How to Win Sponsors for Your Event (and Bring Them Back Every Year)
Sponsorship can mean the difference between turning a profit — or a financial disaster.

Imagine each year you find yourself wasting time (and money) cultivating opportunities and building new relationships because you didn’t put in effort earlier to create a true partnership with your sponsors — and they inevitably dropped you.

Or you’ve secured sponsors for your expo but you don’t deliver on your promises. You tarnish your relationship with those brands and it leaves you blacklisted among other possible sponsors.

Or you didn’t even win over the sponsors you needed for your comic con, so you’re left footing the bill for items your sponsors would have covered. You’re then forced to provide a subpar experience because your budget is tight. Attendees (and the press) condemn you on social media.

In a survey of 1,000 event creators, nearly nine out of 10 said securing sponsors would be a top challenge in 2018. And whether you’re doing it yourself, have a whole team dedicated to sponsors, or plan to outsource your sponsorship program to an agency, sponsorships are a full-time job.
If you want your team to learn the basics of managing sponsor relationships, check out [this free course](https://www.eventbrite.com/blog). For more advanced information about how to get into the heads of sponsors — and create relationships that are long lasting and mutually beneficial — keep reading.

This guide is for festival and event directors who:

- Know why sponsorship is important — both for their brand and their budget
- Want to avoid spending time and money trying to acquire the wrong sponsors
- Need help preserving relationships with their event’s current sponsors

You’ll learn how to:

- Better vet sponsors to ensure they’re a good fit for your event
- Effectively prove your value proposition
- Retain your most valuable sponsors, instead of starting from scratch with every event
Meet the experts

Adi Anand
Director of Business Development,
Sound on Sound Fest

John Riccardi
Strategic Account Manager,
Music at Eventbrite

Angela Terry
Director of Operations,
California Capital Airshow

Larry Weil
President of The
Sponsorship Guy™

Kristi Yim
Founder and Owner,
Resonate

Abby Clemence
Co-Founder and Managing Director,
of Infinity Sponsorship
In a saturated market, events are looking for new ways to stand out. The right sponsors can be a major draw for your attendees, and can actually be the deciding factor for attendees on whether they click “Buy” — or if they pass you by. That means in the near future, brand partnerships could be the difference between building a sustainable business — or stalled ticket sales.

But some brands might already be in multi-year contracts. Some brands might be more interested in your competitor (or already sponsoring them). Some brands might not be the right fit for your audience.

So how do you find the right sponsors for your brand? First things first: Do your homework.

Steps to finding your sponsors

Follow these three key steps to finding those sponsors.

- **Identify broad categories of brands to approach.** You’ve looked through your attendee data and checked out Facebook Insights to get to know your attendees — their key behaviors, interests, and spending habits. What type of companies do they like generally? For example, if the majority of your attendees are interested in craft beer, you should include craft beer companies as potential sponsors. If your attendees are interested in luxury travel, spas and resorts should be on the table. Or if you’re hosting a small art show, local art galleries and art supply stores are going to be good options.
• **Identify specific brands.** Now that you’ve identified what type of companies you want, it’s time to make a list of potential sponsors and research them. You want to learn everything you can about those brands, including their sponsorship process. Set up Google alerts, look through the company’s website, press coverage, and social media accounts. Do they even sponsor events? Are their sponsorship requirements on their website? Are there people who specifically work on sponsorships, or will you be working with someone in their marketing department?

• **Narrow down your list.** Use your research to narrow down your list. Be critical: The brand might be popular, but if your research revealed they’re not a good fit, don’t bother reaching out to them. Focus your attention on the potential sponsors that fit with your audience. If the attendees at your small art show favor local, organic food, you’d be better to choose a local grocery store known for fresh ingredients over a big-name fast food restaurant.

"Do research to find out which companies would resonate with your audience. Work together so the brand has meaningful and engaging connections with the event audience which will result in a longer-term partnership and, ultimately, open the door to lead the brand to other opportunities that you represent."

Kristi Yim, Founder and Owner of Resonate
Whether you’re a pop-up bridal show or a multi-day car show, the key to winning the right sponsors is proving your value.

“If there’s one thing I would underscore, it’s that every sponsorship should be approached as a collaboration, a partnership based on customized goals and execution.”

John Riccardi, Strategic Account Manager at Eventbrite

Now on the music team at Eventbrite, Riccardi previously managed sponsorships for various large-scale promoters and festivals.

Want your sponsors to see you as a true partner? Here’s how.

Start with the basics

- **Define your audience:** When you’re pitching a potential sponsor, start with the basics. Are you giving potential sponsors access to a local audience? National? Global? How many attendees do you have each year? How much money do they spend at your event? Brands are buying audiences, not assets.

- **Be clear about your objectives:** What are you looking for from your sponsors? Funding only? Exposure to their audiences/stakeholders? A multi-event contract?
• **Prove your ROI.** Then, get into the “what’s in it for them.” Your sponsors want to know the return on investment (ROI) — that they’re going to get back more than they spent. To truly win over sponsors, create your value proposition around their key performance indicators (KPIs) — and prove you’re indispensable to them. Your sponsors expect you to bring ideas to the table, and then tailor your pitch to meet their specific need.

Create your value proposition

Every sponsor has different KPIs — like the number of event attendees, the number of new social media followers, or the number of email signups. And every sponsor has different goals — to expand brand awareness, to access your attendee database, or maybe just to sell more. It’s your job to convince sponsors you can help them achieve those goals — better than any other festival or event.

“Most brands and companies know the market, demographic, and audience they want to target. Festivals have a captive audience they can offer brands.”

Adi Anand, Director of Business Development for Sound on Sound Fest

Use your pitch deck to show the full value of sponsoring your event. By the end of your presentation, your sponsors should know that you have a clear understanding of their goals — and that you’re going to help them achieve those goals.
Many companies doing sponsorships may entertain your proposal if they see a fit with their objectives.

Need help? Here are six questions to shape your value proposition. Make sure the answers to these questions are in your pitch — and in your follow-up emails:

- What are your sponsor’s key objectives?
- What do they need to be successful?
- How will sponsoring your event benefit this company?
- How does your event tie to their brand?
- How does your event tie to their marketing objectives?
- Why are you targeting this company as opposed to other similar companies?

Remember that many companies doing sponsorships have a limited budget, well-defined objectives, and are not eager to spend with another event. They’re not searching for new sponsorship opportunities — but they may entertain your proposal if they see a fit with their objectives.
Why value isn’t just a numbers game

Willy Bietak Productions is a full-service, global company specializing in high-quality live entertainment, ice skating shows, state-of-the-art portable ice skating rinks, industrial shows, specialty acts, and costumed characters.

In San Francisco, locals and tourists best know the company for its famous ice rink in Union Square. Now in its 11th year, attendees associate many regular sponsors with the event, thanks to Willy Bietak’s investment in these relationships.

And it’s paid off. Several of the brands, like title sponsor Safeway, have been sponsors for all 11 years. These partnerships are rooted in Willy Bietak’s genuine desire to help sponsors achieve their own goals.

"Last year we started the conversation with Safeway with a short recap of last season, and then pivoted. We recognized that there’s already a great relationship with Safeway, and we wanted to do more for them."

Kristi Yim, Founder and Owner of Resonate, the agency that manages sponsorship for Willy Bietak Productions

Yim and team asked how they could assist with Safeway’s other marketing efforts. “It quickly became clear that they wanted to do even more philanthropic work in the area,” says Yim. “So we are exploring ways to utilize the ice rink platform to support another one of their holiday initiatives. These cross-promotional efforts reinforce Safeway’s programs and demonstrate the true value of our partnership.

“Our value to Safeway isn’t just the sign we hang at the rink,” Yim continues. “It’s the fact that we think of them as a true partner and are invested in their success and growth.”
Mistakes to Avoid

Sponsors talk — so if you damage one relationship, you’ll damage them all. Here are four mistakes to avoid to make sure you don’t become a sponsorship pariah. Share this list with anyone on your team who interacts with sponsors.

**Mistake #1: Information overload**
Sponsors are overwhelmed with information — they get 1,000’s of emails every day, are on conference calls, and are in and out of meetings. Sending a proposal with too much information, especially during the first email or call, is a no-no. While it might seem efficient, you’ll end up disengaging sponsors before you even have a chance to get in the door.

**Mistake #2: Ignoring the finer details**
Every pitch deck, call, or engagement is an opportunity to get it right and/or do it wrong. Create a checklist to go over before you send something to a sponsor — everything from spelling the brand’s name correctly to tailoring the communication for that person.

**Mistake #3: Confusing activity for progress**
“One of the biggest mistakes event creators can make is just sending a proposal and thinking all the work is done,” says Larry Weil, president of The Sponsorship Guy™. “One event that wanted my company to sponsor them sent two boxes completely full of information and no context — other than the proposal. Sponsors won’t even look at that material, so it’s all a waste.”

**Mistake #4: Not getting total buy-in**
“Sponsorship decisions aren’t made in isolation,” warns Abby Clemence, co-founder and managing director of Infinity Sponsorship. “Decision makers will want to get buy-in from other areas of the business. And if you’ve done your due diligence and asked every connection the right questions, you’ll have qualified the opportunity for them.”
According to IEG, nearly six out of 10 sponsors are looking for an early exit to at least one of their sponsors. To make sure you’re not one of them, you need to continually maintain that relationship — and prove your worth.

How to be the perfect partner for your sponsor

Do you have the qualities of a perfect partner for your sponsor? These are the three qualities sponsors are looking for in a partner.

• **Authentic**: Sponsors are looking for partners — not gold diggers. To keep sponsors coming back each year, you need to clearly show that you’re interested in the sponsors’ success. Don’t just call at renewal time — check in monthly or quarterly and give updates about the event.

• **Flexible**: Your sponsors are businesses too, and their objectives and team might change throughout the course of your event. If necessary, you might need to pivot your strategy to achieve your sponsor’s goals.

• **Dedicated**: From initial outreach to onsite to post-event follow-up, your team should have a dedicated liaison to address any of your sponsor’s needs. That person will make sure sponsors know where to load in, where to pick up credentials, and when to expect a post-event fulfillment report.
Proving your ROI — and getting sponsors to re-sign

While your team surely has the best of intentions, if they can’t deliver on what they promise, sponsors will walk out the door. In fact, proving your value is the foundation of a long-term relationship.

In your initial meeting, you learned what KPIs were most important to your sponsor. Now it’s time to collect the data. Here are three easy ways to get data that will matter to your sponsor.

• **Surveys.** Integrate questions about your sponsors (and their presence at your event) into your post-event survey. That direct feedback from attendees to sponsors provides insights that show sponsors the value of your event.

• **Social media.** Social media is your ally when it comes to proving the ROI of sponsorships. You can provide sponsors with information such as how many users interact with sponsor messaging on your social feeds, how many new followers came directly after mentioning a sponsor in a post, and how many times you mentioned a sponsor in social posts.

• **RFID.** If your event is equipped with radio-frequency identification (RFID) technology, you can find out things like how many people interacted with a sponsor’s station. And better? Instead of having fans manually enter their information on an iPad, sponsors can collect that data and more with the swipe of a wristband or badge.

Once you have that data, put it all together and send a fulfillment report to your sponsors. “Your fulfillment report is an extension of your proposal, proving that you actually delivered,” says Weil. “It should include a list of the deliverables you promised and proof (usually photos). That report should also include actual attendance, news coverage, social traction, and ads promoting your event.”
Keeping sponsorship ties alive all year

Now in its 13th year, the California Capital Airshow brings in 100,000 attendees to the Sacramento area to experience a variety of sponsors, to honor the past, and to inspire the future.

And while the airshow might only take place one weekend a year, the work that goes into it is year round — and that also goes for partnering with their sponsors.

Look at your sponsorship relationship as a circle. It starts with a lot of work to make the contact and go through the negotiations, then it’s quiet for a while until the event. During that time, make sure you continue to communicate. And be sure to close that loop.

Angela Terry, Director of Operations for the California Capital Airshow

From initial outreach to pre-event check-ins to post-event follow-up, working with sponsors is a year-long responsibility.

“After the event, thank them and provide a fulfillment report to show examples of their impact on your event,” Terry continues. “Now that you have this contact, keep loving it. Sponsors pay a large part of the event, that directly impacts bottom line of event, so keeping that in mind when you’re working with them as VIPs.”
Now That You’re “Sponsor Ready”

According to IEG’s 2018 report on “What Sponsors Want and Where Dollars Will Go” sponsorship spending in North America is expected to grow faster than other forms of marketing and advertising.

But finding the right sponsors for your event can seem like a fruitless effort. And keeping your sponsors year after year can feel nearly impossible.

However, with the right strategy, identifying new opportunities and developing those relationships become second nature. Save time, money, and stress by focusing on securing partnerships — not transactions.

To learn how you can be your sponsor’s favorite event, contact us or get in touch at 1-866-902-2531.
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Promote, manage, and analyze your event from any device.

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