

Sponsorship Strategies

Sponsors are critical to the financial success of many conferences. Yet some event organizers treat sponsors more like cash cows rather than partners. However, in today's difficult economic times, that approach isn't going to work. Sponsors have limited dollars and to capture those dollars you need to demonstrate the ROI- Return On Investment-of participating in your event.

Most sponsors are looking for two things, 1) visibility for their organization or product and 2) access to your attendees or members. That is how potential sponsors determine where to spend their sponsorship dollars.

Can you provide more visibility at your event? The typical sponsor benefits include putting sponsor logos on the event web site, preferred booth locations, some signage, and a listing in the program. Try going beyond that. Are you giving sponsors an opportunity to be on stage? Some options include introducing a speaker, leading a roundtable session, or giving a talk over lunch. Then take the next step and create opportunities for your sponsors get visibility after the event. Highlight sponsors year round on your website or included in your organization newsletter.

How much access to your attendees do the sponsors get in return for their dollar? First consider access at the event. Try to create a schedule that builds in time for attendees to visit with sponsors and exhibitors when they are not competing with sessions and other programmed activities. Of course you have your breaks and reception on the exhibit hall but is that really enough? Scheduling a book signing by your marquee speaker on the exhibit hall is a terrific way of pulling attendees onto the floor.

Finally, what attendee information do sponsors receive and when do they receive it? Provide contact information to your sponsors and exhibitors in advance, so they can let attendees know they are going to be there - and help promote your event. If your organization does not release attendee emails, you could send a message for your sponsors. Most on-line registration systems have this capability.

Do sponsors receive an attendee mailing list after the event? I know some organizations are hesitant to provide this. Yet it is amazing how infrequently sponsors actually use the information when it is provided!

However none of these benefits may be what your sponsors need. Talk to them and find out what is important to them. (You do contact all your sponsors after each event, right?)

I hope this gets you thinking about your sponsorship program. Next issue I'll give more specific examples of sponsorship benefits.

Shelley E. Griffin, CMM, the president of Boston-based Griffin Conference Group, is a respected industry leader with over twenty years experience. For more helpful tips, please visit our web site at www.griffinconferencegroup.com.