

Sponsorship Matters

Eight Common Elements of Successful Air Show Sponsorship Programs

By *Deb Mitchell*

Because a strong sponsorship program enhances ticket sales, creates additional media coverage and generates revenue that can be invested in other aspects of the show, the success of an air show can often be measured by the success of its sponsorship program. And there are a few core sponsorship principles employed by virtually every successful air show, whether their budgets are fifty thousand dollars or a million dollars. Your program will almost certainly be different than that of other air shows, but any successful program will most likely include all eight of these elements.

Focus

Many years of experience have shown that it's virtually impossible for an air show to have a successful sponsorship program if it does not receive the undivided and ongoing attention of one of the smartest people involved with your show. When an air show asks one of its volunteers to add sponsorship to a long list of other responsibilities that he/she will be handling, the most common result is that the sponsorship program under-delivers for both the show and the sponsors.

Asking a local business to sponsor your air show will require convincing them to dedicate a portion of their limited marketing budget to your event. If you are going to ask them to make this leap of faith, you must be willing to spend the time and effort to develop a strong plan and then execute that plan professionally.

Tip #1: Dedicate at least one person to sponsorship and work very hard to ensure that this person has the time and tools necessary to focus on this very important job.

Getting to Know You

For many marketing specialists, brand managers and small business owners, investing in an air show sponsorship requires a significant change in perspective. The advantages of non-traditional marketing programs like



an air show sponsorship might not be immediately obvious to professionals who have depended on print, television and radio advertising. So, it's critical that an air show build a relationship with not only the company decision maker, but also with other key people within the company.

"The reason we get the support we have is because we took the time to get to know the sponsor. They are more committed to our team than they are the event," explained Judy Willey of the Oregon International Air Show.

Building multiple individual relationships with a single sponsoring organization also provides protection should your key contact leave the company. And, when you have support throughout the company, you help ensure the longevity of your program as managers are promoted or transferred.

Tip #2: Develop understanding and support of your program throughout the sponsoring organization, not just with a single key person.

A Touchy Point

Advertising agencies and marketing consultants love to use catch phrases such as "360 marketing" and "multiple touch points." The concept is that a single program reaches out to prospective customers in multiple different ways. This is a particular strength of air shows and something that you should emphasize and build on as you structure your sponsorship programs. Air shows that create sponsorship programs that have multiple ways to connect with the targeted au-

dience are both more successful and more likely to be renewed in subsequent years. Make a list of your events' assets and educate your sponsor on how to take advantage and integrate all of them into their marketing plan.

Tip #3: Use the full power of your air show to help your sponsors make contact and increase their visibility in as many different ways as possible with current and prospective customers.

Can't Live Without

The easiest way to create a few of those touch points is to develop both a media sponsor and a retail partner sponsorship. Both can generate additional exposure and visibility for sponsors through advertising, contests, circulars, and in-store promotions.

The Vectron Dayton Air Show presented by Kroger uses its partnership with the *Dayton Daily News* to not only reward readers with its Family Fun Sweepstakes, but also to recognize the valuable title and presenting sponsors in the newspaper's promotion.

Ron Carter Dealerships presents the Wings Over Houston Air Show and acts as a retail partner by incorporating the event into its massive purchase of standard advertising (newspaper, television and radio) and buying air show specific media, such as billboards.

Kim Dell, the marketing director for the Cleveland National Air Show presented by Drug Mart, plans a promotional calendar to coordinate different air show-related programs and to prevent the Cleveland market from becoming oversaturated with air show contests and sweepstakes. This keeps the air show sponsors content, increases the effectiveness of each of the programs individually, and ensures that prospective spectators stay tuned in throughout the pre-show promotion.

Tip #4: Make sure that the first few sponsorship deals you make are with your local newspaper, television network affiliate, radio station and retail organization so

Sponsorship Matters

that you can leverage those sponsors to produce programming for other prospective sponsors.

Puttin' on the Ritz

Corporate hospitality is becoming a more important part of many air show sponsorships as businesses seek creative ways to engage their customers and vendors beyond the traditional golf outing. Air shows can capitalize on the family-friendly environment to entice busy executives (and their families) and entertain employees (and their families) as part of a successful sponsorship program.

But sponsors expect more than a tent with a couple of folding chairs and tables. Brenda Kerfoot, of the Vectron Dayton Air Show, calls it creating "the Ritz Carlton experience" meaning using linens, floral arrangements, wait staff, and food beyond burgers and hot dogs.

As in real estate, the value of an air show's hospitality area is all about location, location, location. At the Chicago Air and

Water Show, a hospitality village keeps the sponsors and their guests away from the masses and even offers a slice of beachfront. "All of the client feedback was unanimous. They loved the location and VIP treatment. Many of them had been to the show before, but not like this," said Pepe Miller of the Discovery Networks following their successful program in Chicago.

Top air shows also offer a variety of hospitality levels for sponsors, from small chalets with relatively simple food and beverage options to very large chalets with significant catering components.

Tip #5: Your current and prospective sponsors expect you to provide value-added hospitality options as part of their sponsorship. Be sure to include hospitality options when you pitch prospective sponsors and be sure that you're able to deliver on what you promise.

Sounds of Silence?

Silence is certainly not what a sponsor wants to hear when they've been promised

"multiple public address announcements." Promising public address plugs has become standard within the air show industry, but a weak sound system renders that sponsor benefit worthless if it can't be heard or if it can only be heard by a small portion of the audience. Remember that as you working with your sound system to determine how much of the ramp you want to cover with sound.

Some savvy air shows are using more radio-like recorded announcements or even television commercials on the large video screens. Others are carefully tracking how many times they read the promotional copy over the public address system and at what times. They then present this log to the sponsor as part of the after-action report.

Tip #6: Public address promotional announcements can be an attractive sponsor benefit, but you've got to actually read them, the audience needs to be able to hear them and they'll have the most impact with your sponsor if you can tell them exactly when they were delivered.

Since Kitty Hawk, there have been four forces that act upon an airplane in flight.

Now there are five: lift, weight, thrust, drag... and Rob Reider.

Rob Reider
air show announcer
513.793.2224
robr@robreider.com

Sponsorship Matters

The Devil's in the Details

Besides a creative and compelling sponsorship proposal, the contract is the next most valuable document in a show's sponsorship toolbox. The very best contracts clearly outline every detail from the number of chairs in the chalet to deadlines for payments.

And the most successful shows use the contract itself as a departure point for developing a comprehensive checklist of every detail related to each sponsorship. The contract becomes the event's working plan for each sponsor with some shows keeping contract copies in a special binder that is onsite within handy access should any questions arise during the weekend.

"When you blow it with a sponsor, even if you apologize, you may not get a second chance," says Oregon's Willey.

Tip #7: Only promise what you can deliver and, once you get the sponsor, deliver absolutely everything that you've promised.

Show Me the Results

The old adage of "under promise and over deliver" still holds true when it comes to event sponsorship, but more and more businesses want to know exactly what their "return on investment" (ROI) will be.

Bill Roach, Executive Director of Wings over Houston, explains why an after action or fulfillment report is essential to success. "My title sponsor was able to justify their involvement because we told him how many people at the event they were reach-

ing, and how many media impressions were made with their television and billboard advertising, as well as our own marketing campaign. Our sponsor saw a spike in sales during and after the association with our event. And they were able to attribute that directly to their air show sponsorship because we worked closely with them to quantify the expected impact of their involvement in our event."

MCAS Miramar delivers a hefty binder and a multi-media DVD that recaps exactly what benefits each sponsor receives as a result of their sponsorship. Sponsorship and Sales Manager Dino Richardson explains, "We further illustrate images from the event which may document this, such as photos of their banners on display at the event, or scans of the newspaper tear sheets bearing their brand marks and similar documentable elements. We also include a recap of media exposures the event may have garnered along with the reach or subscription base that each media outlet publishes."

The fulfillment report can also be a valuable tool to sell the next year's sponsorship or to get an existing sponsor to move to a higher level in a subsequent year. Houston's Bill Roach used his detailed fulfillment report as an opportunity to sell a large auto dealership on the advantages of title sponsorship.

Miramar's Dino Richardson has also used the statistics and quantifiable benefits of sponsorship in the after action report as a sales tool. "In 2006, we got feedback from

our largest and newest sponsor that they had never received such a detailed and professional fulfillment report. They told me that they will now require all venues to provide them with a fulfillment report as part of their terms of sponsorship. This particular sponsor is back this year and at a higher sponsorship level."

Tip #8: From the very beginning, build reporting mechanisms into your sponsorship program and then ensure that you develop and deliver the results to your sponsors after the event has concluded.

...

After years of lagging behind, air shows and air show sponsorship programs are gaining visibility, becoming more professional and attracting the attention of sponsorship professionals. Our industry's ability to secure a bigger and bigger portion of the multi-billion dollar event marketing business will depend on our willingness to devote more attention to the details associated with developing and delivering a professional sponsorship program.

Nothing as simple as this tip list will make that happen, but as these types of minimum benchmarks become more and more consistently met by all air shows offering sponsorship programs, we will begin to attract the attention of a larger and larger portion of those organization interested in using event sponsorship as a tool in meeting their overall marketing goals. †

DOUG JARDINE AIRSHOWS.COM

CONTACT US TODAY!
1-951-461-7784

DOUGJARDINE@aol.com
www.DOUGJARDINEairshows.com

Sukhoi 26
AEROBATICS!

WIDEORBIT LAB AND DESIGN BY PRIMALSICOR.COM