

# Winning teams sell replica

## How to plan stock without a crystal ball?

Since the week of 13-20 October 2007 no South African can doubt the powerful influence of a team's performance on the sale of replica jerseys. Cast your minds back: think about the number of customers asking for Springbok replica or supporter jerseys, how fast stock sold out, how demand far out-stripped expectations and how just about every South African showed their colours of support in the week before and after the Springboks' World Cup win.

Think back two weeks earlier when the Springboks were playing their quarter-final match ... even though our team was doing well, there was no indication of the replica-hysteria to follow. Supporter jersey sales were as expected: fair, but not extraordinary.

Which proves that *doing well* does not necessarily sell replica. But that national/provincial/team pride swells in such tsunami-like waves when the prospect of *We are the champions* looms, that every new and old supporter are desperate to wear their team's colours.

Even now, four months later, supporters are still proudly wearing Springbok replica jerseys as casualwear and tourists ask for the *World Champion* jersey on a regular basis. The best news is that this enthusiasm even



2006 World Cup winners Italy

extends to the players' replica jersey with many of the bells and whistles the players enjoyed, that retails for R800-R1 000.

The snag is, of course, that it is impossible to predict which teams are going to emerge as champions and to plan stock accordingly.

"If the Springboks were knocked out in the quarter final, we would have been left with about 50% of our stock," says Dave Linder, MD of Fifth Element, which now also own the SA rights to Canterbury.

While there was hardly any legitimate Springbok jerseys left for sale in South Africa or France a day or two before the final ... you could not give an All Black jersey away in Paris, says Linder. Yet, before the competition started, most French retailers would have felt comfortable stocking up on the favourites' jerseys.

### Glory lingers

By now, retailers should be used to the fact that winning sells and that everybody suffers with losers. Sometimes this demand for stock can last well past expectations.

Eight months after the Blue Bulls became the 2007 Super 14 champions, there was still a huge demand for Blue Bulls supporter jerseys. "In December and January (a month or two before the start of the new Super 14-competition) we sold more than

300 Blue Bulls jerseys," says Lineze Wilson, manager of Sportoria, trading from the Blue Bulls headquarters at Loftus.

This trend was, however, reversed when the Bulls were struggling during the Currie Cup competition and the shirt demand was low.

Changes to shirts also contribute to sales, Wilson believes, because supporters want to wear the latest. The Bulls, for example, change their jerseys every two years and this also drives sales.

This trend continues across sporting codes. "Performance of the team has a definite impact on the sale of replica's — one could almost track it on a monthly basis," says Andrew Robinson, marketing manager of Diadora SA, suppliers of 2007 PSL league winners Mamelodi Sundowns team and supporters jerseys. "In the months that they perform well we do experience greater demand for product and increased sales."

Towards the end of the season when it became apparent that Sundowns was going to end top of the PSL log, sales further increased as fans wanted to show the world that they are associated with a winning team.

Although sales slowed down during the off-season, there was a high demand for the Diadora Sundowns shirts right from the start of the new season.



Reebok's Bloemfontein Celtic



But, while wins increase demand, “there is always a core of loyal supporters who will purchase and wear the replica irrespective of performance,” says Robinson.

### Big game fever

Another factor that influences sales, he says, are the so called *big* games i.e. against Chiefs and Pirates. “There is a definite increase in demand and sales before such games.”

It is not only really big wins — like a series or tournament — that translate into supporter item sales. According to Millé brand manager Roger Ragbar, sales of Golden Arrows replica increase whenever their team win a high-profile match, for example against Orlando Pirates or Sundowns recently.

As can be expected, Golden Arrows’ sales

peak in areas close to their home ground, Lamontville stadium, and are doing very well in the rest of KwaZulu Natal, but there is a demand for supporter jerseys all over the country.

“Supporters move to other areas, there seem to be a lot of movement of people,” says Ragbar. Therefore, although they move to another geographical area, supporters remain true to their team and show their colours wherever they are.

### Support other teams

Reebok, however, found that fans of other teams would cross-support when, for example, Bloemfontein Celtic plays in a neutral match. “You won’t find a Pirates supporter ever wearing Chiefs’ colours, but he may

support Celtic in a neutral match,” says PR manager Deane Nothard.

But, the impressive replica sales from their Bloem Celtic and AmaZulu teams are good examples of how a winning culture is important, he says.

“Based on official home crowd attendance for all league games in 2007, Bloem Celtic (ending in the top eight) had the highest attendance rate of any of the PSL teams at an average of 15 786 per home game.”

AmaZulu are another very popular local team, currently sitting mid-table in the PSL. “True supporters seem to be backing Usuthu as they search for the consistent form their potential warrants. However, for both teams, winning a major trophy will certainly have a significant impact on sales.”

This cross-team support is also evident in rugby. The Western Force team in the Super 14 competition seem to be a *honeymoon* side that attracts support whether they win or lose, says Ian Wright, supplier of ISC supporter replica. “Supporters seem to like the fact that they are doing so much better now after ending bottom of the log in their first season.”

Or could it be that they are based in Perth, SAs 10th province?

### International appeal

Interestingly, tourists from other countries create another market for replica jerseys as they are keen to take local football team jerseys home as souvenirs, says Ragbar.

On the other hand, there is a definite local demand for foreign team jerseys amongst South Africans — as the requests for Italy jerseys showed after their 2006 World Cup win, says kit sponsor Puma SA’s marketing manager, Brett Bellinger.

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## How to make sure you have stock

From the above it is clear that the services of a Sangoma or a crystal ball will be about as much help as accurate planning to make sure that you always have the correct amount of stock to supply to team supporters. Their needs are clearly well-nigh as unpredictable as the result of a match.

Therefore, how to plan?

A good relationship with kit suppliers is an advantage as you would then be included in any contingency plans.

While Springbok replica stocks were low a day or two before the final as the whole country donned green and gold, Canterbury really came to the party when the country wanted to celebrate our becoming world champions.

They took a gamble and partly printed new batches of Springbok shirts, leaving space for the World Champion message

and image of the trophy. As soon as the final whistle blew at 11 o’clock on the night of October 20th, Canterbury started printing the message.

“The first trucks with stock left the next morning by 9am and by lunch time on the Sunday our key customers, with whom we made prior arrangements, could start selling the World Champion shirts,” says Dave Linder, MD of Fifth Element.

Everybody benefitted through this flexibility. But, had the Bokke lost, they would have had to work hard to off-load the stock over the next few years.

During the 2006 FIFA World Cup in Germany adidas also had to make emergency arrangements to supplement the 800 000 supporters jerseys they had printed — a generous number, they thought, as they normally sell about 300 000 shirts in an average year. In

the end they sold 1.2-m German team supporters shirts.

Therefore, even though international team supporters jerseys are usually manufactured in Asian countries to supply to the whole world, brands could make prior arrangements with local manufacturers to supplement stock.

“We are a just-in-time manufacturer that can print, make and deliver a few thousands shirts or jerseys in a few days,” says Gary Blakey, marketing manager of Paarl-based Genuine Connection Promotions. “We can supplement stock in a very fast turnaround time.”

There are many SA apparel and teamwear manufacturers that can make jerseys at short notice. See p93 as well as pp5-14 of the 2008 *Sports Trader Activewear, Sport and Outdoor Directory*.

## Predicting replica stock (from p25)

Sales of official licensed or branded products are *emotional*, says Vivian Casaleti, ex-brand manager for Kaizer Chiefs FC and now MD of SLAM, SAFA Master Licensees, who also have the commercial rights to the Bafana Bafana brand. "They are driven by passion and loyalty, and the more your team wins, the more you want to show your association and be part of a winning team."

But, forget about trying to sell a supporter a team jersey, cap, scarf, magazine or even insurance policy associated with the team the day after they loose or perform badly, she advises.

After all, when the team performs well, people say: *we* played well, *we* won, she observes.

"But when they loose, *they* played terrible or *they* have no strikers etc ... this clearly demonstrates how we relate to sport. At the same time it shows the undeniable passion we have for our teams, especially our national teams."

### Losing losses

While winning teams across the world show how everyone benefits from success, England's national football team's failure to qualify for Euro 2008 is costing Umbro, retailers and the UK economy dearly.

The day after Croatia knocked England out of the competition, shares in one of the UKs biggest retailers, Sports Direct, fell 8.6%. Sports Direct at that stage owned 30% of Umbro shares and had an agreement to take 65% (or 1.8-m) of the national team shirts sold in England (see box: Nike buys Umbro).

Kit supplier Umbro was, however, the hardest hit by the team's failure, with some

## Getting stock to the team

A major sports tournament not only generates sales of replicas, but the kit sponsor has to make sure that the players get what they need.

During the World Cup, Canterbury had to deliver three sets of gear per game to a squad of rugby players of diverse sizes and positions travelling between countries — no mean feat considering that the final squads are only announced a few days before the match!

During the World Cup competition the Springboks required 462 sets of clothing in total. Canterbury International supplied the kits for five of the teams in the World Cup: South Africa, Australia, Scotland, Ireland and Japan — and while not all teams played as many matches as the winning Bokke, the logistics are daunting.

"Canterbury set up a warehouse from where the kits would be dispatched to the team hotels within 24 hours of team announcements, just like they would dispatch supplies to retailers from any other warehouse," explains Dave Linder, MD of Canterbury SA.

Apart from having to get the correct number embroidered on the correct size jersey, Canterbury also supplied different design jerseys to players in different positions.



Dave Linder, MD of Fifth Element

Every 'Bok used two sets of clothing, as they changed jerseys during half time, but also needed a third set in case a jersey or short were damaged. "It is a tribute to the quality of our garments that no jerseys or shorts were damaged," says Linder.

analysts predicting that it could cost them as much as £14-m in lost replica sales. Despite their agreement, Sports Direct drastically cut down on orders and Umbro on production. Instead of the annual 3-m England shirts, Umbro will only produce 1-m England shirts for the coming season, *The Guardian* reported.

The England team's (lack of) performance is, however, expected to have a knock-on ef-

fect that is expected to cost the UK Football Association (FA) and the country £2-bn, reports Jeff Thames in *Sports Insight* magazine. The FA will lose an estimated £15-m in sponsorship deals — many of them performance related — media payments, merchandise sales and prize money, while the economy will lose an estimated £2-bn from the drop in food and beverage, merchandise, magazine and newspaper sales.