



Sponsorship: It's A Game Of Two Halves

Sponsorship is something with which many of us are familiar, whether we keenly await news of who will sponsor our favourite football team, or have our fingers crossed hoping that our beloved cultural event will be able to be staged thanks to a sponsor's support. Unfortunately, despite the ever-increasing awareness of what sponsorship is, **the standard of best practice on the ground can be conspicuous by its absence.**

While some big brands are culpable when it comes to not effectively leveraging their sponsorships of teams, events, festivals, awards and stadia, (with some of the decision-making process behind these sponsorships being more down to vanity and ego than marketing strategy) and other sponsorships merely being left to drift because no strategy is in place behind them, the worst offenders are often the 'sponsees'. Could that be you....?

What is a Sponsee?

A 'sponsee' is the club, event, cause, charitable trust or other project in need of financial support in order to run its programme. All too often, sponsees approach sponsorship with the wrong attitude, a lack of strategy and lack of commitment to the sponsor's needs. In some cases, this is understandable, as many sponsees are too close to their cause and fail to recognise that a sponsor probably doesn't share their own passion and are interested in sponsorship for other reasons.

In my experience, when it comes to the world of football, the root of the trouble lies in an arrogance – a belief that although the club or cause needs the money that the sponsor provides, the club or cause will always be the king-pin in the relationship and the sponsor should be grateful for being allowed into the club's inner sanctum. **If that's your attitude, think again.** Unless a Chairman of a company is sponsoring the club on a whim and is an avid fan, no sponsor wants to be treated as a poor relation or find themselves snubbed by those they are paying to support and often keep in jobs.

How do I know?

I have seen sponsorship from all angles. When I was seconded to British Gas's HQ in London in the 90s, I was asked to head down to a 'little office called Social Policy' which 'sponsored a few things'. What I discovered was a department sponsoring some of the biggest sporting events, environmental causes, arts organisations and competitions in the country. Nothing was done to leverage these until I started lending support, be that to the British Wildlife Photographer of the Year competition, the English National Opera's first tour of Russia, Chef of the Year, or a journey of goodwill made by British teenagers to Berlin.

Later in my career, I became the sponsor's representative at top football clubs. There, rather than finding co-operation from the sponsees, I would typically find a marketing department putting up barriers and closing doors, rather than trying to help the sponsor get value from their sponsorship. Only by working around the system, rather than through it, was I able to get the value the sponsor expected.

That simply shouldn't happen, so if you have managed to attract a sponsor and are doing nothing to assist their marketing of their sponsorship, think long and hard. Ever heard the phrase "they think it's all over ... it is now". If you don't amend your thinking, you could be hearing that very soon.

What do Sponsees Do Wrong?

From the off, many sponsees fail to understand a sponsor's motives for sponsoring something. Too many believe that it is sheer altruism and that a profitable company simply "should" sponsor their project, event or club because it's the "right thing to do". If this sums up your attitude, wise up. The following factors are more likely to be why a company sponsors something:

- 1) They want to build a brand and see the sponsorship as a way to do this.
- 2) They wish to influence perceptions of their brand image – perhaps even changing them through the messages they can communicate via the sponsorship.
- 3) They want to generate goodwill among a target audience important to them, as that adds a 'value' on the balance sheet.
- 4) They need to tap into a new target audience, or an existing one whose loyalty can be increased through the sponsorship.
- 5) They recognise a competitive advantage in aligning their brand with yours.
- 6) They need to engage more with a particular type of consumer (or another target audience).
- 7) They feel that a sponsorship could help create more 'advocates' for their brand.

What Should This Tell You?

If you look at the factors above, a certain penny should be dropping. Until you grasp the essence of what the sponsor really wants, you are likely to be doomed to fail.

Take a look at the questions I'm listing below and truthfully answer them 'yes' or 'no':

- 1) Do you have one sponsorship document that you send to all of the people who you think would make a good sponsor?
- 2) Do you use a sponsorship document that other organisations similar to yours also use?
- 3) Does your sponsorship document contain the name of the organisation that you are targeting for sponsorship?
- 4) Does your sponsorship document open with a paragraph that explains what you know about your potential sponsor?
- 5) Does your sponsorship document talk more about the potential sponsor you are targeting than it does about your organisation?

If you have answered 'yes' to questions 1 and 2, we need to do some serious work on your pitching. If you have answered 'no' to questions 3, 4 and 5, you also need to get back to the drawing board.

As John Motson once famously said, "For those of you watching in black and white, Spurs are in the all-yellow top". If you are presenting things in your shade of yellow, when your sponsor is viewing them in black and white and wanting some hard, fast benefits, you're in trouble.

Lets go through these points to show you why.

The One-Size-Fits-All Sponsorship Proposal

As we have already said, the tuned-in sponsor wants to get involved with sponsorship if it will have a positive impact on their brand – and that's **their** brand, not somebody else's. If you present them with an off-the-shelf Powerpoint presentation that you give to everyone, **you are asking them to do far too much thinking**. You are effectively asking them to consider their brand, digest the information that you provide about your programme, event or club and somehow manage to quickly find the synergy between your brand and theirs that you haven't bothered to outline for them.

Firstly, why should your potential sponsor do that, when they may have another sponsorship proposal on the table that makes the links for them and presents a powerfully persuasive case?

Secondly, what does it say about you if you haven't made the slightest effort to even consider how to tailor your sponsorship programme to the needs of their brand? Remember that old saying about how you never get a second chance to make a first impression. You will have failed at the very first hurdle.

I hear a phrase from sponsees who have flopped on a very regular basis. The phrase is: "They just didn't get it!" But come on guys, how do you expect them to get it, if you haven't made the effort to make sure they do?

Homogenous Proposals

There are great advantages in being one of many similar schemes, who can all access the same sorts of sponsorship components, as at least you get a steer as to what to offer. However, if you are then talking about these packages in a generic manner, just as all of your fellow 'hubs' are doing, **you are not differentiating yourself** from all of the other people like you who are out there in the market.

The answer is to **differentiate your package** from the many others that can be accessed at other clubs or in other locations, by making it **relevant** to the organisation you are pitching to.

The Proposal With No Name

If your sponsorship proposal does not contain the name of the organisation you are pitching the sponsorship to, alarm bells should be ringing. If you haven't even included their name in the proposal, how can you possibly expect them to feel that you have tried to align your brand with theirs? It communicates a lack of interest and duty of care. **Remember, perceptions are everything, so create positive ones!**

The Opening Paragraph

Let's look at the issue of perceptions in relation to the opening paragraph of your sponsorship proposal. If that opening paragraph is all about you, rather than all about them, what does that communicate to the person you are pitching to? Remember that the business you are talking to may already have had their fingers burned by being involved with a club, event, or other project that didn't care one iota about their brand once the money had been handed over. Make sure you instantly attract their interest in what you have to say by making your opening gambit something that relates to them and their brand. **You will instantly be communicating that you are not like those other sponsees who don't really care who pays the dosh, as long as they get it in the bank.**

The Balancing Act

I would say that your document should have at least an equal 50/50 split when it comes to mentions of your brand and your potential sponsor's, but ideally a 60/40 split in their favour. **Your key objective should be to communicate knowledge of their brand values and show how you can align them to yours.** At this point, check your document again. Do you even talk about your brand values? What you need to remember is that sponsorship should be a vibrant and involved relationship between the two parties, not a one-way take while they give. How can you possibly have a relationship with a sponsor if you don't engage with them and their brand values? Fair enough, you might get lucky and get a one-year deal because they need to spend some budget by the end of the year, but I'd wager that you won't get that deal renewed, or leave the relationship with a good testimonial in your hand that you could use with future sponsors. Don't destroy your chances by failing to do your homework and then communicating that. "Fact dropping" can be a very subtle and very effective art form when you are pitching.

SECTION SUMMARY: YOUR CORE OBJECTIVES

If you wish to attract a sponsor, you should be aiming to:

- Communicate that you understand their brand, its values, its targets, its personality, its heritage and its ambitions.
- Demonstrate that you can see ways in which you can align your brand with theirs.
- Manage their perceptions, by instantly showing that you are interested in their brand (product or service).
- Build trust in your ability to deliver an effective sponsorship.
- Allay any fears they may have gained through previous sponsorships.
- Demonstrate the value they will derive from their outlay.

If this sounds like far too much work, you might as well resign yourself to not finding sponsors, or just existing on short-term relationships that will ultimately destroy your reputation as a sponsee, as word gets around. Maybe your role isn't for you and someone else in the organisation would be better suited to it, because like it or not, you are going to have to become a marketer, or find a marketing expert who will assist you (either on a paid or free basis as part of their own corporate social responsibility programme and ethics).

What You Really, Really Need To Do

1. Understand the Value of Research

Your starting point as you go back to the drawing board, or start your quest for sponsorship from scratch is to understand the importance of research to your mission.

You need to build up as complete a picture of your target (the sponsor you are aiming to recruit) as possible, so you need to:

- Use the internet, googling them for several hours, using search terms such as 'brand values', 'ethics', 'corporate social responsibility policy' (CSR), 'environmental policy', 'PR', 'product launches' and 'marketing campaigns', to compile as complete a picture of them as you can.
- Try to get hold of a copy of their annual report and read how they describe their brand.
- Use industry sources to find out where they stand in their market, what is their market share, what are their strengths and weaknesses, who are their competitors?
- If you see them as a 'dream' sponsor, you may also wish to set them up as a google alert. This will give you the latest information on them, which may just present you with a very tactical opportunity with which to target them.

Please remember, however, that a serious sponsor will also do their research on your organisation and also probably you personally. If they find anything negative, unprofessional or distasteful, they will probably not wish to pursue a sponsorship deal. They may, however, expect you to present a case, perhaps admitting to past mistakes, but explaining what you have done to 'clean up your act'. To give you an example, a football sponsorship proposal could hit the rocks because of the personal reputation of a Chairman or individual operating the programme. The grapevine is very active, so if you are serious about sponsorship, be professional and make those around you professional, because sins will certainly be exposed.

This is, of course, particularly true where key individuals are running programmes that involve children, where both society and sponsors expect the highest standards of conduct of teachers, lecturers, doctors and social workers and where any chink in the armour will be exposed in the media, or social media. Think it won't happen to you? You would live a charmed life if it didn't and any scandal of any kind will probably lead to an immediate withdrawal of a sponsor's support. Just think Kate Moss, Ryan Giggs and a host of others and you will remember how sponsors immediately cancelled their contracts as the damage to their brand was felt.

2. Present Your Own Marketing Data

A sponsor will wish to know all about your brand and the people that it engages with. This means that you are going to have to present them with hard facts relating to the **demographics and profiles** of the people who interact with your brand. This is where they will find a synergy with the target audiences that they also wish to address.

To do this, you are going to have to know:

- The gender, age, marital status and location of the people your brand, club, product or service interacts with.
- Whether your brand is interacting with a family audience, empty nesters (couples without children at home), singles, grandparents, or groups.
- Why people interact with your brand. Is it tribalism or fanaticism? Is it for social reasons? Is it because they have been loyal to you for generations? Or is it because their children wish to engage with you? There could be many reasons.
- How frequently they interact with you.
- How much they spend on average when they interact with you.
- What the people who interact with you value.
- What the people who interact with you believe in – their ethics; beliefs system.
- Who your brand might be targeting in future promotions.

This data may not be instantly available, but your sponsorship pitch will be all the more powerful if you collate it and powerfully present it, with authority, to your sponsor.

To do this you could:

- Run surveys.
- Give questionnaires to attendees at events that you run.
- Organise small focus groups comprising people who are representative as a cross-section of your target audience.
- Run exit/entrance surveys as people perhaps arrive/leave your venue.
- Find out if there is any industry/general research available online that can help you present the demographic of your target audience e.g. in your own local area.

3. Forge Relationships

If marketing confuses you, **elicit help** wherever you can from experts who may help you out and offer advice and consultancy.

4. Learn to Present Benefits, Not Features

The majority of sponsorship proposals contain bullet-points of features that a certain sum of money will access e.g. advert in a programme; access to football stars; banner on a stand. These typically leave sponsors cold. **What you need to be doing is explaining why features could be a benefit to a particular brand** e.g. 'You could have a player visit your office and help raise staff morale, or help launch a new sales initiative', or 'You could tap into our database of 5,000, which would open up valuable new sales leads that you might not otherwise access'. Until you learn to present benefits rather than features, you will really struggle. You should be a funnel that leads your sponsor to tangible benefits they cannot access elsewhere.

Here, you need to consider what might really turn a sponsor on. Here are some ideas:

- The thing that money cannot buy – the unique experience that you can package for them.
- Access to a database it would take them time and money to compile themselves.
- Unique 'wallpaper downloads', live web chats with personalities, celebrity endorsement and podcasts
- Event tickets that have a face value.
- Hospitality packages that also have a tangible value.
- Access to new Facebook fans and Twitter followers.
- Unique point of sale materials using your logo.
- In-store appearances.
- Assistance with product launches.
- A chance to set up focus groups with some of your fans/attendees.
- Market penetration in a particular geographical area.
- A chance to market to new target audiences.
- A chance to create incentives; loyalty initiatives for existing customers.
- An opportunity to align with a brand that already shops with you (ideal if you can prove that x% of your audience shops with your potential sponsor, as this will help them build customer loyalty).
- A chance to engage with the customers of the future i.e. children.
- Access to meeting facilities.
- Opportunities to sell/promote merchandise.
- A chance to use fans/attendees in sampling exercises e.g. to support the launch of a new product.
- The opportunity to shift perceptions of the brand.

You fundamentally need to demonstrate that you will deliver two things: Return on Investment (ROI) and Return on Objectives.

The first is a financial measure that you can fulfil through aspects such as equivalent advertising spend and PR editorial coverage delivered through the sponsorship. This is basically a financial payback and the coverage achieved should be higher in value than the money spent on the sponsorship.

The second is where you understand the sponsor's brand and **deliver the results that their brand objectives demand**. These can be intangibles, but can often be measured, if you find ways and means of doing that. You may wish to look at **perception surveys** conducted among target audiences at the start of the sponsorship and then again mid-way through and probably at the end of the year. You can then measure impacts on brand image – a powerful measure for any sponsor.

The Golden Rule of Sponsorship: Sell the Sizzle, Not the Sponsorship

The golden rule of sponsorship is for the sponsor to spend at least an equivalent sum to that which they pay you on the on-going promotion of the sponsorship. **Here, the more sizzle you can help to bring to that, the more you are likely to sell the sponsorship dream.**

This is where PR (public relations) comes into the mix, as **PR is the key tool** you should be using to sell your sponsorship packages. Your sponsorship proposal should not only make sense to a sponsor, because it shows that your brands will be aligned, but also set them alight with its **creativity and ideas**. Ideas sell: it's as simple as that, so if you pack your proposal with out-of-the-box ideas, you will probably be able to bring home the sponsorship bacon.

While the sponsor may have a PR department to help them further along the line, you should be demonstrating to them that you have your own creative PR resource, who will make things happen for them and bring them **extensive, or high impact, editorial coverage**. If you can make your proposal sizzle, you will light the blue touch paper when it comes to their interest.

Here, you need to not only present creativity on paper, but ooze passion and vibrancy when you actually present the programme at pitch. You need to paint pictures with your words, communicate sounds, smells, tastes and feelings through the words that you use, so you already set the scene and the vision for your sponsor. **People buy people**, so no matter how good the ideas, if you present them in an uninvolved, matter-of-fact way, you will probably still fail. Learn how to really sell your sizzle, or bring in someone to help you do that.

Showing that you understand the fundamental importance of PR to sponsorship will earn you brownie points, but probably also make things clearer for someone who may not be a marketing expert themselves, but who can appreciate a great idea when it's put in front of them.

Remember that PR starts the moment you walk through their door and the minute they walk through yours. The latter is particularly important, because of the power of perception once again. If they perceive your environment to be dirty, unkempt and unprofessional or discourteous, or your organisation's employees rude, brash, flash, uncaring or incompetent, it is unlikely that they will want to be aligned with your brand. Manage their perceptions by involving professional, bright, intelligent and sparky (not tarty!) people and your ranking on their perception scale will soar.

If you are worried about giving away intellectual property through your ideas, use a system that Catapult PR uses. Its brand new and cutting-edge and you can protect your ideas for around just £30 – well worth the price if you have an idea that different potential sponsors could use, if they are in the same sector and have similar values.

Fulfilment

Firstly, let me tell you that the adrenalin rush you will feel when you sign up a major sponsor, having done all your homework, presented fabulous ideas and given an engaging and passionate pitch, will be phenomenal. Having done that, however, don't let things go downhill.

Once you get the deal, instantly set up the systems to make it work. Make sure your sponsor has **access to the right people** who will make things happen for them and keep a close eye on it. Don't let a sponsor turn up to a hospitality suite to find their name isn't on the list! Don't let them be rudely treated by someone in a club shop, because the staff member doesn't know who they are. Make sure your internal communication is red hot and continuous throughout the life of the sponsorship. Make sure every possible element of the sponsorship either comes through you, or goes through a team of sponsorship deliverers who are **empowered to make things happen**.

Hold regular meetings with your sponsor and go to those meetings with feedback, facts and figures and editorial coverage.

Make sure that a sponsor only has to ask for something once and, if they appoint an intermediary, make sure that you afford them the same treatment. They will be reporting back to the sponsor.

Contra-Deals

Don't think that all your sponsorship has to be a cash transaction. You may benefit hugely from a website that an IT company could build for you, or from office equipment that an office supplier could provide. Getting an offer of free PR would be worth its weight in gold to you and you may be able to match fund it, if the PR consultant produced an 'in kind' invoice for you. Open your eyes to other possibilities and you will be able to build a sponsor portfolio that has strength, depth and, above all, longevity.

Help Is At Hand

We hope you have found this guide to sponsorship useful and will take its points on board. If you struggle with any aspect of selling or promoting sponsorship, Catapult PR is always on hand to help, or offer some informal advice, if you just fancy a chat on 01253 891114.

Please also bear in mind that Catapult takes CSR seriously and regularly offers free PR support to worthy causes and charities, which may include your organisation. This is typically around **£600 of free support, plus assistance with ideas and pitching**. That could swing a sponsorship deal for you, so don't sneeze at it (and we typically give far more time than we should!).

In the meantime, good luck with your sponsorship programme: just remember that it's not all about YOU! I will leave you with the words of Jenson Button: "Winning is a lot more sweet when it's been difficult before: that's for sure".

Written by:

Jane Hunt, Managing Director, Catapult PR

© Catapult PR, December 29, 2012.