

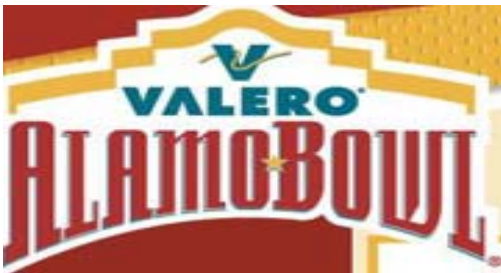
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Valero Goes Bowling
Refiner-marketer's first year as title sponsor of Alamo Bowl sees record crowd

By Joe Bush



SAN ANTONIO -- It was almost all good for Valero Energy Corp. in its first year as title sponsor of the Alamo Bowl, and what wasn't good was only due to unfortunate coincidence.

The logo of the San Antonio-based independent refiner and marketer was omnipresent at the Alamodome during the broadcast of the game's 15th staging in late December. An Alamo Bowl-record 66,166 people watched as Penn State beat Texas A&M 24 to 17. Six "Life is a Highway" Valero ads ran during the ESPN broadcast, and each of the four other bowls featured on ESPN included the ad as well.

Ratings were down to 2.7 from the 6.0 of 2006 (when the bowl was without a sponsor), though, in large part because the NFL game between the New England Patriots and New York Giants was simulcast on NBC and CBS at the same time. New England was bidding to finish the regular season unbeaten, a historic achievement that generated tremendous pregame hype. That game set a record for ratings. Fortunately for Valero, the title-sponsor deal is for three years.

The company, with branded stores in 38 states, entertained plenty of clients and business partners in the title-sponsor areas and got its message out to an area of the country in which it is new, as well as areas to which it might one day reach. Penn State is a member of the Big Ten Conference, which includes schools (and their fans) from the upper Midwest and Great Lakes region. Texas A&M, of the Big 12 Conference, is in legacy Valero territory, but the company has only expanded into Big Ten country in the last couple of years.

"We are targeting expansion of our wholesale distributor business," Valero executive vice president and CFO Mike Ciskowski told *CSP Daily News*. "We felt like from a geographic perspective and a demographic perspective that it made a lot of sense. We were able to promote our brand on a national basis."

Valero had been a sponsor of the Alamo Bowl since its inception, and title sponsors have included Builders Square, Sylvania and MasterCard. It signed on as title sponsor in May 2007.

“All in all, we’re very pleased with the first year, and we’re looking forward to many more,” Ciskowski said. “You probably couldn’t tell from watching it on TV, but the exposure of Valero was everywhere in the Alamodome. Being a minor sponsor, you don’t get near the exposure.”

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1133 Broadway New York NY 10010