SPAM and sports don’t mix but some say, why not?

SSC’s decision to call event Spam draws mixed reaction from students and professionals

DEBBIE YONG

The stranger, the better.
That is what marketing professionals felt when they learnt of the Singapore Sports Council’s unusual name for a sports-themed party at the St James Power Station nightclub this Saturday.

Its Sports Party Animal Movement event’s abbreviated name, Spam, drew ire from one invitee who received an invitation last week.

The invitee, M L Lee, felt that Spam, a common abbreviation for junk e-mail and a brand of canned luncheon meat, was “insulting” and the term “party animal” was humiliating.

But Mr Gary Tan, the marketing manager of Loof bar, felt differently. He said: “From a marketing point of view, anything that catches the eye is good. And party animal is a common expression.”

Ms Debbie Cai, editor of Marketing magazine, added: “People are bombarded with information on events and brands all the time, the good ones generate buzz to get your attention.”

Mr Ben Chung, who handles public relations at hip hop club Butter Factory, felt that the theme could have been “more intriguing”, such as letting guests wait till the event to find out what Spam stands for and its relation to sports, for example.

Peter De Maeyer, assistant professor of marketing at Singapore Management University said that playing on a word’s multiple meanings – or resonance, in textbook-speak – is a common tactic used by advertisers to grab attention.

“Spam is a quirky brand that doesn’t take itself too seriously. It’s imagery and advertising are quite humourous. Spam in the meaning of unsolicited email is one of these fun, informal words,” he said.

These associations, he said, should appeal to the segment the SSC is targeting: The 20 to 30-year-olds who lead an active lifestyle.

But young party-goers my paper spoke to were unimpressed.

“The word party animal is a bit cheesy, and isn’t Spam, as in junk mail, generally unwanted?” said Mr Ming Yuen, 18, a coordinator at Home club.

Mr Lim Aik, 23, a second year National University of Singapore student felt that the party’s name was just not catchy.

“It seems that the planning authorities have a hazy understanding of what appeals to youths. Perhaps they should get more youths’ feedback before they start naming and marketing their parties,” he said.

Some wondered why the SSC wants to link itself to nightlife, which is associated with alcohol consumption, smoking and irregular sleep – anything but a healthy lifestyle.

Undergraduate Lim Zi Xuan, 22, said: “I don’t think it’s offensive but I just don’t see the link.

Still, Prof De Maeyer said: “Ultimately, you can’t please everybody. If you’re always trying to walk on eggshells, you’ll end up with dull, unengaging marketing.”

debyong@sph.com.sg