

What's Fresh Now

The latest trends in special events and meetings

What if the Olympics Come to New York?

We could see a lot of events in 2012. Here's a preview

IF NEW YORK WINS its bid to host the 2012 Olympics—which is a pretty big if—the city's special events industry could experience a business bonanza without precedent, according to planners who have staged corporate events for past Olympic Games.

"The Olympics can relate to any company in any way," says **Bill Morton**, chairman of **Jack Morton Worldwide**, a New York-based event marketing company that produced the opening and closing ceremonies in Athens last summer. "When you think of the Olympics raising the bar further, faster, higher, everybody will want to be a part of that celebration, from customers and clients to their employees and the press."

The games would pump \$11 billion into the local economy, according to **NYC2012**, the committee leading New York's bid. It's unclear how much corporations will spend on entertaining, but planners and vendors predict the sum would be larger than the city has ever seen for a sports event.

"The opportunities are huge for companies to take advantage of an international event on our own turf," says **Chad Thompson**, vice president of **MVP Group**, a sports marketing agency in Manhattan that brokers sponsorships for corporations. New York-based companies that might not be willing to entertain clients at games on another continent will likely do something if all the hoopla is on their home turf, and the international media attention will create even more impetus for local firms to get in on the act. "All eyes will be on New York," Thompson says. "Media will be everywhere clamoring for a great story."

There's one catch, of course: New York hasn't been tapped yet, and faces rival bids from Paris, London, Moscow, and Madrid. The **International Olympic Committee (IOC)** is slated to announce its pick July 6. If any of the European cities win 2012, New York's chances for the 2016 summer games increases significantly, as the IOC will not put consecutive games on the same continent.

No matter where the games are, companies will host all-day hospitality services for clients,



When the International Olympic Committee visited New York this past February, members of the 2004 Olympic fencing team performed a demonstration on the steps of the New York Public Library—just a sample of the many events that could come to the city if the 2012 Olympics are held here.

media, and guests, and will create their own events such as outdoor concerts or receptions with Olympic athletes. Companies with international ties will jockey for a chance to fete visiting teams and their entourages.

McDonald's, an Olympics sponsor for decades, has already committed to a sponsorship for 2012. The burger giant will mostly likely continue its practice of taking top employees from around the world to the games as a reward for winning at McDonald's employee Olympics.

The company will also use the games as a stage for media events as it did last summer in Athens. "It is a great communications opportunity for us," says spokeswoman **Anna Rozenich**. In Athens, McDonald's gave out thousands of pedometers at one event, and donated a playhouse to the pediatric wing of an Athens hospital.

Connie Costas, founder of the **Greenhill Agency**, a New York event-marketing firm, says her clients go all out for the Olympics. "This is an investment a company makes in the Olympic movement," she says. For one New York Fortune 500 company, Costas designed a trip for five successive groups of 40 clients during the 2002 winter games in Salt Lake City. The company spent close to \$1.5 million on transportation, lodging, tickets, meals, gifts, and ski outings.

Tim Hindert, president of **Related Experiences**, which arranges events and sponsorships for **Related Companies**, the developer of the **Time Warner Center** and other properties, says that if the games came to New York, the economic windfall on the Time Warner Center "would be in the millions." He would expect high-end parties, events at **Jazz at Lincoln Center** and the retail space, and parties at the **Mandarin Oriental** hotel.

Last summer's **Republican National Convention (RNC)** gave the event industry a taste of what

the Olympics could bring. The RNC brought \$341 million into New York, with bashes that included a gala media reception that showcased local cuisine and city-inspired entertainment for 6,000 journalists at the Time Warner Center, a party that was lured there by Time Warner chairman **Dick Parsons**.

Michael Desiderio, managing director of **Tavern on the Green**, says convention groups

booked the restaurant solid for four days of non-stop entertaining, bringing Tavern \$200,000 in sales each day. "It was quadruple the revenue we would have on a typical day," Desiderio says.

The Olympics last 18 days, plus there are events such as welcome receptions before the opening ceremonies—all a long jump ahead in duration and international reach of a mere political convention, **Grammy** awards broadcast, or **Super Bowl**. Better yet, the games would be held during the normally slow summer.

Whichever city wins, a local event management firm, **Jet Set Sports** in Far Hills, New Jersey, has already become a "hospitality sponsor" for the **U.S. Olympic Committee** and the U.S. Olympic team of the 2012 games. That means the firm can sell exclusive packages to sponsor companies. For the Salt Lake City games, Jet Set Sports created a package for first-time Olympics sponsor **Monster.com** that included transportation, tickets, and parties for 58 top clients and their guests in five back-to-back groups.

"There will be hundreds of events as part of the games themselves," says Jet Set president **Sead Dizdervic**. "But there will be party business from corporations around the world who want to associate their names with the spirit of the games."

—Louise Kramer