



## THE SURVEY SAYS...

### Dear Readers:

In our effort to keep CSG the regional thought leader in sponsorship during these extraordinary times, we recently completed a survey of 100 key sponsorship decision-makers across the Denver metro area. Our goal was to get a sense of how companies are responding to the pandemic from a sponsorship perspective and to get some indication of what they anticipate in returning to event sponsorship in 2021. We received responses from nearly 40% of those surveyed which provides a statistically reliable sample. While this was a local survey, I am confident that you would find similar outcomes in your market.

### The Survey Says...

The tabulation provided an insightful view into what we might expect in the year ahead. I wanted to provide you with my topline observations.

- Not surprisingly, virtually every sponsor was impacted by the pandemic with 97% experiencing canceled or postponed events.
- Of the sponsors who experienced disrupted events, 65% agreed to defer their sponsorship to 2021. If they had already paid their fees, nearly half allowed the property to retain all or part of the fee and apply it to 2021, while another third requested a refund of 2020 fees already paid.
- Looking ahead, there continues to be great uncertainty about the road ahead for sponsorship in Denver. 87% report that they are under corporate directives not to participate in any "in-person" events. Asked when they expect to return to in-person activities, whether internal or external, only 8% predicted by Q1 2021; 19% in Q2 2021; 8% in Q3 2021. However, the vast majority (65%) said their return to live events was "undermined."
- Most, (55%) are presently unsure how the pandemic will impact their sponsorship budgets; with 32% anticipating a decrease in sponsorship spending; 11% no change; with only 3% anticipating an increase in spending.
- Further for most, sponsorship decisions will be delayed. While approximately a third predict no impact on their regular planning and budgeting cycle; 18% expect these decisions delayed to the very end of Q4 2020; 24% postponed to Q1 2021; and 26% reported decisions being pushed out to Q2 2021 or later.
- Asked about their marketing & communications priorities in 2021, 76% said their focus will be to increase brand awareness and exposure; 53% to grow market share; 50% to build brand presence; 37% to focus on employee engagement; 37% said product launches and openings; and 24% B2B networking and sales.
- In terms of key company CSR and/or philanthropic priorities, education at 62% was the top focus; followed by 49% to health & wellness; 46% to racial equity; 35% to LGBTQ+; 27% to arts; and 24% to youth.

### CSG's Take:

In our 26 years in business, we have never experienced this degree of business disruption. Even the Great Recession in 2008 paled by comparison.

During the last eight months we have worked with our clients and sponsors on various workarounds, including virtual events, event redesigns to accommodate social distancing, creating viral sponsor activations and increased digital impressions and engagement.

The key to our strategy has been open, honest, expedient and compassionate communication with all our stakeholders. We have offered our best advice and remained flexible in finding solutions. We will take that same strategy moving forward for it is the basis of keeping strong relationships with all our partners.

But frankly, until a vaccine is approved and broadly distributed, this is what event sponsorship will likely look like for the immediate months ahead. I remain cautiously optimistic that by July we will be able to return to events looking somewhat like pre-pandemic times.

In the meantime, we are anticipating fewer sponsorship deals with most commitments delayed to the spring of 2021. This will likely translate to a far more compressed sales window taking place between January and May 2021. Further, all agreements will require pandemics as a condition added to force majeure terms.

I hope this research and our insights are useful in your planning and expectations for the months ahead. My sincere best wishes for your success in 2021

Stay strong!

### 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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