



SPONSORSHIP: TIMING IS EVERYTHING

Dear Sponsor Doc:

Our event is not until next September. How reasonable is it for me to be in touch with potential sponsors eleven months out? Sometimes I hear that I need to get back to them closer to the event. Any suggestions on when I should be reaching out?

S.C., Williamsburg, VA

Dear S.C.:

I hate to make your next eight weeks a bit crazy, but NOW is the time to reach out to sponsors for your 2023 event. It's not about your timetable. It's about theirs!

Approximately 65% of publicly traded companies operate on a calendar-based fiscal year that runs from January until December. Even more smaller and privately-owned businesses start their fiscal year in January.

That means that they have already started their planning and budgeting for Fiscal 2023. If you want to be included in their 2023 budget, you need to be in front of them by early December! Even if their sponsorship decisions are not made until early 2023, you want to be in their consideration pipeline before the end of the year.

Start with your renewals. These folks already know you, and hopefully love you. They have likely allocated a budget line for you based upon their 2022 investment. Use your post event report as the opportunity to review their 2022 experience and for you to put the 2023 renewal package in front of them.

Next, I'd approach any declines from 2022. Reconnect with brands that expressed initial interest in your event, but for one reason or another declined. They already have a sense of your event and the sponsorship opportunities you provide so these leads are going to be your warmest.

Then you approach new prospects with your sponsorship opportunities deck and begin the conversation.

Time is either your friend or your foe...make it your friend. Traditionally, I have looked at the sales timeline in three phases:

- **Strategic Sales** (14-10 months out from your event) When you have the benefit of lead time, anything is possible. Think big! Go after those "whales" that could be your Title or Presenting Sponsor. Invite prospects to see your event this year to experience it for themselves and envision their participation. Put together comprehensive proposals and schedule presentations.
- **Tactical Sales** (10-4 months before your event) This is the time frame in which we sell 80% of our sponsor deals. During this phase, you should be "making hay." Get your pitches out

there to as many prospects as possible. Provide reasonable decision deadlines of a couple weeks to a month. But don't wait on yeses prior to approaching another prospect in the same category.

- **Combat Sales** (4 months or fewer prior to your event) I call this Combat Sales, as you take a lot of casualties this close to your event. Time is no longer on your side. Deadlines are already upon you for promotional materials, signage and more. I generally don't initiate many new leads, other than small deals during this time frame. Rather, I spend most of my time following-up on leads generated during the Tactical Sales phase. You are better off to cut your losses and start inviting prospects to this year's event to prospect for next year. (See Strategic Sales)

S.C., I hope my response doesn't keep you awake at night. But if it does, spend those hours getting proposals out the door.

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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