

## Tournament Sponsorship Strategies

JOHN GALLASPY

USA

The diversity of tournaments, not only from the objectives, species, or geography, but also by the motives of its promoter, would appear to make this a very difficult subject to hone in on. How to enhance a tournament's effectiveness, or in some instances even make it possible, through the attraction and retention of corporate sponsors is our objective.

However, there are certain principles, do's and don'ts, if you will, that are universally applicable to all tournament organizations, regardless of their size, purpose and financial structure.

We will present a few of these principles to you today. Some may be more applicable than others to your specific situation, but I hope a few of these comments will make your search for a strong sponsorship base more effective.

### OBJECTIVES AND STRATEGY PLANNING

Hopefully, you've clearly determined what you want to accomplish with your tournament. Your strategy should include a careful analysis and selection of logical and appropriate sponsor candidates. Are your intentions to increase the tourist trade in your area through a highly visible sportfishing industry? If so, local Chambers of Commerce or travel bureaus, airlines, hotel complexes and similar businesses and organizations should be high on your potentials list.

If your aim is to return funds to the resource for better game management or research, then investigate the availability of foundation funds. While most of them will be actually looking to you for financial donations, many are aware of grants or corporate support or interest available. The Sport Fishing Institute in Washington maintains a list of fishing clubs, organizations, and tournaments. Be sure you're on that list to receive mailings and get in the loop of exchange of information with the foundation.

If you are looking for a profit, then look at your tournament participant base and come up with a hook that would make a particular sponsor eager to get his message before them.

In any situation, look at your tournament participants. What do they need to participate? What products or services do they use? Which brand is the most prominent in each category? Which brand is an also ran, not because of product quality but a lack of promotion and consumer interest? Identify it. Categorize them, do they use 4/0 level-wind trolling reels? Create a category such as rods and reels, and put Penn at the top of the list, for example. However, don't stop there. In fact, its only a start. Next, list Daiwa, Shimano or whomever else you

---

feel appropriate. Now go to boat manufacturers and repeat the same process. Motor, depth locator, and navigational instrument manufacturers are some additional examples. List all the possible candidates.

Now, with the sponsorship committee, which in many of your cases could hold its meetings inside your head, since it only has one member, begin looking at the companies one by one. Do you know anyone associated with them? No? OK, do you know anyone that knows anyone associated with them? Give it some thought. Look for local dealers that carry any of their products. Involve them. Solicit their help. Through this selection process, you will identify big potential sponsors, maybe eliminate those that are not appropriate, and make the next step much easier.

### THE SOLICITATION PROCESS

Mention "corporate sponsor" to this group, and in most instances the thought of a tackle manufacturer immediately arises. This reaction is natural, but it limits your possibilities. Let me give a few reasons why:

#### **The Small Tackle Industry**

Much to the surprise of most fishermen, the fishing tackle industry is quite small by comparison. In fact, Sears Roebuck sold more of a particular brand of exercise equipment than all the rod and reel manufacturers sold nationally in one year. Surprisingly, the tackle industry is a very small industry with modest resources.

#### **Excise Tax**

If your objective is to enhance the resource, you need to appreciate that U.S. Tackle manufacturers are already paying 10% of most sales to the government for resource enhancement and protection. Regardless of how noble your cause, any given company can only do so much.

#### **Demand**

Major tackle and outdoor products companies are bombarded by requests for support on a daily basis. No one knows how many tournaments there are, and most of them are looking for support. There are certainly thousands. That's correct...thousands! What do you envision when I mention Oklahoma? Dust Bowl, right? In the Summer of 1987, there were over one hundred significant tournaments, tournaments that attracted two, three and four hundred participants and more. So, what would it be like in Florida..or Texas?

I am not suggesting that the traditional tackle, boat and other recreational product manufacturers are not good candidates for sponsorship. I just want to put them into perspective and urge you to broaden your thinking on who

constitutes a sponsor.

Two of the most successful tournament organizations, both freshwater, are a case study in nailing down non-traditional sponsors. A few years ago, there was a promoter in Kentucky that ran a small organization of 3 people and a dozen or so small bass tournaments. A Chewing Tobacco Company decided their target market fit the demographics of the bass fisherman. Within five years (and with significant sponsorship support from the tobacco company) the organization now employs 35 people on a full-time basis, conducts tournaments covering 49 states, and pays \$100,000 to the first place finishers in their final grand slam. They call it their Classic All American Tournament, and it has no entrance fees and they pay all travel costs. That's one example of what a major non-traditional sponsorship can do.

The second one found a beer company, not the local distributor, but the brewery, and sold them on the idea of owning a tournament program without having to do anything but write a check. They are always looking for extra sponsorship support; special awards, trophies, and so forth. But...their big bucks are secure.

Now I'm not trying to make a case for forgetting the traditional tackle people in your efforts. But...I am saying...broaden your thinking. You want support! The creative bird here gets the worm.

#### NOW FOR THE NUTS AND BOLTS

Develop a presentation portfolio that tells all about your program. It should contain specific information on what you want from a sponsor and what he will receive in return. These should be targeted to the prospective sponsors. Take the time to find out to whom the proposal should be addressed.

The cover letter must be personalized to gain the proper attention. If it's not addressed to an individual, then it's very easy for no individual to take action on your request. Major tackle manufacturers receive numerous requests for sponsorship support in any given week, and it is unbelievable how many of these requests are to whom it may concern xerox copies. Many organizations send out four or five hundred copies of a request letter to the AFTMA membership mailing list and then sit back waiting for the loot to come in, unappreciative of the fact that the companies will receive twenty or thirty such letters a week.

Therefore, it is imperative that you research your selected key candidates before determining who to write. Call local sales representatives, other tournament promoters you may know, or the companies themselves. You will greatly increase your chances of success by making this effort.

You are the best judge of what level of support you need and what you can reasonably expect to get. You might be in the position to offer a major sponsorship to one or a few companies for a large contribution. Maybe the

tournament would even bear their name in return for this support through tournament prizes in the form of merchandise or services from the sponsors. In order for the sponsor to make a decision, the level of commitment you are requesting should be reflected in the extent of information you are going to offer.

The next major consideration is timing. The greater your request, the earlier you should make it. For 1988 tournaments, if you are looking for a few product donations to increase participant interest, there's nothing wrong with getting your letters out a couple of months before the tournament. If you are looking for significant financial support, however, you've probably blown next year. In these instances you need to get the ball rolling no later than August of the preceding year. In fact, most major tournament organizations have contracts put to bed by May of the prior season.

Finally, once the proposal is submitted, the real work is just beginning. Now the lobbying effort starts in earnest. Remember two things; first, there are many people and organizations out there looking for support, and the pie is just so big. Second, in this game, the squeaking wheel gets the oil.

Once your proposal is submitted, call the key contact to be sure it was received. Get a first impression and ask what additional information might be needed. If you've prepared the proposal properly, then nothing is missing. Just by the prospective company's marketing or promotions manager saying that nothing additional is needed, you are on your way to getting an answer.

Now, work behind the scenes. Solicit the help of dealers or regional sales representatives of the company. Don't hesitate to ask them to drop a letter to the company. Solicit their help by informing them how such involvement will help them directly. A sales rep knows that his company is going to spend a certain amount of money a year on a tournament sponsorships. Convince him that it is in his best interest to be sure that he gets his share of this budget. Believe me, its a big help in your solicitation efforts if the local sales rep. supports the program and is in there pitching for you.

Here's a footnote if you're looking for product prizes. Take the time to select specific tackle and equipment items you would like to have donated. Request it by product number. Tell them what you want, when you want it, and why they should give it to you. You will greatly increase your success rate when a clerk in Chicago doesn't have to try and figure out which item would be best for a door prize in Key West.

Waiting for a response can be a real trial. There's nothing wrong with asking a major potential contributor, where exclusivity is granted for a certain category, for a decision by a certain date. If they don't answer by that date, you're still not any worse off than if you hadn't given them a deadline. If the answer is no, then at least you might have time to pursue their competitor. Finally, don't hesitate in the beginning to identify more than one company in a

---

certain product or service category and go after them all at the same time. If done properly without overtly trying to play one sponsor against the other, this tactic may put a sense of urgency in some companies to respond positively and promptly.

So, now you've done everything correctly, you have companies showering you with support and the tournament went without a glitch. To cement the relationships established with those sponsors and insure the tournament's future, follow up with them by providing them a post-tournament briefing. Let them know the benefits of their sponsorship and reinforce the advantages of their participation. If all goes well and the tournament is truly a benefit to them, future solicitations from them will only be a formality.

We hope these comments might have given you a few ideas and might make your solicitation efforts more effective. Thank you for the opportunity to be with you today, and I wish you much success.