

WHO ELSE WANTS TO KNOW WHY SPONSORSHIP IS AN EFFECTIVE MARKETING TOOL?

Sponsorship is a much bigger thing than one might think. It is a very powerful and effective marketing tool because it increases the impact your business has on people beyond awareness and promotion. Unlike advertising, sponsorship creates dynamic connections with positive ideas. Sponsoring a cultural event in particular offers significant, different and exciting marketing opportunities to actively engage with audiences as well as showing support. Attracting your business' audience, sponsorship of an event broadens your exposure, increasing your credibility, image and prestige.

WHAT SPONSORSHIP IS...

To sponsor an event is to support it financially with cash or in-kind, in return for benefits that help your business reach its marketing goals. Sponsorship of an event is a three-way exchange: it provides your business with access to the event audiences; it allows audiences to enjoy an enhanced event; and it gives the organisers the means to put the event together.

Penelope James, Public Relations consultant at Penelope James PR, explains that *"sponsorship can reach out in many different ways to every day marketing – for instance, attendance at events, client entertainment, sampling, working together to achieve common goals such as diversity and inclusion, reach out to young people, fulfill corporate responsibility requirements (...). The results in terms of increasing turnover and attendance can be enormous."*

Sponsorship is a commercial transaction, not a charitable donation. It is an opportunity to engage in a marketing exercise that is going to promote your business in many ways.

WHY ARTS AND CULTURE?

The creative industries in the UK are estimated to contribute over £92bn to the economy per year (DCMS – Department for Culture, Media & Sport). Arts and Culture are widely recognized to be powerful drivers in raising the profile of a region and regenerating communities and businesses.

We have enormous creative talent and force in Kent with theatres, museums, art galleries, music venues, festivals etc... and a number of organisations have successfully helped to establish Kent as a cultural destination, attracting tourism and energizing the local economy:

- The Marlowe Theatre in Canterbury had an economic impact of £34.5 million during the financial Year 2016-2017, attracting over 400,000 people to watch their shows.
- The Canterbury Festival attracts 65,000 visitors every year. Its economic impact in 2016 was estimated at £3 million.
- Turner Contemporary in Margate has welcomed more than 5 million visitors since it opened in 2011. Its economic impact is estimated at £58 million.
- The Broadstairs Folk Week attracts 50,000 visitors each year and inputs £2.4 million into the local economy.

So not only does Kent have a solid base of creative professionals, but it also has many residents and visitors who engage with arts and culture. Whether they produce events or entertain and educate themselves, these are large audiences. Wouldn't a Kent based business want to reach them?

HOW YOUR BUSINESS CAN BENEFIT FROM SPONSORING A CULTURAL EVENT

Any sponsorship campaign should be directed at aiming specific goals, the ultimate one being to drive sales.

One of the most obvious benefit of sponsorship is that it helps your business **increase awareness and brand building**.

When asked how Ashford School has most benefited from being the lead sponsor of the Kent Creative Awards, head of school Mike Buchanan, said: *"Definitely raising the awareness of the name of Ashford School and engaging with like-minded, creative people."* He added: *"It's part of the bigger picture of promoting the name of Ashford School across Kent and doing so with a specific purpose. So, awareness raising is important to us but so too is the message about the school and about the centrality of arts in the people's experience."*

Indeed, sponsorship has the ability to **associate your business to a message**, to a set of ideas and concepts. These ideas can evoke community, a sense of place, localism, creativity, civic pride, etc... The message works in the audience mind and builds loyalty.

Penelope James explains: *"Sponsorship can be a very important part of the marketing mix in terms of raising the company profile to target audiences. E.g. When a recognised UK bank partners with a concert series at the South Bank in London this enables the bank to reach its target demographic (Audience of primarily ABC1) and also associate itself with the most important and influential artists and partners from around the world. The message is subliminal: "we are like the artists you see performing here – professional, highly accomplished and hardworking".*

With sponsorship, your businesses is **associated to positive ideas and quality** and looked at more favourably, with an enhanced image. Sponsorship increases willingness to purchase and loyalty when

it is connected to an event that means something to the people involved. It then triggers positive emotions and feelings.

Mike Buchanan also says: *"It's a great way of getting engaged with something important in the area. Participation in the arts is often a transformative experience for young people and so it is at the centre of what it is we trying to do at Ashford School."*

Sponsoring a cultural event will allow you to **target the customers you want**. By creating a connection with events that have been designed for a variety of audiences (classical music concert; folk music festival; photography project for young people; ...) you can reach specific groups.

Sponsorship is an **active and interactive** marketing tool. The organisers of a sponsored event will offer you a range of benefits to promote your products and services where you will meet your audience. This is a crucial and most effective aspect of sponsorship: it gives you direct access to the audiences so you can take action yourself and use your skills: attending events in person; speaking at an event and addressing the audience; being a guest on a radio show; etc... This is why sponsorship should be considered in your marketing as a complement to advertising, which doesn't offer this interactivity with customers. *"Sponsorship has to be a two-way street, otherwise it won't work. Whereas advertising requires, in general, an instant reaction on behalf of the consumer or they move on and the moment is lost, sponsorship is a slow burn process."* (Penelope James)

Mike Buchanan thinks that: *"Advertising is pretty hit and miss. To be honest we don't engage with advertising very much at all except for specific events and then only in media which hits the demographic of the parents who are likely to send their children to the school. Sponsorship, on the other hand, cut out the need to guess who might be reading a particular journal or listening to a particular programme."*

So, sponsorship creates **opportunities to meet customers and business partners**. VIP receptions, event launches, private views, etc... are excellent for networking. You can maintain your relationships with existing customers and suppliers that you invite at the event; and you also build relationships with new contacts. Also, with events, sponsorship increases awareness and drives sales when potential customers can **try your products and experience your services**. And if you host an event at your venue, you will get **people through the doors**, connecting with your customers directly.

Sponsorship helps you grow your **social media presence** as you actively engage with audiences. As the need for content has become more and more important on social media, you will find it crucial to access visuals and stories provided by the event. Some of them will be created just for your business; others will be unique to the event. And you won't find it anywhere else.

Sponsorship also increases your **presence in the media** when coverage of an event includes your business name and photographs; it helps you **grow your list** when audiences are directed to your website;

...

...and it is **tax deductible!**

CONCLUSION

So, now you have discovered a different way to promote your business!

If well done, sponsoring a cultural event is extremely effective, and excellent value for money, as you actively engage with a targeted audience. Partnerships through sponsorship help your business build very special relationships in the long term, both with the event organisers and the audience. Your business will be visible not just during the event, but also over the months before and after the event, leading to long term partnerships...

Now is the time. An economic downturn may not, at first, seem to be a good time for sponsorship, but in fact it's an opportunity for your business to stand out. I asked Mike Buchanan how important he thinks it is to take the opportunity: *"Even more important in my view as this is when lots of people drop out of sponsorship and hence is a great opportunity for others to fill the void."*

Sponsorship adds value to your marketing with many positives outcomes, and as Mike Buchanan experienced: *"It's a lot of fun!"*. Don't miss out!

How to go about it:

- Be clear about your marketing goals and audiences
- Identify events with audiences that match the customers you want to reach.
- Talk to the event organisers and discuss sponsorship features that work best for you to achieve your goals.
- Make sure you allow some time to act on your sponsorship so audiences hear from you directly. At the very least, acknowledge and promote your involvement.
