

RTÉ Broadcast Sponsorship Guidelines

General Guidelines Sponsorship

Section 1

Introduction

RTÉ offers the opportunity to closely associate with our programme output by way of sponsorship on both Radio, Television and Online services.

This code is designed to simply lay down the opportunities, regulations and restrictions governing sponsorship and to deal with related issues. It covers all programming made by RTÉ, commissioned by RTÉ from the independent sector, and acquired from other sources.

Definition of Sponsorship

Sponsorship is a relationship entered into by a broadcaster or programme maker whereby a direct or indirect contribution is made to the programme in return for promotion of a name, trademark, image, activities or product. The contribution may be in the form of direct funding, provision of facilities or services, or the supply of goods/prizes.

Distinction is needed between what sponsorship is and what advertising is.

Advertising is a message from a commercial or other body contained in a recognisable and separate entity, a commercial break. Sponsorship credits stand apart from commercial breaks and the minutage allowed for them.

As such, it is necessary to ensure that advertising and sponsorship are distinctly separate.

When determining whether the various components of a sponsorship credit broadcast around a sponsored programme amount to the credit being sufficiently distinct from advertising, fine editorial judgements are often required. We are likely to consider several factors including, but not limited to:

- Credits that focus predominantly on the sponsorship arrangement, rather than the sponsor or its products/services, are more likely to be compliant with the existing codes from both the BAI and the ASAI. The following are some of the features that the Clearance Committee is likely to consider when judging whether the focus of a credit is the sponsorship arrangement:
- The use of a creative approach that thematically links the sponsor to the programme. Such links, when used effectively, highlight the fundamental difference between sponsorship and advertising, i.e., sponsorship is about the sponsor's association with the programme, not selling the sponsor's products/services, though reference to product is permitted provided it is not of undue prominence.

- Detailed descriptions of products/services or references to multiple products are likely to detract from the sponsorship message and result in content that is more akin to advertising.
- The use of the sponsor's slogans, straplines, jingles and so on. It is possible for some sponsor's slogans and straplines to be used within a credit, for the purpose of helping to identify the sponsor and/or the sponsorship arrangement, provided they do not directly encourage the purchase or rental of the sponsor's products or services.

Editorial Integrity Transparency

The presence of sponsorship must be clearly indicated to the programme audience.

Furthermore, a sponsor must not have any editorial input or involvement in programming or scheduling, nor should there be reasonable grounds on the part of the viewer to believe that input or influence does exist.

For these reasons RTÉ must carefully consider the suitability of any potential sponsorship arrangements. This is the core principle of this Code. With this overriding principle in place both sponsor and broadcaster can derive the full benefits of a worthwhile relationship. The audience gains from the general improvement in quality and diversity made available by sponsorship adds strength to the overall schedule. Organisations can take appropriate advantage of attractive commercial propositions by being associated with programmes of value and interest.

Section 2

Sponsor Credits

- As well as being of great benefit to the sponsor it is also essential that any sponsorship be clearly indicated at the beginning and/or end of a programme or item.
- No sponsor's message can appear within a TV programme. Within a Radio programme where specific features are sponsored, weather, traffic, book reviews, etc. this prohibition need not apply.
- Where commercial breaks appear within the programme the sponsor may be credited both going into and coming out of the break but separated from the programme.
- Credits at the beginning and end of a television programme may be both visual and verbal but must not exceed 10 seconds in length. Where two or more sponsors are involved this may be extended to 15 seconds.
- In and out of commercial breaks on television, credits may also be visual and verbal but must not exceed 7 seconds in length. On radio a verbal credit of maximum duration of 10 seconds can be given.
- Sponsored programmes cannot include the name of the sponsor in the title of the programme. Coverage of a titled event, however, may include the title whether that coverage is sponsored or not.

- The nature of the sponsorship must be made clear in the credits, thus.
A sponsor funding part or whole of a programme should say, for example, 'Sponsored by' or 'In association with' or words of similar meaning.
- In each case above the broadcaster remains fully responsible for the editorial content of the programme and no credit is allowed which abdicates that responsibility in any way.
- Current advertising copy, or that in use, may not be used as sponsorship credits. Nor can credits be subsequently adapted to advertisements while the sponsorship relationship is in place.
- It is a requirement to ensure that sponsorship does not appear as advertising and vice versa.
- Transparency is key.
- Adherence to guidelines above aids in this separation.
- It is at the discretion of the Clearance Committee as to the separation of advertising copy from sponsorship credits.
- For the sake of clarity, the difference between advertising copy and sponsorship must be that any reasonable person would not confuse either with each other.
- Credits may however be programme related and may also include product use.
- Credits should not equate to calls to purchase products or services; therefore, the inclusion of prices or sales promotions is prohibited.
- While credits and advertising messages must be different, credits must still comply with all relevant Advertising Codes of Practice in force at the time.
- Credits must not be confused with station announcements or news items thus the use of Continuity Presenters or Newsreaders is not acceptable either for visual purposes or as voiceovers. When considering the selection of voiceover artists, it is important to inform RTE in order to avoid any issues of conflict.
- In all cases the decision as to the suitability of credits rests with RTE.

Section 3

Suitability

General headings fall into three categories: –

- Programmes not Suitable for Sponsorship
- Programmes which may be Suitable
- Unsuitable Sponsors

RTE Programmes Not Suitable for Sponsorship

- News Programmes. News programmes including newsflashes, national, regional, local or international, cannot be sponsored.

- Current Affairs. Sponsorship of Current Affairs Programmes is prohibited on RTÉ Television. For the purpose of this section, magazine and programmes of general information are not considered to be current affairs programmes.
- Religious Programmes.
- Station Identity.
- Children's Programmes
- RTÉ reserves the right to include other programmes as it sees fit within the 'Unsuitable for Sponsorship' Category.

RTÉ Programmes Which May Be Suitable

While it may be clear as to why the above programme strands must be seen to be independent of any association, there exists a range of programmes, which must be examined individually on a case-by-case basis.

With the overriding principle that editorial independence must apply in all cases and be clearly seen to apply, the selection of sponsors for informational type programmes needs special attention.

Among a list of Programmes under the following headings: Magazine, Consumer, Lifestyle/DIY, Business or Health Issues, there may be specific programmes which are deemed unsponsorable but many programmes under these headings may be potentially suitable. In general, programmes which offer advice on the comparability, use, purchase or rental of branded products or services, may not be sponsored by those whose business involve the marketing or sale of the products or services featured. So, for example, a Financial Services Company may not sponsor a programme giving advice on how to manage personal/family finances. However, it is quite conceivable that an Airline or a Motor Manufacturer, etc. could sponsor such a programme.

This type/genre of programmes require special attention but are not per se excluded from a suitable sponsorship relationship. Similarly, a magazine or programme of general information may have elements within the programme, e.g., weather, traffic, stocks and shares, book reviews etc. which may be sponsored by suitable products or services.

Unsuitable Sponsors

- A product or service not acceptable under prevailing advertising codes may not be a sponsor.
- A product or service not acceptable for advertising in specific time bands or programme type cannot sponsor programmes in those time bands or of that type.
- Products or services, which may have a merchandising link with a programme, cannot be a sponsor of that programme.
- Anybody whose intents are wholly or mainly political in nature may not be a sponsor.
- Persons or companies generally known for their manufacture or supply of tobacco products cannot be sponsors.
- While pharmaceutical companies may be sponsors, no mention or association with prescription medicines is allowed.

Section 4

Product Placement

- Product Placement is the inclusion of, or reference to a product or service, featured within a programme for which consideration is received by the broadcaster or programme maker. This practice is prohibited save for cinematic works, television films, sport, drama and light entertainment programmes.

Undue Prominence

- No undue prominence may be given in any programme to a commercial product or service. In particular, any reference to such a product or service must be limited to what can clearly be justified by the editorial requirements of the programme itself. An important practical yardstick is that no impression be created of external commercial influence on the editorial process. In no circumstances may the manner of appearance of a product be the subject of negotiation or agreement with the supplier.

Programme Prizes

- Prizes of a substantial nature must be regarded as sponsorship and must be credited at the beginning and/or end of the programme. For the purposes of clarity substantial prizes are defined as goods or services valued at over €30,000 at best commercial prices. This value will be reviewed periodically by RTÉ in line with inflation.
- Sponsors may provide prizes to programmes and broadcasters may mention the prize together with a brief factual statement. Prizes of branded products or services which are referred to editorially elsewhere in the programme must be avoided. Prizes offered by way of audience competitions must not include questions relating to the product. Questions connected to sports and music events, music, film, video, theatre and book reviews are exempt from this provision. In general, prizes should be adding value to the programme content.
- Where Substantial Prizes are not treated as sponsorship and duly acknowledged they must be purchased by the programme at best commercial prices

Sponsored Events

- Coverage of events which may have a sponsor involvement are commonplace. It is acceptable to have a sponsor of the coverage separate to the event sponsor, but the event sponsor may also be the broadcast sponsor.
- Undue coverage of a visual or verbal nature should not be given to advertising signage or branding messages at such events. No coverage should be provided at events, which does not have a bona fide 'non-broadcast' status.

The following can be used as guidelines.

- a) The event must be recognised as official by a sporting or cultural body.
- b) Broadcast coverage of the sponsorship must not be the principal purpose of the event.
- c) The event must be open to the public, whether it is broadcast or not.
- d) The broadcaster must decide in the interest of audiences, and not purely commercial gain.

In general, visual and aural references to the event sponsor should be sufficient to fulfil any contractual obligations, or as would be appropriate to normal broadcast requirements.

Advertising Related to Sponsorship

- Advertising aimed at increasing the awareness of the programme sponsorship relationship can use only phrases, which would be acceptable as straplines. Advertising promoting the sponsorship association will not be aired in or around the sponsored programme.

Promotions / Trailers

- The objective of station promotion or trailers for upcoming programmes is to alert audiences and provide general information about the broadcasters' programme. The sponsors presence should therefore be secondary. Only one display of the sponsor's logo may appear during the programme promotion.

Other Guidelines

The purpose of these guidelines is to provide a framework in which sponsors, programme makers and broadcasters can fully understand the nature of the broadcast sponsorship relationship, its advantages and restrictions. It is designed to reflect existing legal and regulatory requirements but must be interpreted in conjunction with other guidelines in relation to advertising, and RTÉ's Programme Makers' Guidelines which more comprehensively outline the responsibilities of those involved in programme production.

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