

# 5 questions for Fred Haberman on marketing the 2026 Special Olympics

News

The Minneapolis-based firm is planning marketing and media relations for the event in its home city.

by Eric Berger Added 4 hours ago



The Special Olympics closing ceremony took place this week in Germany. (Photo credit: Getty Images).

MINNEAPOLIS: When the Twin Cities hosted the International Summer Special Olympics in 1991, Fred Haberman, a volunteer, drove athletes and sponsors, transported refreshments and handed out T-shirts.

“I was basically one of those young guys that did everything,” Haberman said.

The experience was one of the reasons that he and his wife, Sarah, started the eponymous marketing agency in an effort to work on similar causes.

Three decades later, the U.S.A. Special Olympics selected the Twin Cities as the host for the 2026 games and Haberman, which is based in Minneapolis, as the agency to promote the event.

“My 1991 volunteering experience made such a big impact on me, and I really needed to be a part of this important and inspiring event that was going to be happening again in my city,” Haberman said. “We want to create a lasting legacy and hopefully inspire more work opportunities for people with intellectual disabilities and create more understanding and deeper levels of inclusivity.”

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### **What are the common tactics that are crucial to make campaigns for events like this successful?**

There are a few things. If you look at the Super Bowl, you know where the Super Bowl is going to be two, three years from now. You know where an NCAA event is going to be, and what a lot of these programs have in common is they begin identifying sponsors two to three years in advance.

They also begin to identify who their potential media partners are because many of the companies that are going to come in as sponsors are also looking for brand recognition, both in signage on the ground, as well as potentially through the media. So if you can get your media and marketing strategies in place, it's very helpful to then use those strategies and the inventory that you have identified to help secure impressions and experiential marketing opportunities for those brands.

### **Have you reviewed marketing efforts for previous Special Olympics to see what went well or didn't go well?**

Yeah, we did that before the pitch. You are always looking at what has gone well, what might be unique and what might be innovative. One of the groups that we have been looking at is actually the Berlin games that [closed this week].

We have been paying close attention and have been really impressed with some of their athlete-first marketing efforts, like the [Vogue Germany cover shoot](#) featuring Special Olympics Germany athletes and the [official dance and song](#), as well as [the app](#) — all great, inclusive ways to bring spectators in from all over the world to root for their home teams.

### **Do you already have content in mind?**

We are working on it. This is still three years from today, but what I like about these programs is that there is a strong grassroots component to them, and we are thinking about: how do we inspire greater inclusivity? How do we create more unified schools? There are people in those schools who are champions, whether they are in school or superintendents or volunteers. And one part of this will be activating these networks.

### **Are there ways in which you would like to do things differently than previous Special Olympics marketing campaigns?**

I would say one thing that will be unique will be components of the program that get into Minnesota. [Drogas developed a wonderful logo](#), and there's this aspirational component to it, but at the same time, there is a real Minnesota orientation to it, with a lake and trees. It's a beautiful logo.

There are icons within the logo that I think we will end up using for any number of applications and advertising.

### **In your bid, did you outline a strategy for what you plan to do as far as content captured at the games?**

We had all kinds of ideas. We threw the kitchen sink at it. We wanted it really bad. We came up with creative and how that would be applied, how we would create these inspirational moments with a campaign, with ambassadors, from athletes to celebrities. We also shared ideas about working with the media on how to interview folks with intellectual disabilities and not talk down to them.

We have an opportunity to build on the great work Special Olympics is doing in helping to dispel negative attitudes and stereotypes to make sure the stories focus on the incredible ability of the athletes, reported without any disclaimers or pity. The bottom line is that we want to make sure Special Olympics athletes receive the same respect as any accomplished athlete.

We have Special Olympics language and image guidelines that we will share with anyone writing or speaking about people with intellectual disabilities to ensure that all people are portrayed with individuality and dignity.

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