



For the greater good

Generating social dividends through business

Peter Welton is the Director of the London Legacy 2020 programme at ELBA, the East London Business Alliance. Here, he introduces the work of ELBA and explains how this serves as a model to businesses across the UK that want to develop or improve their corporate social responsibility in the build-up to the London Olympics.

Already companies across the UK are beginning to ask the question: what are we going to do about the 2012 London Olympics? The question is less clear-cut when the answer lies not in an intention to tender, or in a marketing strategy, but in the realm of corporate social responsibility.

The London Organising Committee of the Olympic Games (LOCOG) has begun its search for private sector sponsors. For exclusive rights to the rings, companies will have to part with serious amounts of money. LOCOG, for the purpose of maximising sponsorship revenue, has to divide the world into black and white. You are either a sponsor, with the rights of association, or you are not. If you are not, the law will come down on you like a ton of bricks if you even hint at association. It is a necessary and clear line that is drawn, to protect the most recognisable brand on the planet.

But what, then, of all those companies up and down the UK that want to put their shoulder to the plough to help the UK capture the maximum benefit from this once-in-a-lifetime, global event? Will the protection measures, aimed at protecting the Olympic Rings from ambush marketing, actually drain the deep reservoir of goodwill among the 'non-branded' contingent of companies? The point is at its sharpest in London.



Introducing ELBA

For the past 16 years, an alliance of major City and Canary Wharf companies have engaged in a sustained, pro bono volunteering effort to support the regeneration of East London. Its focus has been on Newham, Hackney and Tower Hamlets, the very boroughs where the Olympic park is to be built, and the most deprived part of the UK. Amongst the members of the East London Business Alliance (ELBA) are more than 80 international investment banks, utility companies, insurance companies, law firms, and others, that have built long-term relationships with every sector in the community.

Every year, these companies field more than 4,000 volunteers in the East End, actively supporting over 500 local organisations. Through this major, long-term, sustained effort the private sector has built relationships with local councils, the National Health Service, the Metropolitan Police, local education authorities, education business partnerships, universities, schools, social entrepreneurs and many local charities.

Taking non-corporate, strategic partners into account, ELBA is an alliance of more than 100 members. ELBA's engagement ranges from nearly 300 volunteers mentoring 500 Hackney school pupils, to senior business leaders offering commercial advice to their major strategic partners. Companies mentor senior police officers, GPs, head teachers, council officers, small business leaders and many others. Law firms offer pro bono legal advice to individuals and businesses, as well as to strategic initiatives of potentially national significance. The Alliance has pioneered successful projects that help local people into jobs in the City. Over 16 years, ELBA has built an unparalleled reputation and helped member companies to engage in practical ways to make a difference to the stubborn problems of deprivation in East London.

The effort is an interesting mix of competition and collaboration. Member companies compete to have the most interesting projects with the greatest impact. Yet there is an underlying collaboration. Many projects are joint efforts, such as a focus on inner-city Shoreditch between Linklaters, UBS and Deutsche Bank. The leverage gained by joining together the efforts of individual companies is immense. The reach and depth of the effort make ELBA a crucial ally for public sector bodies.

Future aims and hopes

At ELBA we are understandably protective of an effort that has taken 16 years to build, and that we fully intend to continue way beyond 2012, and in this regard we are positioning ourselves alongside the deprived communities our members have been serving. We have developed a programme of activity that aims to maximise the economic benefit from the 2012 Games to the inner city, particularly the East End. On 21 February, at the Tower of London, ELBA launched a new effort to encourage the take up of sport, to widen the cultural horizons of inner city children, to help small companies gear up to bid for sub-contracts, and to widen career options and get people into jobs.

ELBA's concern is the physical, social and economic legacy of the Games. That same concern will animate companies across the country. We are inviting companies in London to join us. We recognise that not all will share our focus on challenging deprivation in East London, but are hopeful of an expanded membership, and we expect the impact of a wider combined effort to ripple out across the capital.

Companies outside London will no doubt want to forge links with Business in the Community and coordinate their response. There's work to do to help young people train to replace the construction workers who will start to drift towards London. There is work to be done to help the local tourist industry all over the UK gear up to attract tourists out of the capital. The opportunities of the Olympics to encourage sport in schools and to widen career ambitions of the young are enormous.

At a recent conference organised by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, an idea was floated about creating an alternative brand that would badge this effort. This would be welcome if it encourages companies into the same sort of competitive collaboration witnessed in ELBA.

Regardless of official sanction, private sector companies are at liberty to help the UK maximise the benefit from the Games. The only restriction on that effort is our imagination.



Peter Welton, East London Business Alliance

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