

# THE SPONSOR DOC

With Bruce L. Erley, APR, CFEE

## Sponsorship Sales: A Tough Row to Hoe

### **Dear Sponsor Doc:**

*To be honest, sometimes I just get tired of trying to find sponsors for my event. It is often long hours, chasing lots of rabbits with limited success.*

*Any words of encouragement for me?*

*- S.S. Omaha, Nebraska*



### **Dear S.S.:**

Oh I get it...and so does anyone else whose job is to find and sell sponsorship for their events. I noticed you are from the heartland of the U.S. so let me use some wisdom from farming and ranching that might provide some insight and encouragement.

Yes indeed, finding sponsors can be "a tough row to hoe." The marketplace you work in may be fertile soil or filled with rocks. It is your job to prepare the field for planting. That includes having the right equipment (e.g. event audience demographic info, and well-designed sponsor benefits packages), preparing the soil properly (e.g. creating leads lists, and inviting prospects to experience your event) and knowing the right time to plant, (typically the fall is the best time to plant seeds of sponsor interest.) The good news is that once you prepare the field the right way, it can produce great crops for years to come.

Next, be sure you have "checked on the lower 40." In other words, have you surveyed your ranch? It is essential to annually review your event in order to assemble an inventory of what you have to offer. Be sure to determine those things that will be of greatest interest to potential sponsors. Think beyond booths and banners. Your digital and social media outreach is becoming a valuable asset to

sponsors. Hospitality that can be leveraged with customers, clients and staff should be quantified. Creative activations that provide innovative brand engagement are important to identify.

Further, as any farmer knows, "there is a time to plant and a time to sow." Timing in sponsorship sales will have a significant impact on your success. You wouldn't expect to harvest seeds you plant a month or two earlier, why would you expect to sell a sponsorship only a couple months before your event? I try to renew all the prior year's sponsors within three months following my event. That provides the financial foundation for the coming year's sponsorship budget. With those renewals in hand, I move my focus to finding new sponsors, an effort that begins at least six months in advance. Just as it takes time for a plant to germinate and bear fruit, it takes time to build a relationship with a potential sponsor and have your proposal go through the vetting and evaluation process.

My final bit or ranch-related encouragement for you comes from Billy Crystal in *City Slickers*... "Rollin', rollin', rollin', keep them dogies rollin'." Don't give-up, S.S. Yes, finding sponsors can be hard but persistence and resilience must be your companions along the trail. Happy Trails to You!

With more than three decades in sponsorship sales and consultation, **Bruce L. Erley** is the President and CEO of the Creative Strategies Group, a full-service sponsorship and event marketing agency based in Denver, Colorado he founded in 1995. Accredited in Public Relations (APR) by the Public Relations Society of America and a Certified Festival & Events Executive (CFEE) by the International Festivals and Events Association, Erley is a highly-regarded speaker on event marketing and sponsorship having spoken on the topic around the world in such places as Dubai, Vienna, Beijing, Toronto and New York.

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