

# THE SPONSOR DOC

With Bruce L. Erley, APR, CFEE

## The Future of Festivals in a Virtual World

### **Dear Sponsor Doc:**

*I was recently reading about industry trends for sponsorship spending in 2017 and was a bit alarmed to see the ongoing lackluster growth for the dollars spent on festival and event sponsorship. While the dollars going to music venues and concerts, sports and other properties seem to be growing rapidly, our sector seems to be bumping along the bottom. What's your take on this?*

*L.L. New Orleans, LA*

### **Dear L.L.**

Yes, I have been tracking those trends in spending as well and definitely think there are some things we can do better as producers and organizers of festivals and special events to make our properties more attractive to potential sponsors.

We have to recognize that festivals can be considered "old school," in this fast moving, tech-savvy society in which we live. As producers it is on us to keep our events fresh, creative and relevant to our audiences. I call it "re-venting."

If you continue to provide the same programming and the same experience year after year, your event will become predictable and tired. Your audiences will sense that and begin to find other leisure activities. Further your sponsors will be looking for the "what's new" elements that keep your event current and compelling.

From the perspective of keeping your event attractive to sponsors, they are looking for events that embrace

current technologies as measurement and promotional tools that they can utilize to accomplish their goals. Needless to say that includes recognition on your website, but there are other things you should be doing as well.

### **Here are a few ideas...**

- Grow your social media followings. Don't just post during your event...post year-round. I manage social media for a bike ride, but throughout the year, I am posting stories on interesting cycling routes, latest gear, news about changes in city policies regarding cycling, etc. We have grown our followers to twice as many who actually ride with us.
- Then we invite our sponsors to submit interesting posts that involve their products and services. We try to keep the content more informative that promotional.
- Create interactive experiences that will engage your audience with

your sponsors. Your audiences want to move beyond being spectators to being participants. Have them text vote for their favorite band or menu item at your food court. Give them sponsor branded glow sticks for nighttime events.

- Utilize new technologies such as Live Gauge, that can count the number of mobile phones that pass through your event thus providing you with accurate attendance, and the mobile app GuideBook to replace your paper program.

Audiences and sponsors continue to look for authentic experiences that can be shared, have a local flavor and are important to the community. Tap into that energy and you will get your share of the sponsorship dollars being invested in festivals and events.

**The Sponsor Doc**