



THE ROAD TO **RECOVERY**

Dear Sponsor Doc:

We have been laying pretty low the past year when it comes to soliciting sponsors. It seems like things are beginning to start again. Do you have any advice as how to get things kick-started again with sponsors?

L.C., Tampa

Dear L.C.:

Yes, we are seeing opportunities finally opening up again. I do believe it depends on the state, region, or country you live in, as the government guidelines and restrictions for events really is the driving factor. Some harder hit areas are keeping a lid on public gatherings while others seem wide open.

I would begin by taking the temperature in your own community. Have you set your 2021 dates? Are other events coming back? Are your sponsors expressing optimism? Does there seem to be community demand for getting back to events? If by September, you see events coming back, you should be engaging sponsors NOW!

Here are a few tips to get you going again!

Timing

We are anticipating an extremely compressed sales window. The prospecting, presentation, review and agreement process that normally takes six months, is now going to happen in six weeks. That means that you are going to have to be ready to make accommodations and adjustments in the negotiation process.

Be ready to pull the trigger on short notice. Some inquiries will want proposal by the end of the day. Last minute deals are also going to put pressure on fulfilling sponsor rights and benefits.

But...NOW is the time to reengage! Start with your renewals and 2020 deferrals. Reconnect with brands that were in the consideration "pipeline" before the pandemics. Reach out to former sponsors and prior declines to see if you might once again be a fit. We are finding a lot of market has "re-booted."

Texas Two Step

Get Ready to Dance! You will have to demonstrate more flexibility, innovation, and creativity in your sponsor deals than ever before. We are making pricing adjustments and providing sponsors with flexible outs or exit clauses, because without them some sponsors will not sign their agreement.

We have also needed to rethink sponsor assets and activations. A number are pausing in-person engagement and instead are passing out premium items and looking for "passive" engagements, like photo walls.

Transference

We find that stepping into your sponsor's shoes at a time like this is critical. Your understanding and empathy to their circumstances is essential. Some have changed or lost jobs. Others are double teaming. They are feeling overwhelmed too.

Further, many do not have clarity yet from leadership. Their business objectives are evolving, and most budgets remain fluid. Engage in honest, candid conversations about their objectives and obstacles.

Transparency

While we may not be able to provide *certainty*, we should be able to provide clarity to our sponsors. Transparency requires accuracy, honesty, and expediency. Don't hide information during your negotiations. Establish clear expectations on both sides.

Tone

Your tone, or how you come across in your discussions is one

of your most important attributes. In our conversations, we are intentional in reflecting our sincere gratitude for their business.

We want to show confidence, stability, and professionalism in all their dealings with us. And of paramount importance, reflect kindness in all your communications.

Trust

People do business with people they trust. Trust is built over time, but key components in building trust include your personal and professional integrity. Are you credible in your negotiations? Do you follow through? Are you true to the sponsor's brand and do you demonstrate fidelity to them?

Tenacity

We have never experienced such a disruptive period personally and professionally than that created by COVID-19. But as Winston Churchill famously said, "If you're going through hell, keep going."

I am no Winston Churchill, but I would add my encouragement not to give-up! Don't take declines personally. Stay Positive, be resilient and always keep the faith.

As Douglas MacArthur said, "I shall return!" (And he did.) So shall we all!

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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