

# Sponsorship 101

So you know by now not to put all your funding eggs in one basket. But when it comes to support for your artistic endeavours, sponsorship can be the golden egg, so it's a great one to crack. Flipside: it can also be the hardest.

## What is sponsorship?

Sponsorship is when a company gives you support (cash or in-kind) in return for recognition. It is most definitely not a gift – sponsors always want something back and they want to be able to measure it. It can be a fantastic way to meet your costs, but as more and more organisations look for support, including charities and sporting groups, it's getting harder for individual artists and small orgs to get a slice of the pie. Good job you're used to thinking creatively - a large dose of brain juice is going to be your best chance of getting a company on board.

## What are the trends?

1. Competition – First thing to know is it's a jungle out there, full of monkeys. And now that funding is getting harder to come by, it's full of artists too. Sponsors can pick and choose who to support, and artists have to be much better at selling themselves and managing arrangements. Everything is measured against its commercial return. There really is no such thing as a free lunch.
2. Less cash – Deals are shifting to in-kind support instead of money. This can be very valuable, as long as it's something you actually need.
3. Focus shift – Established companies are supporting fewer groups but for longer. Make sure you're one of the few.
4. Projects – Emerging companies are testing the market with support for short-term projects. Like a blind date, they don't want to commit too early. But if you can keep a sponsor involved beyond the initial deal, you might be heading for a trip down the aisle.
5. Digital – It's all about the tech. If you know what geotargeting and geofencing are, you're in the right game. Sponsors want to target the right people at the right time and you can help them do it. And with your creative brain you can get your sponsor's brand noticed, or even send it viral.
6. Cool to be "co" – Co-create, co-fund or co-work, the trend is to get people participating in and collaborating on projects. More engagement equals more value.
7. The search for unique – Some brands want a cool and independent vibe and you could be just the person to give it to them. Small, local, underground or grassroots events are an opportunity to stand out from the corporate crowd.

## What do sponsors want?

They don't want to feel warm and fuzzy. They want results. They have a product or service to sell and a brand to promote and protect, and they think hanging out with you will help them do that. This is what they're looking for:

- Business results. This might mean brand awareness, a positive view of the company, driving sales, shaping consumer attitudes or maximizing exposure. In all cases, the quality of your work is critical. 'Excellence' speaks volumes to suits. Cold hard numbers also talk. Tell them how many people will come and impress the marketing department. If you haven't established a reputation yet, your job will be much harder but recommendations from established artists can help.
- What's in it for them? Free tickets for the staff, exclusive offers and experiences for their customers, access to your social media channels or database, networking opps, invitations to opening night. All this and more. Just a logo on a postcard won't cut it.
- Audience relevance. Do your people match their people? Get some data on your audience.
- Brand fit. You wouldn't sell chain saws to Greenpeace. Make sure you know their mission statement and avoid conflicts.
- Exclusivity. We're not suggesting you re-title your play but giving naming rights is much more attractive than being way down on a long list. 'Last Cab to Coles' anyone? Or better: 'Coles presents Last Cab to Darwin'.
- Publicity. Yes, you'll need to do a budget, and it needs to be watertight. If you don't have the resources for proper marketing consider approaching the company for help in publicity/promotion instead of cash.
- Understanding between parties. This means cooperation and commitment, good communication and nurturing the relationship. Love your sponsor.

## How do I get a sponsor?

The million dollar question. Unfortunately there's no magic answer. You just have to think strategically and plan rigorously.

Step one is to know thyself. What is your mission? What can you offer? Be clear about your demographic and have stats ready to go. Next, think about what businesses might be interested in what you're offering and do some research on potential targets. Check their websites for mission statements, goals etc. and who they are already sponsoring. Do you know someone who knows someone in the company? Ask for an introduction or connect with their staff on LinkedIn. Check our [website](#) for plenty of case studies, partnership profiles and inspiration on successful relationships between arts, business and donors.

Make an initial approach. This is not a full-blown proposal but a testing of the water to see if they're open to the idea. Create a whizz-bang one-pager about yourself or your company with your mission and values, history, demographics and successes.

Approach media partners first so sponsors know they will get the profile. Find out what the potential sponsor wants and whether it's worth it – if it doesn't help your budget it may just be a pain to deliver. And of course, obey basic manners – be on time, follow up, do what you say you'll do. Above all, be brief, be brilliant, be gone.

They're interested? Super! Now you have to create a great proposal – and we mean great, like unputdownable. Start with a story – yours, or the story of someone whose life you changed through your work. Describe what you do and who you do it for (demographics). Provide measurable deliverables with specific targets and be very clear what you're asking for. Fingers crossed they will say yes. At this point you must get everything in writing, including who expects what from whom and when. Be aware that the contract will probably be drafted by the company's lawyers in terms that further the interests of the company. It's not their job to be even-handed. So it's your job to have it read by your own lawyer. You have to protect your own ethics, image and purpose. Then sign on the dotted line.

### How can I promote my sponsors?

This is what it's all about – getting the sponsor's name out there. Of course you will put their logo on your brochures, on your promotional materials and website and in the event space if possible. But you can also get a bit more creative and give some extra love.

1. Social media. At a creative level, innovative 'acts of kindness' by brands can get noticed and go viral so spread the word far and wide. Create a Twitter page where sponsors can invite customers to get into hashtag conversations. Let the sponsors write guest posts on your blog, hold sponsor Q&A webinars with giveaways and promote their Facebook, Twitter and other social networks.
2. If you're crowdfunding, offer rewards that get your audience engaged with the company.
3. Get your team wearing the sponsor's T-shirts or caps.
4. You and your team have the talent so show off a little. Create networking events and opportunities for your sponsors. This is all part of brand building.
5. Allow product identification. Can the company use the event, venue, work or talent in its advertising? Can they hang banners or put up posters? Can they put their logo on the printed tickets? Can they produce merchandise? You the artist must find ways to publicly acknowledge the sponsorship and associate your work with the company.

Take a look at some of the ways arts organisations and sponsors have worked together in our [partnerships profiles](#).

Sponsorship deals can be long and fruitful relationships – and should be mutually beneficial. Work hard to nurture the relationship so everyone stays happy for years to come.