



six signs a sponsor is

Kim Skildum-Reid tells it the way it is.

Okay, so I'm sitting on the couch watching the fun chick-flick "He's Just Not That Into You" while my husband is out with his buddies. I'm loving it. Too rare.

As usual, I can't stop thinking about sponsorship. So, I think to myself, there are a few signs that sponsorship seekers consistently miss that could tell them that a sponsor just isn't that into them. So, brace yourself for the cold, hard truth about how to read the signs so you can let it go, and move on to something more fruitful.

They tell you to "just send in a proposal."

This is a sponsor saying "leave me alone," without being rude.

In actual fact, it's unintentionally cruel, because it gets the sponsorship seeker's hopes up, when they have little or no realistic chance at a deal. Why do I say that? Because if the sponsor was interested, they would want to keep talking to you – ensuring that you know everything you need to know in order to create a great proposal for them.

In the sponsor's defense, however, I can understand why they use this "throw the dog a bone" method to get away from sponsorship seekers. It is unfortunate, but a lot of seekers, when presented with the opportunity to finally speak with a potential sponsor, lose their minds and switch on the hard sell, which is never a good idea with sponsorship. Sponsors are classified

almost as prey, with predatory sponsorship seekers on the attack at conferences, cocktail parties, and on the phone. When that happens, sponsors say anything to get off that phone call, away from that conversation, or out of that corner.

How to avoid this? Don't sell. Ask questions. Do your homework. Understand them. If they want a proposal, they'll ask for it. If they don't, try to incorporate them into your network and add value to that relationship over some time. Then, you will be able to run the occasional idea past them and ask if they'd like to see a proposal, and they'll give it to you straight.

They never call – or more to the point, they never call back.

Yes, sponsors are busy – too busy to spend a lot of time on all of the unsolicited proposals, calls, letters of request, etc. that come their way. Instead, they've got that "all our funds are currently committed" form letter and they've got voicemail. Please hear me when I tell you this: If they haven't called back after three voicemails, they're not going to.

Some sponsorship seekers seem to think that voicemail is a war of attrition, and that they should just keep hammering away at it. Sorry to break it to you, but voicemail doesn't care how persistent you are, and if you leave more than three messages about your proposal, you'll look desperate.

You can recover from having a proposal go nowhere and maybe do business with that sponsor at some point in future. But

if you make a jerk of yourself, that's going to stick.

The brand manager refers you to the sponsorship manager.

Here is the deal: Most (not all) sponsorship managers are some combination of gatekeepers, relationship managers, and internal consultants. They are very valuable components of the sponsorship process, but are generally not decision makers – particularly on mid- to large-sized sponsorships.

Who does make those decisions? Usually, a brand manager or brand team. So, if you pitch the brand manager or team (which is a great idea for a lot of reasons) and the response is, "You really need to talk to the sponsorship manager," they've just told you no, but don't want to do it themselves.

You are obviously welcome to continue pursuing it, but do it with the understanding that it is highly unlikely to go anywhere. My advice is to concentrate your major efforts on hot prospects, not extreme long shots.

Anyone refers you to the agency.

Similar to the sponsorship manager situation, some companies use their agencies to do the dirty work, flicking unpleasant tasks like gatekeeping and saying "no" to them.

If you have approached someone on the marketing/sponsorship team and they refer you to their agency, they really have said "no." In my experience, this isn't a long shot; this is an absolutely not. I am



just *not* that into you

sure that someone will know someone where this has worked out, but like in the movie, this is the exception. The rule is that if the sponsor is shifting your channel of communication externally, they don't want to talk to you. End of story.

You get referred to their foundation

In some countries and for some companies, a foundation is a well-funded resource for all manner of wonderful, worthy causes. For others, the foundation is an under-funded clearing house for non-profits that the marketing team and/or CEO don't want to deal with. It's go-away money – you don't get the \$50,000 sponsorship and all the extra benefits that come from a strong leverage plan; instead, you get a \$1,500 grant from the foundation.

This is another no-in-disguise situation. If you are a non-profit and have an amazing, strategic marketing opportunity for a company, it has nothing to do with philanthropy, and the last thing you want to do is speak to a foundation.

If it happens, go ahead and apply. A little money is better than none.

They use a sponsorship submission form.

I am sooo not a fan of online sponsorship submission forms! Some companies use sponsorship submission forms as the entry point for sponsorship seekers. The problem is that the best way for you to get your offer considered is if it is highly

customised, strategically-driven, and includes creative ideas for leverage. Sponsorship submission forms simply don't have the scope for you to include the kind of detail and creativity that you need to include to make a compelling offer.

If a sponsor has one of these sponsorship submission forms, they either...

- Are operating with a mindset that is a decade or more out of date (but which fits in a form)... or
- Don't really want to hear what any unsolicited sponsorship seekers have to say.

Whatever the case, don't fill out one of those forms. It's a total waste of effort. Instead, do your homework and then contact the brand team to get more background and ask if they would like to see a proposal. If you are referred to the online form, the answer is, "No, we don't want to see a proposal."

The upshot

If you have read this article and are thinking to yourself that it seems all too familiar, the issue is less likely to do with sponsor disinterest and more to do with your approach. In other words, it's not them... it's you.

If that's the case, it's time to rethink. You should look at:

- Approaching fewer, highly targeted sponsors
- Doing a lot of homework on their target markets, brand attributes, and objectives before creating an offer
- Developing offers that are based on big

and highly customised leverage ideas, not set packages

- Approaching the brand manager or team first
- Re-categorizing sponsorship-seeking as the process of developing a strategic marketing alliance, and losing any hint of it being a numbers game, about "who you know," or about aggressiveness.

If you are looking for a step-by-step process for all of this, you may want to check out *The Sponsorship Seeker's Toolkit 3rd Edition*.

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