

Qantel Plays Off Sports To Score in Vertical Markets

By Robbin S. Goodman

Picture this: San Diego Chargers Quarterback Dan Fouts drops back to pass. He pump fakes once, then spots his tight end, Kellen Winslow, flashing across the field. The ball is released, Winslow leaps gracefully, plucks it from the air, and races across the goal line.

A thrill, certainly, for sports fans. But what's in it for marketers? One of the most successful computer promotions in recent memory. This particular play, known as the 372 F-shoot pump, is unusual in that it was designed with the help of a computer. Like 11 other National Football League teams, San Diego has in its competitive arsenal a minicomputer system manufactured by MDS Qantel.

Faced with competition from heavy hitters like IBM, Hewlett-Packard, and Data General, Qantel felt it was imperative that

the company take a marketing stance that set it apart. The object, according to Qantel President Dallas Talley, was "to create a highly visible position for us in the computer field." Though Qantel is a vertical marketer with good penetration in a number of business areas, the glamor end of its business has always been its sports presence and the Sports-Pac system, a hardware/software package originally developed for Head Coach John McKay of the Tampa Bay Buccaneers in 1978. Currently, the company has more sports-specific computer installations than all its competitors combined.

While the sports market was the immediate target, Qantel had its eye on a much larger universe of potential buyers. Many of the other vertical markets that the company is involved in actually produce more revenue than its Sports-Pac.

A number of marketing approaches were considered, including emphasizing service and reliability — Qantel finished first in a user-satisfaction survey published by Data Pro — but were ultimately rejected. Instead, the company decided to promote its involvement in sports with a "Computer of Champions" integrated campaign.

To project an action-oriented image beyond football, Qantel targeted vertical markets with its "Computer of Champions" integrated campaign.

campaign. Once the concept had been selected, an integrated campaign to win recognition for Qantel products and achievements was developed. "We wanted to push a concept that graphically illustrated that we were emphasizing verticals," Talley notes. "Our success in penetrating the NFL and collegiate ranks provided the rationale."

It's no secret that businesspeople view the playing field, with its violence and abrupt swings of fortune, as analogous to the boardroom. Says David McMichael, creative director at Rogers & French, the California ad agency that handles the Qantel account, "When you reach the sports market on Sunday, you're reaching a lot of the men who go to work on Monday and make managerial — real purchasing — decisions. These guys know people like Tex Schramm [Dallas Cowboys president] and Al Davis [Los Angeles Raiders president] can afford to buy any computer system they want. When they pick Qantel, that's saying something for the product." As luck would also have it, two recent Superbowl participants — the

puterized race in history.

In addition, sportscaster Hank Stram was hired as a Qantel spokesperson. While traveling to NFL cities with his weekly radio broadcasts for CBS Sports, he was booked for interviews with journalists from the print and broadcast media. TV commercials feature basketball legend Jerry West endorsing the Qantel system (his former team, the Los Angeles Lakers, and the NBA champion Boston Celtics are Qantel users).

A number of consumer publications have featured stories on teams using Qantel equipment, including a story on the San Diego Chargers in *Business Week*, and in in-flight publications like *Delta Sky* (three million readers), science publications such as *Omni* (858,000), newspapers from the *New York Times* (900,000) to the *Tampa Tribune* (190,000).

In a half-hour show called *Sports Scan*, sponsored by Kodak and distributed to 15 TV stations and 100 cable systems, a video segment on Qantel and Tampa Bay was viewed by ten million people. More recently, Qantel was



QANTEL. The official computer of the New York Marathon.

During last year's New York City Marathon, 78 million people saw, heard, or read that Qantel made it the most highly computerized race in history

Miami Dolphins in 1983 and Raiders in 1984 — have both been Qantel users.

The "Computer of Champions" theme was used in all of the company's literature, ads, printed sales material, and promotions. And to project an action-oriented image beyond football, Qantel developed software and provided hardware for scoring the New York City Marathon, and the payoff in publicity was immense. During last year's race, some 78 million people saw, heard, or read that Qantel, the "Official Computer of the New York City Marathon," made the 1983 marathon the most highly com-

called upon to provide software for the Olympic Marathon trials in Buffalo, N.Y., as well as named the official computer of the NBA.

Though Qantel, a subsidiary of Mohawk Data Sciences, doesn't release sales figures, there has been a tremendous increase in name recognition. Now the company is positioned to take on the big boys. In today's rapidly evolving marketplace, the "Computer of Champions" is playing to win.

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