

WHITE COLLAR BOXING SUCCESS IS A LESSON FOR OTHER BUSINESSES

An inside look at BritCham Sterling Member Vanda Promotions

Boxing is one of those primordial sports, where something instinctive kicks in, reminding one of the qualities of being alive. Boxing is traditionally a metaphoric sport, as writers strove to expound on primordial reality, arguing that man lost touch with his former self by adopting civility. Normal Mailer, who wrote extensively on boxing, once said, "Boxing arouses two of the deepest anxieties we contain. There is not only the fear of getting hurt, which is profound in more men than will admit to it, but there is the opposite panic, equally unadmitted, of hurting others."

Mailer's statement illustrates one of the main attractions of white collar boxing. It started on Wall Street as a boxing competition, where unfit financial types, most of whom had never stepped into a ring before, trained for a period of time before putting on gloves for a real fight in front of a tuxedo-ed audience. The event is now practised by white collar professionals from all walks of life, usually aged from 20-55.

At the beginning of 2009, Vanda Promotions organised the biggest white collar boxing event ever held in the world. Held at the Suntec Exhibition and Convention Centre, over 1,000

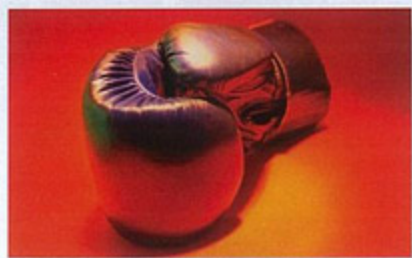


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spectators attended IFS White Collar Boxing Singapore. In a night typical of a professional fight, 14 boxers came out through flame throwers, accompanied by the sound of a 12-piece drum band. Seven rounds of fighting later, the most common remark from the audience was, "How do you top that?", a testament to the event management skills of Vanda Promotions.

IFS White Collar Boxing is also a charity event. Vanda Promotions has so far raised over \$260,000 for the Children's Surgical Centre in Cambodia in the last nine months. In fact, Vanda seems to have found the perfect mix of philanthropy and business. The popularity of the White Collar Boxing events has also spawned the opening of the Vanda Boxing Club.

Over the last year, membership at Vanda Boxing Club has more than doubled,



and the number of classes has tripled. The face of the boxer at the gym has also been changing. There are now many more women who are taking up boxing. The youngest boxer at the gym is 5 years-old and the oldest is 57.

The IFS White Collar Boxing event also has a diverse, large, and growing list of sponsors. The next event in October 2009 looks like it will attract an even bigger audience, and the company has grown as if oblivious to the weak economic climate. How has it accomplished this? ►



First and foremost, Vanda Promotions focuses on the boxers. "We make sure that they have an incredible experience in the training and preparation phase, and they become our greatest advertisements," said Ian Mullane, owner of Vanda Promotions and Vanda Boxing Club. Indeed, many boxers sign up because of the intensive 3-month training programme. The programme alone is life-changing for some, who often become fitter than they ever have before.



It is a personal journey of transformation for most, and the boxers themselves are the main draw for the crowd, who usually make up friends, family and colleagues of the fighters. Much of the sponsorship is garnered through the professional networks of the fighters themselves. "Historically," says Mr. Mullane, "the sponsors normally contact us or come through the boxers. As the event has grown, we have looked to structure the sponsorship proposals to include measurement and meet particular sponsorship aims including brand awareness and client entertainment options."

Even within the event, there are different aims. The title sponsor, IFS, aims mainly to achieve brand exposure. But beyond that, IFS also uses the event to entertain clients, boost staff morale and to generate leads from their involvement. At the last event in Singapore, there were 13 IFS tables. Other sponsors are keen to have the opportunity to associate with one of the most successful and popular social events on the calendar which gives them access to affluent expatriate and local audience.

The pricing of the event is also a key point. "I wouldn't say it is cheap, though I would say it is viewed as great value



because it is unique, all-inclusive and a high-end production," said Mr. Mullane. The tickets are priced well, but the company delivers value for money. Over its time in operation, Vanda Promotions has responded to customer feedback by deliberately stepping up the production values. Even in this economic climate, while they have been slightly more conservative in terms of their forecasting, they have sought ways to maintain their production value.



Beyond the event, Vanda also invests in its local community. They use local judges, referees and available infrastructure, and they use boxers from other gyms as well. Over 3000 people have attended local White Collar Boxing events in less than 2 years, the vast majority of which would have never seen the sport previously.

Vanda Promotions also looks to support local boxers as well as ones around the region. They provide free training and club membership to competitive youth amateurs and members of the national team. Ian Mullane is involved with the coaching and management of the national boxing team, leading to Vanda

sponsorship. When the boxing team won two bronze medals at the Arafura Games in Darwin, their trip was sponsored by Vanda Promotions. Mr. Mullane himself wishes to produce a Commonwealth or Olympic boxing champion for Singapore.

The company is now the biggest promoter of White Collar Boxing on the planet, eclipsing the previous big guns in London. Singapore and Hong Kong hold events twice a year, and there is an annual event in Tokyo, Bangkok, Melbourne and Sydney. There is even an event in Uganda which they are supporting. The focus is always on quality. The success in Singapore comes from the fact that the organisation is staffed by professionals from the boxing and event management fields. Their reputation is simple: an excellent, quality night's entertainment at an attractive price point.

What next for the company? They plan to give the Vanda treatment to both a football and softball tournament. This is part of a drive to establish sustainable sporting events that are annually repeatable and offer both the athlete and audience a special experience, just like the boxing tournament has done. ■

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