

Be Careful When Marketing Around the Olympics

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As consumers get ready to watch the 2018 Winter Olympic Games, some companies are getting ready to capitalize on the public enthusiasm. Many marketers want to incorporate Olympics-related themes – ranging from overt mentions of the Olympics to more subtle sports references – in their ads in order to associate their brands with the attention that is being paid to the games. Although this makes sense from a marketing perspective, it can also pose some legal risks.

The Ted Stevens Olympic & Amateur Sports Act gives the United States Olympic Committee (or “USOC”) exclusive rights to use certain words, like “Olympic,” and



symbols, like the interlocking rings. The Act also prohibits use of any word, symbol, or combination thereof that “tending to cause confusion or mistake, to deceive, or to falsely suggest a connection with” the user of the marks and the Olympics. Other countries – including South Korea – have similar laws.

Some companies pay a lot of money for the right to use these marks, so if you use them without permission, you could get a letter (or worse) from an official sponsor or a group like the USOC. The USOC has even tried stop companies from using marks in hashtags. For example, in 2016, the USOC’s chief marketing officer [wrote](#) that companies could not use hashtags such as #Rio2016 or #TeamUSA.” According to some press reports, the USOC sent letters to various companies reiterating this position.

Feel free to cheer Team USA on from your personal social media accounts this summer. But remember that what may be called “patriotic” when done from your personal account could be called “infringement” when done from a business account.

