



What's next in sponsorship sales

Is your association wondering where sponsorship dollars will be coming from this year? You're not alone: "What I'm seeing is a lot of fear," says Scott Oser, president of Scott Oser Associates. But Oser and other sponsorship sales experts say that dollars are still out there—if your association builds a compelling case for sponsors' support.

"I think each organization needs to know what the unique selling point is of their specific audience. There's a reason that associations need to continue to meet regardless of the economic downturn, and people are still willing to buy," says Sean Soth, a senior vice president at Network Media Partners. Oser agrees, saying, "You've got to know your value proposition. You've got to know what they're going to get for their money. ... It's got to be all about them, and not all about you."

Soth sees a trend toward an integrated sales approach, where the exhibit, advertising, and sponsorship sales teams come together instead of selling separately. This feeds into another trend he sees, away from one-off, item-based sponsorships (the notepad, the lanyard) and toward more comprehensive packages and "experiential" sponsorships that tie into the content of the conference or other face-to-face opportunities like a sponsored demonstration room or social event. No matter what the sponsorship involves, Soth says, the integrated sales approach allows the association to build relationships with its supporters. "You have to create a partnership that's honest," he says.

Oser also cites "partnership" as key to developing sponsorships in today's economy. "The [associations] who have developed a strong relationship and have nurtured the relationship with their partners—the ones who have developed 'partners,' not 'vendors'—those are the ones who are not feeling the hit. Those are the organizations who are actually doing OK," he says. Meanwhile, "the [associations] who are churning and burning them ... who have never made an effort to connect with their partners" are struggling, he says.

The partnerships Oser describes are based on an investment of time and effort on both the associa-

tion and the sponsor's side. "You need to be going to people and saying to them, 'What are your goals and objectives? Within this market, what are you trying to accomplish?'" says Oser. The goal is for your sales team to find ways to help your sponsors reach their goals and objectives.

That ongoing partnership can benefit your association even if your main contact or contacts at the sponsoring company leave (an ever-present possibility in a year of increasing layoffs). Oser says that it's much easier to get your foot in the door to speak to a new contact when your association can reference that ongoing partnership. "Show them what's been done in the past, and explain to them the value," says Oser. If possible, demonstrate the ways that your association has helped the sponsor fulfill its organizational goals in the past. As an added benefit, if your association is in regular contact with a sponsor partner, you're much more likely to know of a staff departure early—rather than discovering it two weeks before your sponsorship deadline. "Then you're really behind the eight ball," says Oser.

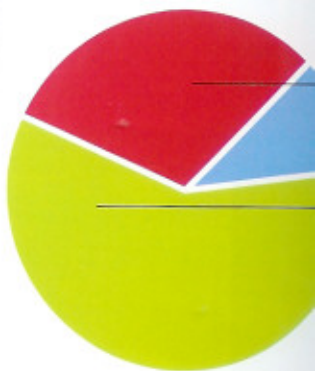
Both Oser and Soth emphasize the importance of encouraging your sponsors to maintain an ongoing presence in front of your members. "You have to be able to explain the benefits of maintaining visibility," says Soth. "If they go dark in a year like this, it might be detrimental to their overall marketing approach moving forward. If you're not there when a customer is ready to establish a relationship, you're not going to be in their plans, period."

But what should you do if your sponsor wishes to stay involved but simply isn't able to pay for the same level of sponsorship they've held in the past? Oser advises flexibility. "One of the things that I try to do—and I've seen most organizations do that I consider to do sponsorship well—is go out with a lot of packages, but tell sponsors that if you don't fit perfectly into any of these, we'll find one that's right for you."

Within that flexibility, however, Oser notes that it's important not to devalue your offerings with price cuts. "I have heard of more that are doing more value-add type stuff, so you get a bigger bang for your buck instead of paying less," he says. "I'd rather offer someone 15 months for the price of 12 than give them a 20 percent discount."

December and January 2011. More than 8,500 association members on a variety of matters. The results regarding travel are below on the survey and more economy. www.asaecenter.org/economy.

Probability in coming year of attending convention more than 50 miles



Probability in coming year of attending training, or professional development

High probability: 19.9 percent

Mid probability: 12.6 percent

Low probability: 67.5 percent

(Note: 34.5 percent of respondents report participating in this way in the previous year.)

Key stat: **43.7** percent of respondents report attending an association meeting or exhibit at an association meeting with a probability they'll do so in the coming year.

"After years of and many experiments I have discovered that sustainable practices not only make money, but are invariably more profitable than conventional methods."

—Trailblazer session speaker Gary H. Stonyfield Farms, in his book *Stirring Money and Save the World*