

Ally Financial's CMO breaks down the strategy behind its promise to spend equally on women's and men's sports advertising

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By Ryan Joe



Ally Financial promised to spend as much on ads in women's sports as it does on men's sports. Women's sports viewership is surging, and ads there perform incredibly well. But networks haven't availed a lot of inventory and still put women's tournaments in bad timeslots. Ally Financial has a history of bucking the trend when it comes to its marketing. During the height of the pandemic in 2020, when most banks slashed their ad budgets, Ally increased spend 8% to \$161 million.

Similarly, as big banks like Citi blast their branding across a multitude of social causes, Ally's CMO Andrea Brimmer has zeroed in on the bank's pledge to spend as much on women's sports as it does on men's sports within five years. Ally made the 50/50 pledge to commemorate the June 23 anniversary of Title IX, the civil rights law prohibiting discrimination based on sex.

As part of that pledge, Ally launched a national campaign Wednesday called "Watch the Game, Change the Game" to promote viewership in women's sports.

Brimmer, who was named to Insider's 2022 Most Innovative CMOs, broke down how Ally is trying to capitalize on the surging interest in women's sports.

Viewership in the 2021 National Women's Soccer League championship match soared 216% over 2019 and the 2022 NCAA Women's Basketball championship was ESPN's most-watched women's title game since 2004.

Still, the ad inventory is cheaper than in men's sports — and produces outsized returns, Brimmer said.

"You won't pay as much in the WNBA finals as you will for the NBA finals," Brimmer said. "But if you can get more people watching women's sports and those audience sizes grow, then the networks will have more ability to charge more for that inventory."

There are also fewer advertisers in women's sports, which works to Ally's advantage.

"You definitely see your awareness grow at a rate that's higher in women's sports than in men's because there aren't as many brands, so people remember the brands that are there," Brimmer said.

Ally plans to encourage other brands to follow its lead nonetheless. "Candidly, I think it would be a good problem to have to fight for prime inventory," Brimmer said.

Ally is challenged getting to 50/50 (it hopes to put 40% of its sports budget into women's sports by next year, and Ally didn't say how much it spends on sports overall) because the networks don't make a lot of women's sports inventory available, believing advertisers won't buy it, she said. And the networks aren't doing women's sports any great favors by shunting them to bad time slots or on streaming sites.

"The NWSL Women's Championship game was on at 9 a.m. on a Saturday morning," Brimmer said. "Put it out at 4 or 5 where you have an opportunity for more people to watch. Move women's sports out of streaming and put it into prime linear places. If I'm CBS, don't just put everything on Paramount, put it on CBS. Don't just put everything on ESPN2, put it on ESPN."

The 50/50 pledge also support's Ally's financial literacy platform and aligns it with supporting women's career growth. Brimmer noted a 2018 EY survey that found that 94% of C-suite women played sports, with 52% at the college level. "When you support women's sports, you're building a pipeline of talent and furthering the future of American business."

And getting to 50/50 means Ally, which spends heavily male-dominated leagues like NASCAR and PGA Tour Champions, is willing to pull spending from men's sports.

"That's what achieving parity is about," Brimmer said. "It doesn't mean you have to overinvest in one vertical. It means balancing the portfolio."