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# 7 tips for writing your corporate partnership proposal.

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Remember the film 'Field of Dreams' with Kevin Costner? I saw it 27 years ago, but the film's key message continues to resonate: 'If you build it, they will come'. The same idea relates to securing corporate partnerships.

The number one reason why most associations fail to secure high-value partnerships is because they haven't created a compelling reason for someone to partner with them.

The message is clear. If you create a great offer, and develop a proposal that will catch the attention of the prospective partner, the partners will come. With that in mind, here's a few tips to help you write that all-important proposal.

## 1. Start writing

You could have a very promising meeting with a potential partner but for the relationship to progress, they'll need to see something in writing. Often more than one person is making the decision to partner with you. Your written proposal can substantially sway the final decision. Find an existing template online and use that as the starting point. Whatever you do, get started and remember, done is better than perfect.

## 2. Think big

No-one got anywhere by thinking small. If you minimise the value of what you have to offer, so will the client. Julian said, "One client with an amazing offer asked for just \$5,000 to sponsor their major event. It was worth much more than that but they didn't want to scare the partner off with a big price tag. The partner rejected the offer because the offer seemed "too cheap" to be believable." Think big! It is easier to offer to lower the price later than try to increase the price when you realised you have undervalued your offer.

And don't forget – offering to place their logo on your website doesn't cut it any more. You need to offer them something that they can't get anywhere else that will help them generate revenue.

## 3. Believe in what you offer

If you don't truly believe your offering has value, neither will the client. Julian says, "Say you represent an association for veterinary nurses. They don't earn huge salaries, but they can influence a significant number of buying decisions which makes them attractive to makers of animal-related products like dog chews, cat litter and worming tablets."

(By the way, your lack of faith in your own offer shows up in subtle ways – by not following up on the proposal, by not being enthusiastic about the offering, and by not asking for what you deserve.)

Don't underestimate what you offer and its value.

## 4. Think long term

Sponsoring one event is not always attractive to prospective partners as it only gives them one opportunity to engage with your market. If you were to bundle three or four events per year into a package and put a single, higher price tag on sponsoring the entire bundle, that suddenly becomes a much more attractive proposition. Even better, think in three-year blocks and not only will you secure a long-term partner (and save yourself finding a new one every year), you'll also be able to offer them better value and more coverage.

It also pays to be flexible when creating the benefit package – if the client wants something included that you hadn't considered, be open to incorporating it. Partnerships are all about helping each other achieve a win-win outcome.

## 5. Write well

First impressions count so take the time to make your proposal look attractive. It's not hard. Use quality images and lots of them. Make the text big so it's easy to read. If you can't write, hire a copywriter who can.

[Bernadette Schwerdt](#), Director of the Australian School of Copywriting has a roster of writers who specialise in writing sponsorship proposals. "It's all about the benefits. Partners want to know, 'what's in it for them' if they

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partner with you so everything must be written from that perspective.”

Looks matter too, so hire a cost-effective graphic designer from [fiverr](#) or [99Designs](#) to design it. Sure, it’s an investment but the pay-off can be big and once you’ve done it well once, you can amend it easily to use for other prospective partners.

## 6. Give them something they can’t get

You have to realise that the one thing partners want is access to your valuable database, and that’s something they can’t get without you. But remember, access does not mean they get a copy of your database. Instead you are providing them with the opportunity to, through you, engage with the valuable market you represent. And if you are prepared to offer exclusivity you greatly enhance the value of what you have to offer. For those not prepared to offer the often-asked for (and almost always denied) endorsement from your association, this is a great way to offer similar value.

## 7. Finish it and send it out

How many half-written proposals do you have in your (digital) bottom drawer that have never been completed or sent?

Julian says, “I often ask my clients how much success they’ve had with securing a corporate partner. They say ‘none’. I ask, ‘how many proposals have you sent out?’ They say, ‘none’. And if they have sent out proposals I ask, ‘how many did you follow up on?’ They say, ‘none.’ That’s probably why they don’t have any partners!”

Finding partners is a numbers game and you need a sales mentality. If you don’t put out the proposals and follow them up, you’ll never get results.

Julian says, “The single biggest factor for the failure to generate partners is the lack of follow up. Be prepared to make many calls. And be prepared to hear ‘no’ a lot.”

Finding corporate partners is not easy but it’s doubly difficult if you don’t have a compelling partnership proposal with an outstanding offer to start with. As the good book says, “In the beginning there was the word, and the word was good,” so make sure yours are and put the time and effort into creating a document that will help close the deal. And remember, “If you build it, they will come.”

## Key take-outs:

1. Start writing – every great partnership begins with a compelling written proposal so start writing and offer as many benefits as you can.
2. Think big – ask for more than what you need so you have room to negotiate.
3. Think long term – offer clients a 12-month package or even better a two- or three- year package rather than offering one-off partnership option.
4. Send it out – nothing can happen if your proposal sits in a drawer gathering dust. Commit to completion and to following up.
5. Write well – if you can’t write or don’t have the time, find a professional who can. It’ll be well worth the investment.

## More information

You can find more information on this topic on the [Strategic Membership Solutions](#) website. Alternatively, email [info@smsonline.net.au](mailto:info@smsonline.net.au) for a list of free resources related to sponsorship, membership, and revenue generation for associations.