

# Industry Insider: Adam Lippard



**Title:** Head of Global Sports and Entertainment Consulting, GMR Marketing  
**Education:** MS, Ohio University  
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*This interview was conducted by Mark Nagel, professor, and Todd C. Koesters, assistant professor, in the Department of Sport and Entertainment Management at the University of South Carolina. Interview edited by Alan Morse, associate professor at the University of Northern Colorado and the Vice President of Industry Affairs of the Sport Marketing Association.*

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**SMQ:** Can you describe your career path?

**Lippard:** I was a broadcast journalism major at Syracuse. Though I enjoyed broadcasting, there was always something unusual about your career being judged on subjective standards. Some people like a broadcaster and some do not, but there is not always a definitive reason. I also had an interest in management, so after a few years I left broadcasting and worked first for the Orlando Magic, then UltimateBid.com and then 15 years ago I began working for GMR Marketing.

**SMQ:** GMR Marketing has had an interesting transformation and strong impact in the sport and entertainment industry since its creation. What are the company's current primary areas of focus?

**Lippard:** We are an experiential marketing agency. We try to bring to life client products and services to their customers. Many years ago, we were primarily an event management company that worked to get fans engaged with our clients' products and services while they were attending events, but we have morphed to offer our clients a wide array of on- and off-site services, whether they are working with sports, entertainment, music, or lifestyle. We try to assist our clients with all the activities that could positively impact their brand equity and revenue opportunities.

**SMQ:** Has there been a transformation in the perception of GMR Marketing and its value?

**Lippard:** Many years ago some of the discussions with clients and potential clients revolved around "do you need an agency" and how could GMR Marketing increase their exposure and financial bottom line. Today, that discussion is mostly moot as nearly every company has an agency, so GMR, like many of our competitors, has been expanding services. The entire agency business has become much more competitive.

**SMQ:** What are some of those enhanced services that you now offer?

**Lippard:** We still work with our clients to activate their sponsorships at events, but now we also focus on all aspects of consulting, including sponsorship strategy, creative design, digital, mobile and social content, promotions, event technology, and staffing. Our recent activities have helped our clients better position themselves to talk *with* the consumer rather than talk *to* the consumer like we did 15 years ago when much of the industry was focused on impressions generated through billboards, signage and other limited mediums. The current environment with digital can take an event with 2,000 to 3,000 attendees and create a much larger, long-lasting impact for our clients than what was possible just a decade ago.

**SMQ:** Though there are now tremendous opportunities, what are the challenges, besides greater competition?

**Lippard:** The biggest challenge is trying to measure the impact of various activities. We need to help our clients generate return on investment and return on objectives through their endeavors. Today, that means focusing not just on the quantity of interactions but, more importantly, the quality. GMR has developed a variety of tools to measure the impact of various activities.

The other tremendous challenge we have is to execute flawlessly once we have developed a plan of action. All of the greatest plans must be executed to maximize their effectiveness. We often challenge our clients to think differently and to use our ideas to meet their objectives. Once we have a plan in place, we must execute or our clients will lose the opportunity to achieve their goals.

**SMQ:** Are there any trends you see happening in the agency business?

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**Lippard:** Clients have learned that effective agencies can provide much more value if they can be involved in the strategy that occurs prior to a deal. In the past, many companies would sign a deal and then realize, “We need an agency to try to make this work.” This often left GMR in a position where we had to execute a plan in a somewhat flawed environment. We had a situation once where a company that had signed a naming-rights partnership came to us to help maximize their outcomes. If that company had approached us prior to signing the deal, we likely would have been able to help them negotiate not only more inventory and benefits for the same price, but more appropriate options to meet their needs. As we have educated our clients and more and more companies have learned from past mistakes, they have realized that strategy and planning are essential to creating a great deal that can lead to effective outcomes.

As an example, we recently worked with a company that over the previous year had invested \$25 million across 100 sponsorships. Before we even thought about or discussed the micro activities for each of those opportunities, we spent considerable time evaluating if the company should build, rebalance, or eliminate each of those partnerships. Having a plan at the beginning, or as I sometime call it, “putting a head and brains on top of the shoulders” can help the client immensely. Our hope is to develop a strategy, create opportunities for activation, and then accurately measure the outcomes from the tactics implemented.

**SMQ:** You mentioned the importance of measurement. Are there things you can share in this area?

**Lippard:** We certainly have a lot of proprietary metrics we cannot share, but the understanding of “evaluation” and “valuation” are important. Evaluation concerns the strategic construct of the plan. Anything that is done should be based on a plan, rather than intuition. Even though most companies have long ago stopped the CEO “ego buy” or “interest buy” there are still some deals that are signed without a concerted plan in place to understand how it fits the overall brand. The goal should be to not simply purchase rights, but rather to understand how those rights fit in the overall strategic vision and then how those rights will be maximized. Valuation concerns measuring the cost-benefit ratio for various activities. Certainly, developing methods to better understand valuation is important but just the notion that a company should not do anything without at least thinking about inputs and outputs can be beneficial.

**SMQ:** There seems to be a growing trend of business-to-business (B2B) companies becoming a greater presence in sport, entertainment, music, and lifestyle. When dealing with B2B companies versus business-to-

consumer (B2C) companies are there any critical differences?

**Lippard:** Certainly, the goals of both types of companies are to get the product and services in the hands of potential customers regardless if that is a business purchaser or someone who would buy at retail. Many of the B2B companies that are investing in our industry are in the technology sector as that is growing at an incredible rate over the past few years. The message that many of those companies are trying to share involves demonstrating how the product advances the team, act, facility, etc. In those cases, we are often helping our clients speak to decision makers like chief technology officers, chief information officers, or other IT decision makers. This can be done through a variety of methods, but we ultimately want those decision makers to see, hear, feel, and experience the product or service the same way a retail customer would interact with a B2C company.

**SMQ:** What are some of the future trends you see developing?

**Lippard:** Right now much of our lives involve looking at “rectangles” whether that be computer screens, cell phones, or other mobile devices. The power of digital content and particularly digital event technology has already become a critical element for events. Technology like geolocate enables companies to understand their consumers’ patterns in a much more enhanced way. In our industry social engagement through a variety of platforms can enable our clients to listen, understand, and then take action to enhance the customer experience. These will continue to occur in the near future, but what is going to be the next trend is virtual reality where we will no longer look at the rectangles but instead be “in” the rectangles. The ability to someday experience the “Jack Nicholson seats” will change our industry and open a new world where consumers from various parts of the world can “be” at a game or concert “with” their friends. Though the technology is currently at a rudimentary stage, it will only get better and better at integrating the sights, sounds and other senses of live, on-site attendance through ever-improving headsets. As important as the projections of how media content distribution models involving television and online will change in the near future, the impact of virtual reality could be much greater in a fairly short period of time. Much of our business is enhancing the time and experiences of our clients through live events and with virtual reality the new programming that will be available will dramatically alter much of how GMR can build activities to benefit our clients.