

THE SPONSOR DOC

With Bruce L. Erley, APR, CFEE

It's All About The Audience

Dear Sponsor Doc:

We are pretty much wrapping up sponsorship sales for our summer event and seem to once again be a bit stuck in terms of revenue. I was close on bringing in a couple new sponsors, but they say they need more information about who is coming to our festival. What information should I provide and how should I get it?

S.C. Breckenridge, CO.

Dear C.O.

From your letter, I need to assume that you are not conducting audience surveys at your event each year. If that is the case, you are not alone, but this is something you need to change *this year!*

To be honest, I am always a bit stunned when I consult with events large and small from State Fairs to Christmas Markets, by the lack of information they can provide about who is attending their event. I hear a lot of "It's principally a family audience..." or "They really are just a cross section of our community..." or my favorite, "I would say evenly split male and female, aged about 18-65."

To be able to attract prospects and create a compelling case for sponsorships, event producers need to know *exactly* who is attending their event. Please believe me when I tell you that sponsors know *everything* about their target customer from the demographic profile to lifestyle interests to buying behaviors. If you can't make the case that they will find their target customer at your event, you will be hard pressed to make the sale.

The good news is that you can take steps before this year's event to correct that deficiency by putting together a plan to survey your audience. Let's get started.

First, determine what type of data collection methodology you want to take.

- **Random Sampling**, whereby you have people canvass select every Nth person to complete the survey is generally the most statistically reliable. In this scenario, you can have staff, volunteers or a third party randomly intercept, say every 15th person they encounter and have them take your survey. Generally, all you would need to collect is 200-400 surveys at even

the larger events to get reliable data.

- **Enter to Win** data collection, is often used by event organizers. In this scenario, you set-up a booth or kiosk and offer an incentive for your event attendees to take the time to stop, fill out information and thereby enter to win a prize. This approach often captures hundreds, if not thousands of "entries" but generally the data is less reliable as the person filling out the survey is self-selecting themselves (versus being randomly selected) and often does not provide accurate or complete data. None-the-less, this audience data is far better than your guessing!
- **Online Surveys**, have become a new effective tool to learn about your audience. Most of us have received these types of surveys after attending conferences or other events for which we registered. Survey Monkey is the one we have used most often, but there are others as well. The key to this approach is that you need to have some prior mechanism to collect the email addresses of your attendees. If you are putting on a run or cycling event, you have those. If you sell tickets online to your event, you are good to go.

So once you have decided what testing instrument you are going to use, let's cover some of the key information you will need to attract sponsors.

The most basic information you will need is a demographic profile. You need to ask your attendee to profile information on the following categories:

- Age
- Gender
- Marital Status

- Household Income
- Profession
- Home Ownership
- Zip Code

Next, I want to get a sense of how they learned about the event. This information will be very helpful to gauge your marketing and sponsor recognition. This question might look like:

Q: How did you learn about the event?

- Newspaper ad
- Radio ad
- Television ad
- Outdoor ad
- Poster/Brochure
- Email
- Website
- Facebook or other social media
- Friend or Neighbor
- Walking by

Finally, if the survey is not getting too long, I like to learn about their future buying habits, particularly for sponsor categories that I have not been able to attract in the past. The question might look like this:

Q: In the next six to twelve months, which of the following products or service purchases do you anticipate making?

- New car or truck
- New home
- Vacation/airline travel
- Insurance
- Etc.
- Etc.

S.C., if you take these steps at this year's event, I can assure you that you

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will dramatically improve your sponsor pitch next year. The more that you can make the case that it is at your event that they will find their target customer, the more likely you can move that revenue needle in 2017.

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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