

ABC's of Regatta Sponsorship

OCTOBER 1999



AMERICAN SAILOR



U.S. TEAM BRINGS HOME THE MEDALS
The 14-member Pan-Am sailing team won gold, silver, and bronze.
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SAILING IS A PASSION FOR GERRY DAHL
Once confined to a wheelchair, he now teaches sailing.
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NATIONAL SAIL TRAINING SYMPOSIUM IN FLORIDA
Get ready for more seminars and product testing . . . coming in January.
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The ABCs of Regatta Sponsorship

We all strive to create an event where participants enjoy good, clean, fun racing; where event organizers are delighted to be involved; and where sponsors feel they are receiving a good return on their investment. You shouldn't be afraid to ask for sponsorship when organizing a regatta, but keep in mind that it's a two-way street.

Generally speaking, the reason you need sponsorship is to provide some level of added value to the competitors, while keeping escalating regatta costs under control. We all know that one way for organizers to cut costs is to ask for "free stuff" instead of buying it at retail prices. It's important, however, to note that the more free stuff (or even cash in some cases) you ask for, the more the local merchant should be able to expect from you.

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SUPPLEMENT TO CRUISING WORLD



Keep It Simple

BY RON ROSENBERG

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A sponsored event in its simplest form begins with the event organizers looking at their budget line by line, and trying to eliminate the costly numbers attached to each item by asking a merchant to contribute an item either for free, or at a deep discount. In return, the organizer normally offers the merchant some form of promotional value.

For example, you might need 100 sandwiches for the Race Committee volunteers and 200 burgers for the evening BBQ. You could call up the local supermarket, or Joe's BBQ & Deli, and ask if they'd like to contribute these goods to the event in return for their company's name and phone number listed on the back of the Notice of Race or the event flyer. In addition, you might add that the company will be verbally mentioned as a sponsor of your event at the skipper's meeting and prizegiving, and they could supply a banner to display on the club grounds throughout the duration of the event.

GET ORGANIZED EARLY

It's unfortunate how common it is for an event organizer to solicit local businesses for their support of an upcoming sailing event and then ask for their generous contributions to be delivered immediately. Exercise common courtesy and be sure to give your potential supporters at least six weeks to gather and deliver the necessary product to properly support your event. Remember to respect the concept that most merchants and their companies have day to day business to conduct, and that most events likely will not take priority over this.

Also, be sure to follow up a commitment conversation with an e-mail or a written letter of agreement, so both you and the merchant are clear on who will get what. I have found that on more basic levels, this is best achieved by simply writing an advance thank you letter reiterating the simple terms of the deal. This goes a long way in minimizing any confusion. Be sure to include dates and location of your event, ideal delivery dates of merchant's product, and delivery address.

Be sure to properly wrap up your event with a thank you letter to each sponsor. As simple as this sounds, it's often overlooked. I like the idea of a report paragraph within this note explaining how valuable the merchant's contribution was to the success of the event. This is also a great time to mention that you hope they en-

Organizers of the 1999 Van Isle 360 Regatta, Wash., offered sponsors banners at the dock parties (left), as well as signage for the sails on each competing boat (below).

Kelly O'Neil photos

joyed and benefited from the experience, and that they will once again show their support next year.

ADD A LITTLE MORE FUN

To add a nice spark to your event, put together a raffle or prize giveaway. These have become very common at the regional championship level with local merchants and a few specific marine industry-based companies who have that rare, "Once they try it, then they'll buy it" confidence. These days, marketing-minded companies often provide product for signage at significant events around the globe, to be distributed at the prizegiving, or at after-dinner raffles. This adds to the list of winners at any level event, as not only the race winners walk away with cool prizes.

SO NOW YOU'RE TALKING MONEY

You've got the basic idea of how event sponsorship works. Your weekend club regatta was a huge success, and now you've been asked to organize a regional championship in a similar manner. This event will be much larger, and so is its accompanying budget.

In addition to reducing your budget through product contributions of food, bottled water, etc., you still have a significant dollar amount needed. Cash sponsorship deals can happen at many various levels, from a \$25 supporting sponsor up to a \$10,000 title sponsor, and in some cases, even higher numbers are possible.

Here's an example of a potential deal. Let's say you struck a deal with your local car dealer (yes, sailing does boast desirable demographics), whereby for a cash contribution of \$1,000, the dealer will place a vehicle on display. In addition, you have agreed to place two event banners around the picnic area where the prizegiving will be held. The dealer has also asked that a commercial flyer be inserted into each sailor's registration kit.

While this sounds simple, managing the expectations of the sponsor is probably the most common area of failure in properly fulfilling a sponsor's requirements. It's crucial to provide both accurate and conservative figures when presenting the scenario to a sponsor who is new to sailing events. Using our car dealer example, you should expect to walk them through the grounds where the event will take place and discuss traffic flow and peak timing opportunities, so the sponsor can staff his display in an

efficient manner. Let them know that there may be only 10 people within 100 yards of the vehicle while the participants are on the water. Maybe the dealer is interested in VIP hospitality or spectator boat privileges?

Remember, when asking potential sponsors for real cash, it's important to know that they are considering reaching into their own pocket for one of two reasons: 1. They truly want to help provide added value to the event on behalf of the organizers and participants; and/or 2. They seek real return for their investment, just as they would from a high-quality ad, or any other business investment



that has proven to drive sales or increase business. Can you really provide this?

In these times of swift and sweeping changes across entire sporting lines, it's always a good idea to check with ISAF and US SAILING to better understand additional guidelines and restrictions regarding sponsorship and sailing.

Most importantly, plan ahead and organize your event so that everybody wins—both competitors and sponsors. That way everyone will want to come back next year.

Ron Rosenberg has won five world championships in five classes, and is the founder of The Big Picture Marketing Group, with clients including Ford Motor Company, Team McLube, and Yale Cordage.