



More than just a name on a shirt

Nick Krige

Aon recently surrendered the advertising rights on the front of Manchester United's shirt to Chevrolet, which offered England's most successful club the biggest sponsorship deal in the history of football. We caught up with Phil Clement, global chief marketing and communications officer at Aon, to find out why companies spend so much on shirt sponsorships and how extensive their involvement with Manchester United is.



Corporate sponsorship has become synonymous with professional sport to the point where it would probably look slightly strange if a team ran onto the field with nothing being advertised on the front of their shirts. Companies are spending billions making sure that their brand is front and centre in the minds of sport fans.

What does it mean for Aon to be involved with Manchester United?

The beauty of our partnership with Manchester United is that it is just as relevant in South Africa as it is in Asia or Latin America. The fact that the African continent is home to six of the top 10 fastest-growing economies makes the

partnership very attractive for us, as we found out last year when the team played a friendly in Cape Town as part of its pre-season tour. That match created a tremendous opportunity for Anton Roux's team in South Africa to connect clients and prospects with Sir Alex Ferguson and the players. That is a tremendous benefit that we can use in any part of the world, as the team has close to 660 million followers, a great majority of whom live outside the UK.

I can say that the benefits of our partnership have exceeded our expectations in terms of strengthening our global brand, serving as an amplifier to unite our 65 000 colleagues in 120 countries around a common theme, and creating new commercial business opportunities. This is tremendous momentum that we plan to continue over the next eight years of our partnership.

How extensive is Aon's involvement with Manchester United?

The move from sponsorship to partnership is bringing Aon into the heart of Manchester United in so many different ways. For the 2013–2014 season, we will have a very powerful set of assets to work with, including the last year of our global shirt sponsorship.

In addition to becoming the first partner of the club's renowned training complex at Carrington, starting next season Manchester United players and coaching staff will wear Aon-branded apparel and training kits at all matches versus British clubs, on international tours, friendly fixtures and training sessions. We will become the principal partner of the Manchester United Business Network. What this

means is that we will be providing advice to the club on issues critical to their success, such as talent, health and wellness.

Finally, Aon will continue to be the principal partner of the Manchester United Foundation. This will allow us to sustain our joint work in helping communities at risk and empowering people around the world to be prepared to manage the challenges they face, and to bring more opportunities within their reach.

What services does Aon offer Manchester United?

We work with global insurers to help them get value for price and solutions for the business challenges they may face on issues such as risk management, talent, healthcare and retirement. We use state-of-the-art data and analytics to provide them with the most current insights.

We provide these services to the club to help it manage its global challenges regarding risk and people issues. For example, Aon Benfield, our reinsurance brokerage business, gave the club invaluable advice on the best strategies and options for access to capital during its initial public offering (IPO) launch. Aon Hewitt, our human resources solutions business, helps the club manage its talent and recruitment of employees as well as the healthcare and retirement issues. Aon Risk Solutions, our risk management business, helps the club manage its risk in everything from construction, motor fleet, directors' and officers' coverage, property, travel and a lot more.

How involved is Aon with looking after employee benefits of Manchester United?

We work very closely with the club to help the management address its employee benefits programme as well as a number of other human resources-related topics. This includes helping identify, attract and retain the best talent, as well as succession planning and

retirement planning. You only have to look at the announcement of Sir Alex Ferguson's retirement and the hiring of David Moyes as the new manager to see that these issues are critical for high-performing organisations. Dealing with them is one of our specialties.

To what extent does Aon provide match day cover and what does that entail?

As part of our risk management offerings, we assist Manchester United on property issues related to construction and engineering, as well as issues related to event cancellation. It may not sound very exciting, but it is critical to the overall success of the club.

How much cover is needed for games, and what are the biggest risks faced by Manchester United on match day?

I can't get into too much detail here other than to say that we work very closely with the club to make sure that match day goes as uneventfully off the pitch as possible.

Why did Aon decide to sponsor United's training ground?

Manchester United wants to be as successful off the pitch as they are on it. It is an impressive global company that, like most of our clients, is trying to grow. We want to support them with a high-level performing team in all aspects of their work, and we are already helping to build sustainable performance around the world like we do for our clients in South Africa and elsewhere.

The training complex is revered as a symbol of innovation and excellence in the world of sport. We have the utmost admiration and respect for the 800 team members at Manchester United and the work they do. Through our partnership

of the training centre, we will provide the club with advice on its risk management, talent, health and retirement issues through the use of powerful data and analytics.

Reports suggest that Chevrolet will be taking over the main shirt sponsorship from the start of the 2014–2015 season. What circumstance led to Aon relinquishing that space?

Well, the reports are true; the club announced Chevrolet will become the new shirt sponsor last year. We are delighted as it is a valued client of Aon's and we are pleased to have Chevrolet join the Manchester United team. Chevy will be a valued participant in the Manchester United Business Network.

You also have to remember that Aon will continue its global shirt sponsorship through the end of the 2013–2014 season. When you add that to what we will be taking on in the next phase of our partnership, it gives Aon a tremendous group of assets to work with.

We had the option to renew our shirt sponsorship, but the tremendous success we achieved in increasing our brand awareness and employee engagement levels allows us to now move from creating greater awareness of what Aon is, to creating greater understanding of what it is that we provide to clients.

Plus, this larger group of assets – the Manchester United Business Network; the Aon Training Complex being the presenting partner of the club's summer tours; the Manchester United Foundation; and having the Aon logo on the training kit was too much to pass up.

How does Aon's sponsorship of United affect its brokers around the world, especially in South Africa?

Manchester United is one of the most recognised brands on Earth. It resonates as well in Johannesburg and Cape Town as it does in Singapore, Tokyo or Buenos Aires. It is this tremendous global brand awareness that ties in nicely with our global network. It gives our brokers and account executives in South Africa the opportunity to reach out to clients with advice and solutions, and to prospects to develop new business opportunities.

When the club was in Johannesburg last year, we were able to have clients and prospects interact with players at the team hotel and be involved in other activities in addition to attending the match. As you can imagine,





opportunities like this can have a tremendous impact on a client or prospect who may be an avid fan of Manchester United or just a fan of soccer.

How does Aon calculate the value and the worth of a sponsorship?

We have a saying at Aon that 'if we can't measure it, we don't do it'. Measurement is a key element of everything we do across our firm, including our partnership with Manchester United. We had three strategic objectives when we launched our partnership in 2010. First, we wanted to increase our global brand awareness, and we did. In the first two years of our partnership, we saw an increase in awareness from 39 to 50 per cent.

Second, we wanted to increase the level of employee engagement across the firm, and we did. Our last global colleague survey showed us that about 80 per cent of our global team either strongly agreed or agreed that Aon has a strong brand. In addition, over 70 per cent

believed that the partnership with Manchester United helped unite our firm. We were very pleased with this result.

And finally, we wanted to increase the level of business opportunities and relationships in our risk and human resources solutions businesses, and we did. While I can't discuss specific numbers, I can say that the partnership with Manchester United exceeded our expectations in all three areas.

Do you have any final comments on Aon's association with Manchester United?

There are a couple of things I would like to add. First, the strength of the Manchester United brand was never demonstrated more powerfully than by the fact that the news surrounding Sir Alex Ferguson's retirement was second only to the news of the retirement of Pope Benedict. Both retirement stories have been two of the biggest news items on the planet. To be aligned with such a powerful

brand has created tremendous opportunities for our firm.

We stand in awe of Sir Alex and his 26 years of unparalleled achievement. He leaves as one of the greatest managers of all time and an inspiration to so many of us at our firm. His record of success, leadership and talent development in particular is without equal, and that is something we really appreciate. We look forward to continuing to work with Sir Alex in his role as a club ambassador.

We believe we are taking the sport sponsorship business model to another level by being more than just a name on the famous Manchester United shirt. The next phase of our partnership with the club will provide Aon with the unique opportunity to showcase our products and solutions in a way that will strengthen the performance of the club while also serving as a powerful vehicle to create greater understanding and preference for our advice and solutions with clients and prospects. I think the next phase of our partnership will be even greater than the first.