

Capture the Gold by Stepping Up Your Game With the Right Registrations

A FAIRWINDSPARTNERS  Study



February 2014



Executive Summary

As the Seattle Seahawks trounced the Denver Broncos on Super bowl Sunday, MetLife was reaping the game-day rewards of its sponsorship: TV exposure in shots of the stadium, tagged photos, countless press hits, and endless social media mentions. Leading up to game-day, the website metlifestadium.com was drawing tens of thousands of visitors a month looking for information, which means tens of thousands of visitors a month exposed to the MetLife brand. Now, as the world's attention is on the eagerly anticipated Olympics, 10 sponsors are also expecting massive branding success.

Yet, despite the potential for heavy traffic and visibility, FairWinds Partners found that brands are surprisingly underrepresented in the sports-venue domain name space. In fact, more third parties own domain names combining a brand name plus one of eight selected sports terms – arena, center, classic, cup, field, park, stadium, tournament - than the corresponding brands do. This leaves brands open to trademark infringers, cybersquatters, and others who may have fair use claims.

Only 8 percent of the sports-related terms combined with Fortune 100 brand names are owned by the corresponding brand, according to FairWinds' study; 74 percent of the combined domain names are still available for registration; and 17 percent are owned by an entity other than the corresponding brand.

Of the 10 Worldwide Olympic Partners, only one is using a "BrandOlympics.com" combination. Four Olympic sponsors don't even own their own BrandOlympics.com.

Domain names combining Fortune 100 brands and the eight sports terms and the "BrandOlympics.com" combination present clear opportunities for

brands to hedge their bets on future sponsorships to promote their products.

Venue sponsorship allows a brand to fit nicely into the social nature of their consumers' lives. Sponsoring a physical venue is a surefire way for brands to create an inextricable link not only with an event, but with the memories that consumers will have and share with their social networks. That awesome basketball game you tweeted about from the Verizon Center? The picture of you and your college friends at Levi Stadium that you Instagrammed and shared on Facebook? They represent positive exposure for the brand behind the venue.

And like with any product launch, venue and Olympic sponsorships should be supported by key domain name registrations to grab online traffic. Brands considering sports arena or Olympic sponsorships would do well to lock down their domain names way in advance of a launch. Even those that may pursue naming rights at some point down the line should consider registering some of these choice domain names for potential future use and to prevent others from exploiting their reputations.

Methodology

FairWinds used the Fortune 100 as its sample brand set, focusing on the most common use of a company's brand name— for example, Kraft Foods became “Kraft” and Liberty Mutual Insurance Group become LibertyMutual.

We then combined each brand with each of eight terms - arena, center, classic, cup, field, park, stadium, and tournament - limiting our search to the generic top-level domain .COM. With eight domain names for each of the 100 brands, we searched for 800 domain names to find out how many were registered by brands, how many were registered by third parties, how many were available, and how the registered domain names were used.

FairWinds then examined registration data for the 800 domain names, as well as the content to which the registered domain names resolved. With this information, we were able to determine whether a domain name was available or registered, and, if registered, whether a domain name was owned by the company that corresponded to the brand or by another party.



Introduction

Brands are constantly juggling different platforms to reach different demographics. Print, TV, and digital platforms are all part of an ever-changing formula for the attention – and buy-in – of customers. Between conceiving of different ideas and then coordinating them, the job of delivering a brand's message is far more complicated than it was 20 years ago.

Some brands have stepped up to the challenge by sponsoring sports events and arenas.

“We’ve shifted our sponsorship focus towards integrating our brands into [the properties] our clients are loyal to,” [said](#) Edward Gold, State Farm’s Advertising Director, told Forbes magazine. “When it comes to sports, it may not be the last place to find an attention focused consumer, but it’s close. What matters more is that people will always watch live sports and they’ll engage with their friends and other fans unlike any other activity.”

The best sponsorships allow fans to incorporate brands into their Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and other social media activities, which is why branding a stadium or a field is a savvy advertising approach. Fans can check in at Citi Field on Foursquare or tag photos at Comcast Arena on Facebook and create instant visibility for a brand. It also boxes competitors out of the audience’s consciousness in a way that a TV commercial does not.

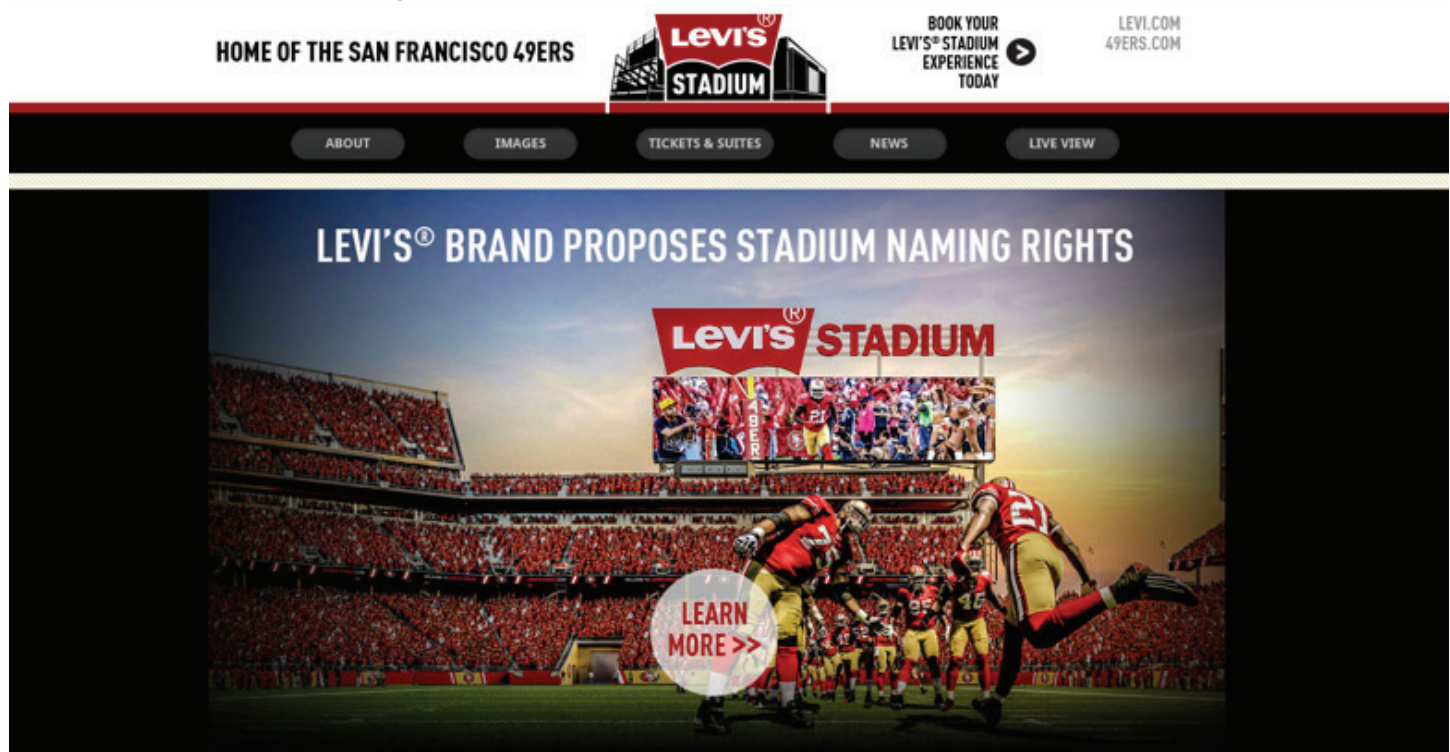
Levi Strauss [made some waves](#) in March 2013 when it acquired at least 12 names related to sports venues, including LevisStadium.com. Sure enough,

about two months later, the media announced that the brand [signed](#) with the San Francisco 49ers: \$220 million for 20-year naming rights on the Santa Clara Stadium. By snapping up the domains containing common variations of its brand – LeviStadium and LeviStraussStadium in .COM and .NET – the company was able to hit the ground running with its digital media strategy¹ and protect its good name.

Levi's also protected itself from potential infringers by snapping up other sports-arena domain names, such as LevisField.com and LeviStraussPark.com. Brands that aren't proactive about protecting their names – those that match their trademarks as well as related variations - might find themselves

spending time and money playing catch-up. Citigroup, for example, had to file a Uniform Domain-Name Dispute-Resolution Policy ([UDRP](#)) to get back CitiField.com².

Since venue sponsorship is a promising platform for branding and some brands have conspicuously bought up domain names around their venues, FairWinds wanted to gage how other brands use the sports-related domain name space. Are brands keeping their options open on future sponsorships? How comprehensive are their defensive registrations? Are third parties snapping up brands' missed opportunities for domain name registrations?



Sports Venues Are Overlooked

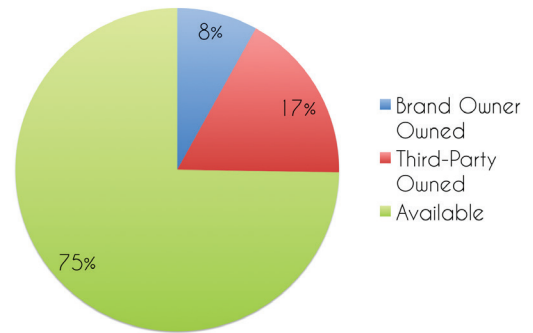
Generally, brands are underrepresented in the sports-venue domain name space, missing out on valuable advertising opportunities and leaving themselves wide open to speculators, cybersquatters, or those who might have fair-use claims to the domain name.

Only 8 percent of the domain names examined are owned by their corresponding brands. Indeed, there's relatively little representation by brands in this space: 74 percent of brand names plus the eight terms are still available for registration.

¹ <http://sanfrancisco.cbslocal.com/2013/05/08/phil-matier-levi-strauss-to-pay-for-naming-rights-on-49ers-stadium/>

² <http://domains.adrforum.com/domains/decisions/1142607.htm>

Given the visibility that sports-venue sponsorships can offer, brands may want to consider registering some choice domain names for future use if there is a possibility that they will seek naming rights in the future. FairWinds found more domain names registered by third parties than by the corresponding brand; 17 percent of the domain names examined are owned by third parties - more than twice as many domain names as are owned by the corresponding brand. That is never good news for a brand.

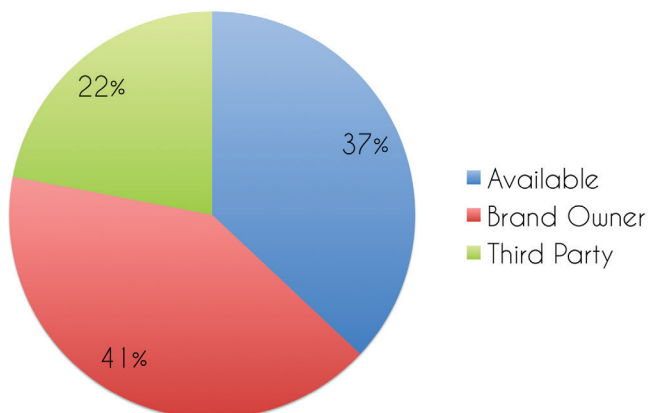


When Opportunity Knocks, Answer Before Someone Else Does

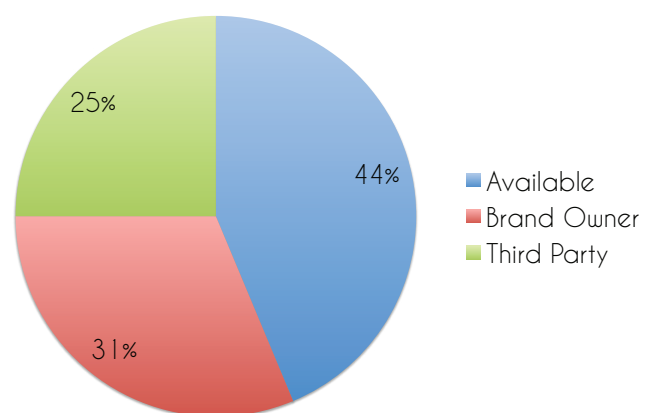
The industries with the most brand-owner domain name registrations also have the most third-party registrations, FairWinds found. This is not surprising: If there is a business incentive for brand owners to register and use a certain type of domain name, there is Internet traffic to capture and monetize. In that case, there is also an incentive for others to register similar domain names and try to profit off of any confused or misdirected traffic.

Take, for example, the Shipping/Packing industry and Telecom industry domain name registrations examined in this report. Shipping/Packing and Telecom companies own the most corresponding domain names of any companies examined: 31 percent and 41 percent of their domain names, respectively. Similarly, third parties own the most Shipping/Packing industry, and the Telecom industry domain names of any industry examined. Third parties own 22 percent of Telecom domain names, and 25 percent of Shipping/Packing domain names.

Telecom



Packing/Shipping



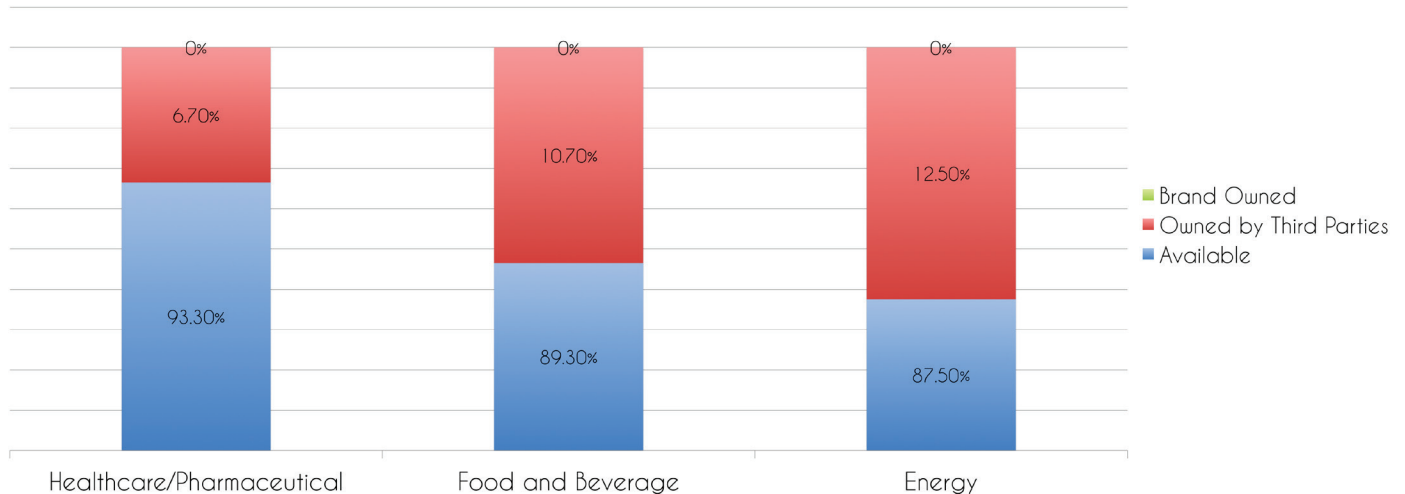
Telecoms are active in sponsoring venues, like the Verizon Center in Washington, D.C., Comcast Arena in Everett, WA, and the AT&T Center in San Antonio, TX. FedEx sponsors FedExField in Landover, MD, and the FedEx Cup golf season. Internet users are looking for these sports venues online, which means more traffic for exact-match domain names, as well as any domain names that confused Internet users are likely

to navigate to by accident (including typos and different venue terms, such as switching out “Field” for “Stadium”). When opportunity knocks, everyone hears it and will try to reap the rewards.

This is important information for those industries that don’t currently own many sports-venue related domain names: Healthcare/Pharmaceutical, Food and Beverage, and Energy. The Healthcare and Pharmaceutical companies in the Fortune 100

have left 93.3 percent of potential domain names available, while the remaining 6.7 percent are owned by third parties; the Food and Beverage companies left 89.3 percent of potential domain names on the table, with the remaining 10.7 percent in the hands of third parties; and Energy companies left 87.5 percent of potential domain names available, with the remaining 12.5 percent owned by third parties.

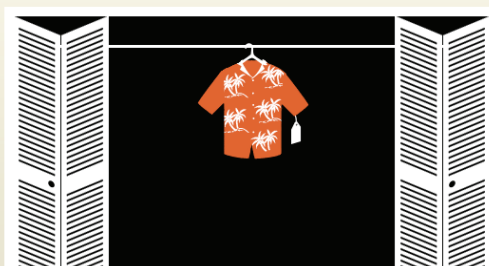
Domain Names



The low number of domain name registrations by the Food and Beverage companies to claim domains in this space is most surprising since they are often the ones to sponsor major sports events. Coca Cola, for example, [is an official sponsor of the Olympic Games](#). By registering certain domain names now, these brands could also keep the option of future sponsorships open. Beyond sponsorship opportunities, Food and Beverage companies, as well as other consumer-facing companies, can use domain names like “Classic” and “Cup” for promotional campaigns around their products – perhaps a recipe competition or rewards points for buying their merchandise.

Brands waiting for sponsorships to be solidified in order to register the appropriate domain names risk exposing themselves to cybersquatting or losing prime domain names to registrants with other, fair use interests if these third-parties get wind of a deal in the works. Similarly, when competitors set up new digital real estate, inattentive companies risk exploitation by third parties as well. UPSCup.com is not owned by the United Parcel Service (UPS), a competitor of FedEx. It is owned by a third party and resolves to content that declares it the “Future home of something quite cool”. Maybe so, but it won’t be something quite cool for UPS, especially with FedEx’s use of FedExCup.com.

Future home of something quite cool



The Branding Olympics

Olympic brand sponsors also are under-using their domain name space. FairWinds combined the 10 Worldwide Olympic Partners with their company name and the term Olympics. For example, Coca-ColaOlympics.com.

Four of the ten combined domain names are owned by the corresponding brand owners and four are still available. Two of the 10 domain names are owned by third parties, but neither currently resolves to content. That's good news for the brand owners: Their name and reputations are not being sullied by wrong doers.

Surprisingly, only one of the combined domain

names resolves to real content. That the other three didn't bother to redirect to their BRAND.com sites is a puzzling oversight. The other six domain names either do not resolve, are under construction, or host an ad for the registrar. These are missed opportunities.

Visa wisely points VisaOlympics.com to branded content and takes home the gold.

Conclusion

Whether or not to purchase naming rights to a stadium or sponsor a sports event is a major business decision for a company, and, like any product launch, should be supported by securing the best domain names possible.

Brands should remember that any opportunity they have to win online visitors, online sales, and branding opportunities, is an opportunity for someone else, as well. It doesn't pay to come in second in the domain name race. The best-case scenario is to reclaim the trophy through a complaint, which costs time and money, and thus is less than a victory.

Given the uncertainty of whether Internet users will search for these venues in any of the .BRAND new generic top-level domains – typing stadium.metlife rather than metlifestadium.com into the address

bar, for example – makes this group of eight combinations a finite resource for brand owners. Even as other, open gTLDs hit advertisements and Internet browsers this year, none of the eight terms examined here will be among the new options. The new gTLD .SPORTS was recently barred from launching, further reducing new combinations for sponsors to create creative new venue domain names. While new gTLDs hold many opportunities for brand owners and Internet users, brand should take a serious look at brand-venue combinations in .COM, as they look for potential sponsorships and act defensively to protect their reputations.

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Herbert Kratky / Shutterstock.com

FairWinds Partners, LLC
1000 Potomac St. NW, Suite 350 | Washington, DC 20007
news@fairwindspartners.com | +1 202 223 9252