

Creating a sponsorship program that sucks

[or A Guide to Creating Your Own Half-A**ed, Completely Unsuccessful Partnership Program]

2018 was a very successful year for many associations building and running high value sponsorship programs. There were some awesome associations who managed to achieve some fantastic results. But ... there were a few who struggled to get even the basics right. If you would like to be similarly unsuccessful, please try some of the following handy tips...

Send a bulk eblast to every single potential sponsor on your database.

Ask them to sponsor your organisation or event without customising your email or proposal in any way. Bonus points if you attach a 20GB proposal document (prospective sponsors just love to receive unsolicited large files). Double bonus points if it's in Word instead of a PDF (trying to read skewed formatting is so much fun). Triple bonus points if it's addressed to "Dear Sir/Madam" (no one wants personalisation anymore).

Don't bother picking up the phone to speak to your potential sponsor.

You've got a great offer and they would be lucky to partner with you. You spent ages putting together an awesome proposal and it looks fantastic. It sells itself so well that no call is needed. Besides, making a phone call would look too eager. Eventually they will read the document and call begging to partner with you... hopefully.

Take your time following up the initial enquiry.

Sure, you sent the proposal out three months ago. But work gets so busy and surely a sponsor wouldn't think it's unprofessional to get a follow up call three months after they received the document. No, wait, four months because I had a holiday booked. Oops, sorry forgot about

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"We engaged Julian to develop our team's ability to proactively engage with current and future members. Julian's workshop was engaging, inspiring, and has broken down a number of barriers holding back our team. I would highly recommend Julian to improve your team's performance and to give them the confidence they need to get to the next level." Matt Golley, Institute of Public Accountants

Christmas. Aaargh, kicking off the new year was so busy and now it's March already. Stuff it, just call on the one-year anniversary it was sent.

Create a proposal document that lists all the sponsorship opportunities without any context.

They don't need to know why your organisation is a good fit for them, the depth of reach you have into your market, the experience other sponsors have had with you, and how your offering can make them more successful. Best thing to do is to list every single opportunity in as much detail as possible. Now is when they need to know the colour options for booth flooring.

Don't bother meeting prospective partners in person.

Who needs to spend the time and the money meeting with them? That just makes the sales process far too long and inconvenient. Surely, they can see this is an awesome opportunity. Why can't they just say yes and make it easy? Don't they understand it costs money to travel to meet them? And what if the sponsorship doesn't go ahead after spending all that money? What a waste that would be. Best not take the chance and try to do it all over the phone.

When you meet with a prospective sponsor get into sales mode away.

Don't waste time. As soon as you walk in the door launch straight into your prepared sales pitch. Who doesn't love interpretative mime as an icebreaker for discussions? Don't bother with small talk as it just wastes time. Ignore the large photo of the person you are meeting receiving the Nobel Peace Prize. Resist the urge to mention the photo of them skiing with their family at the same resort you go to each year. Bonding is for suckers. Who needs a relationship. And whatever you do, don't take the time to ask them about their marketing priorities and objectives either. Who cares how they are going to measure the success of the partnership?

Take your time following up after the meeting.

Often, a successful meeting ends with the sponsor asking for a proposal (or an updated version of an existing proposal). If this happens then it's

time to relax. Take your time pulling it together. The sponsor can wait and should understand that associations operate differently. It takes time to get approval from the Board and staff teams. A six-month turnaround is not just realistic, it's exceeding expectations. Plus, it's ensuring the sponsor will understand that's the way we operate – and if they want to work with us they had better get used to it.

Take the money and run.

Often the easiest part about sponsorship is making the sale. The hardest part is fulfilling the expectations you created during the sales process. The best way to do this is to ghost your new partner. Don't have a kick off meeting to get the partnership off and running. Don't introduce them to the Board and staff team. Certainly don't work internally to smooth the way for the new sponsor and overcome teething problems. The best thing to do is to quietly and quickly fade out of the picture. Take ages to respond to their enquiries and then, when they finally camp outside your office to have a word face-to-face, blame them for everything.

Remember ... you are perfect and expect the same from your sponsors.

Getting a long-term partner is kind of like getting married. You've made a commitment to be with each other. You've both got certain expectations going in. After the honeymoon period is over things can (and will) change. The trick here is to be completely immovable. Remember that you are perfect and you deserve perfection in return. If things get tough there are plenty more fish in the sea. Compromise is not an option.

Learn more

If you'd like an unsuccessful, low-value partnership program please follow the tips above. Alternatively, if you'd like to learn how we can assist you to generate high value, long-term partners for your organisation please contact Julian Moore, Director, SMS*. Julian is Australasia's foremost not-for-profit sponsorship practitioner and is available on 0401 648 533 or julian@smsonline.net.au.

Julian will be presenting workshops on Developing a High Value Sponsorship Program in March and June, and Sales Skills for Association Professionals in May. Book now at www.answers.net.au/events/