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**Many can benefit from Citi Field deal**

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Pity the financial sector's marketing executives. In one year, they've gone from negotiating some of the biggest sponsorships the industry has ever seen, to desperately trying to figure out how to get out of those same deals.

Case in point: Citibank.

Its story is old hat by now (at least in terms of the mercury-quick news cycle). In 2006, Citibank committed \$400 million over 20 years to affix its name to the Mets' new home of brick, steel and grass. For several months, there was much industry praise regarding the deal, as it builds prominence for the company brand in the financial center of the universe.

Then, a little more than one year later, some unfamiliar financial terms began to worm their way into the zeitgeist: subprime lending, credit default swaps, TARP. Suddenly the nation's financial titans, Citibank included, were on the brink of collapse without immediate government intervention. Hundreds of billions of dollars later, most of those "titans" remain on shaky financial footing.

Citibank, recipient of about \$45 billion in government Troubled Asset Relief Program money last fall, has not helped itself in the court of public opinion. You might recall something about buying new corporate jets after being bailed out.

Which brings us back to Citi Field. The front page of the Feb. 3 edition of The Wall Street Journal practically screamed: "Citi Explores Breaking Mets Deal." After their very public lashing regarding the jet purchase, Citibank officials are understandably skittish about public opinion regarding perceived extravagance. Politicians are promoting this sensitivity, with Reps. Dennis Kucinich, D-Ohio, and Ted Poe, R-Texas, in a new spirit of bipartisanship, publicly condemning the Citibank-Mets'

partnership.

So what to do? Citibank is legally obligated to the terms of the deal. Pulling the plug would be both expensive and leave Citibank empty-handed. Sticking with the deal will undoubtedly open the company up to new criticism and scrutiny.

One suggestion: Citibank should pass through Citi Field sponsorship rights to the federal government. For the uninitiated, "pass through" refers to a useful (though largely underutilized) component of sponsorships, whereby a primary sponsor (Citibank) will assign certain assets (e.g. signage, media, hospitality, etc.) to a strategic business partner (Uncle Sam) for mutual benefit.

There's certainly no shortage of government supported advocacy programs that could benefit from exposure at the Mets' new cathedral of baseball. For example, childhood obesity is still a national epidemic, one that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is actively combating. The Office of National Drug Control Policy, the organization behind the "Parents: The Anti-Drug" campaign, would undoubtedly benefit. Perhaps Homeland Security could even use sponsorship assets to help remind us what color threat level we're currently in.

The government and taxpayers would benefit by having a new, high profile platform from which to showcase services designed to benefit citizens. Citibank would be able to hold onto their marketing jewel, while simultaneously scoring a public relations coup by delegating space at the ballpark to fitting government programs.

Citibank and the federal government, by dint of the gargantuan taxpayer-funded bailout, are now partners. Citi Field gives them an opportunity to act accordingly.

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