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WTA CEO Stacy Allaster Highlights Growth in Year-End Address

By [Paula Vergara](#)

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Stacey Allaster has completed her first full year as head of the [WTA](#), after replacing Larry Scott in July, 2009. Her strategies for growth and sustainability of the WTA are far-reaching and ambitious. In this global economic downturn, women's tennis has shown significant financial growth via sponsorships, as well as increases in global TV viewership, and event attendance in 2010. Allaster's priorities for 2011 include the circuit structure (Roadmap), nurturing sponsors, digital growth (social media, web, live streaming), marketing efforts in China, as well as the season-ending championships in Istanbul.

Weathering the Economic Storm

During her speech, Stacey Allaster seemed confident that the WTA has been able to weather the challenging economic storm quite well. In 2010, premier events showed a "slight" growth in attendance. Seven tournaments secured new title sponsors, with just one tournament losing its title sponsor.

Roadmap: Is it Working?

The circuit structure (Roadmap) has been a front-burner issue for Allaster. The WTA launched the Roadmap in 2009 in an effort to shorten the season, offer better geographical flow, and minimize injuries. A new tournament in Doha has been added for 2011 to follow Dubai, so players can make an easier transition (i.e., less wear and tear from travel). Allaster has also made it a priority to monitor the overall health and well-being of players, giving them some breaks in between tournaments. Is the Roadmap working? "Absolutely," said Allaster. "Compared to where we were in 2008, withdrawals are down 35%, and our top 10 players are committing at 84% to our top events."

Changes to the Calendar

Four new tournaments have been added to the WTA's [2011 Calendar](#):

1. Doha: Qatar Ladies Open (Premier) 2/21/2011
2. Belgium: Brussels Ladies Open (Premier) 5/16/2011
3. Azerbaijan: Baku Cup (International) 7/18/2011
4. Maryland: Troy Park Women's Tennis Championships (International) 7/25/2011

WTA Brand: Simpler is Better

The WTA recently unveiled its new logo. In her speech, Allaster went into detail about how they developed the new logo, and reviewed the history of name changes to the WTA since 1973. She and her team ultimately decided to go back to the organization's roots: The Women's Tennis Association. "That would be our hero brand", said Allaster. "Then we would create a sub-portfolio of brands: WTA Tour, WTA Championships, WTA news, rankings, scores, WTA Premier event. We wanted to keep our communication simple, and also create a model for commercialization so we could have revenue growth." Allaster also stressed the need to make the logo smaller to be effective in mobile communication, television graphics, and social media.

Sponsorships Old and New

The WTA lost Sony Ericsson as their title sponsor, but was able to re-negotiate a new partnership, making Sony Ericsson its Lead Global Partner for 2011 and 2012. This new partnership will allow the WTA to pursue new marketing programs that specifically target the young, up-and-coming players in the 30 to 50 ranking category.

In 2010, the WTA secured three new sponsors, with two more in the works. "We had not secured a new sponsor in six years," said Allaster. "I think that had everything to do with the Sony Ericsson WTA Tour. Because when you have such a dominant brand [Sony Ericsson], it is much harder to attract other brands to want to partner." Allaster noted that this new commercial model has enabled the WTA to generate more revenue than they had with Sony Ericsson as their title sponsor.

Oriflame, a Swedish-based cosmetics company, will have a presence at a majority of the European tournaments. **Peak**, a Chinese-based apparel company that also works with NBA China, is part of the

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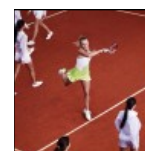
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WTA's strategic effort to grow tennis and promote the WTA brand in China. In 2011, Peak will launch a WTA clothing line in China in 6,000 retail outlets.

The WTA's third sponsor will be announced in the next few weeks.

Digital Endeavors: Website, Social Media

WTATour.com (formerly sonyericssonwtatour.com) has seen a 40% increase in activity in 2010. Digital innovations include a new mobile website, as well as a Spanish website. Allaster's plan for the website is to eventually change the URL from WTATour.com to WTA.com, but that domain name is currently owned by someone else.

Social Media has been a tremendous area for growth. The WTA has seen an increase of 1.5 million fans via social networks this year, bringing the total to five million fans connected with players and the WTA.

TV and Live Streaming

There are complications in this area, as well as room for growth. Allaster says digital needs to strike a balance with broadcast rights, but is looking forward to exploring the possibilities. The WTA currently shares the TennisTV.com portal with the ATP for live tournament streaming. "As we look to our new TV strategy, it's definitely one of the components that we're looking in. Production values, optimizing our exposure, and reaching more fans internationally." Production costs are also much less with live streaming. In addition, Allaster believes that the streamed matches don't necessarily need to have the same production quality as television broadcasts.

TV Viewership

Allaster reported a 15% increase in global TV coverage of women's tennis. The reason, said Allaster: "I think it's because of that depth of athlete that we've been talking about all year. Eight players from different nations in the top 10. That has created new stars in global markets, and created more demand for WTA."

WTA Working More Closely With ATP

In 2011, 20 of the WTA events will be combined with the ATP Tour, and six of the ATP Masters Series will be combined with the WTA's top, premier events. Having a combined championships isn't so simple. With the men's tour ending in November, the idea of bringing the two season-ending championship events from both Tours together would be impossible. "If they can perhaps achieve their goals to shorten the calendar, that will bring us closer to that potential reality," said Allaster.

International Growth Strategy: China and Its Youth

The WTA has targeted Asia-Pacific (China specifically) as a strategic market with tremendous potential for growth. One of the four Premier Mandatory events (China Open) was placed there specifically with the intention of growing tennis in China. The WTA will be working closely with the Chinese Tennis Association to educate Chinese youth about tennis. "We need to get racquets in their hands and show them our sport is fun through tennis festivals throughout the country," said Allaster. That's created an opportunity for our brand, and also assets for our partners, like Peak." Li Na, China's No. 1 player and first player from China to crack the top 10, has also helped to expose women's tennis to a wider audience in her home country.

Istanbul


Starting next year, the WTA Championships will have a new home: Istanbul. The tournament will be located there through 2013, and will be known as "The People's Championships". Allaster commented, "Rather than it just being those corporate boxes courtside, let's bring the fans and people down. They get to do that at Wimbledon, and there's nothing more exciting than when we see that one section of the stadium with all of fans being totally into the event."

With strong prospects for growth in multiple areas, 2011 is shaping up to be an exciting year for the WTA.

Paula Vergara is a freelance tennis journalist, covering the WTA and ATP tours. Paula's publishing credits include On the Baseline Tennis News, Tennis.com, USTA New England Magazine, and Bob Larson's Tennis News. Paula is also a member of the United States Tennis Writers' Association. To view her work, visit www.paula-vergara.blogspot.com.

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