



By Kim Skildum-Reid

Must-Have Organisational Traits For Successful Sponsorship Seeking

I've spent a bit of time over the past year or so covering the traits you want and don't want in sponsorship managers, but as important as it is to have the right people in the job, it's even more important to have the right organisational approach to sponsorship.

Below, I've listed my take on the eight most critical organisational traits of successful rightsholders. These are the gears that transfer the power of your properties into a compelling sponsorship opportunity. Miss any of them, and hitting financial targets gets more difficult.

Senior Management with a Clue

Seeking sponsorship is HARD, and trying to do it when your board

or senior management doesn't understand what's involved is even harder. If they don't have at least a basic grasp of best practice, they will...

- Ask you to make up budget shortfalls with sponsorship, whether there is the commercial value to do that or not.
- Task you with raising sponsorship when the lead time is far too short (see below).
- Want to deliver as little as possible to the sponsors for the money they invest.
- Not understand the value of the other, non-cash benefits a sponsor brings to the table
- Sell sponsorship to their buddies for way less than it's worth, or offer them things you can't actually deliver.

Successful rightsholders make an organisational commitment to best practice sponsorship. They educate up and down the chain, and senior executives and board members actually get involved in parts of the sponsorship process from time to time, giving them a lot of insight as to the strategy and rigour involved.

Courage

All organisations face tough challenges and have to take calculated risks, and sponsorship seekers are no exception. In fact, the nature of sponsorship is such that rightsholders need to not only stand up for what's right for their organisation, but for their fans, as well.

Successful sponsorship seekers have the courage to keep sponsors and

stakeholders in the loop as soon as an issue is identified, rather than living in hope that it will all work out. Successful sponsorship seekers have the courage to walk away from a sponsor that isn't good for the organisation – a sponsor that pays too little money, demands too much, a Sponzilla – so they're free to pursue better sponsors. And successful sponsorship seekers have the courage to say no to sponsors that want to disrespect the fan experience.

They Know What has Value to a Sponsor

Successful sponsorship seekers understand that sponsorship is an investment of marketing funds, and to justify that investment, it must deliver returns against marketing objectives. It's not a handout, nor is it altruistic.

Successful sponsorship seekers know that needing money for something has no bearing on the commercial value to a sponsor. They've identified their most commercially valuable properties and sell as much sponsorship as they can around those properties, using any excess money to fund their less sexy properties.

Psychographic Research

Successful sponsorship seekers know their audience. They know the motivations, priorities, and lifestyles. They know why they care, why they're fans. They know those fans don't love the club, museum, event, charity, or whatever because they're 24-39-year-old females. They know age and gender don't drive decisions, nor do they drive sponsorship.

Rather than doing research by tick-box, they ask the fans what the best and worst parts of the fan experience are. They ask why they decided to donate or attend or join, and let the fans answer in their own words. They know psychographics are both meaningful and useful, and demographics really only tell you who your fans aren't.

For more on why psychographic segmentation is crucial, [click here](#) to read "Psychographics: A critical building block for sponsorship seekers".

Agreement on What is on the Table

This is the way most sponsorship seekers approach creating an offer:

- They offer the same boring 4-5 benefits over and over
- They offer the fewest benefits possible to do the deal
- They put any creative requests from sponsors into the too-hard basket
- They hit the panic button if a sponsor wants to influence the property in any way (even if it's good for the fans)

This is in stark contrast to successful sponsorship seekers, who know that different sponsors need vastly different things, and they have a huge number of benefits that they could offer. (How huge? [Click here](#) to download my Generic Inventory for pages and pages of options!)

But shifting to a flexible, best-practice approach, offering fully customised proposals to sponsors, can put organisations right out of their comfort zones. And creating that huge list of options invites overthinking by every stakeholder and self-styled sponsorship expert.

The answer lies in the inventory. Virtually all truly successful sponsorship seekers work from some kind of inventory, customised to reflect everything they could offer, if the circumstances warrant. If there are potentially problematic benefits, or benefits that substantially change the property (such as selling naming rights), these can be flagged for further assessment and approval before offering them.

Responsive Producers

Operations people are often preternaturally disposed to hate sponsorship. They shouldn't be, but they've been burned over and over by commercial managers selling sponsorship benefits that are really difficult to deliver. Sponsorship has been the bane of their existence, and they assume it always will be.

Really successful sponsorship seekers have changed this up completely. They make operations/producers part of the sponsorship process, so that their needs and challenges are taken fully into account when developing sponsorship offers.

One trick that works really well is to incorporate their challenges and limitations into your inventory of benefits.

Once you've customised your inventory of benefits, work with your operations team to identify any benefits that are difficult for them to deliver, or that need a lot of lead time to do, and mark them with an asterisk. (They may also have some suggestions for benefits that you haven't thought of.) Then, undertake to never include one of those benefits in a sponsorship offer unless you talk to operations first. That way, it's still possible to offer those benefits, but only if the logistics, timing, and revenue work.

Humility

This is a hard one for some sponsorship seekers to swallow,

but sponsorship isn't about you. Sponsors don't want to connect with you or align with you. They want to connect and align with your fans – the people who care about your organisation and what you do.

Successful sponsorship seekers embrace this idea, take their organisational ego out of the picture, and anchor their offers and their servicing around helping sponsors to build and nurture bonds with the fans, and add value to their relationships with fans.

Realistic Lead Times

I feel like I've written about lead time a lot recently. That's because it's both an overlooked problem and an overlooked asset.

Sponsors need lead time – the more the better – in order to turn the opportunity you're trying to sell them into a result for their brand. They need time to make a decision, plan, and then implement the leverage program. To that end, successful sponsorship seekers...

- Finalise all major components of the program or event they're selling sponsorship around early – when, where, themes, etc.
- Get customised sponsorship proposals into the marketplace at least six months before launch, and longer is better.
- Know how to create a short lead time proposal, which could lengthen the sales window by another couple of months.
- Stop selling when there's no longer time for the sponsor to do what they need to do.

If producers, bureaucracy, or whatever is making it hard to get into the market early, then that is going to greatly affect your bottom line, and that's a problem you need to solve before you're going to be truly successful.

Kim Skildum-Reid is one of the sponsorship industry's most influential thought leaders. She has a blue chip list of consulting and training clients spanning six continents, is author of global industry bestsellers, *The Sponsorship Seeker's Toolkit* and *The Corporate Sponsorship Toolkit*, and commentates to major business media around the world. She is the brains behind industry hub, [PowerSponsorship.com](#), and offers sponsorship consulting, training, speaking, and coaching.