Make Your Event Sponsorships Stick without Backbreaking Labor

Follow these easy steps to make your special-event sponsors happy – and your events more successful.

By Karen Eber Davis

Most event sponsorships barely stick. Like a self-stick note taped to a brick wall, they stay for a moment before fluttering into the wind.

Want proof? Name one sponsor from the last three events you attended. At the events, you heard the sponsors' names. You noticed the banners. You read the program. You applauded to thank them. But do you remember them?

After the event, most of us fail to recall the names of the sponsors. Why? Afterwards, en route to our offices and in the days that follow, we're bombarded with other names, announcements, and news. If an event sponsor's name sticks, it's remembered. Otherwise it's lost.

> "Take what you learn back to your office and build your invitation list."

The good news: Research proves that even un-sticky sponsorships create lasting positive impressions on an event's attendees. However, obtaining a "positive impression" may or may not be enough return for a potential sponsor to invest in or renew a sponsorship with you. Sponsors want attendees to actually contact them, buy their products and services, and spread the word about them.

Helping your sponsors gain sticky returns on their investment supports all the labor you put into events. It assures profitable events. It improves future income. Over time you can increase your sponsorship rates. What's more, sticky sponsorships generate "rinse and repeat" future commitments. Here are some low-labor ways to help your sponsors create value.

Sticky Pre-Event

Most of the effort to create sticky sponsorships occurs before events. It will be worth your time to follow these pre-event steps:

> "Name one sponsor from the last three events you attended."

Pick your sponsors carefully. Ask yourself: "Who can benefit from sponsoring this event?" Note: This is a *very* different question from, "Who can we *get* as a sponsor?"

Get sticky early. Ask your sponsors: "Who do you hope will be in the room?" Reach beyond fluffy answers such as, "Wealthy people who will become customers." Instead, help sponsors hone their answers to something more specific, such as, "People who are new in town and are looking for a financial manager." Ask questions to help your sponsors sharpen their focus. Might you offer some kind of joint invitation? Take what you learn back to your office and build your invitation list.

Help sponsors craft pre, during, and follow-up event plans. How will they activate their sponsorship? How will they take advantage of each benefit in their package? Determine what, if any, help they need from you. Set early deadlines.

In advance, develop e-mails and materials to support your sponsors' marketing efforts. To reduce your labor, ask the sponsors if their marketing people would like to help.

Ask sponsors what introductions they would like at the event. Work with board members, staff, and long-time volunteers to write these introductions. Make each introduction thoughtful and memorable. If possible, include personal endorsements.

At least 48 hours before the event, provide sponsors with a list that includes the names and affiliations of those planning to attend the event.

Since sponsors can harm their cause by droning on and overselling, work with them to script a few sentences about themselves and how their services can help those in attendance. Impress on them the importance of being concise.

Sticky during the Event

At most events, you'll be greeting people and finalizing details. Support your sponsors by doing the following:

Encourage sponsors, board members, and staff to arrive early so people can meet and connect.

Station sponsors at intersections in the room so they have the opportunity to greet many guests and to help with crowd control.

Ask your volunteer helpers to stay near your sponsors to catch overflow and move chatty guests along.

Sticky Ever After

Post-event stickiness is like pressing down on something you already glued. It provides great reward with minimal effort. So don't forget these after-event tips:

Within a week, call to thank the sponsors. Ask about their returns. Strategize ways to follow up and capitalize on their investment. For instance, the sponsor might gather apps, articles, or media recommended at the event and provide it to attendees. As you conclude your conversation, tell sponsors that you'll check in again in a month. Returns take time.

Call again in 30 days. Report good news about the event's successes. Thank the sponsors for making it happen. Inquire about their results. Share any feedback you received and any insights about how your sponsors might achieve even more in the future. Tell them about your next event and let them know when you'll be sharing information about it with them. (Put that date in your calendar.)

Add to this list. Use what you learn to make future sponsorships stickier. What you do today will jet-start your next event.

Karen Eber Davis, MBA, a professional advisor on income development and partnership between for-profits and nonprofits, is the author of 7 Nonprofit Income Streams: Open the Floodgates to Sustainability *(CharityChannel Press). For a free excerpt from her book, e-mail Karen@kedconsult.com.*

Make Your Fundraising Events Count

To increase profits and form meaningful relations with sponsors, take a look at these articles (NonprofitWorld.org):

Taming the Beast: Four Keys to that Special Event (Vol. 20, No. 4)

How to Foster a Positive Funding Relationship (Vol. 32, No. 4)

Improve Your Special Events (Vol. 30, No. 5)

Transform Your Impact: Funding that Gets Results (Vol. 32, No. 1)

Deeper Donor Relationships = Increased Contributions (Vol. 26, No. 4)

Seven Fundraising-Event Strategies for Challenging Times (Vol. 28, No. 1)

Also see Learning Institute programs on-line: Resource Development and O for Opportunity (NonprofitWorld.org/LearningInstitute).