



The case **Dole**

MARKETING AWARD 2026 – XXXVIII EDITION





THE CASE IN BRIEF

Dole Italia is part of Dole plc, the global fresh fruit giant. With a turnover of \$8.5 billion and 160 distribution centers worldwide, it is the leading global player for bananas and one of the leaders for pineapples and grapes. In Italy, Dole moves over 50 million kg of fruit per year: bananas and pineapples are the heart of the business, but the portfolio is broad and increasingly focused on organic and premium segments.

The fresh fruit market in Italy, however, is not simple: **private label** dominates (35%) and consumers struggle to recognize brands. The challenge? **To stand out not on price but on values**, and here Dole plays the card of quality, sustainability, and transparency. With the "**Dole Farm Code**" you can discover where each fruit was grown: a virtual journey to the plantation.

Dole uses communication built on multiple fronts, such as traditional media, social media, in-store activities, but a key role in the brand's communication mix is represented by sports sponsorships: from the Rome and Milan marathons to triathlon and basketball, where in 2025 it became Title Sponsor of Rinascita Basket Rimini. The idea is clear: to associate the brand with health, energy, and wellbeing. And now it's your turn: what would you do to increase Dole's awareness among young people aged 15 to 30? What value proposition would you build? How would you use sports sponsorships in innovative ways to make Dole "the official fruit" of this generation? You have €200,000 per year for the two-year period 2026-2027:

your plan must be creative, coherent, and capable of strengthening the brand's image.

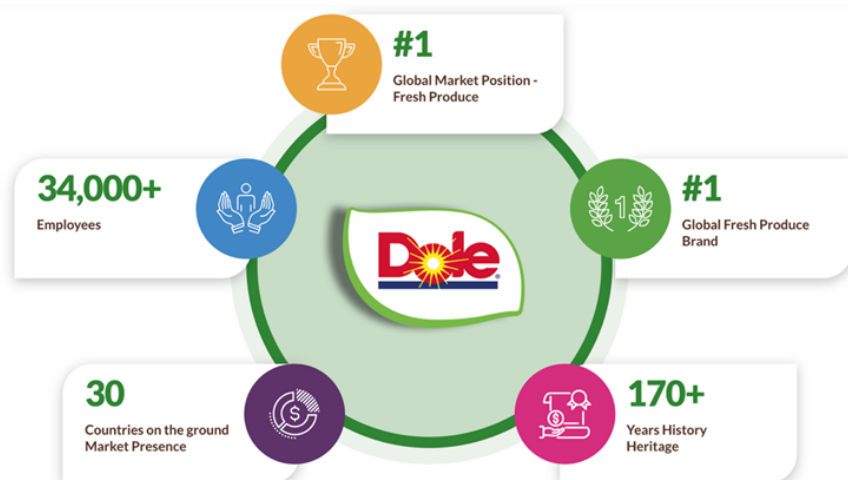
1. DOLE PLC AND THE ITALIAN SUBSIDIARY

Dole Italia is part of the international group Dole plc, a world leader in the production and marketing of fresh fruit and vegetables. With over 170 years of history, Dole plc is the **global leader in fresh fruit and vegetables and category leader in numerous mainstream segments in major markets**: it is the leading operator for bananas in North America and second in Europe; second for pineapples in North America and Europe and the leading global exporter of grapes. With a global turnover of \$8.5 billion in 2024, the group stands out for its wide range of products, distribution reach, and commitment to quality, sustainability, and innovation.

Dole PLC

From the beginning, everything at Dole has centered on a simple principle: quality, quality, and more quality.

Since then, Dole has grown into one of the industry's leading companies, with a wide range of products in a variety of markets, continually committed to ensuring that consumers worldwide have access to the highest quality fruit and vegetables.



In 1851, the cornerstone of Dole Food Company, Inc. was laid when Samuel Castle and Amos Cooke, originally from Boston, established their trading company in Hawaii: 12 years later, the company Philipp Astheimer & Sohn was established in Hamburg, becoming the basis for trade in Europe. In 1899, James Drummond Dole arrived in Hawaii fresh from Harvard with a degree in horticulture and agriculture. Within a couple of years, he began growing pineapples in Wahiawa, on the Hawaiian island of Oahu. He established the Hawaiian Pineapple Company and began making the name "Hawaii" synonymous with "Pineapple." During these years, Dole formulated his famous quality promise: "We built this company on quality, quality, and more quality." To capitalize on the value of quality, in 1933 the company began printing "DOLE" on cans and pineapple juice packages for the first time. In 1961, Dole merged with Castle & Cooke, retaining the "DOLE" brand. After acquiring the Standard Fruit and Steamship Company in 1964, DOLE bananas were introduced to the European market in 1978.

In 1986, the DOLE logo was renewed: the bright yellow sun was chosen, synonymous with freshness, quality, health, and flavorful products. In 1990, Dole expanded into the packaged fresh vegetables segment, one of the fastest-growing segments in supermarkets. In 2001, Dole entered the organic market with organic bananas.

In 2018, Dole's owner, David Murdock, completed the sale of 45% of Dole Food Company shares to Total Produce: that year, Dole also renewed its brand identity to evoke, with the new logo, the freshness of the farm.

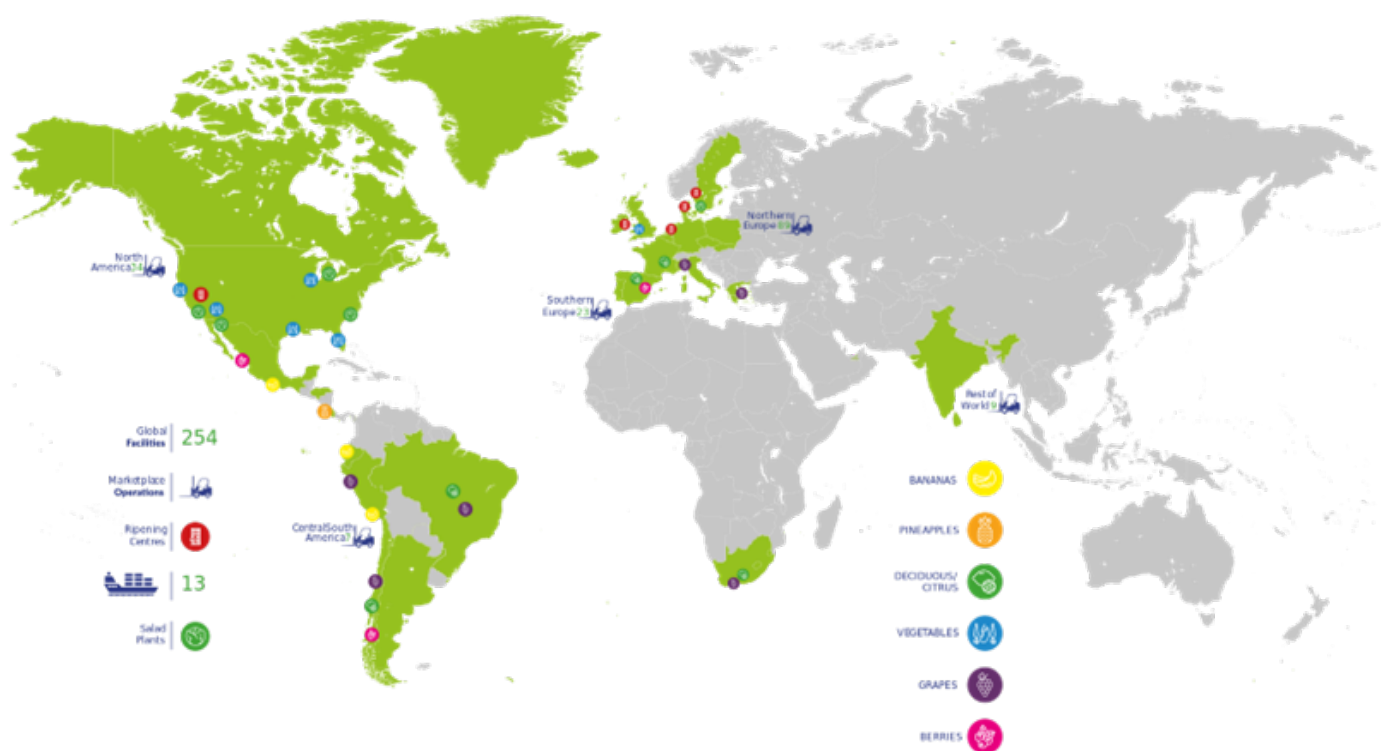
Dole's reach today is global!

GLOBAL PRESENCE

Global operations include approximately 160 distribution and processing centers, 75 packing facilities, 12 refrigerated warehouses, 11 owned vessels, and 114,000 acres of owned farmland.

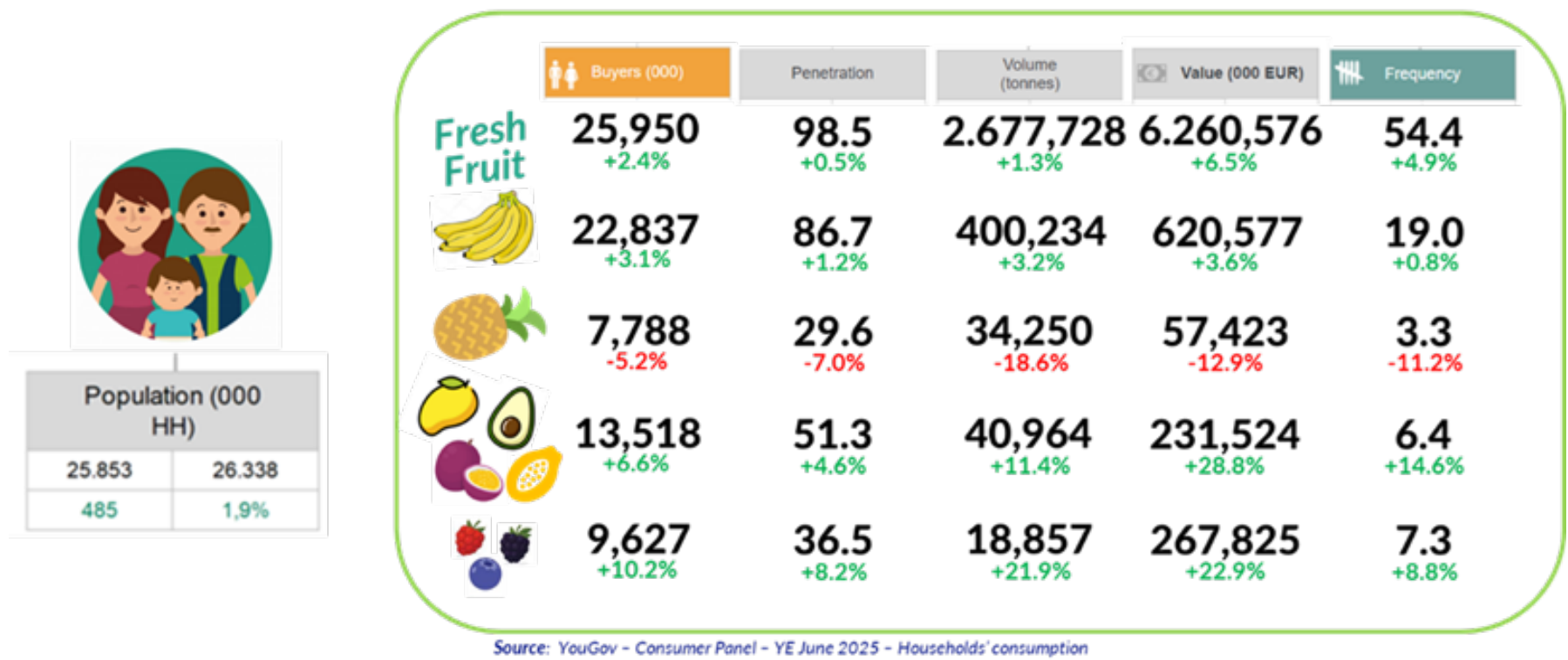
In Italy, Dole represents one of the most significant players in the fresh fruit market, with 2024 revenues of around \$200 million, equivalent to over 6.5 million boxes of bananas and 50 million kilograms of other fruit moved.

The core business consists of bananas (Dole Premium Conventional and Dole Organic banana - 58% net sales/YE Dec24) and Pineapples (Tropical Gold Pineapple, Golden Selection Pineapple - 7% net sales/YE Dec24), but the product portfolio includes a rich selection **of tropical and non-tropical fruit, such as citrus (oranges, grapefruits, lemons, clementines), pears, grapes, blueberries, kiwis, stone fruit (peaches, apricots, plums, cherries),** plantains, baby bananas, avocados, mangoes, papayas, passion fruit, ginger, and limes. Diversification and growing attention to the organic and premium segments characterize the evolution of the assortment.



2. THE ITALIAN FRESH FRUIT MARKET

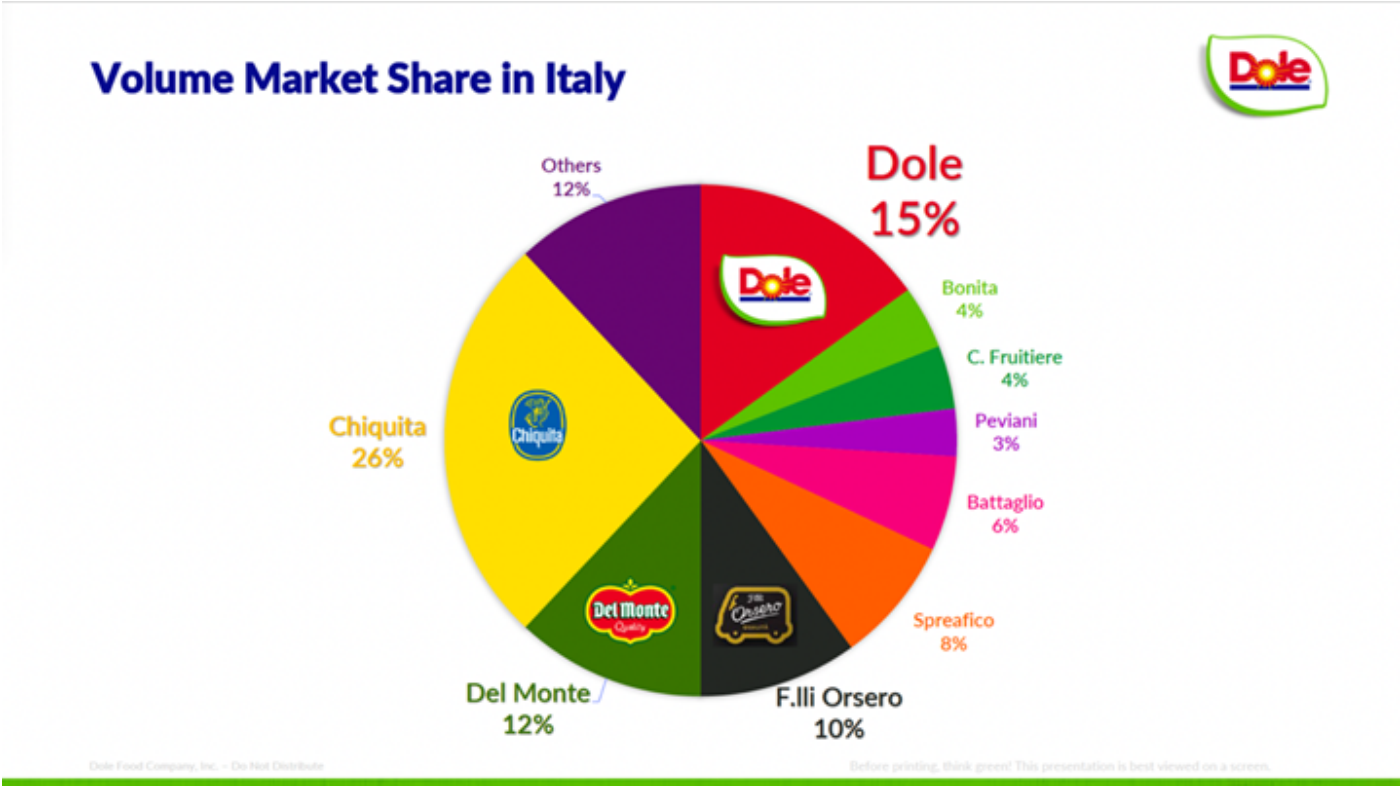
Fresh Fruit consumption Trends



The Italian fresh fruit and vegetable market has been experiencing **significant changes** in recent years.

The ultra-fresh sector faces some structural challenges today: the almost complete absence of strong and recognizable brands makes consumer loyalty difficult, as consumers struggle to navigate a market of unbranded products, while the strong penetration of private label (approximately 35% by value and volume) pushes toward price competition rather than perceived value. Additionally, logistical and operational management, particularly to ensure shelf-life and breadth/depth of assortment, requires significant improvement in supply chain flows and promotional offering enhancement, in the constant attempt not to reduce category profitability.

In the Italian banana market, Dole holds a 15% volume share, positioning itself between Chiquita (26%) and Del Monte (12%). Other relevant competitors include F.lli Orsero (10%), Spreafico (8%), and Battaglio (6%).



3. CORPORATE STRATEGY AND POSITIONING

Dole Italia's strategy is built on **four fundamental pillars** that define its market approach: being the preferred partner of the best customers, maintaining a broad product portfolio, consistently pursuing a premium quality level, and operating as a service excellence. These pillars are reflected in the values that guide the company, the channels through which it reaches consumers, and the ways it communicates its identity, strongly oriented toward health, transparency, and sustainability.

„Dole is committed to being honest and transparent about our efforts and our impacts.“



Johan Lindén, President – CEO, Dole Food Co. Inc.

3.1 VALUES AND TRANSPARENCY: THE DOLE WAY

“Our mission: To inspire consumers, helping and encouraging them to adopt healthier eating and a better lifestyle”

Dole's mission is **“to make the world a healthier place.”** Dole is committed to nourishing the planet with high-quality fresh food, offering consumers the opportunity to choose a healthy lifestyle by bringing to market a premium brand of the highest quality, freshest, and most flavorful fruit and vegetables that constantly innovates and represents the foundation for healthy meals.

The Company's values are: premium quality, responsibility and sustainability, and transparency. The company concretizes these values in a model called “The Dole Way”, which works on three assets:

1. **Nature:** reduce environmental impact where the company operates and protect and strengthen ecosystems
2. **Food:** offer healthy, safe, nutritious, and responsibly grown food
3. **People:** improve the living conditions of all people throughout the supply chain, from farmers to the end consumer.

Transparency is ensured by a precise selection and certification system for each farm, according to the Food Safety Supplier Verification program and through a traceability system for each individual product along the entire supply chain.

Traceability is made transparent to the end consumer through the Dole Farm Code, a 5-digit code present on the labels of all Dole Bananas and the collars on all Dole Pineapples, indicating the exact farm where that particular purchased fruit was produced: the end user, by logging onto the [dole.it](https://www.dole.com/it-it/sustainability/explore-our-farms) website and entering this 5-digit code in the appropriate field, can take a true virtual journey to the fruit's origin, obtain numerous information about the farm, learn about its workers and activities, and discover many curiosities about the products and their benefits (<https://www.dole.com/it-it/sustainability/explore-our-farms>).

Responsibility & Sustainability Framework



3.2 DISTRIBUTION AND IN-STORE ACTIVITIES

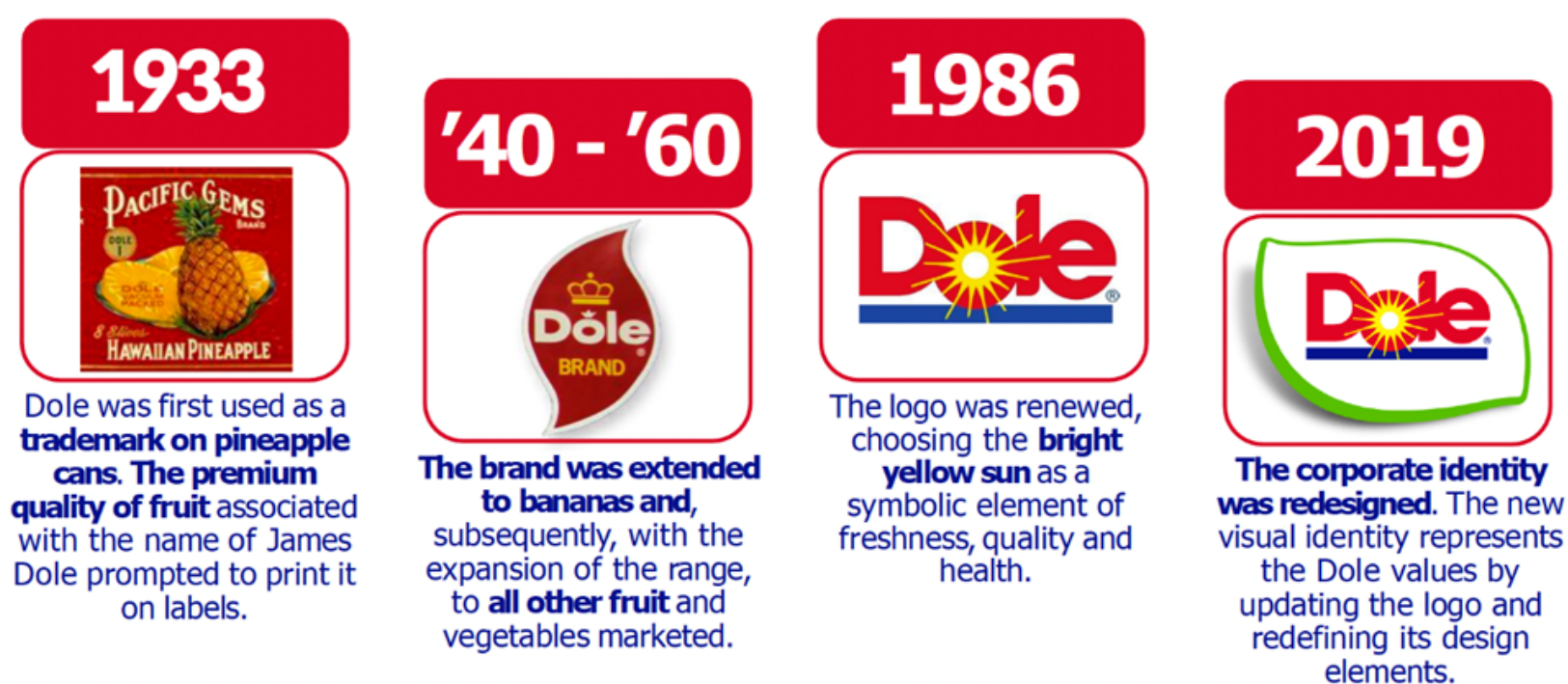
Dole Italia operates through a well-structured logistics network consisting of 2 Ripening and Distribution Centers located in Calcio, in the province of Bergamo (Dole Italia Headquarters) and in Guidonia Montecelio, in the province of Rome, and 5 external logistics hubs (Civitavecchia, Livorno, Ravenna, Salerno, and Catania). This geographic distribution allows effective and efficient service to both large-scale retail (GDO - 75%) and the traditional channel (fruit and vegetable markets and wholesalers - 25%).

Dole also invests in visibility within points of sale, offering:

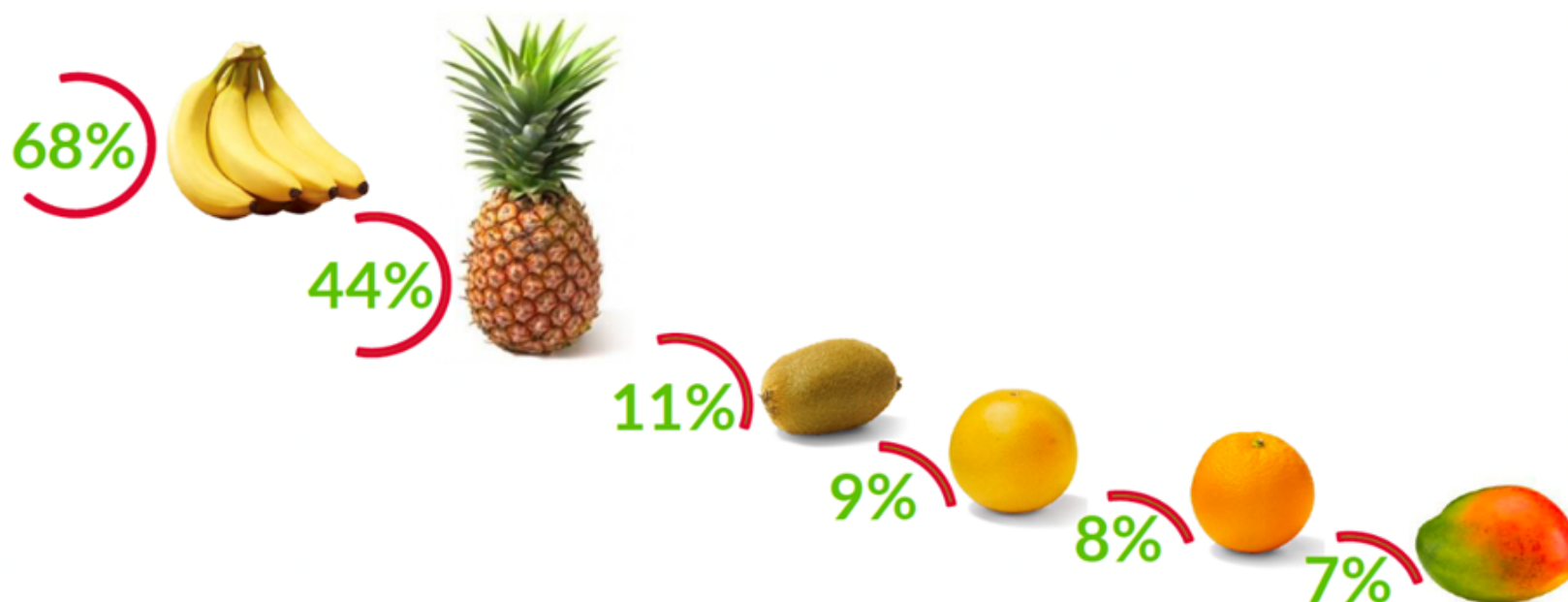
- Permanent and temporary displays
- In-store promotions
- Photo contests for the best display by retailers

These activities strengthen the relationship with retailers and improve product positioning at the point of sale, as well as Brand recognizability.

3.3 THE BRAND AND ITS COMMUNICATION



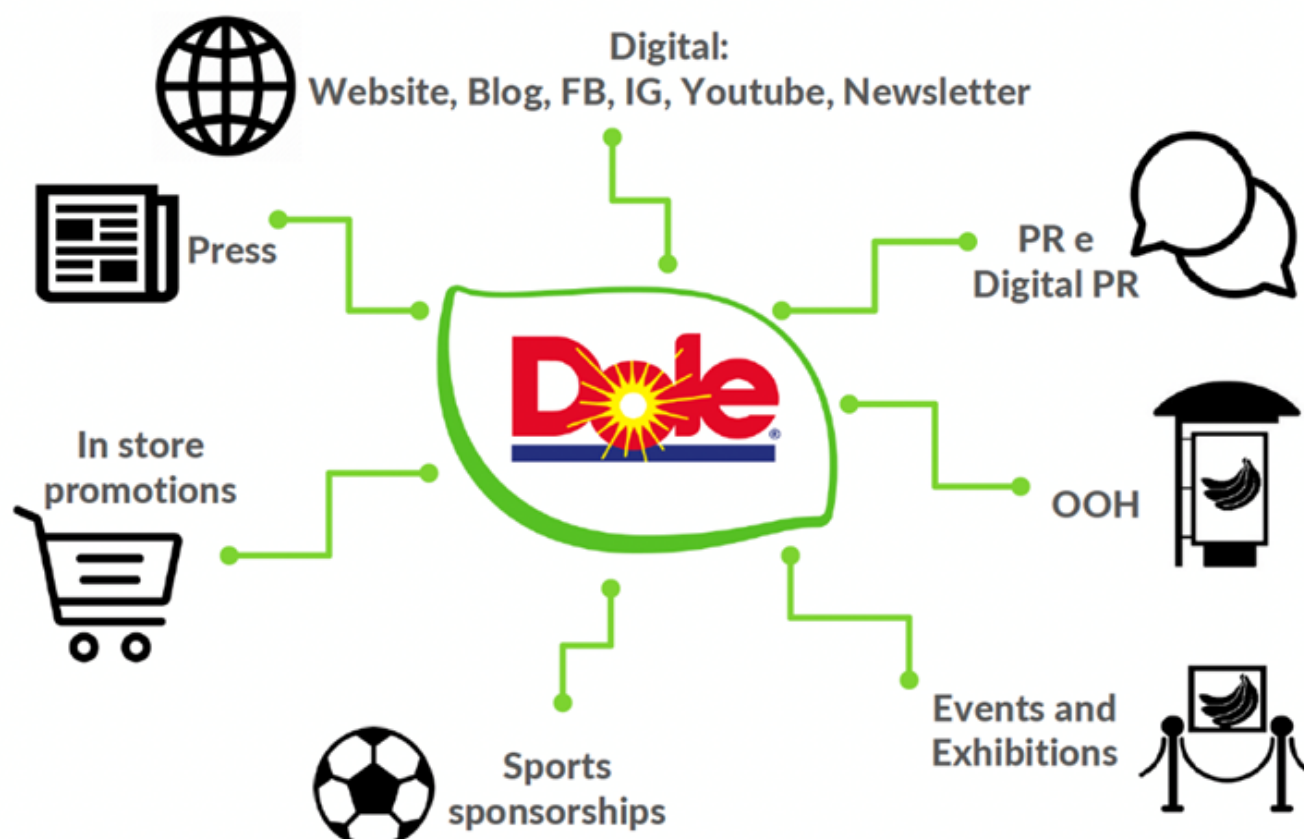
Dole Italia's communication embraces a **multichannel strategy** that balances digital presence, outdoor activations, and sports sponsorships supported by in-store and experiential initiatives. Dole Italia's strength emerges from the numbers: the brand has high levels of awareness, especially in association with two product categories, bananas and pineapples. Their products are perceived as safe, of excellent quality, and healthy.



Source: Ipsos GMBH - Online omnibus survey - Base = 1.000 persons / 16-70 years / Italy - 2023

These results derive from careful Media planning, which includes Above the Line (ATL) Media and Below the Line (BTL) Media, integrated and innovative touchpoints.

II Media Plan



Digital channels are represented by the website, which has a "discovery" functionality, the newsletter (addressed to over 70,000 contacts), and social media that allow the community to connect: Facebook (the Dole Italia page has over 120,000 followers), Instagram (approximately 5,500 followers), and the YouTube channel, with video showcases.

Among the various communication strategies, sports sponsorships have assumed a particularly strategic role for Dole Italia over time. This choice is not accidental: there is a natural connection between the company's products and athletes' nutritional needs. The fresh fruit-athletic performance combination has allowed Dole to build successful partnerships in the sports world, transforming **sponsorships from a simple visibility tool to a value communication platform**. Before analyzing in detail the sponsorship portfolio developed by Dole Italia over the years, it is useful to understand this marketing strategy by first introducing its fundamental characteristics.



dole_ita

170 post

5955 follower

168 seguiti

Dole Italia

Ce n'è per tutti i frutti 🍌🍌🍌

Eventi: @dolesummervibes

Per altri contenuti ricchi di gusto 🍌

🔗 linktr.ee/dole_ita

4. SPORTS SPONSORSHIPS: FUNDAMENTAL ELEMENTS

Sports sponsorships represent one of the most widespread and strategic forms of commercial communication in contemporary marketing. They are configured as commercial agreements through which a company (**sponsor**) provides financial resources, products, or services to a sports entity (**sponsee**) in exchange for communication benefits and association of its brand with the sponsored sports entity. The distinctive mechanism of sports sponsorships lies in their ability to create an associative link between the brand and the values, emotions, and image of the sports world.

4.1 CLASSIFICATION OF SPONSORSHIP BY LEVEL AND TYPE

In the context of sports sponsorships, it is possible to distinguish different types of partnerships based on visibility level, required investments, and rights acquired by the sponsor. It should be noted that this classification, while commonly adopted in literature, finds variable applications in practice. Each sports entity can in fact independently define different sponsorship levels, sometimes overlapping roles or using different denominations.

The **title sponsor** represents the highest level of sponsorship, characterized by the direct association of the company's name with the event, competition, or sponsored team. Through this agreement, the sponsor brand becomes an integral part of the official name of the sports entity. Title sponsors enjoy a series of exclusive privileges: maximum visibility in all official communications, priority presence in promotional materials, privileged access to advertising spaces during events, and rights to use the image of the competition or team in their own marketing campaigns. The required investment is generally the highest but guarantees a return in terms of awareness and brand association that is particularly significant.

Official partners are positioned immediately below the title sponsor in the sponsorship hierarchy. This category includes companies that, while not having naming rights, benefit from a recognized official status that confers communication and visibility rights. Official sponsors are typically organized by product categories, guaranteeing sectoral exclusivity. Within this category is also the main sponsor, which often represents the main partner for visibility and investment, such as the brand present on the front of a team's game jersey. In practice, the title sponsor and main sponsor often coincide, making the distinction between the two categories less clear.

Technical sponsorship represents a specific form of partnership that provides for the supply of sports apparel and technical equipment to athletes or teams. Technical sponsors also include companies that provide products or services essential for carrying out sports activities. This category can include suppliers of beverages, food, transportation services, technologies, timing systems, and other essential goods and services. Although the visibility level is generally lower than previous categories, the qualification as official supplier allows this association to be used in marketing activities and to benefit from the credibility derived from the sponsorship.

Finally, the sports sponsorship landscape is completed by presenting partners, which represent an intermediate formula allowing the sponsor's name to be associated with specific sections or moments of the sporting event (such as "the technical commentary presented by..." or "the ranking offered by..."), and regional/local partners, agreements that offer local or regional companies the opportunity to associate with significant teams, events, or athletes for their geographic reference area.

4.2 SPONSORED SUBJECT

Beyond the distinction by investment level, sports sponsorships can also be classified based on the sponsored subject.

Sponsorship of **individual athletes** involves direct agreement with individual athletes, who become true brand ambassadors. This modality allows exploitation of the athlete's personality, charisma, and successes to transfer these positive qualities to the sponsored product or service.

Team sponsorship represents one of the most widespread and consolidated forms, where the company associates its name with a sports team benefiting from its consolidated fanbase and sporting results. Team sponsorship offers continuous visibility throughout the entire sports season and the possibility of reaching very loyal and engaged communities.

Event sponsorship includes support for competitions, tournaments, and sports events. This agreement is particularly attractive for globally appealing events such as Olympics, World Cups, or Grand Slam tennis tournaments, which guarantee international visibility and the possibility of reaching geographically distant markets in relatively short times.

Finally, facility sponsorship includes the naming of stadiums, arenas, and sports centers through naming rights, guaranteeing continuous visibility that extends well beyond individual sporting events. This form of sponsorship creates a lasting association with the place of sports experience, benefiting from all media mentions of the facility and becoming an integral part of the reference sports territory's identity.

4.3 SPONSOR EXPOSURE AND VISIBILITY METHODS

Another useful element for understanding the value of a sports sponsorship concerns the **methods of sponsor brand exposure**. Depending on the context in which the brand is exposed, the frequency of exposure and, consequently, the visibility obtained vary. One of the most immediate and recognizable forms of visibility for the sponsor brand is exposure on sports apparel and equipment. The logo on the front of the jersey represents the most expensive and desired position. Within sports facilities, brands can access a variety of promotional spaces that offer different levels of exposure and investment. Perimeter boards represent a very widespread form, positioned along the field edges to guarantee continuous exposure during television broadcasts. Modern dynamic LED walls alternate different sponsors during the event, maximizing the number of exposed brands, while scoreboards guarantee visibility during pause moments and statistics display. In the digital era, media visibility has assumed an increasingly important role in sports sponsorships. Brands obtain exposure through television graphics during broadcasts and backgrounds visible in interviews and press conferences, but it is especially on social media that new opportunities open up. When sponsorship involves individual athletes, they often become protagonists of communication: they share posts and stories that tell the partnership story. This more personal and immediate approach significantly amplifies the sponsorship impact compared to traditional channels.

4.4 BENEFITS AND RESULTS OF SPONSORSHIPS

Sports sponsorships are not limited to offering visibility. When well designed, they generate concrete effects on brand perception and consumer behavior. Among the main expected benefits, three fundamental outcomes can be identified.

The first benefit concerns the **improvement of brand image** (Sponsor Image) through positive association with the sponsored team, athlete, or event. Association with prestigious sports entities can therefore strategically reposition a brand in consumers' minds.

The second outcome is represented by **positive word-of-mouth** that sponsorship recipients can generate by perceiving the sponsor brand as recommendable. This effect is particularly valuable because it amplifies the sponsorship impact well beyond direct exposure, creating a form of spontaneous advocacy.

The third benefit consists in developing **purchase intentions** toward the brand and its products or services. The positive emotional association generated by sponsorship concretely translates into advantageous consumption behaviors for the sponsor, representing the ultimate and most tangible result of the sponsorship investment.

4.5 THE CONCEPT OF "FIT" IN SPONSORSHIPS

A fundamental element for sponsorship success is represented by the concept of "fit" or congruence, defined as the **alignment between a particular sponsor brand and the sponsee, evaluated on the basis of brand image**. The fit between sponsor and sponsee can influence the ability to remember the sponsor, its credibility, emotional involvement, and loyalty from consumers. Those who perceive high fit show faster acceptance of the sponsorship and easier transfer of positive values from the sponsee. Conversely, low levels of perceived fit can generate confusion and, in some cases, resistance toward the sponsor brand.

Fit evaluation is based on four main variables: the direct or indirect use of sponsor products during sports activity, similarity between the sponsee's audience and the sponsor's target segment, geographic similarity between sponsor and sponsee, and finally attitude similarity by consumers toward brand and sports entity. It is crucial to emphasize that fit should not be conceived statically. An adequate communication strategy sustained over time by the sponsor brand can in fact influence the public's evaluation of this coherence, managing to improve even initial situations of low fit.

5. DOLE ITALIA AND SPORTS SPONSORSHIPS

The natural connection between Dole's products and sports activity has allowed the brand to develop a "360-degree" sponsorship strategy, embracing different disciplines, levels of awareness, and types of events, ranging from professional competitions to amateur circuits. Dole Italia's approach is not limited to simple brand visibility, but aims to create an association between brand values and the sports world.

5.1 RUNNING

Regarding running, Dole Italia is Official Supplier of the main Italian marathons, from Rome and Milan to Venice and Florence. The presence extends to Bologna, Turin, Naples, and regional events such as Verona and Carrara. But the real strength of this strategy is breadth: Dole Italia supports approximately 120 city and local races, from niche ultramarathons to village races. This means being present not only in newsworthy events, but also in local competitions where the most authentic passion for running is often found.

5.2 SWIMMING

In the field of swimming, Dole Italia is Official Supplier of open water events in the "Swim The Island" circuit, which takes place in three Italian locations distributed throughout the year: San Teodoro in Sardinia, Sirmione on Lake Garda, and Golfo dell'Isola in Campania in October. These events differ from traditional pool competitions in their staging in particularly beautiful natural settings.

5.3 TRIATHLON

In the field of triathlon, Dole Italia has developed a particularly significant strategic partnership with the DDS 7MP Triathlon Team. The choice of triathlon as a flagship discipline is not accidental: this sport perfectly embodies Dole's fundamental values through the requirement of endurance, balanced nutrition, and optimal performance across three different disciplines. Triathlon in fact requires sophisticated nutritional preparation to sustain swimming, cycling, and running in sequence.

5.4 FOOTBALL

In the field of football, Dole Italia has developed various partnerships over time that have allowed it to experiment with different levels of sponsorship and visibility methods. Among the most relevant collaborations are those with Inter, as Official Fresh Fruit Supplier, and with Atalanta, as Official Healthy Food Partner. The brand has also established agreements with Cremonese, as Supporter Partner, and with Catanzaro, as Official Supporter. Dole has also supported special initiatives such as "Operazione Nostalgia," an event dedicated to celebrating Italian football history.

5.5 BASKET

In the field of basketball, Dole Italia has built over time a diversified portfolio of partnerships ranging from Lega Basket Serie A (as Platinum Sponsor of the championship) to collaborations with teams such as Brescia Pallacanestro, Scafati Basket, and Vanoli Cremona, to supporting specific events such as the Trentino Basket Cup and the 3x3 basketball competition "To the Tower."

In 2025, the partnership with Rinascita Basket Rimini marks a turning point: for the first time in its history, Dole assumes the role of Title Sponsor of a team. The team has officially become "Dole Rinascita Basket Rimini," with the company's name becoming an integral part of the sports identity.

5.6 OTHER SPORTING EVENTS

Beyond these contexts, Dole Italia has diversified its presence in other sports and events. In cycling, Dole Italia is present at the Giro d'Italia through the Caravan. The company also sponsors the Italian Beach Volleyball Championship Fonzies and Fluxo's outdoor events and participates in the fitness world fair RiminiWellness. This variety of sports and events allows Dole to reach different audiences and test its presence in less traditional sports contexts.

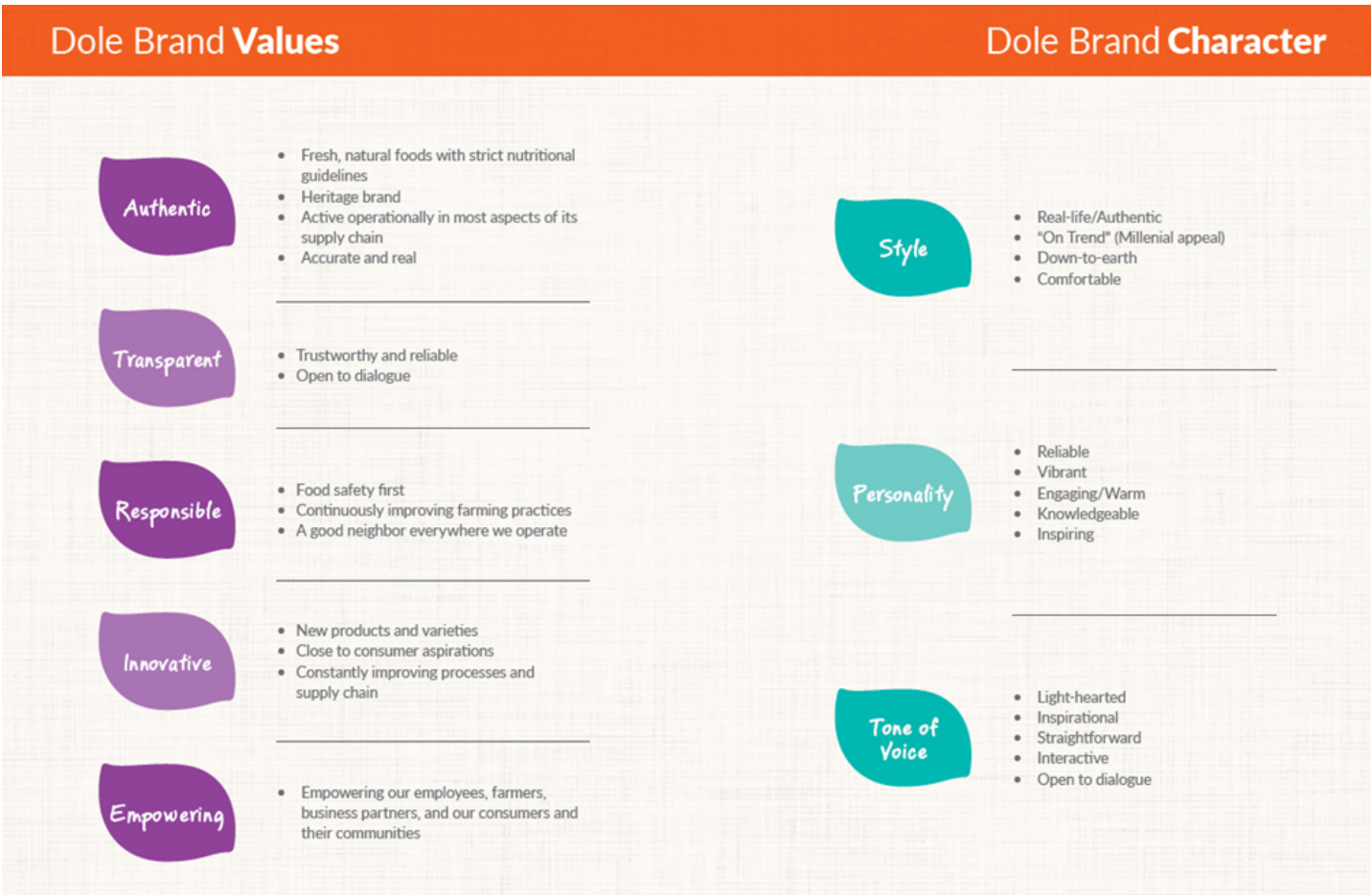
6. THE 2025 CHALLENGE: INCREASING BRAND AWARENESS AND APPEAL OF DOLE AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE THROUGH SPORTS SPONSORSHIPS

Based on the considerations made so far, the challenge of the 38th edition of the SIM Marketing Award is as follows:

to increase the awareness and appeal of the Dole brand among young people, emphasizing those brand values considered most aligned with the target audience, particularly using the leverage of sports sponsorships.

Specifically, taking on the role of Dole's Marketing Team, each team must develop a Marketing Plan for the two-year period 2026-2027 that, by defining the strategic and operational aspects for establishing the brand's value proposition, contributes to precisely defining its positioning and increasing its awareness, while simultaneously improving the image perceived by the market.

The following figure illustrates the mix of values and characteristic traits of the Dole brand.



Around (some of) these values, a coherent and effective value proposition must therefore be outlined through the configuration of a Marketing Plan targeting one or more market segments appropriately selected and justified. As is well known, the brand can be examined on two levels, one cognitive and the other emotional-symbolic, which are interconnected.

- On the cognitive level, Dole’s brand awareness has certainly reached significant levels, although primarily in reference to certain products. Brand awareness must therefore be rapidly nurtured through coherent choices in the Marketing Plan.
- On the emotional-symbolic level, it is necessary to strengthen brand identity, orienting its distinctive traits more toward the identified target audience.

Through the Plan, therefore, it is essential to clearly communicate the value proposition in ways that are coherent and recognizable in customers’ minds and that are immediately associated with the

brand and its values where they are recognizable, promoting a positive reputation and building a stable relationship with the market.

In the proposed Marketing Plan, the team must therefore:

1. **Analyze the competitive context** of the exotic fruit market from a broad competition perspective and with reference to different purchasing/consumption behaviors, focusing on value aspects of lifestyle, sports, and healthy eating
2. Select the **customer segment(s)** to be primarily targeted, within the market band represented by people aged between **15 and 30 years**
3. Justify the choice in terms of **target attractiveness/potential** and consistency with brand values
4. Specify the chosen value proposition and brand positioning
5. Define all strategic and operational aspects necessary to implement them. In particular, each plan must outline, consistently with the chosen strategic objectives:
 - The operational leverage of **product** - For example, proposing innovations related to labels, service level, information, to concretely reinforce brand values
 - The leverage of **distribution** - Intervening, for example, on seeking sponsorship partners, in-store activities, etc.
 - And the leverage of **communication** - Defining an integrated Communication-Mix that improves image and strengthens brand awareness also through innovative tools or channels, at the center of which must necessarily be the tool represented by sports sponsorships, possibly to be used in innovative ways.
 - The **price leverage should NOT be considered**, nor should modifications to the sales channel mix, assortment, or introduction of new products be proposed.

For the **Marketing Plan for the two-year period 2026-2027**, the available budget for each of the two years is **€200,000**.

The market to be considered is the Italian one.

Regarding sports sponsorships, all types of sports may be considered with the exception of football and extreme sports that endanger the athlete's life and those that include the use of motors (motor racing, motocross, etc.). Similarly, eSports are not to be considered.

Acknowledgements

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