

Tips For Corporate Sponsorships

Securing corporate sponsorships is quite different from most fundraising. Few businesses or corporations can afford to simply give donations to every charitable organization that asks, no matter how strongly the business may feel about the mission. Potential sponsors also must consider the opportunity from a marketing point of view and sponsorship executives will ask themselves questions such as the following:

- How does this sponsorship support my overall marketing goals?
- Will this sponsorship help me reach my target audience?
- How does sponsoring this organization/event support my brand positioning and image?
- What are my opportunities for exposure? How much of my message will I be able to deliver?
- Is this an exclusive opportunity? If not, who are the other sponsors? Do I want to want to associate my brand with the brands of the other sponsors?
- Is this a multi-year commitment?
- How does this fit with the other sponsorships with which I am already involved? Do they all add up to a position or cause I can “own” in the market?

So, before you approach potential corporate sponsors put yourself in their shoes and look at your opportunity from their points of view. You know what YOU want, but what do THEY want?

Identify Your Sponsor’s Target Market

Know your own supporters well. Create a demographic profile: age, income, zip code, presence of children, and any information you can gather that might help create a picture of your constituents. Identify how your opportunity will put the sponsors in front of their target market.

Look for Potential Sponsors with Brand Synergies

Think of your brand (your mission, what you stand for) and make a list of corporate sponsors who might have an affinity for your brand. For example, if your organization is about literacy, a bookseller or publisher would have an affinity. Also, think about how your organization’s brand adds value to the sponsor’s brand. Let’s say you have a reputation for high quality summer family entertainment. What type of sponsor would like to associate with your reputation? An ice cream company? Athletic footwear? Car dealership?



Relative to brand, some businesses may ask you to divulge your other sponsors. This is important to them because they may be happy to be associated with your organization but not necessarily with other sponsoring businesses. For example, let's say you're talking to an organic food company that worked very hard to establish a brand that stands for whole, nourishing, healthy foods. They may not be too happy if your other sponsors are beer and fast-food companies.

Think About Exclusivity

Some businesses may ask for exclusivity or exclusivity in a category. Exclusivity in a category is more common than total exclusivity. For example, if a bank makes a significant corporate sponsorship investment, it's not unreasonable for them to request exclusivity in the bank or financial services category. Listing sponsors' names in a program is one thing, having sponsors' names on every t-shirt, sign, banner and website is another, so you have to decide under what circumstances you are willing to offer exclusivity and for what price. Be careful not to price yourself out of the market though.

Consider Your Competition

It's easy to assume your competition is other nonprofits seeking sponsorship partners and it is. But that's not all. Remember, you are competing for marketing dollars. Those same dollars could be used to fund advertising, direct mail, search engine optimization, promotion, email, virtually all venues of marketing media. The good news is most organizations like to use a mix of media and some sponsorships offer unique opportunities for brand synergy. Bottom line, broaden your horizon when you're thinking about competition.

Identify the Opportunities for Exposure

Be very clear about your opportunities for exposure. Will there be a brochure, program, signs, banners, e-mails, direct mail, radio announcements, t-shirts, website? Where and how will the sponsor's name appear? Will the sponsor be able to include a tagline or message? Do you have ongoing contact with your supporters? How will the sponsor be included in your ongoing activities?



Develop Structured Levels of Sponsorship

Develop well-structured levels of sponsorship and be very clear about what sponsors get at each level of donation/sponsorship. Does the sponsor get a page in the program or a name on a list? Does the sponsor's name appear on your website, banners, and a t-shirt? How much "real estate" is allocated to the corporate sponsor in each exposure, at each level? You will save yourself a lot of headaches by identifying this up front.

Consider Multi-Year Commitments

Determine whether you want to offer multi-year commitments. Some organizations offer ONLY multi-year commitments.

Create Professional Looking Sponsorship Marketing Materials

You don't want to spend a LOT of money on corporate sponsorship marketing materials because they might send the wrong message on how you spend your resources, but they should be clear and professional looking. Make sure you have something you can walk through as you pitch your opportunities and then leave behind. Include all your opportunities for the year and be sure to include demographic profiles of your supporters too. A sponsor may not spark to the event you have in mind but may find something else of interest. Bring along copies of materials showing current sponsorships, previous events, and measurements from previous events if you have them.

Ask for Testimonials and References

If you have very satisfied corporate sponsors, ask them to serve as references for prospective sponsors and/or provide quotes for your marketing materials.

Make Personal Visits

Don't just mail your materials. Call and try to get appointments with the marketing director or community relations person. You can look them up on their website. But you'll be much more successful getting an appointment if you network to get a personal introduction.



Measure Your Results

Businesses love useful data. How many people attend your event? What is the traffic on your website? What is the profile of your supporters? Provide them with the data that can help them build the case for sponsorship. They will also ask for measurements. Though you won't be able to tell them how many sales they will get out of an event, you can help them gauge how many exposures. They should have their own formulas for how many exposures lead to prospects, to pipeline, to sales.

Follow Through on Your Promises

Make sure that you can deliver on what you promise. If you're not sure you have sufficient staff to send out e-mails, create and saturate the town with posters, etc., best to take it out of your offering.

Formalize Your Agreements in Writing

Prepare your agreements in advance for each level of sponsorship. Detail exactly the amount of the sponsorship and the benefits your sponsor will receive. That way, you can produce an agreement pronto if your sponsor is ready to sign.

Thank Your Sponsors

Send thank you notes to your sponsors (email is acceptable), one upon signing agreements and another upon receiving the checks.

Send Proofs for Approval

Ask for logos, copy and other data files you require right away. It takes time to assemble proofs and you might as well start gathering your materials. If there's a program ad or something that requires approval from your sponsor, share your production schedule and send proofs accordingly.



Honor Your Sponsors

If your sponsors are participating in events, of course invite them and look for opportunities for them to speak. At the very least, introduce them to VIPs and include them in photos. Send the photos to them as they might be useful in the company newsletter, website, or annual report.

Develop Lasting Relationships

As with most things in life, it's all about the relationships. Check in with your corporate sponsors regularly. Invite them to your events and other gatherings and introduce them to your senior team. Take them to coffee or lunch and try to learn as much as possible about their goals. Keep them updated about your organization and above all, listen to their needs. You'll be on the road to long, mutually beneficial relationships.

