



HARNESSING THE POWER OF RELATIONSHIPS

Dear Sponsor Doc:

I'm just starting out selling sponsorship for my event. I've taken your earlier advice and got my proposals ready to go, but I'm just not sure about my sales approach to potential sponsors. Do you have any suggestions about the "style" or method you use when selling?

KC, San Antonio

Dear S.C.:

To be honest, I don't consider myself to be a "salesperson" pitching a deal to a potential customer. I don't like being "sold" when I'm buying a car for example. I like being listened to in terms of my needs and then educated as to the best options for me. If at any point, I feel like I'm simply being "played" for a quick sale...I'm out!

I see my role as a matchmaker...brokering win-win relationships between an event and a sponsor that mutually achieves both our objectives symbiotically. While they may be a sponsor of the event, I prefer viewing them as a partner.

Certainly, the financial support provided by a sponsor is essential, but I'm also looking for a sponsor who is engaged with us and embraces our event. Someone who is totally involved and enjoys the experience. A company with shared values and compatible missions. Ultimately, I am seeking a sponsor experiencing success through us, where their involvement and innovation improves our event and makes their brand come alive

I've always described my approach to sales as "consultative" and "relational."

As a consultant, I try to understand their business, their target customer, as well as their principal marketing, communications, and sales objectives. With those in mind, I seek to craft partnerships that achieve their goals which achieve those of the event.

Relational sales are more nuanced. It is based on the premise that people like to do business with people they like.

Relational sales take time. My most meaningful and successful sponsor relationships have taken years to develop. I consider many of these sponsors as friends vs customers. In addition to time, other key elements for creating these relationships include transparency (honest, open, clear communications of circumstances both good and bad); being true blue (loyalty and dedication of your sponsor and their brand); and building trust (demonstrating integrity, honesty, and capability).

In terms of how you conduct yourself as a sponsorship ambassador of your event, I would encourage you to personally develop these skill sets:

- Integrity (Conducting yourself ethically and professional in all aspects)
- Familiar/Friendly (First name basis)
- Candor/Straight Shooting (Don't be slick)
- Owning up to mistakes (Don't pass the buck, even when you can)
- Solutions-oriented (Have make-goods and work arounds in mind)

- Advocacy (Use their products, come to their defense)
- Service (Over-deliver)
- Random Acts of Kindness (A card or note, generosity with hospitality)
- Humor (Joking, laughing)
- Availability (Respond quickly and be focused on them and their issues)
- Appreciation (Notes of gratitude, gifts, comments)
- Loyalty (To their brand and to the relationship)
- A focus on their success

But remember...While friendships are friendships, business is business. I have had many a long terms sponsor say no to a renewal for a variety of reasons, and I never take it personally.

In sales, flash never trumps substance. While relationships will help you with access, credibility, trust, and acceptance, they DO NOT replace your delivering a good product in an ethical, professional, and successful manner

Best of luck KC as you take on this exciting new responsibility. I hope you find it as fulfilling as I have over my career.

The Sponsor Doc

Bruce L. Erley, CFEE, APR is the Founder and President of Creative Strategies Group, a consultancy based in Denver, Colorado which he founded in September, 1995. Creative Strategies Group (CSG) specializes in sponsorship and event marketing consultation for events, festivals, nonprofit organizations and other properties as well as municipalities and for-profit companies. With more than four decades experience, Erley is considered a master in the field. In 2012, Erley served as the World Board Chairman of the International Festivals & Events Association (IFEA). He is a 2015 inductee into the IFEA Hall of Fame. He is 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.

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