

5 SPONSORSHIP MYTHS AND HOW TO BUST THEM

by Gail S. Bower

In times of uncertainty, it's natural to feel confused about what course of action to take. Under the double threat of a pandemic and financial crisis, confusion is exponential.

We're grieving. We're unsure about all the factors that affect our businesses. And thus, we have difficulty determining where our organizations may be going next.

Naturally, this confusion applies, too, to how you proceed with B2B sales, including corporate sponsorship. Then, our mind starts inventing stories that inform or justify our behavior.

This myth-making can lead to faulty thinking, which we need help busting, especially when we're working in isolation.

So let's take a look at five common sponsorship myths and bust them. First, what can history tell us about sponsorship sales?

What happened during the last recession?

In the U.S. during the Great Recession, Congress called out sponsorship as greedy, money-making, and elitist. One member actually drafted legislation prohibiting banks that received TARP dollars, used to clean up "toxic assets," from hosting and sponsoring events.

This action seemed to have no consideration for consequences. Many people lost their jobs and needed conferences to network and build their skills. For most people, stress levels were high. We found comfort in every kind of entertainment and sports event, from Lalapalooza to Little League.

(My annoyance over these cavalier proclamations inspired me to write my short guidebook, *How to Jump-Start Your Sponsorship Strategy in Tough Times*, to help nonprofits and associations figure out what to do.)

Fortunately, corporations continued buying sponsorship, still one of the most powerful marketing vehicles ever. Sometimes they executed with stealth tactics to fly under-the-radar. But they did so with one condition. They only invested in value.

Sounds obvious, right?

Yet some organizations remain unclear about what constitutes “value.”

What can we learn today?

Today’s circumstances are a little trickier—but not impossible. Investing in value will continue to be the norm and the criteria.

Your first challenge, however, is to pay attention to what you’re telling yourself right now. And if you’re buying into myths, let’s bust them.

Otherwise, you’ll be frozen in your tracks.

Myth #1: Nobody is buying now.

Not true. My clients’ sponsors are buying. And I see other signs of sponsorship life in the marketplace.

However, before you go selling, you most likely need two steps:

A massive update of your sponsorship value, and

1. A heart-to-heart conversation with your partners. Their businesses are changing just as fast as yours.

Myth #2: Sponsorship dollars will go away.

If you offer compelling value to the right prospect or current sponsor, they will invest. The operative words: “compelling” and “right.”

Generic packages, like Gold, Silver & Bronze offerings, will not make the cut.

If you’re simply looking for a donation, pursue a gift and save yourself a lot of aggravation. If what you really are pursuing is a donation, refrain from using sponsorship language and from giving away value.

Myth #3: We canceled our event and have nothing to sell.

Sponsorship works best with events, but many activities and initiatives in your organization can be sponsored. Take a fresh look at your programs, services, campaigns, and virtual events.

Reinvent.

Myth #4: All our revenue went away; we'll get sponsorship money.

Not so fast. Corporations are not ATM machines doling out dollars to waylay nonprofit or association cash flow crunches.

Corporate sponsorship is an excellent source of revenue for many organizations, if you have:

Value to offer

- A significant marketing strategy and operation
- Staff and organizational competency to develop relationships and deliver (an acquired skill, by the way).

I encourage organizations to pursue sponsorship as a revenue source when it fits their business models. But start first by knowing what you're getting into, so you have success and avoid massive disappointment.

Myth #5: Sponsors don't want to hear from me.

You're right. They don't if you're on a fishing expedition, looking for quick cash.

Investing time now on building and expanding existing and even new relationships will serve you well. Be curious about what's changing at your sponsor's company. Many are pivoting—GM is manufacturing ventilators!—or expanding delivery options or selling more online.

With every new change comes new hurdles and, for you, new opportunities.

Every day I see signs of sponsorship life. Companies are sponsoring in new ways and focusing on new causes.

Let's bust your myth-making and look for new opportunities for your organization. I won't say it will be a piece of cake. But as businesses get ready to open up, get your engines ready, too.