

The art of (sponsor) seduction

Are you ready to attract new partners in 2019? The time to start cultivating these new relationships is now.

Sponsorship in its purest form is displaying your brand name loud and clear on, say a sports jersey or stadium arena. But in the not-for-profit sector, sponsorship is an entirely different ball game.

You are essentially after a partner – meaning the ‘sponsors’ require a return on their financial investment. This could mean the ability to research your association’s membership demographic, access to your communications channel or engagement with members at association-based events – all of which can lead to the sale of more of your new partner’s products and services.

Another difference between traditional sponsorship and partnership relationships is the length of time the latter take to cultivate. To secure a partnership you need to appeal to the higher echelons in an organisation – be that the marketing director, company director, CEO or the board – which means greater time and effort spent. Therefore, not-for-profits and associations should already be thinking about securing partnerships for 2019 now. That means figuring out how to access potential partners, determine what you can offer them, and proposing an implementation plan to be outlaid early next year.

Associations generally need to do the seeking, usually because corporate companies either don’t know you exist, or how you can help them. It’s up to you to educate them about who you are, who you communicate with, what you do and how you do it, and what they would get out of the partnership.

Planning ahead

It all begins with identifying who your members are. Segment them into demographics by gender, age, geographical location and job title. Then, break it down further by determining the top 40 products and services

those demographics use on a regular basis in their workplaces or daily lives. For example, if your membership base is primarily in the manufacturing business, the companies they work for will be using mass amounts of electricity, so an energy company would be a good partnership target.

The next step is to approach the proprietors of the 40 products and services on your list, demonstrating that you have access to a sizeable group of potential or existing customers. Propose the methods of engagement the company could have with this group – such as exclusive access to your membership portal, events or research.

The approach

The number one way to make the approach is to draw up an enticing, tailored proposal that highlights what’s in it for the corporate company. Send a personally addressed, hard copy of this proposal to the company (avoid the easily deletable email) and follow this up with a phone call 10 days later to set up a meeting. This is no sales pitch – you are putting forth how you, with unfettered access to a significant portion of their consumer base, can work to achieve results for them.

What’s in it for you?

Partnerships can easily account for half of an association’s total annual revenue. Failure to lock them down means associations can miss out on a huge revenue stream. This income could translate into enhanced communications with members, bigger and better events, services and advocacy. Or even more staff and nicer offices. As you can see, the process is long and involved, but the benefits are many. So, it’s worth every association’s while to start working on developing partnerships now.

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