

# Using Sponsorship to Grow Your Business

**G**iving to charity by writing a cheque is the most common form of philanthropy in the world and it can be as strategic as any other if care is given to picking an organization that shares your values. I've always believed that business has a responsibility to be a good corporate citizen which supports various organizations and charities.

Like many business owners, I have a hard time saying “no” and I've caught myself - usually after the fact - feeling that I didn't really get anything back from a sponsorship project. I've rationalized my support by telling myself that doing something good to help someone else should be reward enough; and sometimes it is. However, **sponsorship should be win/win**. It should provide an opportunity to promote your business and find new customers while contributing to a worthy cause.

After a couple of years in business, it became apparent to us that we needed a policy to handle the number of requests we received from worthy causes. We opted to keep it simple and selected 3 criteria to follow:

1. *Is the request coming from a current customer?*
2. *Is the request coming from an organization whose values are closely aligned with our own?*
3. *Is the request coming from an organization in our community that could become, or introduce us to new customers over time?*

We review each request against these criteria and look at our budget, also a critical factor in sponsorship, to see how we can make the most of our contribution in whatever form that takes.

We've found that to make a sponsorship work for us, we need to get involved beyond the chequebook philanthropic model and volunteer our time on organizing committees, at the event, hosting something for other sponsors or getting our customers and suppliers directly involved with us.



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We learned from our experience that you never buy a ticket to an event, you buy a table or enter a team and then sell available spots to your suppliers or invite your customers to join you. This provides a great networking opportunity and shows a level of commitment to the community that builds better relationships. This also demonstrates to the organizing committee that your business is sincere in helping their cause and provides more incentive to make an introduction or accept a meeting to discuss reciprocal business.

We found that being a little fish in a big pond didn't really work well as a small business. By agreeing to be a minor sponsor of a major event, the return was simply some advertising in a program and signage at the event which could not and did not translate into many sales opportunities.

To address this, we looked for an opportunity to be a title sponsor of an event and have our business name associated with the event. This provides instant



access to all level of the organization you are supporting and allows you to gain insight into their challenges and position your business to help. Also, the title sponsor receives the recognition and publicity in all PSAs (Public Service Announcements), and media buys to promote the event. The financial commitment is often higher so it limits your ability to do multiple events but the returns are greater as well.

Here are a few more things that can increase the value of your sponsorship: First, try to **engage your staff** in the event. This can build morale and heighten a sense of accomplishment within the workplace. Second, find a way to **let your customers know** you are sponsoring an event. You can add a note on your invoices, elaborate in an e-newsletter, create a promo spot on your website or make a splash in social media, but find a way to let your customers know. You may find some other supporters of the same cause in your customer base or perhaps just gain their respect for your efforts, either way it is a positive for you and the organization you are supporting. Lastly, **leverage your suppliers** for help. A quick

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e-mail to your top 20 suppliers asking them to help you with a small financial contribution or prizes to be used for auction or giveaway is generally met with a positive response as the ask is small enough to be handled at the local level with management approval.

One last thing to share about sponsorship, just like a Google AdWords campaign, time will tell a tale. You probably should not expect to see instant business results from sponsorship, however, if by the end of year 3 you are not able to justify the sponsorship dollars with the amount of business directly related to the sponsor, you may want to consider moving on to a new organization.

Sponsorship really is win/win and most charities and non-profit organizations understand that doing business with the organization that support them is a benefit to everyone.

Our Kwik Kopy Putting for Pets Golf Tournament has its own microsite for info and registration ([puttingforpets.com](http://puttingforpets.com)). Microsites are a great way to draw attention to your event. Interested in promoting your title event? Contact KKHalifax and let us provide you with a free 30-minute consultation on an event microsite. Call 902.453.5151 or e-mail [info@kkhalifax.com](mailto:info@kkhalifax.com)