



Finding a Sponsor - What can you offer in return?

A SPONSOR'S OBJECTIVE IS TO INCREASE SALES

CAN YOU SUPPORT YOUR SPONSOR?

Understanding Sponsorship

Before you spend time trying to find a sponsor you need to understand why a company will sponsor a person, a team or an event.

Put yourself in their shoes; would you spend your money on someone without knowing what you're going to get in return, and will the return be worth the investment.

What is sponsorship?

Sponsorship is when a business provides funds, services or products in return for something that will benefit the sponsors business.

The sponsor can benefit if you promote their company name to increase their exposure, or help them sell their products or services in a more direct way.

Sponsorship is a small part of a company's overall marketing strategy. They can pay for advertising to reach their target audience or they can sponsor someone who can provide the company with more exposure.

Selecting a potential sponsor

Before you can select a potential sponsor you first need to know what it is that you're selling; what do you have to offer?

Are you a display team who can promote a company at events? Are you a competition team who are goal oriented to winning medals? Are you a drop zone with a captive customer base? Are you a world class skydiver with a big fan base? Are you an event organiser with a large customer database? Are you able to get yourself some good media coverage in the newspapers or on TV? Are you in a position to guide others to a certain product or service?

Basically, what do you have that could benefit your potential sponsor. Do you have a good understanding of your audience and does it overlap with the sponsors target audience.

If you can't promote to the same target audience as your potential sponsor, then they will not sponsor you. If they already have the same exposure that you are promoting, then they will not sponsor you.

Types of sponsors

Sponsors can be split into two groups: companies within the skydiving industry and companies with no skydiving products or services who want to use skydiving to capture the minds of their potential customers.



What is your target audience?

Who's going to see that you have a sponsor? And will it be the same people that your sponsor wants to market to?

In other words do you both have the same target audience?



Skydiving Companies

It's very easy to determine the target audience for companies within the skydiving industry.

Manufacturers want to sell more rigs, parachute centers want more customers, especially tandems and AFF students, skydiving shops want to sell more products etc.

If you want something from a company within the industry then you must show how you can help them achieve their goals and objectives.

Companies in the skydiving industry still sponsor skydivers in a big way; however, the majority of skydiving companies are not happy with their investment because they don't get the return that they expect. Because of this, it's now much harder than it's ever been to get a sponsor within the skydiving industry.

Some of the bigger companies, however, have a set budget for marketing and sponsorship and they will spend that every year so all they have to decide is who to spend the money on. Who's going to give them the biggest exposure in the industry.

None Skydiving Companies

Getting a sponsor from outside the skydiving industry is like winning the lottery. Big companies have big budgets for marketing and sponsorship but they also have higher demands. If you want someone to buy you equipment or pay for your skydives, then they want to know how you are going to promote their company to the mass market (usually none skydivers).

For example, telling Red Bull that you can promote them at your local drop zone and at competitions will not get you a sponsorship, but telling them that you will get on national TV and your photos will get in the national newspapers as well as going viral online with YouTube and Facebook etc may get their interest, especially if it's across many countries. If you can get worldwide exposure then you are almost guaranteed a sponsorship.

They will want to see their name and company logo as big as possible and promoted to their target audience. In the case of Red Bull they aim their marketing at active, adventurous young males between the ages of 16 to 29 years old.

Spreading the word

You can help your sponsor by putting their company name, logo or message onto one of the following: your parachute, a giant display flag, a wind blade, your jumpsuits, your rig or even a Freefall tube. You need to show your sponsor how you can promote his/her company.

Canopy Artwork



Adding a company logo to the bottom surface of your parachute provides a very visual impact for a company who sponsors a parachute display team or an event. Canopy artwork is a great way to assist a marketing campaign to get your sponsor's message across during an event or through the media.

If you're an active skydiver and you get seen on a regular basis by many other skydivers, then your canopy can be a big marketing billboard for companies within the skydiving industry. You can promote your sponsor every time you jump and this is one of the best ways to impress your sponsor so they keep coming back to you.

If you get your photo in skydiving magazines and seen across the social websites that skydivers use, then your sponsor gets to see his logo getting some great exposure.

If you do exhibition jumping in your local area then why not get a local company who is actively marketing towards local customers, and tell them how you can promote their company during events as well as at the local parachute center where their potential customers turn up in their thousands every year.

Every time you jump your sponsor will get the exposure they want and if you provide them with some great marketing photos they will continue to sponsor you year after year, especially if his company logo gets seen in the local newspapers on your parachute.

Did you know that canopy artwork can be added to a canopy after it's been manufactured and that a company logo can easily be removed and replaced by another one, without affecting your canopy performance?

Giant Display Flags

Giant display flags provide an additional 200 sq ft of advertising space during a high impact display. Corporate sponsors and parachute display teams have realized that the giant display flags can be re-used again and again and therefore receive excellent value for money.

National companies who want to market across the country sponsor parachute exhibitions because of the mass coverage they get throughout the year at many different events. If you promote skydiving exhibitions then you can get better sponsors by making sure they get their message across on a giant display flag which can be seen clearly by people at the event as well as getting some great photos in the local newspapers at each event.

Giant display flags mean that you can get many different sponsors by jumping a different company flags at different events or even two or three companies at any single event to improve your profit.

The company can also use the flags for display purposes when not being jumped for even more exposure.

Wind Blades

Wind Blades have very quickly become a highly visual method of adding to the available advertising space at drop zones or events. Wind

Blades also provide additional safety by indicating the wind direction to skydivers as they approach the landing area.

If you organise a parachute display then imagine how happy your sponsor will be when they see their company name on a wind blade in the middle of a display arena. They can then get to use it after the display to further their investment.

Wind blades positioned at your local parachute centre can give you and your sponsor even more exposure for a very low price compared to other types of media.

Freefall Tubes

Freefall tubes can be used for some spectacular marketing opportunities. Add a company name or logo to a freefall tube and promote a company or an event with some great freefall photos

Jumpsuits & Wingsuits

Your skydiving jumpsuits can provide some good marketing opportunities at the drop zone and at a parachute displays when the team meets the local community. A good Wingsuit photo with a company logo on in flight, can capture the imagination of anyone who sees it

Add a company name and logo to help give your sponsor maximum exposure.

Other Sports

Skydiving has some advantages because of its perceived danger by the general public and the media, however, we are up against other sports who get much more exposure than skydiving.

Formula 1 is seen on TV by millions, aircrafts are seen by hundreds of thousands at air shows, and even skateboarders get some good TV coverage. Extreme skiers and BASE jumpers are seen on a regular basis online and when their videos go viral the sponsors go back to them. Sail boats are always in the news for one reason or another which is great exposure for the sponsors.

You need to show potential sponsors why they should sponsor skydiving instead of other sports by being very active in helping them to market their company and products by using skydiving as a platform.



European companies spent over 30 billion euros on sponsorships in 2011 and the trend is set to increase

Ten ways to get a sponsorship deal off the ground

Step 1 - Understand what you have to offer a sponsor

Before you can approach a potential sponsor with a proposal, you must understand what you have to offer. This will help you clarify what types of organisations to target.

Understanding what you have to offer can be broken down into four areas:

1. **Your personal attributes and skills** - What can you bring to the table that will be of value to the sponsor? This could include social media skills, ability to talk in public, a knack for writing press releases, specific sales and marketing skills or a unique and marketable 'look'.
2. **Your target audience** – Do you have a good grasp of who your target audience is and how they overlap with the sponsor's target audience? Take the time to get to know your audience and what it is about them that will appeal to a sponsor.
3. **Unique marketing initiatives** – What can you offer that puts you ahead of

alternative marketing channels a sponsor could use?

6. **Outcomes and value for the sponsor** – Given the above, how can you improve a sponsor's business by partnering with you? Increased sales, loyal fans and distributors, staff morale? You get the idea.

Step 2 - Research your potential sponsors

Once you understand what it is you have to offer it's time to research your potential sponsors.

The process:

- Create a wish list of sponsors
- Research each of the sponsors
- Record the details in a Sponsor Research file
- Perform a reality check; how compatible are you really?
- At the end of the process you'll have a list of say 20 to 30 sponsors who fit the bill.
- Next, take action to contact the person who can say yes to your sponsorship proposal.



Step 3 - Contact the person who can say yes to your sponsorship proposal

With a list of compatible sponsors it's time to contact the person who can say yes to your sponsorship proposal.

Lots of people can say no and only a very few can say yes. It's in your best interests to go straight to the source and not waste your time with people who don't have the authority to approve your proposal.

Listed below are some of the techniques you can use to reach the right person, ordered by effectiveness and how well you already know the sponsor.

Cold calling

Cold calling is the least effective method to contact a sponsor but it also requires the least investment on your part.

If you don't know the sponsor at all this is one of the few options at your disposal. The aim is to develop some rapport with the sponsor so you can shift from the cold call to a position where they will discuss their objectives. Here's a great way to cold call a potential sponsor.

Lumpy mail and follow-up

During the research process, if you've highlighted a number of sponsors who are a really good fit with what you have to offer, sending some lumpy mail first may be more effective than cold calling alone.

With electronic communications and email the norm these days, it's fun to receive a package in the mail that's not junk or a bill. And when it's lumpy, there's an extra incentive to open it and find out what's inside. It also demonstrates that you've been doing your research and have a knack for unique marketing initiatives.

So what clever lumpy mail ideas can you think of? Here are a couple of ideas that have been used before:

- The whole box and dice – send one of those executive toys with a note that says "Looking

for unique ways to market your business?

"We're the whole box and dice".

- A t-shirt with "You've been KO'd" printed on the front including a note that says "Partner with KO skydiving - a winning team".

Obviously this option is more expensive than cold calling alone. Limit your lumpy mail to say your top 10 hot sponsorship prospects.

Make sure you follow-up with a call a few days later. If you've piqued their interest you'll have a much better chance of building a relationship with the person who can say yes to your sponsorship proposal.



Sponsorship websites

Next cab off the rank is sponsorship websites including Sponsorship Pitch. These websites facilitate the connection between sponsors and sponsorship seekers.

As a sponsorship seeker you add your proposal to the system which sponsors can then review and contact you to discuss the opportunity in more detail. You can also approach sponsors directly with a proposal suited to their documented marketing objectives.

These systems also double as research tools and effective ways to help build your own brand online through social networking with sponsorship professionals and brand managers.

Networking with your potential sponsors

Good old fashioned networking. It's a great way to build your business and is equally effective when seeking sponsorship.

Networking in this instance is all about making direct connections with your prospective sponsors. If you've done the research it shouldn't be too difficult to find appropriate networking opportunities.

Word of mouth referrals

The holy grail of sponsorship proposal success; a sponsor's trusted advisor refers you directly as a sponsorship opportunity worth investigating.

First you've got to develop relationships with the facilitators and leaders within your field; people who have established connections with the upper management and marketing departments of your prospective sponsors.

This comes about from natural networking and building relationships based on trust and mutual interests. At the end of the day it's not all about business or a means to an end. It's about genuine interaction and real relationships.

Think about all the things you enjoy doing and the places where you can meet with these facilitators and leaders.

- Do you enjoy golf for instance? Plenty of mutually beneficial relationships are built over a few rounds and a couple of beers.
- What about becoming a member of your beloved football team? A shared passion with your fellow members builds instant rapport.
- How about volunteering some of your time to help out a not-for-profit organisation? You can create some great connections with other volunteers.
- Word of mouth referrals are by far the most effective but are also the most time consuming. Choose activities you enjoy and

build natural relationships with people; and as a side-effect you may just get your foot in the door with a major sponsor.

Step 4 - Develop a trusting relationship with the sponsor

Having connected with the sponsorship decision maker it's your job to develop a relationship where they can trust you and minimise any perceived risks.

This process will be longer or shorter based on how you connected with the sponsor initially; longer from a cold call and shorter by a word of mouth referral.

Tips for developing trust:

- Don't do the hard sell
- Listen to what they have to say
- Demonstrate you've done the research
- Make good use of your established brand to reinforce your professionalism
- Provide referrals and testimonials when asked (note: don't burn your bridges)
- Prepare marketing material that emphasises benefits and value to the sponsor
- Have a history that illustrates you'll be around for the long haul

Step 5 - Establish the sponsor's marketing objectives

Once you've developed the necessary trust and rapport with a sponsor you investigate and explore their marketing objectives. This is the point where a majority of sponsorship proposals fail.

Why? Too often sponsorship seekers prepare a proposal without ever working directly with the sponsor to determine their

objectives. How can you possibly know what they want or need without ever asking?

Fundamentally, all marketing objectives are focused on generating more sales and protecting or improving the sponsor's bottom line.

By delivering a sponsorship proposal too early you're indicating that the process is about you, what you want and what you assume the sponsor wants.

If you take the time to establish the sponsor's marketing objectives, you're indicating that it's about them, what they want and how they can use your unique marketing initiatives to reach their objectives.

Step 6 - Agree on how you will measure sponsorship success

The success of any sponsorship can be measured in two ways:

Quantitatively – tangible results you can count

Qualitatively – less tangible results that improve the sponsor's position or circumstance

When you establish the marketing objectives you need to agree with the sponsor how success will be measured.

Quantitative examples:

Facebook fan numbers increase by 2000 over a 6 month period

Subscriptions to the customer loyalty program increase by 25% to June

5000 unique visits to the sponsor's website from an online competition

The more difficult marketing objectives to measure are qualitative or intangible. This includes customer satisfaction levels, customer loyalty and brand perception amongst women etc.

So how do we measure them?

By measuring the side-effects and indirect outcomes. For example, did the number of complaints from customers decrease during the period? Has the % of customer referrals increased? Did more women attend the sponsor's events?

Qualitative examples:

Positive brand chatter on the various social media networks

Higher numbers of customers contributing to surveys

Lower churn rate of customer to the sponsor's main competitor

Step 7 - Ascertain the value to the sponsor

With the marketing objectives in place and the measures of success defined, we now have the two inputs required to ascertain the value to the sponsor and subsequently the cost of the sponsorship proposal.

The obvious way to ascertain value is to simply ask for a budget. However, this rarely works. Sponsors are unlikely to divulge their budget. If they do, more power to you.

Let's assume that 10% of sales revenue is set aside for marketing and sponsorship purposes. But you won't know this if you don't ascertain the value to the sponsor.

So the more difficult approach, but ultimately more realistic and rewarding for both you and the sponsor is to demonstrate value and calculate the required investment based on that value.



Step 8 - Explore the available options

All the pieces of the sponsorship puzzle are now coming together. We've established:

- The sponsor's marketing objectives
- Agreed on the measures of success and;
- Ascertained the value to the sponsor

Now it's time to get those creative juices flowing and workshop your unique marketing initiatives with the sponsor.

Go back to step 1 and review what you can offer the sponsor. In the context of all the new information what can you realistically do within the budget to meet the sponsor's marketing objectives? How can you customise your approach to provide the greatest value?

Now I'm not talking about logos or sign writing or hospitality etc. These are a given and will be documented in your sponsorship proposal. But they are not the focus.

Concentrate on those areas that are unique to you and the sponsorship opportunity you're providing.

What's unique about what you do? How can you and the sponsor leverage these to meet their marketing objectives and provide value?

Step 9 - Develop your sponsorship proposal

With all the ground work behind you, putting together a winning sponsorship proposal isn't that difficult.

In fact, if the process has gone smoothly and you've followed the steps, the sponsorship proposal is primarily about documenting what you've already discussed and agreed to.

Keep it short, sharp and to the point. Sponsorship managers don't have the time to review lengthy documents.

You can of course change the structure below to suit your needs and incorporate any requests from the sponsor. Like so many things, less is more.

What I would recommend however, is you include some custom imagery and branding to give the sponsor an idea of what things could look like. Sponsors just dig seeing their brand or logo adorning a race car or impressive banner over the entrance to an event.

7 key sections of your sponsorship proposal

1 - SPONSORSHIP OPPORTUNITY

The sponsorship opportunity is an executive summary or synopsis if you like, focusing on the benefits and outcomes for the sponsor.

Limited to a few paragraphs and the liberal use of bullet points, senior managers should be able to read this section of your sponsorship proposal and come away with a good idea what you do, who you are and what's in it for them.

2 - MARKETING OBJECTIVES

Next we outline the marketing objectives as discussed with and agreed by the sponsor. For example:

"As discussed, the marketing objectives for the sponsorship program are:

Increase gross sales by 5% in the eastern district directly related to vouchers distributed at events

Implement a social media strategy and develop a Facebook fan base of 5000 by the end of the financial year

Encourage distributors to stock the latest range of products

Etc..."

3 - MEASURES OF SUCCESS

Document the quantitative and qualitative metrics you will use to measure the success of the sponsorship program, as discussed with and agreed to by the sponsor. For example:

"The measures will include:

Monthly analysis of direct sales figures and how they correlate with the objectives

Exit surveys of event attendees to ascertain brand awareness

Noticeable shift to positive feedback on social media channels

Etc..."

4 - VALUE TO THE SPONSOR

One of the most important sections of the proposal is detailing the value to the sponsor. This is the sell, the "what's in it for me".

Through good management and thorough research you already have this information straight from the sponsor. You've discussed it and agreed on the details previously, so it's a matter of stating the facts.

"The value to 'the sponsor' will include:

Measurable increase in the profitability of the eastern district, directly attributed to the sponsorship program and implementation of the unique marketing initiatives

Stronger relationship with fans which leads to higher conversion rates and repeat sales

Additional sales which will allow you to invest more funds into research and development of new products

Etc..."

5 - UNIQUE MARKETING INITIATIVES

So far most of the information in the sponsorship proposal has been a re-iteration of the elements already discussed and agreed to with the sponsor.

Looking back through your information, propose a number of unique marketing initiatives designed to meet the sponsors objectives, can be measured and provide the required value.

Include information regarding the target audience that's relevant to the sponsor:

Total audience numbers

Demographics - statistical view of the target audience, including age, gender, income, schooling, occupation etc.

Psychographics - attributes relating to personality, values, attitudes, interests and lifestyle etc.

Detail a number of options that incorporate the unique marketing initiatives and fit with the sponsor's expected return on investment.

You could provide an option below the estimated budget, one right on budget and one over. You may find the sponsors will go for the higher option if the perceived value is there.

6 - TERMS AND CONDITIONS

Up until this point we've not mentioned the investment amount; now's it time to get to the nitty-gritty.

In the terms and conditions section of the sponsorship proposal include:

The cost per sponsorship

The time-frame of the sponsorship proposal

Your payment terms. If the proposal last a year then I like 50% up front, 30% after 6 months and 20% after 9 months

Details of any insurance you hold. You'll need public liability insurance (another cost you need to be aware of)

Any other conditions or special features the sponsor should be aware of

7 - CALL TO ACTION

Finally, place a call to action at the end of the proposal. Include:

All of your contact details including email, mobile phone, social media and website address

An opportunity to come and see you in action if appropriate e.g. a sporting team or regular event

A message thanking the sponsors for their time and consideration of your proposal

And so on...

Step 10 - Deliver the sponsorship proposal and follow-up

With the sponsorship proposal written up it's time to think about how to deliver it. You could use Word and send it by email. This isn't very sexy or exciting.

I suggest you mark-up your proposal using a desktop publishing application like Serif Page Plus. I use this myself for proposals and other marketing material. It's fairly easy to use and doesn't cost very much.

If you're proficient with Word and Excel then you'll be able to use Page Plus, no worries. The additional investment is well worth it and may be the extra polish that gets the sponsorship proposal over the line.

However, if you're not that comfortable using desktop applications then consider engaging an online freelancer to do the work for you.

Once you're done marking-up your proposal all nice and pretty, don't wimp out and print



it as a PDF and email it to the sponsor. Get it professionally printed and send 2 copies to the sponsor and keep 2 copies for yourself.

And you're done...exhale and relax. A few days later call the sponsor and get their feedback on the proposal. Hopefully you'll get the nod and you can get the lawyers involved figuring out the finer details.

If the sponsor requests changes, review them in context and adjust your pricing accordingly.

But if things don't go quite to plan and your sponsorship proposal is rejected, make sure you find out why.



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