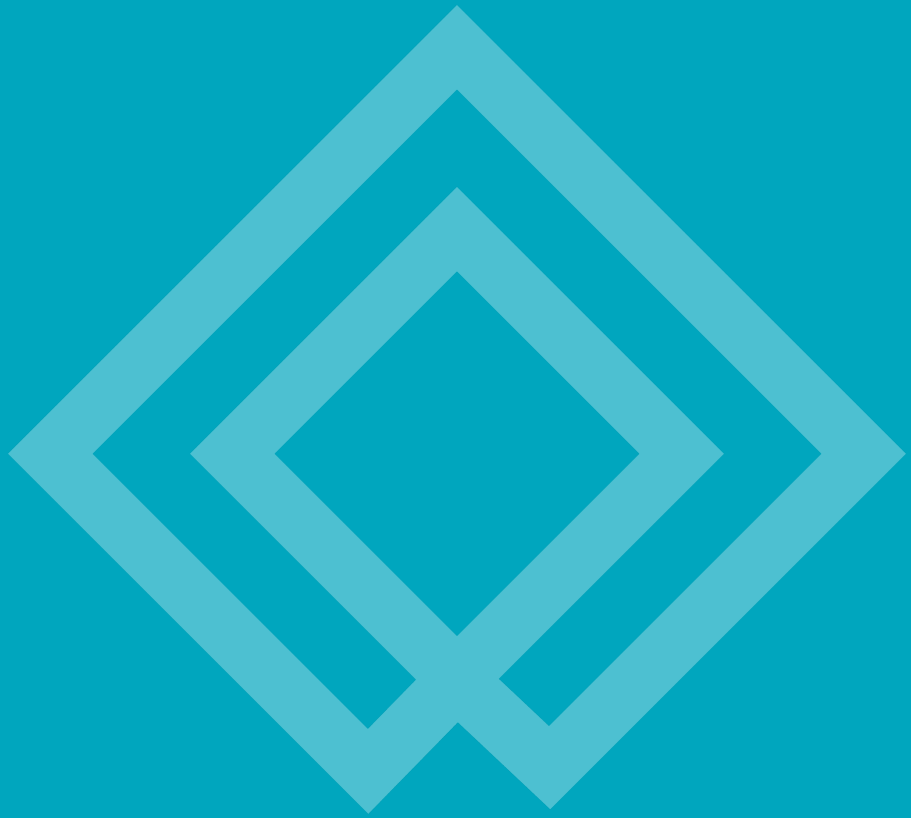
Modelling the expected lifetime contribution of the customers recruited is standard finance practice for consumer brands, not a sponsorship convention.

Table 12: Forma's chain, year one (links 4 and 5). All figures illustrative.

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07

Calculate profit, then ROI



ROI is a ratio of profit to cost

STEP ONE

Calculate profit

Profit = incremental contribution, less sponsorship cost
Take the incremental contribution from stage 6: the revenue the sponsorship produced, less the cost of making and selling those items. Subtract the full cost of the sponsorship, the rights fee plus everything spent activating it. What is left is the profit.

STEP TWO

Calculate ROI

ROI = profit ÷ sponsorship cost
Divide that profit by the same sponsorship cost. The answer is the ROI: profit earned for every £1 spent. There are two ways to look at it: on realised contribution, which the business has already received, and on realised plus forecast margin, which is the case for the investment.

> "Cutting spend boosts ROI but reduces net profit. That's why firms that focus on ROI tend to underinvest and make less money."
>
> **LES BINET AND WILL DAVIS, GO BIG OR GO HOME**

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ROI is a ratio of profit to cost (cont.)

Binet and Davis show that ROI becomes a misleading target when treated as the primary goal. It rewards cutting budget over growing profit, favours harvesting existing demand over recruiting new customers, and correlates negatively with penetration growth.

> A high ROI can indicate an efficient sponsorship. It can equally indicate one too small to move the business, or one that captured demand which already existed.

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE

An ROI figure derived from isolated, margin-adjusted profit net of the full cost, and reported alongside the business objective.

COMMON FAILURE

Reporting an "ROI" built from gross revenue, reach or media value, which produces a precise-looking figure that carries no meaning.

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Calculating Forma's ROI

REALISED, YEAR ONE

£607,500

Incremental contribution in year one, from stage 6.

–

TOTAL COST, YEAR ONE

£620,000

Rights fee £100,000 + Production £110,000 + Media £400,000

=

PROFIT, YEAR ONE

–£12,500

Not yet paid back. Payback expected around week 2 on the forecast run rate.

ROI, YEAR ONE

–0.02:1

2p lost per £1 so far.

REALISED + FORECAST

£2,744,010

Year one realised plus years 2 to 4 forecast at £221.40 per new customer.

–

TOTAL COST, YEAR ONE

£620,000

Rights fee £100,000 + Production £110,000 + Media £400,000

=

PROFIT, LIFETIME

£2,124,010

Forecast based on the LTV and retention assumptions in stage 6.

ROI, LIFETIME

3.43:1

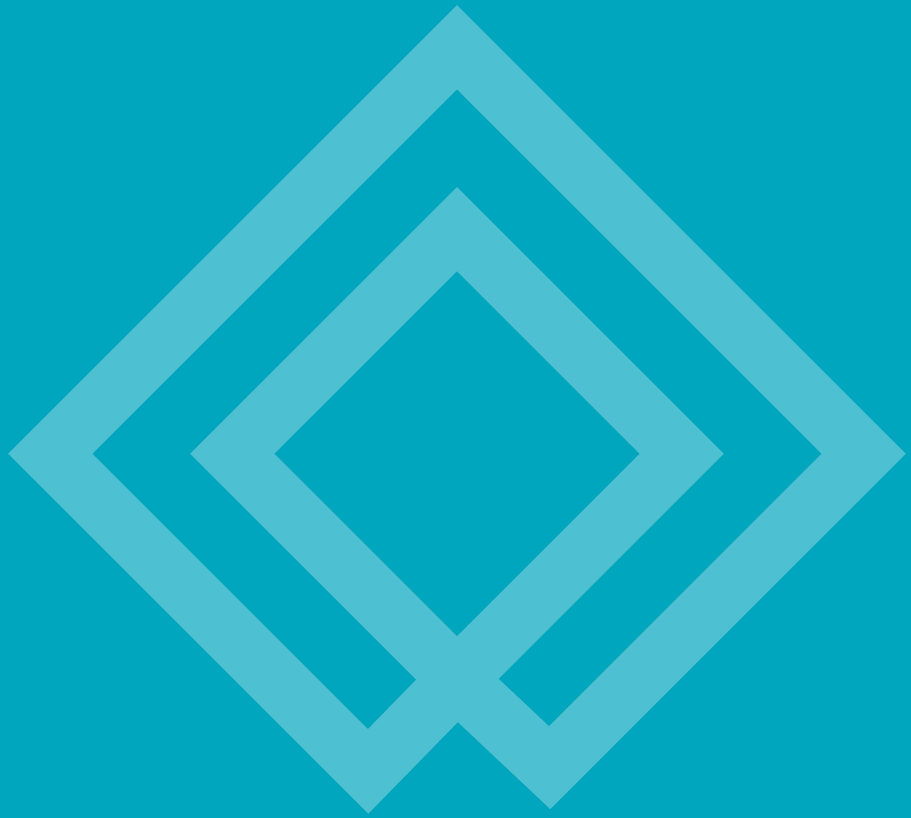
£3.43 profit per £1 invested.

Figure 7: Forma's ROI, year one realised and lifetime forecast. Lifetime figures are undiscounted and assume base LTV and retention hold for sponsorship-acquired customers.

Judged on year one sales alone, the sponsorship barely broke even. But judged on the customers it recruited, it returns more than three times its cost. This is the problem Binet and Field identified in The Long and the Short of It: short windows evaluating direct sales systematically undervalue the activity that grows brands. In Forma's case the sponsorship has recruited customers whose value arrives over years. A 6-12 month evaluation window would call it a failure; the brand might even exit the deal early based on a loss, end the measurement programme without ever realising the partnership actually performed, and miss out on the value of years 2+.

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In Summary



Applying this guide

IN SUMMARY

The seven stages are cumulative and are best worked in order.

1. **Set integrated objectives** that ladder up to a single business goal, each with a defined audience
2. **Identify the KPIs** that measure each objective, and set a measurement window for each
3. **Establish a baseline** before activation, and select tools to capture those KPIs within the budget
4. **Build in incrementality tests** designed before launch, with a defined control or counterfactual
5. **Triangulate** across independent sources, anchored by incrementality testing
6. **Build the chain of evidence** from exposure to incremental brand and behaviour change, to sales uplift above the base
7. **Calculate profit, then ROI**, to understand how efficiently the effects were achieved.

None of this requires an econometrics budget

Most of it requires the discipline to ask, before the activation, what would have to be true for the sponsorship to have worked, what would happen if the sponsorship didn't run, and how that would be known.

The answers are available at every budget. The rest is a matter of doing the work in the right order.

Some common questions

IN SUMMARY

WHAT ABOUT PURPOSE-LED SPONSORSHIPS?

If a brand that sponsors a cause wants a stakeholder, a customer, an employee or a regulator to know it did, then it has a commercial purpose as well as a social one. Purpose-led work sits in the framework like any other. It will more often serve brand objectives but the aim is the same: arrive at a modelled value for the activity, even if that value was generated for something other than the business's bottom line. The measurement doesn't change because the motive is a good one.

WHAT IF WE BOUGHT IT BECAUSE THE CEO LOVES THE SPORT?

If a sponsorship is a CEO's passion point and that's the only reason for investment with no expectation of a return, then you don't need to measure it. Just don't come asking for the commercial effect three years in. The same test applies as for purpose: the moment you want any stakeholder to know the brand sponsors something, it has a commercial goal, and the goal can be measured.

ISN'T MEDIA VALUE A VALID MEASURE?

Equivalent media value tells you what the exposure would have cost to buy, using a questionable calculation based on a fictional TV rate. If it is anything, it is a price, not an effect. Media value is most harmful when it is reported as a return, providing an "ROI" that is completely unrelated to profit. SEF advises against its use, whilst encouraging the continued measurement of exposure that sits behind it.

WE'VE ALREADY STARTED. IS IT TOO LATE TO BEGIN?

Not at all - remember, consistent and good enough is a good place to start. You may not have pre-sponsorship baselines in place for every measure and some of the incrementality tests will be ruled out, but the seasonal nature of many sponsorships also means there are natural breaks that can allow you to set new baselines. Getting robust measurement in place half-way through the deal is better than never at all.

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SEF

Bringing sponsorship into the same analytical frame as the rest of marketing

The Sponsorship Effectiveness Forum is a cross-industry group of brands, rights holders and agencies working to promote and advance the credible measurement and evaluation of sponsorship activity. We meet quarterly, publish shared research, and set standards the discipline can be held to.

GET INVOLVED

If you plan, buy or evaluate partnerships and want to learn more, contribute a case, share data, or join the next forum, we would like to hear from you.

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