

# MAXIMIZING

*the Sponsorship Experience*

**Make it a  
cappuccino;**

**Not a  
to-go cup!**



Ewald  Consulting

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*Imagine that you are commuting to work in the morning. You wake up a bit early and get a head start on the day so you decide to treat yourself to coffee on your way to the office. As you consider your options, you choose to bypass the styrofoam cup of “caffeinated beverage” at the gas station and venture to a nearby coffee shop. You order a smooth grande cappuccino with crème, not hesitating when the cashier requests \$4.75 – more than double the amount you would have paid at the gas station.*

*You sit in an overstuffed chair and enjoy the cozy surroundings. By choosing to go to the coffee shop you knew that you were purchasing more than just a cup of coffee; you were purchasing the experience. This is the mindset you want your sponsors to have when they make the decision to support your organization. You can help them get there.*

# Why Should Someone Sponsor?

Sponsorship creates a meaningful partnership between a vendor and your organization. Through sponsorship, a supplier demonstrates a commitment to advancing your organization and industry as a whole.

Sponsors gain legitimacy by affiliating with a respected industry institution like yours. Your members (i.e. the sponsor's customers) put a lot of well-founded trust in your organization as an objective source for industry information. Sponsorship builds a vendor's credibility and develops a good rapport in the industry. It also diversifies your revenue sources, and can assure additional funding to allow your organization to better serve its mission.

When you seek sponsors, don't be timid. You are offering them an opportunity that may be their best – if not only – chance to get the word out about their product or service to a very targeted market. The alternatives avail-

able may be expensive, impersonal, and/or have a low return on investment (e.g. mass marketing, cold calling, direct mail). Don't undervalue what you can bring to a sponsor. ■



# Identifying Sponsor Prospects

Consider how your organization identifies sponsor prospects. Are you regularly branching out to new prospects or do you wind up contacting the same few vendors over and over again? While it is important to nurture and reinforce relationships with long-term supporters, as we will discuss later, you also want to cultivate new relationships so you do not overburden any one sponsor by continuously drawing from the same well.

For example, in the magazine publishing industry it is important to have strong relationships with obvious sponsor prospects like printing companies, but what about newspaper distributors or web designers? These types of vendors may not have a history of sponsorship with a magazine-based organization, but perhaps only because they haven't been approached. Ask yourself which vendors in your industry might benefit from getting their name in front of a targeted audience — your audience. What companies want vis-

ibility but aren't being offered the opportunity to be a sponsor? Companies that have no previous involvement with your organization could see sponsorship as their vehicle to launch into the market.

An additional way to identify sponsor prospects is to research companies that are sponsoring similar activities at a different scale — be it local, regional, or national. Find organizations that are similar to yours and see who is supporting them. If they serve a similar demographic, it is likely that the sponsor will want to support you as well. Companies that have a history of supporting organizations in your industry will naturally benefit from sponsorship with your association. For example, an association that offers a multi-state regional conference should assess what companies sponsor state and national events with a similar base of attendees. Review the event websites and conference brochures to see who is getting recognition.

## Making a BIG Ask!

You'll be surprised at how quickly you can develop an exhaustive list of prospective sponsors through a little research and concentrated effort. It is important to note, however, that the length of your prospect list is no indicator of success. You want to identify high-potential sponsor prospects that are likely to sustain a relationship with your organization over time.

The next step in the identification process is to engage knowledgeable volunteers in your organization to review the list and single out those individuals and companies that are familiar or where a relationship already exists, that are focused toward your market, and that seem like the best fit for your organization overall.

The result should be a significantly shorter list than you started with, and it should be very targeted. ■

*If you are going to solicit a particularly large sponsorship it is a good idea to include an in-person visit. Have a discussion about the types of things your organization can provide. Establish what sort of a relationship the sponsor intends to have with your organization and what benefits would be most valuable to him/her.*



*We think you're an important stakeholder for the industry.. it sounds like you're interested in this and this. Let's see if we can put a package together for you that will give you the benefits you're interested in and position you well with our members.*



# Communicate Value to Your Sponsors

**L**ook at the mission of your organization. If you serve the greater good of a finite group of people, sponsor prospects who hold a vested interest in this group will agree that your cause is worthy of support. If you have demographic data on your group, share that with prospective sponsors to illustrate who they can reach. This concept also applies to event participant lists and the board of directors roster.

Demonstrate the breadth and depth of your organization's reach to decision-makers in your group. This is valuable and compelling information to companies, especially those that have a limited marketing budget. By providing this information, you guarantee exposure that other marketing approaches may not be able to muster. Are you offering recognition on your website? Several website platforms track the number of hits that your website is getting

as well as how many viewers clicked a specific sponsor's link. This is another concrete measure of sponsorship value.

Testimonials from previous or current sponsors are compelling to prospects for two reasons: First, it builds credibility by having a third party attest to the value that your organization offers. The prospective sponsor will have a better sense of the impact that sponsorship will have if a testimonial comes from someone who has a similar perspective on and/or relationship to the group.

This relates to the second reason why testimonials are helpful – because sponsors are frequently market competitors. If the prospective sponsor sees that his/her competitor is involved in your organization and is getting value from it, then s/he will be all the more compelled to engage. Testimonials should

be concise and simple. You can solicit them individually from well-established sponsors or generally from exhibitors and sponsors at a previous event, i.e., “Last year I exhibited at the Annual Conference and I was able to develop five sales leads that I otherwise would not have had.”

A key element of success in securing new sponsors is the person who makes the ask. Your organization needs people on your side who are influential and able to capture the attention of decision-makers. Think of the top five companies/leaders in your field and make sure you have a contact with each of them. Ask your board members to name leading companies and people they consider to be key thinkers.

By securing support from known authorities in the industry, you demonstrate that you can

likewise connect sponsors to these leaders. Establishing a connection to industry authority is very valuable; you will have an easier time getting the attention of a prospective sponsor if you can offer them this type of value.

A subtlety that is often overlooked when establishing sponsorship value is the quality of the materials you use to present yourself and your sponsors to the public. This includes newsletters, event flyers, brochures, and your website. These materials demonstrate the type of organization that your sponsors are supporting.

Sponsors want to be affiliated with a legitimate, professional, and cost-effective organization. Make sure your promotional materials reflect your organization professionally while not being overly extravagant or wasteful of resources. ■

# Your Turn: Be Able to Answer the Questions

**E**xercise: The following are questions that you need to be able to answer before you start approaching sponsor prospects. Take a moment to think about and respond to the following questions:

- ▶ Why should someone want to sponsor my organization?
- ▶ What are three categories of business my organization should target?
- ▶ What is one website I will look at for sponsorship ideas?
- ▶ Who is one current sponsor I will ask for suggestions to improve our sponsorship offerings?

Why should someone sponsor your organization? Generally it is because they want business contacts or they believe in and want to be affiliated with your organization's mission.

Ask current and previous sponsors what they like best about their sponsorship and what can be improved for next time. What was valuable to them? ■

## ***How do you treat your sponsors?***

- ▶ *Do you provide them with a sponsor nametag, button, or ribbon at events so attendees can recognize them easily?*
- ▶ *Do you welcome them with a handshake and greet them by name when they arrive?*
- ▶ *Make sure your sponsors feel that they are being taken care of and appreciated for their support.*
- ▶ *Personal attention makes the difference.*

# Set Sponsorship Fees

When setting sponsorship fees, remember that you are selling an investment in the sponsorship experience, not just an isolated expense. Don't tell yourself, "Oh, our little group, no one would pay that much to participate in one of our events." Set your price to the market and don't underestimate the value you can offer to a sponsor.

It is often remarkable to learn what sponsors take away from their investment over time. If affiliation and sponsorship support with your organization generate sales and notoriety in the industry, your sponsors will come back every time. Communicate this value – be the \$4.75 cappuccino!

When estimating a sponsorship fee structure, there are a variety of elements to consider. First, if there are multiple levels of sponsorship, each fee must be less expensive than the

sum of each smaller level to entice a sponsor toward a larger investment. Likewise, make sure to guard your ability to tailor a package to meet a large sponsor's interests. If a prospect wants to give you money, make sure that there is a fitting way for them to do so.

Additional factors to consider when establishing your sponsorship package prices include:

- ✓ distribution/circulation size;
- ✓ what other organizations charge for similar packages;
- ✓ the cost for you to deliver it;
- ✓ what you've charged in the past;
- ✓ what the market will bear. ■

# Start the Dialogue

Having developed a core list of high-priority prospects and established key benefits that you are able to offer, it is time to take the big leap and make contact with your prospective sponsors. If any of the leaders in your organization already have a relationship with a prospective sponsor, they may be the natural choice to take the first step to make contact. However, for those sponsors who are being contacted for the first time, it is best to begin by familiarizing them with the organization.

One way to do this is by adding the sponsor prospect to your newsletter or magazine mailing list. Send them a complimentary copy of your association's special publication along with a personalized letter of introduction. Now your potential sponsor will have some frame of reference when you call them later about sponsorship rather than making a complete cold call.

Oftentimes we speak at a sponsor prospect by explaining what our sponsorship opportunity will give them before we ask what the sponsor is looking for. Get their interest, biggest challenge, and see if you can help them. Ask them, "Who are your ideal customers?" and, "What are you looking for in the sponsorship? How do you want your company to be thought of in this industry?" Ask the sponsor, "What is your biggest challenge?"

For some, it is finding the decision-makers at industry companies. For others, it is a challenge to announce a new product launch. Some are looking for the right environment to help them network more effectively. In each case, your sponsors have unique challenges. It is your job to discern whether or not your organization is able to help them address these challenges and connect them with potential customers.

These questions will tease out whether or not sponsorship is a wise investment. If the answer is a great big “No,” then it’s in everyone’s best interest that you move on. Don’t waste resources providing sponsorship benefits that are not appreciated or even wanted! If sponsorship does not appear to be a good fit for the organization, it is best to identify this early. If sponsorship has a lot to offer to the prospect, answering these questions makes their decision to sign up even easier.

Sponsorship is a partnership, not a one-time sale. Nurture the relationship all year long and follow up to keep the value fresh in your sponsor’s mind. ■

“The best way to get what you want is to help other people get what they want.”

~ Zig Ziglar

## Common Error!

*It's easy to get sponsorship money and forget what you promised. If you make promises to a sponsor, it is essential to communicate with key staff members who need to follow up. Do this as soon as you secure a sponsorship. If you have annual sponsors, check in with them a few times throughout the year to thank them for their support and remind them of the benefits they are receiving as a sponsor.*

*Sponsors need to be activated and encouraged to take advantage of all of their benefits in order to feel the full value of sponsoring your organization's work. One way to ensure your sponsors are getting the most out of their sponsorship is by giving them a checklist to mark off the benefits they're using, see which benefits remain, and know how to access them. It is important to make this list specific and easy to use. Sponsors will not see the value of benefits that are difficult to use.*

# Sponsor Recognition

You've secured your first sponsor. Congratulations! Who knows about it? Did you get the word out to members? Sponsorship is an important decision for many companies and there is a need to provide some visible result right away. Sponsors need to feel the value of sponsorship as soon as possible and for the length of their support — be it for one event or five years. Make sure to get the word out about your new sponsor so they know they are appreciated from the very start of the relationship.

Be creative when acknowledging your sponsors in writing. Write a feature article that profiles the sponsor, why they are involved with your organization, and what benefit they offer to your readership. This is much better than simply listing them in the magazine or newsletter because it helps your members relate to the sponsor and it even further clarifies to the sponsor why your organization is the right fit. You could place a sponsor's ad in the publication for free. As more organiza-

tions move to electronic publications that may not be as conducive to ads, having an exclusive e-newsletter sponsorship can be very valuable to the sponsor and lucrative for your organization. However, it is important to consistently tell your e-newsletter sponsor how often your website is visited. Certainly ask members if they are sensitive about giving out their electronic information before you provide this to a sponsor.

If your sponsor sends representatives to an event that your organization is hosting, have something visible thanking their company. Name badge ribbons are a common method to make that personal connection between an individual's name and the support that the sponsor provides to your group. Give your sponsor a registration list before they show up at the event so they can see if their current and/or prospective customers will be there. Personally thank your sponsor for attending your event and make sure that staff and board members spend time with sponsor

representatives to show appreciation. Make an announcement at the start of the event asking attendees to thank anyone they see wearing a sponsor ribbon.

Make sure to recognize your biggest sponsors at your biggest event. A supplementary “Sponsor Thank You” event that will likely get low attendance from the people your sponsor wants to meet is a poor use of the resources you’ve worked hard to secure.

Some organizations provide sponsors with free tickets or conference passes so they can distribute them to their own customers. This two-in-one benefit can make your sponsor feel good and increase attendance at your event. ■

## Ways to Recognize Sponsors

- ✓ Signage at event
- ✓ Allow sponsor to introduce keynote speaker
- ✓ Mention in printed materials
- ✓ Ribbon on nametag
- ✓ Hospitality/VIP tickets
- ✓ Newsletter: List sponsors, Spotlight, Ad
- ✓ Insert in conference materials/bag
- ✓ Booth or tabletop
- ✓ Web site: Logo, Hot link, Ad or E-newsletter sponsor
- ✓ Attendee list: Printed, Electronic
- ✓ Give away company logo item
- ✓ Profile company in onsite program
- ✓ Logo on conference bags or lanyards
- ✓ One-time use of member list
- ✓ Elevator pitch
- ✓ Banner ad on promotional email
- ✓ Be creative, but always be mindful that sponsors want prominent affiliation with a quality product.

*The Top Shelf naming rights sponsors for parties of the event, if sponsor coffee you can hand it out. Have a series of events sponsored by one sponsor: Have a book sponsor with a sticker on the cover. Have an exclusive dinner or luncheon for those who want personal contact with hard-to-reach power brokers.*

*NOTE: When thanking sponsors from the podium, make sure to pronounce the sponsor name correctly!*

# The Multiplier Effect

The value of sponsors to your organization is not limited to the price tag you put on sponsorship packages. There are plenty of ways that you can partner with your sponsors to multiply the benefits to your organization, the people you serve, and the sponsor.

If a high-level executive at your sponsoring company is the authority on a subject of interest to your members, you can include this individual as a speaker at one of your events or s/he could present an award to one of your members. This is a way for your sponsor to get exposure, your members to get cutting-

edge information, and for your organization to be reinforced as an authoritative forum for such interactions. The sponsor will have a keen interest in helping you promote the event by distributing information to their own customers – people who may not know about your organization yet, but who could be prospective members.

Don't forget to ask your sponsor about the best way to let their customers know about the event and their support for it. Ask for a link from their website stating, "We are a proud sponsor of organization ABC." ■



# Follow-Up and Feedback

Send prompt follow-up to sponsors after an event is held or a publication is printed with statistics about the number of attendees/readers, any press exposure about the event/publication, and any measure of their exposure. Send them a reminder of the cumulative recognition they received as a sponsor for your organization: press releases, call for entries, registration piece, even a printed copy of an email promotion. It is compelling to see – in one place – all of the points where the sponsor received exposure through a consistently branded message.

Try to communicate feedback to your sponsors from the event attendees or publication readers. This can include testimonials from surveys or evaluations, focus groups, or interviews. Most importantly, ask the sponsor about their sponsorship experience, which is the first step to renewing their support as a sponsor the next time. ■

## Other Nice Extras

There are plenty of little extras you can use to help a sponsor relationship grow. You could offer to host one of your events or meetings at the sponsor's facility. Most sponsors will be eager to show off their offices. Suggest they volunteer with your organization and/or join a committee so they can meet others who are passionate about your mission and learn more about the social culture of the group.

If this is your sponsor's first time participating, provide personal introductions and guidance on how to make the most of their sponsorship. If there are sponsor representatives at your event, ask if there is someone specific they would like to meet. See how appreciative sponsors are when you provide a personal introduction to someone they would like to meet for the first time. ■

# Nurture the Relationship

**D**evelop sponsorship packages with an annual renewal. This allows your sponsors and your organization the ability to build sponsorship into an annual budget and plan accordingly. Additionally, annual renewal means that you only have to ask each sponsor for a financial contribution once — and they get recognition all year long.

Sponsors and fundraisers alike report that it is easier to ask once for a large contribution than to solicit smaller amounts every time your organization has a new initiative. Do not confuse this with a suggestion that you only approach each sponsor annually. Remember to check in frequently and consistently throughout the year so your sponsor does not develop the sentiment that every interaction with you is a financial one. Make sure your sponsors are cognizant of their sponsorship and the benefits it affords them. Send communication related to their business. Send congratulations if they receive an award or if one of their staff receives a promotion.

Make a point to visit top sponsors at their own office once a year so they feel valued. Survey them and host a focus group of current and prospective sponsors to get new ideas for an established event. Never assume that the benefits you offered a year ago are exactly what sponsors want today. ■

## ***Keep the Momentum!***

**S**et a sponsorship recruitment goal and revisit it often. Keep the board and pertinent committee members informed of your progress. While there are several methods to communicate sponsorship options to your prospects (including blast email, direct mail, or a template message from key volunteers), personal contact through phone calls or in-person meetings is often the most effective way to communicate because it conveys how important this support is to your leaders, your organization, and your cause. ■

# Sponsor Prospect Letter

## Dear Sponsor,

As a member of the board of directors for XYZ, and on behalf of the organization, I would like to offer you the opportunity to support the XYZ in the coming year. Your commitment to the XYZ helps provide educational events, such as the Summit and Expo in June; networking opportunities, such as the many luncheons held during the course of the year; and celebratory events like our Annual Awards held in December. It is because of your support that our community can enjoy the many benefits that the XYZ offers.

We know your sponsorship is altruistic in spirit, but we also realize that you are trying to reach the many individuals who make up this vibrant community.

Providing marketing opportunities for your company is our goal with these sponsorship opportunities. Your commitment to XYZ is good for the organization and we hope it is good for you, too, by providing access to key decision-makers in our region.

Thank you for your consideration. We appreciate your support of our organization and the community we serve.

Best regards,

John Doe  
President, XYZ

# Summary

Be sponsor-worthy. Be able to tell people why you're unique. Be able to tell them what you're giving them as a sponsor. Give it to them. Communicate frequently and consistently.

**Be the cappuccino!**

## **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:**

**Additional resources can be found on the Ewald Consulting website at [www.ewald.com](http://www.ewald.com).**

- ▶ *Secrets for Citizen Lobbyists Book*
- ▶ *Board Leadership Training Course*
- ▶ *Resource Articles and Podcasts*
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# About the Author



Paul J. Hanscom, CAE has been with Ewald Consulting since 2004. Previously, Paul worked in project management and implementation for various companies, nonprofits and government institutions. He is experienced in monitoring and evaluation, strategic planning, and membership/ sponsorship development.

Paul has a master's degree in international development from American University and a double bachelor's degree. Paul is the founder and 2007 president of the Midwest International NGO Network (MINN) and has been published by the American Society for Association Executives and the Center for Association Leadership. Paul earned his CAE in 2008.



# BE

*the Cappuccino!*

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