b2bmarketing.net

Making the most of your event sponsorship

B2B Marketing

Insight · Development · Training · Events





Contents

Introduction 3

Section 1
Preparation 4

Section 2
Event day 7

Section 3
Post-event activity 12

About
B2B Marketing 14

Making the most of your event sponsorship © B2B Marketing 2017

Introduction

With more than 1.3 million business events taking place in the UK each year – and trade shows alone attracting in excess of 13 million visitors – sponsorship continues to be a great way for marketers to raise awareness, generate leads and attract new customers.

And yet so many B2B brands fail to capitalise on – or worse still, squander – the opportunities associated with sponsoring an event, and end up with a disappointing return on their efforts.

"The reasons for this are myriad," say marketing experts William Rosen and Laurence Minsky. "But more often than not, they can be traced back to treating the sponsorship as an end in itself, rather than as an enabler of marketers' broader strategies and objectives."

This practical guide will explain how to:

- Establish which events are right for your business.
- Negotiate the most effective sponsorship package.
- Maximise your impact on the day.
- Come up with compelling exhibition stands, presentations and roundtables.
- Formulate an action plan once the dust has settled
- Measure your ROI.

Many B2B brands fail to capitalise on – or worse still, squander – the opportunities associated with sponsoring an event

Section 1
Preparation

1.1 Sponsoring the right event

Your first consideration should be whether event sponsorship is the most effective way to achieve your business' objectives. Ask yourself the following questions:

- **What are the goals of the business?**
  These should be what ultimately inform your sponsorship strategy. What is the business' overarching objective? Is it to increase revenue? Win more new business? Improve growth? Without understanding what the business wants to achieve, you'll struggle to judge whether events sponsorship will be right for you.

- **What are your marketing goals?**
  In theory, these should be derived from the business' overall goals – but in reality that's not always the case. If the company's trying to increase revenue, marketing might have a specific number to hit. If the company's goal is to improve brand awareness, marketing may have a target number of customers to reach.

- **How will your marketing strategy help you achieve your goals?**
  Once your marketing goals have been established, you'll need a strategy to underpin how you're going to meet them. If the goal is winning new customers, how will this be achieved? It could be through a mixture of channels, with events sponsorship being one.

Once you have the answers to these three questions, you should have a framework in place to understand how any potential events sponsorship will fit in with your business and marketing strategies.

Target the relevant audience

Whatever your goals, finding the right audience will be a key element of any event sponsorship strategy. Many events pride themselves on delegate numbers, but remember that it's always about quality over quantity. The Consumer Electronics Show welcomes hundreds of thousands of visitors through its doors each year, but that's not much use if you're selling industrial pumping equipment. Ask event organisers for a detailed breakdown of previous years' attendees in order to establish whether this is the correct audience for your business.

Brand alignment

Another important consideration is around how the event matches up with your own brand. Ensure you do your research. Are they a reputable organisation? Will they deliver on what's promised (in terms of both audience and logistics)? Will your brand benefit from being seen alongside theirs?

Many events pride themselves on delegate numbers, but remember that it's always about quality over quantity



Being the only brand from your sector or product segment may be valuable, but you might have to pay a premium for it

1.2 What type of sponsorship is right for your goals?

Understanding the proposals available

Most events will offer a wide variety of sponsorship packages, and it can be tricky to decipher which is best for you. You may be tempted to look at your budget and match that to the package on offer. But be careful: price doesn't always correlate with value. So-called 'headline' packages sometimes offer little more for their money than cheaper alternatives, yet cost two or three times as much. In addition, cheaper sponsorships (putting your brand on the event lanyard, for example) can often provide greater exposure than a single exhibition stand.

Sponsoring the sizzle

One brand agency made the most of its exposure at a breakfast meeting by sponsoring the sausages. This helped them stand out more than if they'd just gone for a blanket deal to cover the whole breakfast.

The proposed packages should just be the starting point for your negotiation. Don't be afraid to ask for a deal tailored to your needs; you may even want to pick and choose different elements to help you meet your objectives. Perhaps there are sponsorship offers that have worked for you at other events, or things on offer elsewhere you'd like?

Also bear in mind that sponsorship packages aren't always created by the events team, so try to ensure sponsorship negotiations involve all parties to maximise the potential of what's on offer.

Timing your deal right

Preparing successfully for an event can be a lengthy process, so ensure there's enough time for both negotiation and successful execution. If there's not enough time to do both well, perhaps the event isn't right for you at this time.

Some further considerations:

- **What is the monetary value of what is being proposed?** It's worth breaking down each element of the package on offer and assigning a financial value to each. Many add-ons thrown into a package – such as branding on marketing material pre-event or post-event drinks sponsorship – sound exciting but may prove relatively worthless when it comes to how they'll help you meet your overall objectives.
- **Are you paying a premium for the audience or venue?** Paying extra to reach the right people is fine (within reason), but paying more to subsidise the cost of a beautiful (and perhaps unsuitable) venue less so.
- **How exclusive is the sponsorship?** Being the only brand from your sector or product segment may be valuable, but you might have to pay a premium for it.



1.3 Preparing for the event

Having chosen your event carefully and negotiated a package that works for you, it's time to start thinking about the event itself.

- **Who will be attending?**
  As part of your deal, can you access information on confirmed delegates? If not, is the organiser willing to share details from previous years' events? Targeting these individuals through email or social media campaigns should be a key strand of your strategy. If important targets are confirmed attendees, get in touch with them in advance to arrange meetings at the event itself.

- **Keep track of the host's pre-event activity.**
  Surveys, webinars, or social media initiatives like Twitter chats are frequently used by organisers to engage delegates and drive interest. Find out what role you can play in these, and whether your sponsorship extends to this activity.

- **Engage with the content and themes of the conference.**
  It's a common misstep to roll out the same strategy for each event you sponsor. Aligning yourselves with the event's theme will be more engaging to potential delegates (and win you brownie points with the organisers). If speakers at the event are clients of yours, make sure you co-ordinate with them in advance.

- **Promote your attendance.**
  Consider how you're going to let delegates know you're sponsoring the event. You could use social media to run a pre-event competition for delegates, announce speakers or promote what's happening on your stand on the day. You could even recruit delegates to help with your planning, through running a social media poll on what freebies to give away on the day.

- **Use your guest passes wisely.**
  Most organisers provide sponsors with a limited number of event places. Think carefully about how you use these. Are there potential prospects you could invite? If you're taking an ABM approach to events, remember it's not all about lead generation. Getting a prospect to spend a day at an event will be far more valuable to both you and them. Don't forget your influencers or brand ambassadors either; inviting them can also be a good way to increase awareness.

But remember…

Building a good relationship with the event organiser is crucial to your success. When making requests you'll be reliant, to some extent, on their goodwill and patience, so try not to antagonise them before the event take place. Make sure you meet their deadlines and expectations. Being easy to deal with will pay dividends in the long-run.

Pick a card…

'Tradeshow coach' Susan Friedmann has a novel way of identifying prospects pre-event. Before the event she sends playing cards to different types of target: kings to key customers; queens to vendors and suppliers; knaves to hot prospects; and aces to 'whales' (huge prospects). These cards can be exchanged for gifts on the exhibition stand on event day, allowing staff to quickly identify what type of customer they are and how they should be engaged.

Making the most of your event sponsorship © B2B Marketing 2017

Section 2
Event day

2.1 Exhibition stand

There's one big question you need to answer here: what's the reason for delegates to visit your stand? Simply 'being there' isn't a good enough incentive. Whether your event features 10, 100 or 1000 exhibitors, you'll need to make yours stand out from the crowd and deliver a compelling experience to delegates. Here are some considerations:

- **Location.** Where will your stand be? Insist on a visit to the venue with organisers to understand where you'll be placed and how the event will be set up. Consider too how this may affect footfall.

Size shouldn't matter

When one small exhibitor was up against the giants of the tech industry at one event, it decided to slap it's logo on bottles of hot sauce and give them away to delegates. This resulted in people queueing to visit their stand, and immediately made them memorable.

Insist on a visit to the venue with organisers to understand where you'll be placed and how the event will be set up



Making the most of your event sponsorship © B2B Marketing 2017

- **Consider the space.** Will you just have room for your stand, or could you offer a rest area or charging point for delegates? Boxy, straight-looking stands tend to be cheaper and simpler to set up, but look less dramatic. Natural materials, such as wood (or in the case of one exhibitor, straw bales) will make you stand out further.

- **Choosing your team.** Perhaps there are other advocates in the business who would be a better choice for the target audience? If you're a tech firm trying to sell to developers, a couple of developers from your own business might be best placed to explain your product and thus provide delegates with a richer experience.

Make your team stand out

A dating app developer needed to get his team to stand out at a large web development exhibition. The team wore fancy dress angel wings, and ended up with their picture in a national newspaper. Fancy dress won't work for every brand, but putting the team in a vibrant t-shirt can work wonders.

- **How can you enhance the delegate experience?** Knowing the venue's coffee wasn't up to much, one trade show exhibitor brought along its own barista and coffee machine to drum up engagement. Another went further by having a barista provide personalised coffee art for thirsty delegates. Definitely one way to get noticed!

- **Employ gamification.** Unleash a sense of competition among your delegates. Darts, Batak boards or 'test your strength' machines could all help you draw a crowd.

If the key fits

One sponsor provided plastic keys to be handed to delegates on arrival. Only one of these keys opened a box on its stand containing a prize. It gave delegates an incentive to visit a stand they may otherwise have passed by.

- **Use technology**. Key Technology, which manufactures food processing equipment, used VR to show delegates what it feels like to be a bean inside their processing machine. NFC and RFID technology is also being used to allow sponsors to read delegate information quickly in order to provide a superior customer experience.

It's all in the wrist

Wristbands that incorporate NFC or RFID technology are becoming increasingly popular at events and trade shows. These can be used to trigger experiences (such as a video or music being played) when the delegate passes by a stand or marker. They can also be linked to mobiles to provide text alerts about what's happening on stands.



› **Drive social media buzz.** Can you provide a photo opportunity with one of those cut-outs you find at the seaside or a special guest? One exhibitor in Las Vegas hired a showgirl to pose for photos with delegates in front of their logo, which were then posted to Facebook to increase reach.

Star in a car

A B2B office supplies company exhibiting at one US event also happened to be the sponsor of a stock car racing team. They brought the racing car with its superstar driver along to the trade show, and allowed delegates to sit in the car, get a signed photo and have their picture taken with both car and its driver. The result: a buzz around the stand and a constant flow of traffic to the stand.

Ensure you get plenty of pictures of your activity, as these will also be useful for post-event follow-up (see section four).

A prize draw exchange for business cards is a little old-fashioned in an age where many millennial employees don't have them

Giveaways and freebies

Nobody wants paper collateral anymore, and you're not going to create a real buzz with offers of branded pens, USB sticks or mouse mats. Here are five more appealing alternatives:

› **Clothing.** Hats and t-shirts can turn delegates into walking billboards. One exhibitor even allows delegates to print their own t-shirts at the event.

› **Gifts for kids or pets.** This allows mum or dad to bring home a present from their trip. Think soft toys for kids or branded bowls for pets.

› **Care packages.** Conferences can be long and tiring. Boxes with plasters, aspirin, wipes, tea bags, fruits and branded bottled water always go down well with delegates.

› **Umbrellas.** Always practical and useful (in the UK, at least!)

› **Something people will photograph and share.** Giving away wacky sunglasses and getting people to take a selfie and share on social media can be great for brand awareness.

Collecting data on delegates

Capturing the details of those interacting with and passing your stand will be key to following up post-event. A prize draw exchange for business cards is a little old-fashioned in an age where many millennial employees don't have them. There might be technology, such as badge scanning, used by the event organiser that you could use or you might need to bring your own. Consider how this data will be transferred into your CRM or data management systems back in the office.



2.2 Speaking opportunities

These are increasingly few and far between – and often for good reason: some salespeople just can't help themselves giving a captive audience the hard sell when given half a chance.

Remember:

- **Choose the right person.** Jim Bland might be the subject matter expert, but is he the most dynamic representation of your company?
- **Stick to the brief.** There's only one thing more pointless than a direct sales pitch, and that's a thinly-veiled sales pitch that treats your audience with contempt because it assumes they won't be able to see it for what it is. Offer something of value to the audience.
- **Be prepared.** Obvious, but so often forgotten. How many times should your presentation be rehearsed? The number of times it takes to deliver it off by heart.
- **Position your plants.** Have some friendly faces in the audience on hand to pose questions at the end.
- **Consider the timing of the slot.** Have you been left with the graveyard shift (the post-lunch session)? Think of ways to jolt delegates out of their food comas.
- **Make it interactive.** Delegates need more than a lecture to keep them engaged.

2.3 Hosting roundtable discussions

These can be a great way of targeting and meeting a small number of specific prospects or customers, but a major consideration should be the value for the delegate. Networking and sharing ideas with peers may not be enough for them, so perhaps you need to offer a further incentive such as lunch. Is it an open discussion or held under Chatham House rules? This could well affect your planned outputs (content, press or social media coverage), so needs to be established upfront.

2.4 Social media interaction

No event nowadays is complete without its own hashtag and social media coverage. Understand what the organisers are planning – a live blog or Twitter wall, for example – and how that ties into your strategy.

Remember that social media is meant to be a conversation platform. Engage with those who are interacting on the day and seek them out in person. If you've invited social influencers along as guests, make sure your activity is co-ordinated with theirs too.

Networking no-nos

Approaching the right people to chat to at an event can often be a minefield. Here are six individuals to avoid.

1. The nepotist: They are on the lookout to deposit their son, daughter, niece, nephew or godchild on an unsuspecting victim for a couple of week's work experience over the summer holidays.

2. The fabulist: A flagrant disregard for whatever anyone else says or thinks, will go off in monologues about the semi-fictional team they manage, and tell spurious tales of personal progression only half-based on the truth.

3. The stalker: Takes a multichannel approach, both on and offline. They'll be the one taking advantage of the unwritten rules of social etiquette by cornering you until you make it clear they're becoming a nuisance.

4. The badge hawk: By the time their eyes are somewhere between your neck and chin they'll have calculated whether or not you'e worth their time, or start looking over your shoulder for someone more worthwhile.

5. The high horse rider: Anyone affronted by the concept of a conversation with a stranger at a networking event can bog off.

6. Anyone who takes it too seriously. Could having a drink leave you perceived as a free-loader? No, it won't. Just enjoy it.

Section 3
Post-event activity

3.1 What happens next

Having had a successful day with a busy stand and plenty of engaged delegates, what should happen next?

Examine what your contract entitles you to. Will you receive delegate information and contact details that will allow you to follow up? Is there data from the event's associated app you can access? Are you included on branded emails post-event? Event organisers often struggle to secure delegate feedback, so perhaps you could help them with this.

If you've given a presentation, find out when you can expect to receive feedback. Be aware that this feedback may be sugar-coated if the organiser in question wants you to spend money at their next event.

Data collected at an event should be entered into your CRM system within 24-72 hours of completion, and you should be looking to get in touch with prospects within two to three days. Research the prospects you met, and before you get in touch make sure you're ready to answer any questions or problems they raised with you in person. Salespeople sometimes ignore event or trade show leads sent to them, so some qualification may be required to push them to act.

The goal of the follow-up is to elicit a response, and email is the simplest way to do this. Make it personal (and we don't just mean including their name in a mass email), and don't send any marketing material unless they've specifically asked for it. There'll be plenty of time to do this in any ensuing conversation.

Consider what opportunities the event offers for content marketing. Sharing a list of things you learned at the event is a perennial favourite and provides value for your audience, whether it be through a blog, video or downloadable report. The images and video you collected during the event will be vital when it comes to adding some colour to these pieces of content.

Follow-up activity should be co-ordinated with the event organiser. You don't want your efforts to be duplicated or to be swamping delegates with similar content.

Wish you were here...

Provide prospects with a tangible reminder of their experience by purchasing a job lot of postcards from the city or country where the event took place. You can then mail these to contacts post-event with a reminder of your meeting at the event in that particular location.





3.2 Measuring success

It's crucial to record your engagement with customers or prospects at events in your CRM or customer view systems so you can track the ROI of your sponsorship.

Tracking these interactions as part of the customer journey will allow you to work out the ROI of your sponsorship activity as part of your overall marketing mix. This is especially important if your objective is increasing revenue – the ability to work out revenue generated versus how much the sponsorship cost. As well as the sponsorship price, don't forget to incorporate the cost of staff time on the day itself and all pre-event preparation.

A post-event debrief will also help you to measure how successful the sponsorship was. Conduct this swiftly post-event while thoughts are still fresh.

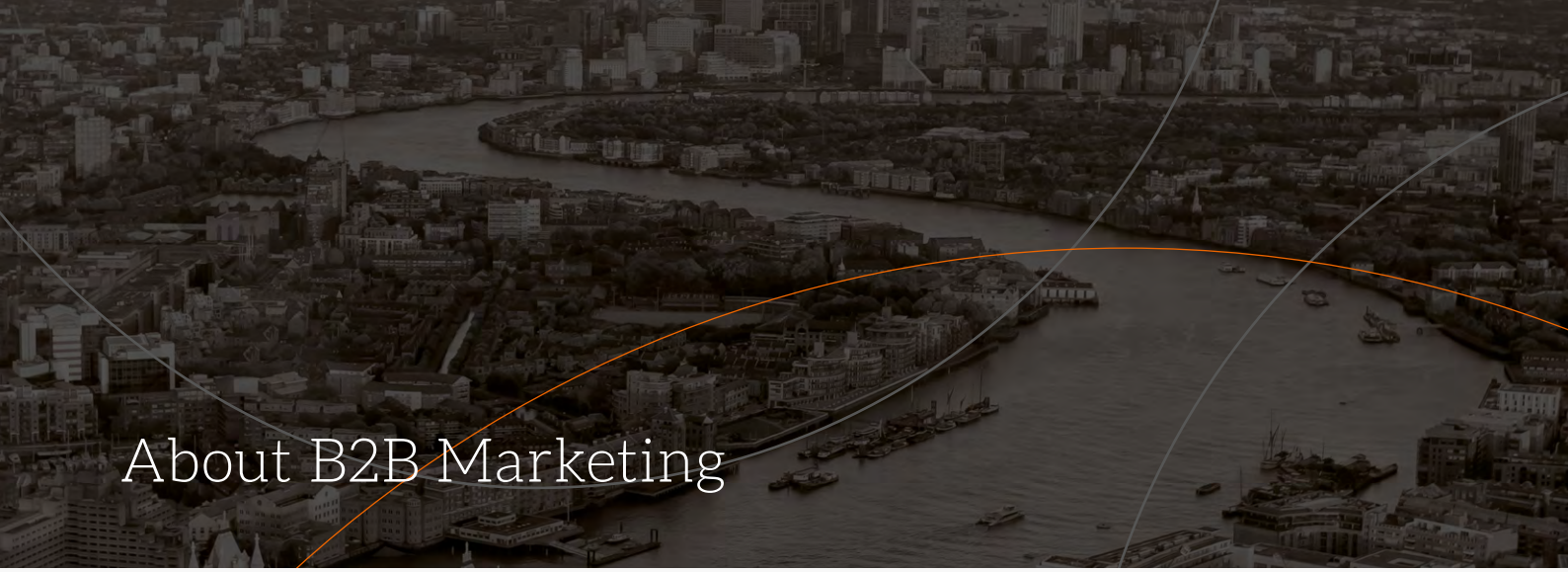
The following points should also be considered:

- How did the sponsorship meet your initial objectives?
- Did the audience match the one you wanted to target?
- Did you receive everything you were entitled to as sponsor?
- How were your interactions with the event organisers?
- How much interest did the pre-event preparation generate?
- Did the stand perform well on the day? Were the staff on the stand the right brand advocates?
- Were the presentation messages communicated effectively?
- What was feedback from delegates like?
- Is it worth sponsoring the same event again?

Hopefully this guide has given you the tools and ideas you need to make the most of your event sponsorship.

The important thing is to ensure your sponsorship strategy is considered in the round – you won't be able to maximise your ROI if you don't connect your preparation with the event activity with effective follow-up and the measurement of your return.

Ultimately the two biggest success factors will be those identified right at the start of the process. Was this the right event to sponsor? And was the audience the one you were looking to target? Get these two right, and you'll be well on your way to maximising the potential of your investment.



About B2B Marketing

With hundreds of thousands of users across the globe, we're the leading trusted voice at the centre of the B2B marketing community.

B2B Marketing members are kept up to date with the latest strategies, insight and inspiration from the B2B marketing space, through our dedicated:

- Research and analysis
- News
- Information portal
- Events
- Training
- Networking.

Why become a B2B Marketing Premium member?

Our Premium membership package delivers outstanding value, and is the go-to choice for thousands of senior-level B2B marketers, decision-makers and leaders.

Here's just some of the value Premium membership provides:

- Automatic discounts for events and training courses.
- B2B marketing-specific best practice guides worth over £3000.
- B2B industry benchmarking reports worth over £3300.
- New premium research, analysis, benchmarking reports and guides published every month.
- An annual subscription to the quarterly *B2B Marketing* magazine.

Our promise to you

Things change fast in B2B. Just staying on top of the changes can be a full-time job. So we do that job for you.

With our membership, training and events we guarantee you'll:

- Put your best ever strategies in place.
- Lock down the multiple skills, tools and insights you need.
- Find real-world inspiration for rolling out outstanding marketing initiatives.

How to get started

- Go to b2bmarketing.net/join to set up your Premium membership.
- Check out Events, Training and Enterprise Solutions on our website.
- Call us on +44 (0)207 014 4920 if you'd like to discuss your specific business needs.

Learn more about our training at:
b2bmarketing.net/training

Check out our events at:
b2bmarketing.net/events

B2B Marketing
Insight · Development · Training · Events

b2bmarketing.net

B2B Marketing

Insight · Development · Training · Events

Contact us

B2B Marketing
Clover House
147–149 Farringdon Road
London
EC1R 3HN

Tel: +44 (0)20 7014 4920
info@b2bmarketing.net
b2bmarketing.net