CONSUMER PROTECTION

The World Cup of Brands: How to Ride Football Euphoria Without Facing a Multi-Million Penalty

IN BRIEF

The World Cup kicked off on June 11 in Mexico City and, for a little over a month, will be the most-watched event on the planet. Industry estimates point to a cumulative audience of nearly five billion people and more than USD 10 billion in additional global advertising spend. For fans, it is a celebration. For brands, it is the most coveted communications platform in the world.

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Yet there is a second tournament that almost no one sees, played far from the pitch: in marketing, legal and compliance departments. The question there is not who scores the goal, but who can lawfully capitalize on collective euphoria without crossing a regulatory line that, this year, has become significantly more costly. Since April 2026, leveraging the World Cup without being an official sponsor may carry penalties of approximately MXN 29 million.

Emotion sells, but it does not exempt brands from compliance

Sport creates what few industries generate organically: emotional connection. People celebrate, suffer, build memories and develop a sense of identity around teams and national squads.

That emotional charge makes the World Cup an exceptional opportunity, and there is nothing improper about leveraging it. The challenge arises when emotion begins to displace information. “Last chance”, “limited edition”, “exclusive access”, “enter to win a once-in-a-lifetime experience”: the vocabulary of FOMO — the fear of missing out — multiplies during these weeks and encourages fast consumption decisions, sometimes before consumers have all the elements required to assess the offer.

A simple but demanding rule should be kept in mind: in Mexico, advertising must be truthful, verifiable and non-misleading, as required by Article 32 of the Federal Consumer Protection Law. Emotion may persuade; it must not replace information.

Leveraging the World Cup now has rules — and penalties

Every brand wants a share of the conversation. That instinct is legitimate; the problem is assuming that any "World Cup" content is free territory. It is not. FIFA protects names, logos, the trophy, mascots, typefaces and official symbols. This year, Mexico tightened the net: the amendment to the Federal Law for the Protection of Industrial Property, published in April 2026, classified ambush marketing as an administrative infringement and placed enforcement within the jurisdiction of the Mexican Institute of Industrial Property (IMPI), with fines that may approach MXN 29 million and even the closure of the relevant establishment.

The key change is more nuanced than it may appear: infringement no longer depends solely on the use of a registered trademark, but also on the perception generated by the campaign among consumers. If advertising suggests, without authorization, an official link or sponsorship relationship with the tournament or its sponsors, risk may arise even if no third-party logo is used. The good news is that brands may still play within the rules: they can join the conversation through creative campaigns, general references to football and messages aimed at fans, provided they do not create confusion regarding a relationship that does not exist. One reminder is often overlooked: a player's name and likeness are also protected assets, and their use requires authorization.

In 2026, the line between opportunity marketing and ambush marketing has ceased to be merely a matter of creativity and has become, above all, a matter of intellectual property compliance.

Promotions and sweepstakes: chance comes with procedure

Travel, tickets, official merchandise, meet-and-greets with players and VIP experiences: promotions linked to the tournament are multiplying. Here, the rules are specific. A promotion must clearly disclose its dates, mechanics, prizes, territorial scope and restrictions, in accordance with NOM-028-SCFI-2007.

Where chance is involved, authorization is generally required from the Ministry of the Interior (Secretaría de Gobernación), through the General Directorate for Games and Sweepstakes; and, in all cases, PROFECO must be notified at least three business days in advance.

A social-media "giveaway" is still a promotion and is subject to the same obligations. An inconvenient truth should also be noted: the phrase "restrictions apply" is not a substitute for complete information; in most cases, it is the footprint of a promotion that was not reviewed in time.

Influencers: transparency is not optional

Content creators will be central players in Mexico 2026; we will see intense activity around travel, lodging

Consumers have the right to distinguish between a recommendation based on genuine experience and one arising from a commercial collaboration. For that reason, PROFECO's Influencer Advertising Guide requires sponsorships to be disclosed visibly and from the outset, using clear labels such as #PaidAdvertising.

Covert advertising not only erodes trust — the most valuable asset of any brand and any creator — it is also one of the new fronts of ambush marketing: paying a creator to appear with brands other than the official sponsor may still constitute ambush marketing, even when the content is posted from a phone.

Data also plays a role

Behind every promotion, app, loyalty program or personalized experience lies a discreet exchange: in order to participate, individuals provide data about themselves — name, email address, telephone number, location, age, preferences and even digital habits.

That landscape has changed. Since March 2025, Mexico has had a new Federal Law on the Protection of Personal Data Held by Private Parties; INAI was abolished and the competent authority is now the Secretariat for Anti-Corruption and Good Government.

In practical terms, the privacy notice must be available from the moment personal data is collected, any purpose other than the one originally disclosed requires new consent, and data subjects retain their rights of access, rectification, cancellation and opposition.

The golden rule remains the same: request only the data you need, explain what you will use it for and for how long. In the digital economy, personal data is an asset of enormous value; the World Cup will be no exception.

A quick guide to launching your campaign on time — and in full compliance

Classify before creating. Determine whether your product falls within the scope of PROFECO or COFEPRIS. Cosmetics, supplements, foods with claimed properties and alcoholic beverages are subject to their own permits, notices and legends — and to strict rules when minors are involved.

Substantiate every claim. Any objective statement ("best seller", "number one", "X improvement") requires verifiable evidence to be documented before the campaign goes live. What the average consumer understands must match what the product actually does.

If chance is involved, there is a procedure. Authorization from SEGOB is required when chance determines the outcome, notice must be filed with PROFECO three business days in advance, and complete terms and conditions must be available. "Fine print" is not a substitute.

Clear intellectual property rights. Before mentioning the tournament, using symbols or player images, or implying any link, validate which assets are protected and whether you are authorized to use them. When in doubt, seek advice; do not rely on creative workarounds.

Label paid content. Influencers and creators must disclose sponsorships visibly and from the very first moment.

Minimize data. Make the privacy notice available at the point of collection, define a clear purpose and retention period, and obtain consent for any new uses.

Review before launch, not after. An approval desk that brings together marketing, legal, regulatory and privacy teams before launch saves rework and prevents unpleasant surprises.

Document and preserve. One file per piece — final version, supporting evidence, validations, permits and proof of dissemination — is your best defense in the event of an inspection.

Recurring mistakes — and how to avoid them

- Suggesting a sponsorship or official link with the World Cup that does not exist.
- Using “restrictions apply” as a catch-all clause that supposedly covers everything.
- Launching a sweepstakes or prize draw without SEGOB authorization or without notice to PROFECO.
- Publishing influencer content without disclosing that it is paid.
- Collecting more data than necessary “just in case”.
- Making absolute claims such as “the best”, “guaranteed” or “everyone”.
- Targeting alcohol advertising, or advertising for food products bearing front-of-package warning labels, at minors.
- Leaving legal review until the end, when there is no longer room for correction.
- Allowing inconsistencies between the print and digital versions of the same campaign.

Final thoughts

The 2026 World Cup will be remembered as the most digital and most monetized in history. Brands will compete for the attention of consumers who are increasingly connected, informed and demanding. For that reason, success will not depend only on who generates the strongest emotional response, but on who does so with greater transparency and responsibility. A good campaign may inspire a purchase, a connection or a memorable experience; what it must not do is interfere with the consumer’s ability to decide freely and on an informed basis.

Supporting companies so that creativity and compliance play on the same team — in advertising, consumer protection, intellectual property, privacy and compliance — is now one of the most relevant conversations in the market. Because in the World Cup, as in business, the brands that play best are not those that assume the

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