

A TYPOLOGY OF
ONLINE SPONSORSHIPS

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Master of Arts

by
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The undersigned, appointed by the Dean of the Graduate School, have examined the thesis entitled

A Typology of Online Sponsorships

Presented by Katherine Renick,

A candidate for the degree of Master of Arts,

And hereby certify that in their opinion it is worthy of acceptance.

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Dr. Glen Cameron

Dr. Kevin Wise

Dr. Joel Poor

To Sean, Mom, Folgers, and Diet Coke
*I couldn't have done it
without you guys*

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Introduction

[1]

Throughout the history of strategic communications, sponsorship has often taken a backseat to advertising. This oversight is true for interest as well as research. Scholarly journals are filled with studies on advertising, with sponsorship research occasionally punctuating the pages. Sponsorship has often been touted as an excuse for senior managers to get front row seats to big events, but has recently earned more recognition in efforts to justify the millions of dollars that go into sponsorship annually. The rise of the Internet has led to a dramatic evolution of sponsorship as a promotional tool. Previously, sponsorship was an expensive means of strategic communications that was typically limited to events and sports teams. The increased attention and respect that sponsorship has received has piqued the interest of advertisers and researchers alike.

Today sponsorship is being done on a much smaller scale via the Internet, which creates many new opportunities and poses new questions about how sponsorships work. Instead of having to spend millions of dollars to promote an event, sponsors can now pay to sponsor features on websites, or the entire sites themselves. Research has arisen examining whether the principles applied to traditional

sponsorships apply online. Although there is a significant amount of research concerning the effects of online sponsorship, there is a lack of research concerning how sponsorship is being utilized across the Internet.

The effects that have been researched focus primarily on general sponsorship concepts and the nature of online advertising. A popular concept in traditional sponsorship research, fit (also known as relevance or congruence), is based on the consistency of expectations about the sponsor and sponsored property (Simmons & Becker-Olson 2006). Fit has long been studied in relation to traditional sponsorships, and is now being examined in online sponsorships. Rodgers (2003) has identified the importance of associative links, which are mental associations based on fit, on recall and attitudes towards sponsors. The location on the page has also been found to affect memory and attitudes towards sponsors and sponsored content (Rodgers, Cameron, & Brill 2005).

These concepts are essential to understanding how people respond to online sponsorship, but only examine one side of the situation. What I sought to understand was how sponsorships are being used across the website. I looked at what types of websites utilize sponsorships; if different types are more prone to using sponsorships. I also examined how the sponsorships were formatted

on websites and if certain types of websites favor certain sponsorship characteristics, such as location on the page or using graphics versus plain text. All of this was used determine if practitioners are placing sponsorships that are in line with researched effects.

These questions were examined by a content analysis. This method was selected because it allows for systematic assessment of a large sample. Categorization of site and sponsorship types is essential to answering the questions I posed. After data collection and analysis have been completed, this research will provide a tool for researchers and practitioners alike to understand how sponsorship is being used across the Internet.

Literature Review

[2]

Theoretical Framework: "Though this be madness, yet there is method in 't." –William Shakespeare

The following theoretical framework is a recurring theme throughout most of the research on sponsorship and online media. Other theories are presented throughout this review, but none are as prevalent as this.

Associative Links/fit/relevance

A concept that applies to the importance of relevant sponsorship is associative linking. Rodgers (2003) defines the theory when she writes, "An associative link refers to the perceived strength of the sponsor-sponsee matchup. Research in this area assumes that strong associative links are more persuasive than weak links" (67).

Associative linking is critical in sponsorship research since sponsorships are not sending a direct message about their product, but rather sending an indirect message through support of a sponsee, or property.

Traditional Sponsorships: Relevance and Success

Research has demonstrated that relevance is a key component in developing sponsorships. Relevance is also described as congruence, fit, and linking. Cornwell, Pruitt, and Van Ness (2001) looked at the importance of businesses sponsoring winning drivers in Indy car racing, and more importantly, the value of sponsors' products being related to the automotive industry. By empirically assessing the net-of-market share prices of sponsors, the researchers found that winning had little impact on the sponsor's success. They also found that sponsors that were not strongly linked to auto racing were far less successful than sponsors whose products were more closely linked. Additionally, in the case of a car oil sponsor, the effects of sponsorship went beyond awareness and even caused persuasion among consumers.

Rifon, Choi, Trimble, and Li (2004) examine the importance of congruence in the sponsorship of health content on the Internet. (The additional importance of the use of new media is later examined.) In regard to the congruence effects, the authors referenced the importance of attribution theory. Consumer attributions of sponsor motive were regarded as an important factor and the authors posited that strong congruence would lead to positive motive attributions. This

hypothesis was confirmed through experimental research comparing congruent and non-congruent sponsors of a fictional health website.

The previous research presents a case for sponsorship relevance, which is taken even further by the literature that examines the different degrees of congruence in sponsorships. In "Achieving marketing objectives through social sponsorships," Simmons and Becker-Olsen (2006) looked at the value of high fit, low fit, and created fit sponsorships. A created fit is when a seemingly low fit sponsor's values are linked with a property to make the fit more rational to the audience. Through experimentation, the authors first examined the reasons high fit sponsorships are more effective than low fit sponsorships. They found that low fit sponsorships reduce audiences' clarity of the sponsor's positioning and generate more negative attitudes toward the sponsorship than when there was a high natural fit. The second portion of the study looked at the effectiveness of a created fit and the source of the sponsorship message. As hypothesized, the researchers found that created fit sponsorships received more positive feedback and greater recall than low fit sponsorships. The researchers also found that created fit sponsorships were considered more credible when the property rather than the sponsor presented the message. This study provides empirical data supporting the importance of high fit or created fit sponsorships.

Although many researchers provide qualitative evidence that low fit sponsorships are unsuccessful (or even harmful) to a sponsor, the data in this article provides a strong quantitative argument for the case.

Created fit is strongly related to the concepts presented in Masterson's (2005) "The importance of creative match in television sponsorship," a look at the importance of relating sponsorships to television programming in Great Britain. From in-depth interviews the research affirmed the importance of high fit sponsorships and also learned from her participants that content that enhanced the interaction with the program led to higher acceptance of low fit sponsorships. This contradicts findings that low-fit sponsorships typically evoke negative emotions, but can be reconciled by the researcher's findings that the audience appreciated the effect of the low-fit sponsorships on prompting social interaction with fellow viewers.

Poon and Prendergast (2006) created a new framework for sponsorships based on combining the different types of product relevance. The two types of product relevance are function-based similarity and image-based similarity. Previously, the two had only been examined independent of one another. This framework proposes integrated product relevance, creating four conditions combining

image- and function-based similarity. These are based on the level of each similarity, such as high function and low image or high function and high image. The article recommended evaluating sponsorships using the cognition, affect, and experience hierarchy with perceived quality, attitude toward the brand, and purchase intention representing each stage, respectively. The authors also hypothesize that high functioning relationships should be analyzed using a Learn → Feel → Do model and high image relationships should be analyzed using a Feel → Learn → Do model. The theoretical framework presented in this critical literature is essential in considering the different types of relevance associated with sponsorships and how they should be utilized to receive the maximum benefits to the sponsor and the property.

Along with congruence, another important factor affecting the sponsorships is the sponsor/property relationship. Unlike advertising, where the audience receives a direct message from a single sender, sponsorships rely on the combination of two entities working in synchronization. This relationship initially depends on relevance, but much more as the sponsorship campaign is carried out. Farrelly, Quester, and Greyser (2005) examined the effects of ambush marketing on legitimate corporate sponsorships. Ambush marketing is a tactic used by firms to try to create illegitimate connections with

events of which they are not the sponsors. To examine these effects and the views held by legitimate sponsors and properties the researchers conducted twenty in-depth interviews with sponsorship professionals. The professionals recognized the potential threats of ambush marketing and saw the need to use as many resources as possible to publicize and legitimize sponsorships. Additionally, there was a large focus on the importance of building long-term sponsor-property relationships to create strong links in consumers' minds. This research emphasizes that both sponsors and properties must do a great deal of work to preserve sponsorship integrity in order to have the mutually beneficial relationship sponsorship is meant to provide.

Research has also addressed the combination of the different factors necessary to ensure sponsorship success. Crimmins and Horn (1996) analyzed survey data regarding responses to sponsorships and use it to illustrate the four features that determine sponsor success: link strength, duration of the link, gratitude to link, and perceptual change. The authors demonstrate the effectiveness of sponsorships when sponsors have strong, long-term links appreciated by their target market. They also examined the failures resulting from weak, short-term links, and concluded with suggestions for improving sponsorships. This research is an effective combination of the relevance and sponsorship factors to produce profitable results. It also

acknowledges the fact that sponsorship is moving from a strategic communications misfit used for perks for high-ranking managers to become a respected, effective strategic communications tool.

Stipp and Schiavone (1996) examined Olympic sponsorships effects on corporate image and the importance of advertising to promote the sponsorship. Previous findings showed that audiences regard Olympic strategic communications, more than other media vehicles, with extremely positive feelings. Those advertisers who identifies themselves as Olympic sponsors in their commercials received even more positive feedback. Researchers wanted to examine sponsorship effects and more specifically the benefits of advertising for sponsors. The hypothesis was that positive feelings for Olympic sponsors in general would be associated with a company who identified itself as an Olympic sponsor in its commercials. The hypothesis was tested using phone surveys of Olympic viewers before and after the Olympics. In general, participants respected the values Olympic sponsors while accepting the fact that it was also part of a business plan. The findings showed that viewers have a positive image of Olympic sponsors and using this connection in commercials increased commercial recall and positive attitude towards a company. This study is important because it examines the benefits of supplementing sponsorship with commercial advertising and the

importance of associative links. By associating sponsors with the values that different media vehicles stand for, sponsors will receive the “halo effect” of positive image that Olympics sponsors share with the games themselves. This research shows that just because sponsorship uses different methods of persuasion than advertising, the strategic communications can be greatly benefited by the combination of the different promotional tools.

Quester and Thompson (2001) focused on the differences between arts sponsorships and sports sponsorships, which are the most popular form of sponsorships. The authors found that advertising promoting the sponsorship was the most important factor. They also found sponsorship to be more effective than advertising in this setting because of the appreciation factor. The appreciation factor sets sponsorship apart from advertising in consumers’ minds, and tends to make it more accepted because the consumers often feel grateful to the sponsor.

Even with the research showing the sponsorship is more than just a frivolous tactic used for great seats at huge events, criticism still remains in the public opinion, Clark, Cornwell, and Pruitt (2002) rebut the idea, specifically that sports sponsorships are unprofitable. The study is important because it provides a strong case for a basic tenet of marketing, using a promotional tool to generate business. However,

it largely ignores the factors other authors presented as necessary for success, such as heavy promotion of the sponsorship.

As one can see, there are many different factors and theories that figure into determining what makes an effective sponsorship. The creators of sponsorships need to form long-term, meaningful relationships with properties; need to configure sensible links between the sponsors and properties; and need to provide adequate resources to promote the sponsorship with other forms of strategic communications. Although the literature on sponsorship is far from conclusive, it provides a strong frame in which to examine new media sponsorships.

New Media Sponsorships: We're Not in Kansas Anymore

When the literature on traditional sponsorships and interactivity combine, a new field of research on new media sponsorships evolves. The literature on Internet sponsorships takes a look at the concepts addressed in the previous research, but places them in an entirely new context. Rifon et al. (2004) looked at, along with the importance of relevance of the sponsorship, other benefits of taking sponsorships online. Notably, that the consumers have instant access to more information about the sponsor. Instead of signage at a concert, media consumers who encounter sponsorship can now learn much more about the sponsor if they are interested.

Rodgers (2003) examined the relationship between sponsor relevance and memory, attitudinal, intended behavioral, and context affects. Two experiments were conducted on students and non-students measuring the effects of websites with relevant and irrelevant sponsors. The findings of the study affirmed the hypotheses that relevant sponsorship relationships have stronger positive effects than irrelevant sponsorship relationships. The study provides strong evidence that the success of online sponsorship can be dependent on relevance. Although sponsorships online present many new challenges, the results of this study imply that many issues facing new media sponsors remain the same as those faced by traditional sponsors.

Despain, Gray, and Harvey (2006) also have looked at sponsorship on the Internet. This article is important for a number of reasons. First, it examines "true sponsorship," as opposed to common sponsorship, which is more widely used today. With true sponsorship, there is only one sponsor for an entire webpage, event, television show, etc. With common sponsorship, there is a clearly identified sponsor, but there is also advertising by the sponsor and parties other than the sponsor. True sponsorship always has the key elements of exclusivity/visibility and an emotive connection. Additionally, this article recognizes the growing use of sponsorship on the Internet and the need for research to understand its uses and effects. The results of

the study show that sponsorship is a persuasive means of communication, but has distinctly different cognitive effects than advertising.

Just as the location of signs promoting a sponsor at an event such as a concert or sporting event, the location of sponsor identification on a website is an old issue requiring a new perspective. Rodgers, Cameron, and Brill (2005) determined the effect of sponsorship placement in a news story. This research provides a theoretical framework using cognitive processing to predict the participants interaction with the media. The authors hypothesized that memory for a sponsor would be highest when it was placed in the middle, attitude would be most negative towards the sponsor when it was placed in the middle, memory for the content would be highest when the sponsorship was placed at the end, and the credibility for the content and the media vehicle (an e-newspaper) would be highest when the sponsorship was placed at the end. Participants completed a pretest, read a news story with a sponsorship placed at the beginning, middle or end, and took a posttest. The research findings supported the first three hypotheses, while there were no significant findings in support of the fourth hypotheses regarding credibility. The cognitive processing framework served as a successful theory for analyzing the effects of online sponsorships on users. This article is of particular

importance because it examines the effects of “highly evolved” sponsorship on the Internet. As the research shows, online sponsorship presents many challenges that have long been faced by sponsors, but in an entirely new setting.

Research Design

[3]

Research Method

The method is a content analysis. According to Davis, advertising content analysis is the "...systematic, objective, and quantitative analysis of advertising conducted to infer a pattern of advertising practice..."(392-393). Davis explains the purpose of content analysis in academic research as "...identifying trends in advertising practices or in relating advertising characteristics to effects" (393). This research will fulfill the former function by creating a typology of contemporary online sponsorships. Additionally, it will also fulfill the latter function by comparing the typology to effects that have been identified in controlled settings. The analysis will address whether trends shown by practitioners reflect theories based on researched effects.

Sample

Websites were chosen from the Alexa.com Top United States sites and the Technorati.com Top blogs and HealthRatings.com Top Health information sites. Sites were chosen based on popularity due to the attractiveness of higher traffic media to advertisers. Websites were

classified based on type in order to determine and compare the use and format of sponsorships within and across website types.

Timeframe

The websites will be analyzed over the course of four weeks in January and February 2008. This timeframe has been selected because of its nearness to New Years' Day and the tendency for individuals to seek out information related to their resolutions. Forty-five websites (15 general sites, 15 health information sites, and 15 blogs) will be analyzed Monday/Wednesday/Friday for the first and third weeks of the study. The remaining forty-five websites will be analyzed Monday/Wednesday/Friday for the second and fourth weeks of the study. By analyzing each site multiple times, the changing nature of sponsorship on specific sites and site types can be determined.

Research Questions

The research questions are:

- What are the predominant structural features and characteristics of Internet sponsorships?
- What types of websites are more likely to have sponsorships?
- To what extent do different website types employ similar or different sponsorships?
- What are the most predominant sponsorship characteristics, if any, among similar and different website types?

Operational Definitions

For the purpose of this research, the following terms will be defined as such:

- *Website Type* – The genre of the website.
- *Sponsorship Type* – The graphic and/or textual representation of the sponsorship
- *Characteristics* – Characteristics are the specific features of a sponsorship such as location and relevance.
 - *Location* – Where the sponsorship is located on the page.
 - *Relevance* – The fit (or congruence) between a sponsor and a sponsored property (Rodgers, 2003).
- *Structure* – The combination of various characteristics that identify a sponsorship. For example, if health website sponsorships are consistently at the top of the page, high fit, and do not link to the sponsor's page this would be the health website characteristic.

Categories

The categories to be examined are: website type, sponsorship type, sponsored material, identification, and characteristics.

Website Type/Format

Websites from the frames using Technorati.com and HealthRatings.org for selection are already formatted or typified as

“blog” and “health” respectively. All sites not formatted as blogs, are identified as “regular websites.” The general sites chosen from Alexa.com will be typified using existing Nielsen/NetRatings categories. The Nielsen/Net Ratings categories being used are (examples follow in parentheses):

- General Community (Facebook.com)
- Portals and Search Engines (AOL.com)
- General/National News (CNN.com)
- Sports & Recreation (ESPN.com)
- Finance (Money.AOL.com)
- Shopping & Auction (Ebay.com)
- Entertainment (People.com)
- Weather (Weather.com)

Separating sites by type will allow for analysis of sponsorships within and across types.

Sponsorship Type

Sponsorship type will examine the physical form the sponsorship takes. These variables are:

- Animated box (A box that has motion)
- Static box (A graphic within a box that does not move)
- Text- (Unlinked text (graphic text such as logos included) identifying the content or function (i.e. search) on the page as provided by a sponsorship.)
- Link (A link on the page identified as a "Sponsored Link")
- Banner (A banner on the page identifying the content or function (i.e. search) on the page as provided by a sponsorship.)
- Border (Images surrounding the content on three sides that stay still as the content is scrolled down the page)

Sponsored Material

This category examines the property that is being sponsored. The sponsored material can range from the entire site to a single function on the site, such as the search engine on the site or a toolbar. This category will be used to establish if certain types of sponsorships are more prevalent with certain types of sites. The variables for this category are:

- Entire site
- One section on a site
- One page on a site
- Article
- Forum
- Live chat
- Tools
- Search

Disclosure

This category will look at whether the sponsorship is identified by the use of the words "Sponsored by," "Sponsorship," or "Brought to you By." If a sponsorship is identified whether or not the word sponsorship is specifically used, if the sponsorship is contained in its own box, and if there are multiple sponsorships within a box. Unidentified sponsorship will be coded based on Harvey's (2006)

definition of true online sponsorships where there is an “absence of any other advertising on the page” (400).

Characteristics

These categories will examine whether the sponsorships follow the research findings supporting online sponsorship. This component is crucial for assessing if advertising theory is being applied to advertising practice. The characteristics being examined are:

- Relevance
 - Is the sponsorship a high fit/low fit with the sponsored material? Fit, which is also called congruence, is determined to be “high” or “low” based on the relevance of a sponsorship. Rodgers (2003) attributes high relevance to stronger associative links that lead to improved recall and attitudes towards a sponsor (68).
 - High fit – According to Simmons and Becker-Olson (2006), high fit sponsorships are consistent with consumer expectations about the sponsor and the sponsored property (155). An example of a high fit sponsorship is a heart medication sponsoring a heart health section on a website.
 - Low fit – According to Simmons and Becker-Olson (2006), low fit sponsorships are not consistent with

consumer expectations about the sponsor and the sponsored property (155). An example of a low fit sponsorship is a credit card sponsoring a heart health section on a website.

- Created fit – Simmons and Becker-Olson (2006) describe created fit as a “...semantic link between otherwise unrelated organizations...” (161). Their finding indicate that created fit sponsorships showed significantly more successful than low-fit sponsorships and were on par with high (or natural) fit sponsorships. An example of a created fit sponsorship would be a credit card company sponsoring a heart health section and using the tagline, “Visa - Improving your quality of life.”

- Prominence

- Where is the sponsorship located on the vertical plane of the screen?
 - Top- Above all content or aligned with the highest placed content or graphics.
 - Middle- In the middle of content, after a natural break (Rodgers, Cameron, and Brill 2005).
 - Bottom- Below any website content or graphics.

- Location
 - Where is the sponsorship located on the horizontal plane of the screen?
 - Left – To the left of the content
 - Center – In the center of the page
 - Right – To the right of the content

Analysis

SPSS 16.0 will be used to analyze the data. Descriptive statistics will be used to examine the RQs and chi-square analyses will be conducted where needed.

Sample [4]

Most Read Health/Diet/Pharmacy Sites (Health compiled 7/07, Diet compiled 9/06, Pharmacy compilation date not found, entitled "latest results")

Source: HealthRatings.org

1. National Institutes of Health
2. WebMD
3. MSN Health and Fitness
4. About Health
5. MedicineNet.com
6. Yahoo! Health
7. Mayo Clinic.com
8. Real Age
9. AOL Health
10. Drugs.com
11. QualityHealth.com
12. Aetna InteliHealth
13. Kids Health
14. Healthology

15. RxList
16. Everyday Health
17. MedHelp.org
18. Prevention.com
19. eMedicineHelp
20. familydoctor.org
21. Weight Watchers
22. eDiets
23. The Sonoma Diet
24. Light n' Fit
25. The Biggest Loser Club
26. The South Beach Diet
27. Trim Life
28. Walgreens.com
29. CVS.com
30. RiteAid.com

Most Read Blogs (compiled Jan 13, 2007)

Source: Technorati.com

1. Engadget
2. Gizmodo
3. TechCrunch

4. Breaking News and Opinions on the Huffington Post
5. Boing Boing
6. LifeHacker
7. Ars Technica
8. Blog de Beppe Grillo
9. Mashable!
10. Icanhazcheezburger.com
11. Daily Kos: State of the Nation
12. TMZ.com
13. PerezHilton.com
14. PostSecret
15. Seth's Blog
16. ReadWriteWeb
17. ProBlogger.net
18. Official Google Blog
19. TreeHugger
20. Smashing Magazine
21. Kotaku
22. Dosh Dosh
23. Copyblogger
24. Think Progress
25. Consumerist: Shoppers Bite Back

26. Valleywag
27. GigaOM
28. ShoeMoney
29. Crooks and Liars
30. Scobleizer

Most Read General (compiled January 13, 2007)

Source: Alexa.com

1. Google
2. Yahoo!
3. MySpace
4. YouTube
5. Facebook
6. Windows Live
7. Ebay
8. Wikipedia
9. MSN
10. Craigslist
11. Amazon.com
12. AOL
13. Blogger
14. Megaupload

15. Go
16. The Internet Movie Database
17. Photobucket
18. CNN
19. Microsoft
20. Flickr
21. Comcast.net
22. Rapidshare
23. LiveJournal
24. Weather
25. AOL Instant Messenger
26. Veoh.com
27. GameFAQs
28. Digg
29. Best Buy
30. New York Times

Code Sheet [5]

WEBSITE NAME: _____

SPONSOR NAME: _____

DATE: _____

Website Type

General Community (1)

Portals and Search Engines (2)

General/National News (3)

Sports and Recreation (4)

Finance (5)

Shopping and Auction (6)

Entertainment (7)

Weather (8)

Health (9)

Technology (10)

Other (11)

Page Type

Main page (1)

Sub page (2)

Other (3)

Page Format

Regular website (1)

Blog (2)

Forum (3)

Other (4)

Sponsorship Present

Yes (1)

No (2)

Sponsorship Type

Animated box (1)

Static box (2)

Text (3)

Link (4)

Banner (5)

Border (6)

Other (7)

N/A (8)

Sponsored Material

Entire site (1)

One page on site (2)

One section on site (3)

Article (4)

Forum (5)

Live chat (6)

Tool (7)

Search (8)

Other (9)

N/A (10)

Unclear (11)

Disclosure

Clearly (1)

Unclear (2)

None (3)

N/A (4)

Hyperlink

None (1)

Within current/partner site (2)

Sponsor main page (3)

Sponsor deep page (4)

N/A (5)

Relevance

High fit (1)

Low fit (2)

Created fit (3)

N/A (4)

Prominence

Top (1)

Middle (2)

Bottom (3)

N/A (4)

Other (5)

Location

Left (1)

Center (2)

Right (3)

N/A (4)

Other (5)

Code Book [6]

Website Name: The official name of the website being looked at.

Sponsor Name: The provided name of the specific sponsorship being examined on the website. (*Note:* Multiple sponsor names can be found on one website and will each be coded independently.)

Website Type: A listing of the genre of website. Write in additional types not represented by the categories under the "Other" category.

Page Format: The style of the webpage. Used to differentiate between standard websites and blogs.

Page Type: The main page of the website or a sub page reached via a link on the first page. For each main page visited, two separate sub pages (each directed from the homepage) should be visited.

Sponsorship Type: The appearance of the sponsorship. For example, a box with animation or a static box.

Sponsored Material: The website feature that the sponsorship is providing (claims to be providing) for the user. This may vary from the entire site to a section of the site to a search feature, among others.

Level of Disclosure: The level to which the sponsorship is identified as being such.

Sponsorship Hyperlink: Whether or not the sponsorship is hyperlinked to another page.

Main Page Link: Hyperlink to the sponsor's homepage

Deep Link: Hyperlink to a page on the sponsor's website other than the home page.

Relevance: The degree to which the sponsor is logically related to the sponsored property. High fit sponsorships are clearly related to the sponsored property. Low fit are not. Created fit sponsorships are sponsors that do not seem to relate to the sponsored property, but offer an explanation that increases relevant ties between the two.

Prominence: How prominent a sponsorship is on a site in relation to placement at the top, middle or bottom.

Location: Where the sponsorship is located on a horizontal plane.

Method [7]

Pre-Testing

Four sites were used for pre-testing. The sites were randomly selected using the random number generator on Random.org. The sites were:

- Mashable – a social networking site
- Weight Watchers – a diet site
- Game FAQs – a technology site
- Valleywag – a technology site

Pre-testing was conducted on February 12 and February 16, 2008. The 4 sites (12 pages) were coded for the first time on February 12 and screen shots were taken of each page. Screen shots were taken to ensure uniformity for the second pre-test.

The second pre-test was conducted on February 16 using the screen shots. Upon completing the second pre-test, the data was tested for intracoder reliability using Holsti's formula. Of the 132 variables coded, there were 5 discrepancies. This resulted in a score of .96.

The only change to the codebook and code sheet prior to beginning testing was the addition of the “Unclear (11)” variable to the “Sponsored Material” category.

Coding

Coding was conducted three days a week for four weeks, beginning February 18, 2008 and ending March 14, 2008. On weeks 1 and 3, all odd numbered websites from the sampling frame were coded; on weeks 2 and 4, all even numbered websites were coded. For each site that was visited the main page was coded first. Any sponsorships found on the page were coded as individual units of analysis. Subsequently, two sub pages on each site were also coded. Main or sub pages that did not have any sponsorships were coded as “No Sponsorship” and placed in a separate file when data collection ended. Approximately 250 sponsorships were discovered each day.

Upon completion of coding, all coding files were combined equaling 4,014 potential sponsorships coded. Of those, 1,047 were non-sponsorships - pages where a sponsorship was not found. The remaining, 2,967 were individual sponsorships.

Post-Testing

Following the completion of each day of coding, 10% of the sponsorships found that day were randomly selected using the random number generator on Random.org. Screen shots were taken of these

sponsorships (and any pages they linked to) and were saved for reliability testing. All reliability testing was done on March 18, 2008. Reliability testing was done on 298 sponsorships. Out of those 298 sponsorships there were 3,267 variables. Of those variables, there were 161 discrepancies, resulting in an intracoder reliability score of .9507.

Results

[8]

Sponsorship Characteristics Across Website Types

Likelihood of Having a Sponsorship on Different Types of Websites

A cross tabulation run comparing Website Type * Sponsorship Present produced $\chi^2 (9, N = 4014) = 8.95, p < .001$.

Website Type	Sponsorships Found	Page Visited & No Sponsorship Found
General Community	172	157
Portals & Search Engines	144	63
General/National News	99	75
Sports & Recreation	0	7
Shopping & Auction	23	96
Entertainment	17	42
Weather	51	6
Health	1595	309
Technology	839	133
Other	27	159

Table 1 Website Type & Sponsorship Presence

Sponsorships were more likely to be found on Technology and Health sites. When a Technology page was examined, 86.3% of the time a sponsorship was found. When a Health page was examined, 83.8% of the time a sponsorship was found.

Another type of site that offered a high likelihood of having a sponsorship was Weather (89.5%), but only 57 sponsorships were found for the Weather category – all taken from Weather.com. On the

other hand, there were 972 Technology samples and 1904 Health samples from many sites. As Weather.com was the only high-trafficked weather site given by the sample-selecting resources, it is reasonable to assume that if a Internet-user was seeking out weather information on the web, he or she would be highly likely to see a sponsorship on a main- or sub-page at Weather.com.

Although the Sports & Recreation sample was very small (7), not a single sponsorship was found on a Sports & Recreation page, making it the least likely site to visit and encounter a sponsorship. The likelihood of visiting an Entertainment or Shopping & Auction website and finding a sponsorship were also low, 28.8% and 19.3%, respectively.

The sites that had the broadest content all offered similar likelihood of visiting and seeing a sponsorship. They were General Community (52.3%), Portals/Search Engines (69.6%), and General/National News (56.9%). With likelihood over 50% of finding a sponsorship when visiting these sites, the difference in relevance found between these three types of sites and health and websites is notable.

Website Type and Relevance

A cross tabulation comparing Website Type * Relevance produced $\chi^2 (32, N = 2967) = 3.97, p < .001$.

To begin with, a large number of sponsorships found on a general site, You Tube.com, were a relevance of "N/A" because of the unique situation of You Tube.com. Since You Tube.com is a video site that does not offer information relating to any one genre and the videos were on the "Sponsors" page, there was no content for the sponsors to fit with. Along with the Social Networking site, Facebook.com, You Tube.com presents an interesting opportunity that will be discussed later.

Website Type	High-Fit Sponsorships	Low-Fit Sponsorships	Created-Fit Sponsorships
General Community Portals & Search Engines	20	23	2
General/National News	114	20	6
Shopping & Auction	21	76	2
Entertainment	23	0	0
Weather	9	6	2
Health	1	28	22
Technology	1495	87	1
Other	684	124	0
	0	5	22

Table 2 Website Type & Relevance

That situation aside, sponsorships found on General Community websites were more often a low than high fit, though not by much. Portal and Search Engine sponsorships were found to be highly

relevant 79.2% of the time. The least relevant sponsorships among sites where a visitor was more than 50% likely to find sponsorships were on General/National News, with 76.8% of the sponsorships found being low-fit sponsorship.

The sites most likely to have sponsorships were also the sites most likely to have relevant sponsorships. 81.5% of sponsorships found on Technology sites were high-fit. On Health sites the percentage of high-fit sponsorships found was 93.7%. These findings will be further discussed, including their relationships to structure, in the discussion.

Of the total created-fit sponsorships identified, 81.5% were

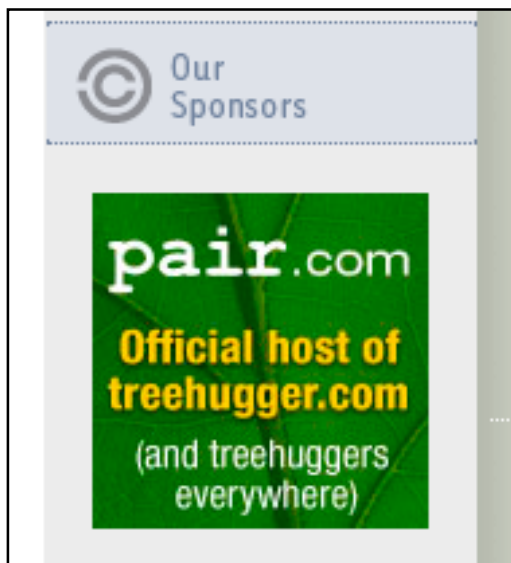


Figure 1 Pair.com on TreeHugger.com

found on websites categorized as “Other.” The prime example of a created-fit sponsorship on an “Other” website is the Pair.com sponsorship on TreeHugger.com, an environmental blog. Pair.com is a web hosting site, which is not an industry usually associated with environmentalism. However, the

static box seen in Figure 1 clearly identifies Pair.com as a sponsor of

TreeHugger.com and draws a connection between the two – this

website hosting company supports environmentalists. Pair.com was one of the most consistent sponsors found over the course of the research.

The next highest incidence of created-fit sponsorships was found in the Weather website type, specifically Weather.com. These sponsorships connected products, services, and retailers with Weather. The Home Depot sponsored a section that changed weekly and featured weatherizing tips for the home. Because the Home Depot offers so many home improvement services, relating the section directly to weather makes the sponsorship more relevant to the user. Other created-fit sponsors included Nationwide Insurance (addressing the need for insurance related specifically to weather damage) and Clorox cleaning products (connecting cleanliness to healthy travel on Weather.com's Travel page.)

Entertainment websites had had 11.8% of created-fit websites, often relating the sponsor to celebrity news or scandal. On General Community (1.2%), Portals & Search Engines (4.2%), and General/National News (2%) sites, created-fit sponsorships were rare. The lowest created-fit findings were on Health (.1%), Technology (0%) and, Shopping & Auction (0%).

Website Type and Page Placement

As noted in the operational definitions, prominence and location were coded to describe placement on vertical and horizontal planes, respectively. Prominence and location were cross tabulated within each website type to determine common placement structures among the different types of websites.

Within the website type General Community, Location * Prominence was cross tabulated producing a χ^2 (16, N = 172) = 397.42, $p < .001$.

The results for this section are unique, once again because of YouTube.com. The sponsorships boxes linking to video pages made up the entire page and were the content, which negated the sponsorship location as there would have been an equal amount of sponsorships for each page location. For this reason, these sponsorships were coded as "Other." Because of the sheer quantity of sponsorships on the YouTube.com sponsors channel page, the "other" placement of prominence and location makes up for 66.9% of the results.

Following that, the most common sponsorship placement on a page was midway down, towards the center, which was coded as Middle (2), Middle (2). This placement accounted for 11.6%. Placements at the bottom-center and top left both made up 6.4% of

the page placements. All other placements on General Community websites made up less than 5%.

	Left Side of Page	Middle of Page	Right Side of Page
Top of Page	0	1	11
Midway Down Page	0	5	0
Bottom of Page	4	11	20

Table 3 Page Placement on General Community Websites

Within the website type Portals & Search Engines, Location * Prominence was cross tabulated producing a $\chi^2(4, N = 144) = 44.36$, $p < .001$.

The page placement of sponsorships for Portals & Search Engines is much more evenly distributed, with no one page placement counting for more than 50% of the total. The placement that was slightly more common than the others was midway down the page on the right side, which accounted for 32.6%. Other common placements

	Left Side of Page	Middle of Page	Right Side of Page
Top of Page	4	33	3
Midway Down Page	0	40	47
Bottom of Page	0	17	0

Table 4 Page Placement on Portals & Search Engine Websites

included midway down and centered (27.8%) and at the top of the page in the middle (22.9%).

The website type General/National News, Location * Prominence was cross tabulated producing a $\chi^2(4, N = 99) = 8.57$, $p > .05$. As this

data produced insignificant results, the category General/National News will not be discussed in relation to page placement. Likewise, the Shopping & Auction and Other types also produced inconclusive results and will not be discussed.

The website type Entertainment, Location * Prominence was cross tabulated producing a $\chi^2(4, N = 17) = 17.36, p < .05$.

The Entertainment site type was unique because 17.6% (3) of the sponsorships found could not be described by location and prominence. A unique sponsorship feature utilized by blogs, and particularly Entertainment blogs in this case, is a border. This border goes along the top and sides of the page and stays still as the content of the blog scrolls down. Although this example was only found three times, it presents a new sponsorship format that is particularly friendly to the blog style page format.

	Left Side of Page	Middle of Page	Right Side of Page
Top of Page	0	0	0
Midway Down Page	0	16	24
Bottom of Page	11	0	0

Table 5 Page Placement on Weather.com

The most common sponsorship page placement on Entertainment sites was midway down the page on the right. These ten sponsorships accounted for 58.8% of the page placements on Entertainment sites.

The website type Weather, Location * Prominence was cross tabulated producing a $c^2(2, N=51) = 51.00, p < .001$.

Out of all the possible placement combinations, Weather site sponsorships were only found in three placements: Midway down the page in the middle, midway down the page on the right, and at the bottom of the page on the left. The simple reasoning for this lack of any other placements is that there was only Weather site, Weather.com. Although other site types show patterns with the type, this example merely serves to show the uniformity of one site's sponsorship use.

The website type Health, Location * Prominence was cross tabulated producing a $c^2(4, N = 1595) = 1.16, p < .001$.

The large majority of sponsorships on Health sites are found at the bottom of the page, towards the middle. This 72.5% of page placements can be directly attributed to three of the four sites sampled that are part of the WebMD network. The sites WebMD.com,

	Left Side of Page	Middle of Page	Right Side of Page
Top of Page	0	0	24
Midway Down Page	150	123	141
Bottom of Page	1	1156	0

Table 6 Page Placement on Health Sites

MedicineNet.com, and RxList.com all use an identical format for sponsorships. These sponsorships were found at the exact same



Figure 2 Sponsorships on WebMD, Medicine Net, and RxList

placement on the main page and sub pages of all three websites. An example of the sponsorships found on these sites can be seen in Figure 2. The remaining WebMD network site sampled, eMedicine.com,



Figure 3 Sponsorships on eMedicine

offered a different page placement, which can be seen in Figure 3. This placement style made up for 9.4% of the Health sponsorships. Additionally, eMedicine.com only featured sponsorships on the main page. These differences in

placement and other characteristics suggest a differentiation being made by the network identified through the structure of its sponsorships. This, as well as the use of different sponsors among the network websites, will be addressed following the analysis of Sponsorship Type, Sponsored Material, and Hyperlink.

Another common placement was the midway down the page in the middle, which made up only 7.7% of the results. Although the percentage seems meager, the enormous quantity of WebMD sponsorships overshadows this result. This placement was found one hundred and twenty-three times, most often on the About Health Network in the form of a link. Placement of Sponsorship Types will be discussed in a further section.

	Left Side of Page	Middle of Page	Right Side of Page
Top of Page	95	3	607
Midway Down Page	0	46	55
Bottom of Page	0	10	23

Table 7 Page Placement on Technology Websites

The website type Technology, Location * Prominence was cross tabulated producing $\chi^2(4, N = 839) = 311.69, p < .001$.

The highest occurring page placement was at the top of the page on the right side (72.3%). This can be attributed to the commonality of "Sponsor Galleries" on tech blogs, which were nearly always located in this position. An example of a sponsor gallery from the site SmashingMagazine.com can be seen in Figure 4. These top-right Sponsor Galleries were found in other blogs, but were nowhere near as prevalent as on Technology websites. These findings indicate a trend

among this type of website to have a gallery of static or animated boxes in a similar place to identify sponsors.

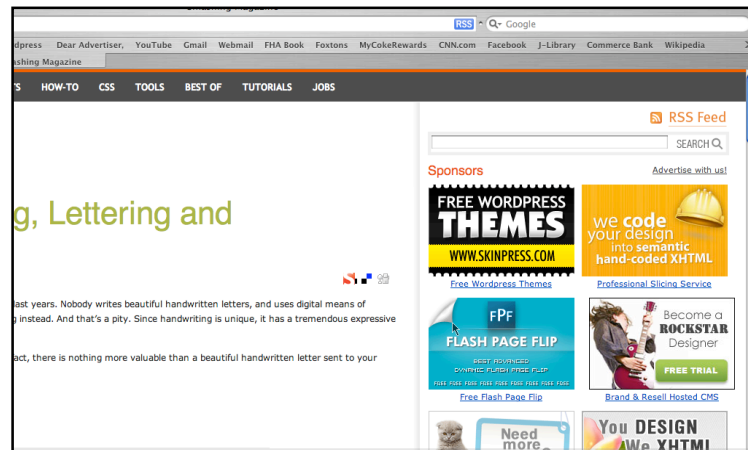


Figure 4 Sponsor Gallery on SmashingMagazine.com

The next most frequent placement was top left, which accounted for 11.6%, followed by midway down the page on the right side, which made up 6.6%. All other placements on the page represented less than 5% of the sponsorships on Technology sites.

What is notable about the page placement of sponsorships across Website Type is the appearance of either same ownership or web designer trending. Pertaining to the example of the Technology “Sponsor Galleries;” presumably these galleries would be equally effective on the left side of the page, or a bit further down like the created-fit sponsorship on TreeHugger.com. However, only Technology websites made such high use of this format. Additionally, the rationale

of the WebMD network sites (whose noteworthy disclosure will be later discussed) for putting the sponsorships at the bottom is to not interfere with un-sponsored content. The sites that tended to have more evenly distributed page placements were the sites that offer much broader content and are more likely to be part of a community, such as technological bloggers. Lastly, based on the data on likelihood of sponsorship and relevance, consistent page placement is an indicator of websites that frequently feature high-fit sponsorships.

Website Type and Sponsorship Type

As described in the operational definitions, sponsorship type means the appearance of the sponsorship. Sponsorships come in many shapes and sizes and are an important characteristic of sponsorship structures as a whole. A cross tabulation comparing Website Type * Sponsorship Type resulted in $\chi^2 (48, N = 2967) = 5.45, p < .001$.

	Animated Box	Static Box	Text	Link	Banner	Border	Other
General Community	1	9	1	35	0	0	126
Portals & Search Engines	2	22	87	33	0	0	0
General/National News	0	72	3	24	0	0	0
Shopping & Auction	0	0	0	23	0	0	0
Entertainment	0	0	14	0	0	3	0
Weather	3	13	0	35	0	0	0
Health	0	2	82	1511	0	0	0
Technology	181	465	59	128	6	0	0
Other	15	12	0	0	0	0	0

Table 8 Website Type & Sponsorship Type

Once again, YouTube.com resulted in unique results for General Community websites. The YouTube.com format will be discussed later.

Following the 73.3% of General Community site sponsorships that were classified as "Other" because of the nature of YouTube.com sponsorships, the next most prevalent sponsorship type on General Community websites was a sponsored link. This sponsorship type accounted for 20.3% of sponsorships on General Community sites. The static box sponsorship type represented 5.2% of sponsorships found on General Community sites and the remaining sponsorship types each counted for less than 1%.

Text was the most common type of sponsorship found on Portals and Search Engines. 60.4% of the sponsorships found on these types of site were plain or graphic text that was not within a box. This structural characteristic can be explained because many of the sponsored materials on Portals and Search Engines are tools (such as diet calculators and stock checkers). A cross tabulation for Portals and Search Engines, Sponsorship Type * Sponsored Material showed that when the sponsored material was a tool, the sponsorship type was text 100% of the time. This cross tabulation produced χ^2 (15, N=144) =198.92, $p < .001$. Sponsored materials will be discussed at length in the next section, but it is of importance pertaining to this section to note that nearly one-third of sponsored tools were found on Search

Engines and Portals. As for drawing distinctions between sponsorship types and website types, Search Engines and Portals have a high number of sponsorships that appear as text because of their high number of sponsored tools.

Sponsored links represented 22.9% of sponsorships found on Portals and Search Engines. Sponsorships in the form of boxes were less likely to be found, with static boxes accounting for 15.3% of the sponsorships on Portals and Search Engines, and animated boxes counting for only 1.4%.

The majority of sponsorships on General/National News sites were static boxes. These sponsorships accounted for 72.7% of the sponsorships found on news sites. An example of a static box was found on CNN.com. This sponsorship by Career Builder was for a "Quick Job Search." Other static boxes were for searches or were listed as outside resources. The static boxes on MSNBC.com failed to be disclosed as sponsored, although the presence of sponsorship was evident to the researcher.

Once again sponsored links accounted for nearly a quarter (24.2%) of the sponsorships on General/National News sites. It is worth mentioning that, although they share an identical appearance, links that take the user to sponsored content and links that do not provide any content and take the user to an outside site (so-called

"Sponsored Links") are very different. These differences will be further addressed in the Discussion.

One hundred percent of the sponsorships in the Shopping and Auction website type were links and found on BestBuy.com.

BestBuy.com is an example of links that take users to sponsored content. CNET, a technology information network, sponsored sections on the BestBuy.com website about home theater systems. This use of links for sponsorship fits the definition of sponsorship that pertains to the traditional use of the term.

On Entertainment websites, 82.4% of the sponsorships were links. Although only 17.6% of sponsorships on Entertainment sites were borders, they accounted for 100% of borders across the website types. At this state of online sponsorship, Entertainment websites are the only genre that has picked up on this new form of sponsorship. Because 52.9% of the Entertainment sites were blogs, this sponsorship type can be more narrowly identified with not just Entertainment sites in general, but Entertainment blogs.

Links were the most common sponsorship type for the Weather website type, representing 68.6% of the sponsorships found. 25.5% of the sponsorships were static boxes. The remaining 5.9% were animated boxes.

The overwhelming majority of sponsorships on Health sites were links. Links accounted for 94.7% of sponsorships on Health sites. Additionally, 84.5% of the links found across the websites were on Health sites. Although text sponsorships made up 33.3% of text sponsorships among the website types, they only represented 5.1% of the sponsorships on Health sites.

On Technology sites, the presence of the aforementioned “Sponsor Galleries” was evident through the sponsorship types. On these sites, 55.4% of sponsorships were static boxes and animated boxes represented 21.6%. The images of websites saved from the research, such as the one that was shown in Figure 4, corroborate this evidence and the uniformity of “Sponsor Galleries” among Technology websites.

The websites coded as “Other” produced a finding of interest. 100% of sponsorships found on these sites were either animated or static boxes. Animated boxes represented 55.6% and static boxes represented 44.4%. The lack of links (specifically, “sponsored links” on the “Other” sites, which tend to have narrow focuses, will be examined in the following section.

The nature of links across website types

As previously mentioned, links fall into two distinct categories that reveal the complexity of the use of sponsorship (or even just

terms associated with the idea of sponsorship) on the Internet. To examine the nature of links across website types a cross tabulation was run across Website Types, Sponsorship Type * Relevance. For Health websites, which will be looked at first, the χ^2 (12, N=1595) = 910.14, $p < .001$.

When it came to links on Health websites, 74.7% of them sponsored a section on the website, which represented 98.3% of the links that led to a sponsored section. These represent the links that uphold the accepted definition of sponsorship. On General Community websites, which had a χ^2 (12, N = 172) = 200.62, $p < .001$, the material being sponsored was unclear 100% of the time. On Portals and Search Engines, which had a χ^2 (15, N = 144) = 198.93, $p < .001$, the material being sponsored by links was also unclear 100% of the time. On General/National News sites, which had χ^2 (6, N = 99) = 44.24, $p < .001$, the material being sponsored by links was, once again, unclear 100% of the time. For Weather, which had χ^2 (2, N = 51) = 16.81, $p < .001$, material sponsored by links was unclear 68.6% of the time. Technology sites, which had χ^2 (12, N = 839) = 1.64, $p < .001$, also had links that did not clearly sponsor any material 100% of the time. As mentioned before, sites in the "Other" category did not feature any links.

These findings suggest that Health sites are the only sites using links in alignment with the definition of sponsorship. The rest of the sites using links are using "Sponsored Links," which is an abuse of the meaning of sponsorship as defined in the traditional sense. Simply put, a "Sponsored Link" is a text-link advertisement. The "sponsorship" being that an individual or company paid to have the link placed on the site. When followed, the link takes the user to an outside site. The use of the term sponsorship in association with these links creates potential problems for current links that do provide content. Equally important is the possibility that future sponsors who use links will lose credibility because of the wide spread use of "sponsored links".

Another important aspect of sponsored links is relevance. A cross tabulation was performed for Sponsored Material * Sponsorship Relevance * Sponsorship Types. Links produced $\chi^2 (16, N = 1789) = 2.21, p < .001$.

Links that sponsored sections on a website represented 73.3% of high-fit sponsorships. Links that did not sponsor any clear content on a website represented 96.4% of low-fit sponsorships. These links are not only misrepresenting the term sponsorship, but in many instances are failing to be relevant, a linchpin for sponsorships. If users notice irrelevance of many sponsored links, the use of the term sponsorship

could potentially have effects on the perception of all sponsorships across the Internet.

A cross tabulation of Sponsorship Type * Relevance * Website Type was run to examine which sites had the most irrelevant links. Links on General Community sites, which produced $c^2 (16, N = 172) = 2.02$, $p < .001$, were found to be low-fit 60% of the time. Links on Portals & Search Engines, which produced $c^2 (9, N = 144) = 1.3$, $p < .001$, were found to be low-fit 60.6% of the time. Links on General/National News sites, which produced $c^2 (4, N = 99) = 23.63$, $p < .001$, sites were found to be low-fit 91.7% of the time. What these sites have in common, aside from their high concentration of low-fit links, is the broadness of their content. These results suggested that the operators of these sites take little interest in the relevance of links to their sites. As previously mentioned, all of these low-fit links that are associating themselves with the term “sponsored” have the potential to hurt relevant links, whether or not they are sponsored links or links that actually sponsor content, on sites with a narrower content focus.

Website Type and Level of Disclosure

A cross tabulation run comparing Website Type * Level of Disclosure produced $c^2 (24, N = 2967) = 1.05$, $p < .001$.

Out of all the sponsorships found, 89.5% were clearly disclosed. The highest level of clear disclosure was found on “Other” sites, with 100% of the sponsorships found on these sites being clearly disclosed. Technology and Health sites had nearly as many clear disclosures, with 96.4% and 92.3%, respectively, clearly disclosed. 88.2% of sponsorships on Entertainment websites were clearly disclosed. As a result of the overall high level of clear disclosure, the other types of sites had relatively high levels, but also featured much higher levels of unclear and no disclosure than the site types mentioned above.

	Clear	Unclear	None
General Community Portals & Search Engines	153	5	14
General/National News	107	7	30
Shopping & Auction	50	2	46
Entertainment	0	4	19
Weather	15	0	2
Health	23	0	28
Technology	1472	120	3
Other	809	0	30
	27	0	0

Table 9 Website Type & Level of Disclosure

Out of all the sponsorships found, 4.7% were unclearly disclosed. Unclear disclosure occurred when content was identified as sponsored, but the sponsor was not identified or the user had to leave the site to determine who the sponsor was. The highest level of unclearly disclosed sponsorship was on Shopping & Auction websites, with 17.4% of the sponsorships found being unclear.

Although only 7.5% of sponsorships on Health sites had an unclear level of disclosure, these accounted for 87% of the unclear disclosures across the website types. The websites with the highest amount of unclear disclosures were EverydayHealth.com and Prevention.com. Both sites featured links to sponsored sections, but did not identify the sponsor or forced the user to click on vague ads that took the user from the section to the sponsor's page. Even upon reaching a sponsor's page, the sponsor was not always easily identifiable. The sponsorships from these sites are a stark contrast to the sites from the WebMD network, which identified 100% of the sponsorship. Although these sites are utilizing sponsorship in its true form, they have failed to perfect the structure in the way that the WebMD network has.

Out of all the sponsorships found, 5.8% were not disclosed. This content was judged by the researcher to be clearly sponsored, but lacked any identification of sponsorship. Weather.com failed to identify 54.6% of sponsorships found on the site. These sponsored links were identified as "Columbia Special Offers" (in reference to Columbia, MO, the researcher's location) and were structurally identical to sponsored links found on other sites. Additionally, a number of the sponsors were companies that used sponsored links on other websites researched. The inability of Weather.com to identify these sponsors is a contrast to

the other half of sponsorships found on the website, which were extremely sophisticated.

Sponsorship Characteristics Within Website Types

Just as important as examining how sponsorships are structured across website types is taking a look at how different sites within the same website type are structuring their sponsorships and making use of the terms sponsorship and sponsored. The presence or lack of uniformity within website types provides insight into whether sponsors and sponsees have developed formulas for sponsorships on website types, or have yet to harness the power of sponsorship on the Internet. This will be particularly important in the case of “sponsored links” and their relevance to site content.

Health

As a special focus of the research, sponsorships on Health websites deserve close examination. Although the massive amount of identical sponsorships on the WebMD network (fully disclosed, relevant links to a section within the website) count for a large portion of the data, there are other health websites that accept sponsorships and fail to meet the high standards set by the WebMD network. A cross tabulation within the Health Website Type for Sponsored Material *

Level of Disclosure was run. The resulting χ^2 (12, N = 1595) = 5.19, $p < .001$.

	Clear	Unclear	None
One page	45	0	0
One section	1025	120	3
Article	29	0	0
Tool	18	0	0
Unclear	340	0	0

Table 10 Sponsored Material & Level of Disclosure on Health Websites

100% of the unclear disclosures on a Health site were for sponsored sections. These 120 cases were all found on EverydayHealth.com and Prevention.com. An example of the links to the sponsorships on EverdayHealth.com can be seen in Figure 5. These links take the user to a section on the website about a condition described by the link.

EverydayHealth.com has editorial control of sections listed as "Sponsored Content," while the sponsor has editorial control of the sections listed as "From Our Sponsors." The section for the link that reads, "Living with Asthma" can be seen in Figure 6. As the figure

shows, there is no sponsor name given and although there are sections labeled "Advertisement," as though an ad should appear there, they are blank. There is even text that reads, "Content provided by:", with nothing following it.

Everyday Solutions sponsored content

- [ADHD Family Resource Center](#)
- [Everyday Solutions for ADHD](#)
- [Everyday Solutions for Allergies](#)
- [Living with Asthma](#)

From Our Sponsors:

- [New Hope for Alzheimer's](#)
- [Living with Bipolar](#)
- [Bottle-Feeding Guide](#)
- [Chemotherapy Support Center](#)
- [Living with Crohn's Disease](#)
- [Living with Migraines](#)
- [Nighttime Oral Health](#)
- [Depression Resource Center](#)

Figure 5 Sponsorships on EverydayHealth.com

Solutions for Asthma

Most Popular • Popul...

HEALTH™

[Health A-Z](#) [Drugs A-Z](#) [Specialists](#) [Support Groups](#) [News](#) [Recipes](#) [Toolkit](#)

Track your calories online with
Calorie Counter [Start Now!](#)

Special Report:
Everyday Solutions for Asthma

About This Special Report

Content provided by:

Part 6: Flu and Asthma: A Double Threat
Always unpleasant for everyone, the flu is especially dangerous for those with asthma—sometimes even life threatening. It can compromise lung function severely, making asthma symptoms worse. Prevention is key, as is early treatment. [Read more](#)

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Special Asthma Assessment
How controlled is your asthma?

- ☐ Well—I experience symptoms less than two times a week.
- ☐ Above Average—I experience symptoms more than two times a week but no more than once a day.
- ☐ Somewhat—I experience symptoms daily.
- ☐ Poorly—I continuously experience symptoms throughout the day.

[Don't Miss These Top 10 Asthma Tips](#)

Figure 6 Unclear Sponsored Content on EverydayHealth.com

In contrast to this example, is the section reached by clicking the link that reads, "Chemotherapy Support Center." The section is clearly labeled as, "Sponsored by: Chemotherapy.com." The inconsistency of these sponsorships demonstrates a lack of structure on the part of EverydayHealth.com.

Along with the WebMD sites, another site that provided an exemplary use of sponsorship online was WeightWatchers.com. WeightWatchers.com used sponsorship on only one page of the site, Food & Recipes. The link for "Tyson, Quick and Flavorful Dishes" takes the user to a page featuring a number of healthy dishes that can be made with chicken. This use of relevant sponsorships that provide useful content are an example of sponsorships that are mutually beneficial to both the sponsor and the sponsee, and also provide a benefit to the user. When they succeed, sponsorships such as these will provide the much desired "halo effect" described by Stipp and Schiavone (1996). Without having to directly appeal to the consumer, the sponsor has created goodwill for the service they have provided. Additionally, the sponsee has the benefit of the consumer's appreciation for providing healthy, delicious meals, if the sponsor's meals are up to par.

The "sponsored link," also made a number of appearances on Health sites. A cross tabulation run for Sponsored Material *

Sponsorship Type within Health sites produced χ^2 (12, N = 1595) = 9.10, $p < .001$. These results showed that although links only made up 22.4% of unclear sponsored material, 99.7% of unclear sponsored materials on Health sites were links.

Two sites with high numbers of “sponsored links” were eDiets.com and AboutHealth.com. What distinguish the two are the varying levels of relevance for these “sponsored links.” Although “sponsored links,” are not truly examples of sponsorship, relevance is important for maintaining the credibility of the term sponsorship and that of the website to stay somewhat in line with the concept of sponsorship. AboutHealth.com had eight sponsorships on the main page and each of the sub pages, Allergies and Asthma, examined. The sponsored links on the main page were for general health websites. They were not specialized, but did not need to be given the general nature of the home page. On the Allergies and Asthma pages, nearly all of the sponsorships were for websites related to the specific page topic. The only low-fit sponsorship to be found was for a company called Basement Systems, which refinished crawl spaces in homes. There was no connection made to benefits to allergies or asthma. The high-fit sponsorships provided, to some degree, the benefits that true sponsorships provide. The links to relevant content, products, and services gave the user access to many other sites that were in line

with the condition being researched. On the other hand, the low-fit sponsorship offered no additional information that would assist the consumer with his or her present needs.

Although eDiets.com had high-fit links, the number of low-fit links was much higher than the other Health Sites discussed previously. While some links offered highly relevant solutions, such as stretch mark removal or weight loss supplements, others (which appeared more than once) were very low fit. Keeping in mind that eDiets.com is a site directed towards women (there was not a single image of a man on the site), the relevance of a sponsorship for a product called Prostate Formula is very low. Other low-fit sponsorships included links for online marketing surveys, fundraising training courses, medical hair restoration, laser eye surgery, lab created diamonds, and sleep aids. With the wealth of diet products, it shows a lack of strategy on the part of eDiets.com for allowing so many low-fit products to be associated with the term "sponsored." A more effective method could be to label high-fit links as sponsorships and low fit as advertisements, which are not expected to be relevant to the content.

As far as the overall structure of Health site sponsorships, it is notable that there was not a single sponsorship that took the form of an animated box, and that 94.7% of sponsorships on Health sites were links. The animated box, arguably the most attention-grabbing format

of those found, is a contrast to the understated appearance of a link. Thus, the pattern of links among Health websites shows a level of discretion among sites of this type.

Technology

A cross-tabulation of Technology sites was run to determine the number of Technology site sponsorships that were found on blogs.

Page Type * Page Format produced $c^2 (2, N = 839) = 2.65, p < .001$.

85.8% of sponsorships found of Technology pages were on blogs. As mentioned earlier, more than any other website type the blog community had developed unique structures of the sponsorships with "Sponsor Galleries." The results have already shown that sponsor galleries are usually located at the top, right hand side of the page. Other important characteristics, such as sponsorship type and sponsored material also showed relative uniformity.

Of all of the sponsorships found on Technology websites, 55.4% were static boxes and 21.6% were animated boxes. For the total sample, sponsorships were static boxes 20.1% of the time and animated boxes 6.8% of the time. This large difference indicates an important relationship between technology websites and box type sponsorships.

Another distinguishing feature of Technology sponsorships is the sponsored material. A cross tabulation for Website Type * Sponsorship

Type produced c^2 (64, N = 2967) = 4.03, $p < .001$. 95.8% of the sponsorships for an entire site were found on Technology websites. Since the majority of Technology sponsorships were on blogs, another cross tabulation was run comparing Page Format * Sponsored Material *Website Type. For Technology sites the results produced c^2 (6, N = 839) = 91.7, $p < .001$. 100% of the sponsorships for an entire site Technology site were found on blogs. These results indicate that the many technology blogs have adopted a similar format for their sponsorships.

General Community

Of the General Community sites sampled, two produced results

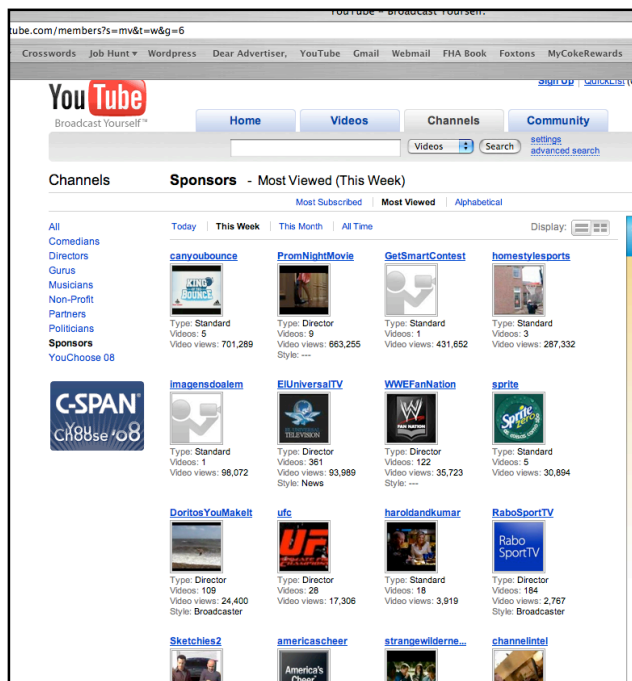


Figure 7 Sponsors Channel on YouTube.com

that showed sophisticated utilization of online sponsorship. The first, YouTube.com, has been responsible for the many unique results for the General Community sites. YouTube.com has a section on the websites for its many "Channels." Just

like television channels, the channels on YouTube.com are based on different types of content. Channel pages are organized by types, which include Comedians, Non-Profit, Musicians, and Gurus, among others. There is even a channel (You Choose 08) dedicated to the 2008 election.

The Sponsors channel, which can be seen in Figure 7, is dedicated solely to sponsored video pages. These videos run the gamut of products and services, ranging from tax services to professional wrestling to movies to soft drinks. An example of a sponsored video page can be seen in Figure 8.

What makes these videos unique in the world of sponsorship on a website is the lack of relevance. YouTube.com is all about videos, simply put. The content of the video makes no difference on this site, which provides sponsors with a unique opportunity. The sponsored content doesn't have to be relevant to the site, because there is nothing to be relevant to. These circumstances give new meaning to McLuhan's adage, "The medium is the message."

YouTube.com offers sponsors the ability to connect with users who are part of the YouTube.com community. Not only do they offer users videos to simply watch, many allow for users to participate in the page and upload their own videos.

Although sponsorships like this could not be used every type of website, YouTube.com's sophisticated use of sponsorships is a prime example of how different websites can tailor sponsorships to their identity and strengths.



Figure 8 WWE Sponsored Page on YouTube.com

Another website that has taken advantage of sponsorship that can be tailored to the site's unique features is the social networking site Facebook.com. Facebook.com allows sponsors to create groups that are sponsored by companies. These groups offer Facebook.com users to form communities based on their affinity for these groups. Sponsorships often appear on a user's homepage in the news feed. The news feed is a list of happenings on Facebook.com, such as what friends joined a new group or what friend added new pictures. The clearly labeled sponsorships appear in the news feed too, and move down the page as new updates are added by the system. One of these

announcements was for mark., a youth-targeted division of Avon cosmetics.

When the user follows the link in the news feed announcement, she is taken to the mark. Facebook.com group. In the top, right corner of the group is the identification of sponsorship. This is especially important, because users can create their own groups and the distinction is critical for the credibility of Facebook.com and the sponsor. As a member of the group, members can post photos, write on the “wall” (a message board) of the group’s page, watch videos, participate in discussions, enter to win prizes, and more. Additionally, a user’s membership in the group can be seen by her friends, further spreading the word. As of April 12, 2008, the mark. group on Facebook.com had 30,763 members.

Sponsorships like this one on Facebook.com are an excellent example of traditional sponsorship, evolved by its presence online. Just like a traditional sponsorship, through payment, the sponsorship of the group provides for an experience. Except on the Internet, sponsorships such as this one allow for instant interaction with others across the globe. Additionally, this evolution is also seen in the fact that the sponsor is the focus of the experience. This creates an ongoing, interactive relationship between the sponsor and the consumer. A presence in the life of a consumer through a sponsored

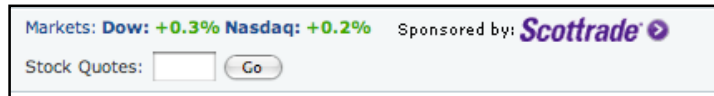
group creates many more opportunities for the transfer of the “halo effect” than a one-time visit to a beauty seminar, for example, that has been sponsored by Avon cosmetics.

Portals & Search Engines

Portals and Search Engines are unique because of the broadness of their main page content, and the many specialized sub-pages pages. A cross tabulation run for Website Type * Relevance produced $\chi^2 (32, N = 2967) = 3.98, p < .001$. These results showed that sponsorships found on Portals and Search Engines were relevant 79.2% of the time. The majority of the low-fit sponsorships were found on AOL.com’s City Guide page. These were sponsored links on a page that was devoted to activities in St. Louis, but often linked to restaurants or nightclubs in other cities.

A sharp contrast to this low level of fit was on AOL.com’s Autos page. Likewise, Yahoo.com had relevant, sophisticated sponsorships on the page as well. Yahoo.com featured an insurance section sponsored by State Farm Insurance, as well as sections sponsored by carmakers Toyota and Suzuki. AOL.com had a luxury car review section sponsored by Lexus, and other pages sponsored by carmakers Toyota, Volvo, and Hyundai. The sponsorships on these pages were prime examples of traditional sponsorship principles translated to the Internet.

Another common feature used by both Yahoo.com and AOL.com on their main pages



was the “stock

checker.” An example

Figure 9 Scottrade on Yahoo.com

of the stock checker tool on Yahoo.com can be seen in Figure 9. On Yahoo.com, the tool was sponsored only by Scottrade over the course of the research. On AOL.com, Scottrade and E*Trade were sponsors of the tool. On both sites, these were the only sponsored tools. As these findings and the findings on the auto pages show, these powerful search engines have developed similar strategies for sponsorship on their web pages.

Discussion [9]

As the results show, sponsorship on the Internet is at many different stages of evolution among and across website types. The following discussion examines the key discoveries and insights on a number of the topics examined.

Health

Health websites had the majority of sponsorships based on the agreed-upon definition of sponsorship: non-persuasive provision of a service (content). Although the two aforementioned sites, EverydayHealth.com and Prevention.com, failed to be entirely transparent with their sponsorships; on the whole, sponsorship on Health sites were consistently the most sophisticated.

The WebMD network was the most consistent with its sponsorships. The sponsorships in three of the WebMD network sites (WebMD, RxList, and Everyday Health) were always located at the bottom of the page, be it a main or sub-page. Every site featured fifteen (3 down, 5 across) links that took the user to a WebMD section about the condition the drug treated. These sections featured multiple

pages intended to educate the user about the condition. Each page was clearly disclosed as “Sponsored by DRUG NAME.”

Throughout the course of the research, some of the links remained in the exact same position, others rotated but remained constant, while others still appeared for a few days and disappeared. Along with the consistency of the link format, the sponsorship disclosure was also consistent. The provider of the content could always be identified in the exact same place on every single sponsored section.

The distinctly different sponsorship format on eMedicine.com coincided with the distinctly different format of that site in comparison with the other WebMD sites, showing sophistication by tailoring in the sponsorship to the different site formats. These sites are an example of web sponsorship closely mirroring traditional sponsorship. The website is provided with additional, informative content. The sponsor is offered an opportunity to share their information with consumers in a manner that is much more informative than a thirty-second clip on television. Lastly, the consumer is being provided with content related to his or her condition, with full knowledge that the content is provided by the drug company.

As mentioned in the results regarding the sponsorship on Facebook.com, what makes these sponsorships unique from traditional

sponsorship is that the sponsor is the focus of the content, not the sponsee. In these cases, the sponsee is simply a vehicle. Among all the changes of sponsorships as they have appeared online, this is the most notable.

Technology and Blogs

Over the past few years blogs, online web journals, have emerged as a hugely popular website format. Sometimes a blog is a section on a website, but more often blogs are their own, narrowly focused sites. Blogs are unique in that they encourage users to interact with the writer and other readers by commenting on posts and sharing their own ideas, opposed to passively consuming the content of a website. Blogs are also unique because the content on most blogs is relegated to one page. There are usually pages about the blog, but there are very few browsing options on a blog. This is a contrast to the typical website, which often features many sub pages with unique content. Even when blogs have separate pages for different categories, all of the content has appeared on the main page. The ever-growing popularity of blogs and their unique aspects present many opportunities for online sponsorship different from that used on traditional websites.

The popularity of similar sponsorships on the Technology blogs is to be expected for none other reason than the technologically inclined

tend to be on the forefront of emerging trends on the Internet. This combined with the closely-knit blogging community (the Blogosphere, as it is often called) leads to a strategy that has gained widespread adoption among technology bloggers.

Although they were few and far between, individual sponsored posts also appeared on the blogs. These posts, sponsored by the likes of Windows Mobile, Toyota, and TheWellMom.com, offer a glimpse into the future of blogging and the evolution of sponsorship. Blogging offers the opportunity for small-scale sponsorships that hold true to the traditional definition of sponsorship.

Sponsored Links

The misuse of the term “sponsored” in terms of sponsored links has been addressed, and relevance of sponsored links has been mentioned as well. Examining examples of high- and low-fit sponsorships provides insight into the strategy (or lack thereof) of sponsored links. A sponsor that made heavy use of sponsored links was the diet supplement, Wu-Yi Source. Of the 22 sponsored links found for Wu-Yi Source, 17 were relevant to the content on the page. The others found held absolutely no relevance to the page content. Although the sponsored links were relevant most of the time, the low-fit sponsorships suggest a lack of strategy on the advertiser’s part. From the results gathered, it seems a large number of the advertisers

using “sponsored links” are “shooting in the dark” and would be better served to take the term sponsorship to heart and provide Internet users with high-fit relevant information.

Created-Fit Sponsorships

Although not many created-fit sponsorships were found throughout the course of the research, there were some notable examples. Most of the created-fit sponsorships were found on Weather.com. The Home Depot is not a sponsor that would be immediately identified as related to weather. However, through the sections on Weather.com, the Home Depot positioned itself as a retailer that provides goods and services for dealing with weather, such as non-slip tile that will prevent falls when people come inside from the rain. An even more unlikely sponsor for Weather.com was Clorox, but there was a created fit angle that made the sponsorship a higher fit. On the Travel section of Weather.com, Clorox provides tips for being germ-free when traveling.

Another example of a created-fit sponsorship was Candies shoes on the entertainment gossip blog, PerezHilton.com. Although shoes are not a product that comes to mind when someone mentions celebrity gossip, the sponsorship used a popular young actress and had text about a celebrity scandal. In this way, the shoes were associated with scandalous young celebrities, a main focus of the blog’s content.

Limitations [10]

The primary limitation of this research was an inability to gather even more information. Although a vast quantity of data was retrieved, the picture would have been more complete if every page on every site could have been visited. Due to the constraints of time and womanpower, this was not possible for this body of work.

Another limitation was the disproportionate amount of Health sites in relation to other sites. Although Health sites were a focus and a large percentage of sponsorships were found in relation to the amount of other sites sampled, the amount of Health sponsorships may appear to be higher than they are in reality.

An additional element that would have added further depth to this research would have been the utilization of more theoretical frameworks. Although the relevance framework provided a many insights into the research matter, looking at the data through different lenses may have shed light on additional findings.

Implications [11]

As this research provides a broad look at sponsorships across the Internet, the next step for future researchers would be to narrow their scope. Entire theses could be written on individual sites, such as Facebook.com, YouTube.com or WebMD.com, regarding their innovative and sophisticated use of sponsorship on the Internet. Another narrower topic that could use further research is that of sponsored links. Studying the amount of links classified as "Sponsored Links" versus "Text-Link Ads" would provide a great deal of insight about trends in online strategic communications as a whole. Additionally, the strategies behind "sponsored link" placements would provide a great deal of information about the importance of relevance to sponsors.

There are also qualitative opportunities for researchers to learn more about the process of creating online sponsorships. Additionally, the relationships between sponsors and sponsees are well worth examining. As online sponsorships continue to grow, there is an ever-expanding wealth of information to be uncovered.

Another implication of this research is that it offers a look at the way sponsorships are being used in reality. Up until this point, the majority of sponsorship research involved the effects of sponsorships in controlled situations. With this better understanding, researchers will be able to tailor their experiments on sponsorship effects to the way that different types of sponsorships are actually being used across the Internet. It also provides a foundation for researchers to conduct a historical analysis of the way sponsorship is evolving on the Internet in a similar way that it did with television, as some sponsorships are beginning to look more like advertisements. This is much like the way television programs were originally sponsored and then segued into the use of advertisements.

The research also provides insights into the way sponsorships online allow for targeted marketing strategies. The nature of the sponsorships on narrow website types offer an opportunity for researchers and practitioners to understand the way that sponsors are able to shape their creative efforts for a specific media and target audience.

Conclusion

[12]

As the results and discussion have shown, online sponsorship is a format that shares many similarities and an equal number of differences with traditional sponsorship. Where traditional sponsorship is a large-scale, expensive endeavor, online sponsorship presents sponsors with much smaller-scale, and presumably less expensive, opportunities. While the traditional definition of sponsorship has become clear-cut over the many years of practice, the term sponsorship on the Internet remains murky. Even with these differences, this research has shown that sponsorship is being found on many websites across the Internet, with tweaks to the medium.

From Health to Technology, Portals & Search Engines to Entertainment, sponsorships took a variety of forms. Even similarly structured sponsorships were vastly different when their context was compared, as was the case for links leading to sponsored content and “sponsored links.” These differences indicate a split in interpretation when sponsorship came to the Internet. As mentioned, “sponsored links” may not, in fact, be sponsorship, but their use of the term is certain to affect the way a sponsorship on the Internet is viewed. The popularity of sponsored links will likely lead to new definitions of what

sponsorship means when used online. Conversely, sponsored links could also struggle as a result of this misleading description and adopt a new identification, such as text-link ads.

The results of this research also provide insights for practitioners using sponsorship on the Internet. Practitioners who have sponsorships on certain types of websites can see how similar sites are utilizing sponsorships. Additionally, practitioners can see the emergence of patterns on different types of sites and develop an understanding of the strategies used by the most sophisticated sponsorships on the web.

On the whole, this examination provides insight into the way communications on the Internet have not only led to an evolution of sponsorships, but of all communications. The way that sponsorships have evolved on the Internet mirrors the changes in personal contacts, news stories, advertising, and more. As the world becomes even more dependent on the Internet, it is to be expected that sponsorships will be more prevalent on the web, particularly because of their increased accessibility for both sponsors and Internet users.

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