



## RESEARCHING: PROSPECTIVE SPONSORS

### Dear Sponsor Doc:

I have asked my intern to research prospective sponsors, but so far, when I've assigned this task, I find that my staff doesn't understand what I'm looking for, so it hasn't been very helpful.

I was wondering before I re-invent the wheel of coming up with a "research template," if you had any advice or anything you could share regarding where to start when doing sponsor research. Any insight you can provide would be incredibly helpful.

**E.F. Indianapolis, IN**

### Dear E.F.

A blank white sheet of paper...I know the feeling when you are putting together a list of sponsor prospects for the first time. It can be quite daunting! But I have found there are some effective ways to develop and research sponsor leads lists.

The first thing is to develop a list of the types of businesses that you think would have a natural interest in your event based either upon the theme of the event or the profile of your audience.

For example, if it is a home and garden event, your list of endemic prospects connected with the theme or type of event might include home improvement retailers, window companies, online home service advisors, etc.

Non-endemic categories, which are comprised of prospects which are interested in the home show's audience profile, might include home insurance agencies, truck/SUV automotive dealers, and credit unions or banks that make consumer home equity loans.

Next, you need to flesh out your category list with specific companies in your geographic region that you feel might be candidates for solicitation. Generally, I try to identify companies that are demonstrating aggressive marketing efforts or competitive positions in their advertising, might be rebranding or that are already active sponsoring other events.

In terms of conducting the actual research, there are three effective sources to where I typically compile my leads lists...online, business & trade publications and through person-to-person networking.

- **Online Research** – Clearly search engines are a remarkable tool to identify sponsorship leads. Google has become my most helpful platform. The first thing I do is search other similar events across the country. Who are their sponsors? What business categories sponsor them? Would that translate to my event? Are there any specific companies that have operations in my geographic area?

Then I dig into the websites of specific companies that make my prospect list. I try to discover their mission & values, their history, (do they have an upcoming business anniversary?), their past sponsorships or granting criteria.

To identify specific people, I go to LinkedIn. In the search bar, put in the company name, the word "sponsorship" or "marketing" and your state. I have found this to be a fountain of information for locating specific contacts.

- **Business & Trade Publications** – I get many sponsor leads by perusing publications. You are looking for activity in the business sector that might create an opportunity for sponsor interest -- new company coming to your community, a bank changing its name, a company on a hiring spree.

Check the business section of your local newspaper or your regional business journal. Subscribe to sponsorship and marketing publications such as the ESP Sponsorship Report, Event Marketer, Advertising Age or Advertising Week. They provide a fountain of ideas.

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- **Networking** – Never underestimate the effectiveness of good, old-fashion networking. This is where your organization's leaders or board members can really help you connect with local decision-makers.

We also maintain memberships in local chambers of commerce, visitor and convention bureaus and downtown partnerships or business improvement districts. We attend their mixers, work their memberships lists and volunteer on their committees or in leadership roles.

I have also found that our current sponsors are often good sources to connect us with their network of business associates. As long as they are not competitors, our sponsors have been most willing, when asked, to make introductions for us.

E.F., I hope these tips prove fruitful in your effort to identify prospects and secure new sponsors for your event. They are out there...now go get them!

### The Sponsor Doc

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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