

Sponsorship isn't a freebie; it's a partnership of a different kind

By Jane Stevenson

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As a brand that believes in, and nurtures community and relationships, it's increasingly difficult saying no to the daily calls for sponsorship. Yes or no. Small words with a big impact, if used correctly.



Image source: Gallo/Getty Images.

Everyone is looking for a helping hand in some way or another, but not everyone understands the resource impact on the sponsor. Not only financial but manpower, equipment, time and focus. So, it's vital that we make the right decisions for the right reasons so that it's a constructive, reciprocal and sustainable transaction for all involved. Return on Investment (ROI) is a key measure of success, so ensure that you get something in exchange for what you give. You may potentially reap the reward of ROI way beyond what you ever imagined.

So where do we start? I have some key drivers in the decision tree for all sponsorships within the organisation I work for:

1. Brand alignment

Your image is your most valuable commodity; it's your identity in the marketplace; it's what you're known for and how your customers perceive you. It goes without saying, you will do anything to protect your brand and maintain a positive image, respect and favourable public opinion. So, when you sponsor an event or organisation, or you seek sponsorship, ensure the partnership is mutually beneficial in terms of brand image and reputation, and that it lends you credibility.

2. A good cause, a way to impact

Making a difference in the world beyond your business or industry should be at the heart of all companies. If there is a way to create impact, for a great cause, the ROI is immeasurable. You may not feel it directly in your business, but society will feel the benefit, and that's equally important. Plus, you never know who is in the audience who may make a future buying decision based on your sponsorship.

3. The right audience to showcase your offering to

When you place your brand in partnership with an event or organisation, you automatically open your brand to a broader audience that you might not usually access. People who are attracted to the brand you're partnering with will undoubtedly be attracted to your brand. Any time your company can secure new customers through association, it's a winning partnership. And where possible, add in more value to the experience, use it to showcase your brand to its absolute fullest.

4. It enhances customer relationships

Organisations always want to give consumers a positive experience when they engage with their brand, not just when they make a purchase. One of the remarkable things about sponsorship is that the investment enables you to enhance your customer experience positively. Providing customers with an experience they will rave about, that they will share on and off-line, which will have a long-term benefit to your brand. Loyal customers become brand evangelists, and what company doesn't want loyal customers spreading the word.

Sponsorships are seldom freebies but rather a way to develop, nurture and forge relationships that create impact beyond profits. Investment in sponsorship can elevate your business or organisation and is a great marketing opportunity to grow awareness around your business. But do it wisely and with great thought to ensure that everyone wins, and no one feels taken advantage. Some of our regular sponsorship clients offer us the bravest platforms that lend itself to our team have creative fun; it's a win-win all the way!

ABOUT JANE STEVENSON

Named by CEO publication as SA's most influential government businesswoman in the SME sector in 2012, she's big on vision, strategy and effective communication. Start with a successful business strategy and executive coaching consultancy to leading national brands... add the experience of being a Board and EXCO member of the Nelson Mandela Bay Business Chamber; and stir in some fearless Scottish roots and a dedication to building organisational vision. The result? A motivating, passionate team player.

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