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How to write a sponsorship proposal for a football club

For any grassroots club, expanding your sponsorship revenue from a stream of tiny investments to an ocean of regular income should be high on the list of priorities. As a major source of income, identifying and generating a good portfolio of sponsors is a vital, but far from simple, task. How do you source potential sponsors? How do you make the initial approach? What space in and around your club are worthy to a sponsor? What should be covered in the proposal? Questions you're probably asking yourself right now, and ones that we'll touch on here. Identify the right sponsors The first question any club needs to ask themselves is "What do we want to achieve through sponsorship?" For most, the answer will likely be to bring in the extra revenue that allows your club to prosper - but that isn't the only benefit a sponsor can bring. It might not be cash alone this particular sponsor can offer. Do they provide a service or product your club could have use for? If so, secure some free or discounted equipment; it's a good way of improving an area of your club without outlaying any actual money. Elsewhere, their customer base could contain a number of your potential customers (as a club, members and people who use your facilities are customers - it's a difficult mindset to adopt, but one you'll need if you are to grow your club from a financial perspective). Aside from income, ensure that sponsors are willing to promote your club in some way - helping you extend your reach. Finally, there could be opportunities for collaboration. Does your sponsor run a particular event your club could attend? Or can they bring something to your club events? Harness your new affiliation by working together to bring about mutual benefits. To get these secondary benefits mentioned above, you need a sponsor that shares similar values to your own. Selecting the right sponsor can open up a lot more doors than one that has no real connection with your club. Before you approach anyone, draw up a list of companies that would be an ideal fit as one of your sponsors. Think who might be interested in supporting your cause. As a community club, the first place to look is around the local area. Are there any businesses that have that obvious point of connection? Sports businesses are obvious, but any business that serves your local community (just like you do) should be drawn up on the list. Don't be afraid to leverage personal ties here either. Think of the number of businesses your club members work for or even own. Given they already contribute to the club on a daily basis, their enthusiasm for getting involved should be high. In order for your sponsorship approaches to be successful, you have to target the right businesses. Make extensive research beforehand, and you'll ensure you don't waste time in the future. Set out your goals, and find the perfect fit for achieving them. Determine what you're offering Sponsorship is a two way street. Sure, you want to see revenue and other benefits coming into the club, but sponsorship is about relationships. Both parties need to be happy, so you need to make them a compelling offer. Give your club a sponsorship audit and determine exactly what you can offer to a potential sponsor. Start by calculating your audience across all channels. This includes members who turn up on a daily basis: parents and supporters who come and watch games on a Sunday afternoon; away members and supporters who visit once a year to take you on; the amount of people who use your club facilities (be it your training pitch or function room); and the number of visitors your website gains, plus social media followers. When you throw it altogether, you'll have an exciting, sellable asset that should excite sponsors. Next, take a stroll around your club (both on and offline) and draw up a list of everything that could potentially be sponsored. Around the club, their will be ample opportunity for pitch side hoardings, match day sponsors, kit sponsorship and alike. Plus, through your digital channels website and social media sponsorship is an easy way to get a business in front of an online audience. Draw up everything you're willing to sponsor, plus the potential reach that sponsor will gain from it. Without this clarity, your proposal could end up targeting the wrong business, or see the perfect opportunity slip through your fingers. Making the approach So you've got your intentions in order, list of companies to approach and understand exactly what you can offer them. Time to make that all important approach. At this point, you don't need to go all gung-ho armed with a proposal, contract and pen ready to sign. Act professionally and gauge a companies interest with an introductory letter. Note: Unless specifically asked by a sponsor - don't approach via email. Inboxes are crammed full today, and they can all too easily end up lost or ignored. You'll find a number of templates online for structuring the layout and content of this letter - but keep it business-like but friendly. Use a professional, formal tone and ensure the letter has all the correct headers and structures (such as dates and addresses) that you'd expect from a business style letter. One vital point is around personalisation. Sure, stick to a broad template using the same language and layout for every company you approach, but use personal touches wherever possible. For example, address your letter to the companies CEO, or someone you know to be responsible for sponsorships. Wherever possible, use the company's name and tailor the message to the relationship you'd specifically like to have with them. Again, this is just the initial stages - so write concisely. Be sure to include: A snappy intro Don't skirt around the issue. Be quick to introduce yourself, your club and your "exciting" proposition without droning on. The benefits to the sponsor Go in early with what your club can bring to the business - make this potential collaboration seem like an opportunity too good to miss. Facts about the club Back up every claim you make. If you say you'll push their business to an all-new audience, how big is this audience? Give a brief overview of your club, it's values and stats you drew up earlier. A brief overview of a potential partnership Finally, introduce a few of the options available to the company. Don't go into too much detail, and don't throw too many options in - hit them with your best options. Contact information And of course, do not forget to add your contact details on the end so they can get back in touch with the club. You'll find a number of examples of this type of thing online, so give them a read to give you an idea of what to aim for. Once you've sent over the letter (sending via post may be your best option as it's more likely to actually be opened by that person), you can follow up in person. Don't go charging in the day after you sent the letter - leave it a week or so and follow up with a phone call. Try to arrange a call or meeting with your contact so you can take it to the next level. What to include in the proposal So, you've approached each potential sponsor and whittled it down a few interested parties. Now to hand over the proposal. This should a much more detailed document essentially building on what was mentioned in your opening letter. Club history and values Begin with some background on your club. When were you formed? Where do you play? What age groups play at your club and do they cover boys, girls, men and women? You can also go into some detail about your club's values. Community sport is about serving your area with passion and dedication. Communicate this passion from the off, making an emotional connection with a company that (hopefully) buys into your club and it's mission statement. Size and audience Next, give a breakdown of your club's audience and potential reach. With a clear demographic covering exactly who is at your club, sponsors that wish to meet this target market will be excited by your club. Hit them with the big, overarching numbers first - then branch out into age, gender and club role. Like we mentioned above, be sure to include your digital footprint, as it offers a number of opportunities to sell sponsorship. Include your club website traffic and social media followers, as well as much as you know about them (you can find out things such as the age, location and gender of your social media followers in their respective settings). Sponsorship possibilities at the club Once you've sold your club with impressive stats and a reminiscent trip down your club's history timeline, delve a little more into where you'll be exposing this particular business. Again, you can lead with a series of options, each of which could form a package of various pieces of sponsorship. Include both on and offline and include details on pricing (or alternative benefits you wish to gain from this sponsor). You could even create a bronze, silver and gold tier-style system, with greater benefits coming from increased costs. Be sure to link benefit back to each package, creating a clear link between price and benefit. Some info about what's expected from the sponsor This partnership is a two-way street, so it's best to make your sponsors clear of their role before they get started. Outline what you expect in return for all the benefits you'll be handing to their business - aside from the obvious financial incentives. If there are any additional requirements you'd like to include, do so here. Examples might be the presence of their business at a club event, local PR you'd like them to get involved in, or offering a prize to be given away in a joint social media competition. 4 things to consider for your proposal The proposal is a pretty important document for a making a success of your sponsorship deal. Make it as compelling as possible by considering all these pointers: 1. Use professional, exciting aesthetics Without wanting to repeat myself, this proposal is an opportunity to "sell" your club. Don't let poor visuals get in the way of that. If you can, take the time to create a professional pdf complete with images from your club. If you know a graphic designer at the club, ask for a couple of hours of their time to spruce up the proposal. 2. Be clear in your message You may have a little more room to play with in the proposal, but that's still no reason to ramble. Be clear and concise when you communicate the key points. Cover the details about your club, an evidence-based section on your club's audience, the sponsorship opportunities and what you expect in return. And nothing else. 3. Consider video For real wow-factor, consider making a video about your club. Be careful not to tread on the toes of a point above here ("Use professional, exciting aesthetics"), as a grainy, wobbly hack won't do you any favours. Still, if you've got a video guru at the club, ask them to chip in. After all, video is a much more exciting way to tell a story. 4. Proofread it Before you go handing over your masterpiece, make sure it's free from any and all typos and spelling errors. If there's one way to shoot down a compelling offer, it's through the unprofessionalism of bad grammar. Pass it round the club to check for typos and give your proposal that final 2-3%. 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