

## **5 Strategies to Jump Start Your Sponsorship Program**

Many of my clients are finding that sponsorship support for their event is down this year. This is occurring primarily because many corporate sponsors' marketing budgets have been cut due to the economic downturn.

This means that just doing what you have done in the past may not work this year. It is time to develop new strategies to jump start your sponsorship program. Here are some suggestions. You may already know this...but are you doing it?

1. Reach out to your top sponsors from previous years. This is your A list. For some organizations this may be just a few top sponsors, for others you may want to reach out to the top 10% on your list. I suggest contacting this group before the sponsorship materials are finalized. Tell them you are developing this year's sponsorship materials and want their input. Ask if they think they will participate at the same level as in the past.

If they indicate that their marketing budget has been reduced, this is an ideal time to have a conversation about what level of financial support they anticipate they can provide. Find out which benefits of your sponsorship packages provide the most value to them. Be sure to treat them like a true partner.

2. Follow up, follow up, follow up. In the past it might have been enough to send the materials and then wait for the phone to ring. You may be surprised to learn that some organizations do just that. That approach is not going to work in today's environment. Follow up is critical. The rule of thumb is at least three touches (I know, that can be difficult.)

If you send the initial sponsorship notice by email, then following up by phone is important. Emails do not always get through. Your sponsorship offer may have gone off to junk mail, never to be seen. If the initial offer is done through the mail, you could follow up by email or phone. I think the best strategy is to follow up using a different mode of communication. If you need to, hire someone to make those calls.

3. Revamp your sponsorship packages and levels. Use the information you learned when you spoke with your top prospects to re-define your sponsorship packages and levels. So instead of promoting high cost sponsorship levels that have numerous benefits bundled together, create options that allow your sponsors to select from a range of benefits at a lower cost.

Some organizations have top sponsorship levels that cost in excess of \$100,000. If you are having trouble selling your top levels this year, you may have more success marketing just those benefits that bring the greatest ROI to your sponsors. For example, many sponsors don't need four or six complimentary registrations to your event, but that is included in the package.

Try offering more a la carte opportunities that provide the benefits that your sponsors value most at a more favorable price point. These lower cost opportunities are also easier to promote to first-time sponsors who are testing the waters.

4. Add a time-based discount to encourage early decisions. In addition to lowering the basic price point, I suggest you consider adding a time-based discount as well. This will encourage folks to make a decision sooner rather than later. In past years sponsors may have acted quickly to secure top levels or exclusive offerings, but this year may need to be motivated by true savings.

5. Grow your sponsorship prospect list. Capturing new sponsors this year will be challenging. Every organization wants to make sure they are spending their limited sponsorship dollars in the right place. Your program may be a better fit for their target audience than where they have participated in the past. They may be ready to try something new. Make sure you position your program as the must attend event for that market. Some forward thinking companies are actually increasing their marketing dollars this year.

Do some research on the web. Find similar organizations and conferences and see who their sponsors are—it will often suggest categories of potential sponsors you hadn't thought of before.

Consider offering a discount or complimentary registration to prospective sponsors so that they can check out your event first hand. If your registration numbers are down this year, it would be a good idea to share attendance figures from the past few years so they know this is an anomaly.

The main reason you want to start the process this year is that cultivating new sponsors is often a multi-year process. They learn about your event, but might not be ready to invest just yet. However your event is now on their radar. That is the important first step.

**Shelley E. Griffin**, CMM, is the founder and president of Griffin Conference Group, which provides comprehensive meeting and conference planning services. Shelley is a respected industry leader with over twenty years experience. For more helpful tips, please visit our web site at [www.griffinconferencegroup.com](http://www.griffinconferencegroup.com).