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Faster, higher, stronger and digital

Millions of Americans will watch the Olympics but never turn on a TV set.

"The Beijing Games will be the first Olympics in which a chunk of viewers, up to 5%, will watch their Olympic coverage via personal computers or mobile phones", estimates Dean DeBiase, CEO of TNS Media, which measures media globally. And those viewers are the coveted trendsetting ones marketers want to reach.

The best place to reach them: social media. The Olympics are emotional, with heartbreaking wins and losses. When viewers are touched by something, they increasingly express those feelings via social-networking sites such as Facebook or MySpace.

McDonald's spent zero on digital marketing in the 2004 Summer Games but will spend about 10% of its 2008 Olympic marketing budget on new media, says Mary Dillon, marketing chief. Coke's digital spending is up 50% from the 2006 Winter Games.

"In the past, it was about being a proud sponsor of the Olympics... but now, by linking up with social-networking sites or even individual bloggers, "Sponsors can get a lot closer to the action by sponsoring the people who are talking about it."

More than one in three mobile phone owners have video-capable cellphones, Nielsen reports. More than 147 million people worldwide now participate in a social network via their mobile phones, eMarketer reports.