Corporate Sponsorship Guidelines

by Jeffrey Lependorf

Notes from CollaborACTION! Arts Marketing and Sponsorship Partnerships That Work Conference (April 12 – 15, 2003)

Note: Sadly, few literary presenters will be able to broker major sponsorships without having a major venue or national profile and a marketing budget. However, some of these techniques and issues may still be useful in seeking corporate marketing support. In general, the term "marketing partnership" may be more effective than "sponsorship."

"Sponsorship" is a marketing strategy used to communicate about a product. It is NOT philanthropy. The value of the product is not need based. In this case, the sponsor is "the buyer" and the organization being sponsored is the "property." So, you are *selling* and the sponsor expects a *deal*. The average length of a sponsorship is three years. Most corporate marketing goes to sports, but the arts get their share.

To get ready, you need to gather your marketing assets, which consist of whatever collaterals you can think of (things that a logo can go on -- like gala bags, display areas, etc.); measure your audience (geographic and psychographic – what value set does your audience hold, who is your typical audience member, etc.) -- you need to demonstrate that you understand both your reach and loyalty of your audience; and gauge your "climate" (internal culture: positives include an entrepreneurial spirit, where trying new things is OK, flexibility, superior content/performance, and the understanding that sponsorship is a deal, not a donation).

Attributes of a successful partnership include knowing your audience (create a profile for the sponsor), interacting comfortably with business people, being responsive, being realistic (it typically takes 2 to 5 years of process to develop a program), and delivering or making good on your promises. Good prospects for corporate sponsorship types include traditional businesses like automotive, financial services, spirits and wineries (pouring rights are something you have to sell at events), and newcomers like business-to-business services, hotel and dining, technology and energy.

Before embarking on a sponsorship program, take a reality check: Do you have real prospects? Do you have a track record? Have you identified the right type of sponsor for you? (Don't waste their time – look to companies already sponsoring in your community.) Sponsor motivations (in order) include: imagery/content (What do you stand for?), access to audience, goodwill (how they feel about it, as opposed to the

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reality of the deal), employee/customer relations (Will the program serve their employees?), drives sales, creates influence (you act as a fulcrum to get them into relationships). Some things to remember are that sponsors will have a low tolerance for failures and that they are used to tense work environments (so an element of fun in the work environment is something that you can offer).

Now, assemble all the tools you have that carry value. One of these is a marketing plan (sponsors find comfort in knowing that you have one, even though they may not need it). Next is your media buy/barter. Essentially, you are not in the game if you are not buying media these days. The rest are easy: audience statistics, tangible marketing tools (like a database), and your Web and collateral pricing sheets. Intangibles include rating your property, determining if you are newsworthy (the sponsor is part of the public – does that public know you?), protection from “ambush” (exclusivity at the top level), and sponsor ease (ease = perceived value). To create a competitive analysis you must track local deals and price local media.

Finally, tips on creating a proposal: remember first that a proposal facilitates a sale, it cannot make a sale—it is NOT a grant proposal. Avoid too much text and include testimonials where possible. Good luck!

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