

PROSPECTING

Finding New Sponsors: Going Where Others Fear To Tread Pays Off

Is it worth it to spend the time and effort researching, finding a point of entry and educating a company with no sponsorship personnel, budget or history? Agency Performance Sponsorship Group (*IEG SR*, July 22, 2002) says it absolutely is.

Case in point: PSG recently sold a \$250,000 sponsorship of El Cajon, Calif.'s East County Performing Arts Center to Windowmaster Products, Inc., a window and door manufacturer that had never sponsored. The agency also is negotiating title of the venue with another sponsorship newcomer, a deal it expects to close by the end of the year. Searching out "new blood" is PSG's primary prospecting method, not a last resort, according to senior partner Judy Haber. Non-sponsors typically are more receptive to sponsorship proposals because they are not inundated with pitches. PSG's perspective is that selling sponsorship is a numbers game: The more targeted prospects you pitch the better your chances of making a deal. While some would argue that non-sponsors are not targeted, Haber counters that just because a company, or a category, has not been active in the medium does not mean it will not have objectives that can be effectively met through sponsoring.

Selling The ECPAC

Cutbacks in state and local government funding led ECPAC to hire PSG to package and sell sponsorship. The 26-year-old, 1,100-seat venue, which is owned by the City of El Cajon, had

received contributions from corporate foundations and had offered limited benefits, but had never sold marketing-driven sponsorships. "It was time to take our sponsorship program to the next level," said Dick Zellner, CEO of the Arts Center Foundation, the nonprofit that manages ECPAC through a contract with the city.

Since the primary prospects for sponsoring a property such as ECPAC would be based or have offices locally, Haber's first step was to visit ECPAC's market area east of San Diego, spending time learning the business landscape and getting a feel for local issues and concerns that could be parlayed into the sponsorship sales effort.

An issue that quickly rose to the top: California's budget crisis and the subsequent cutback in funding for the arts and, in particular, arts education. Using that concern as a sales tool, Haber built an arts education overlay into ECPAC's packages. She then focused on companies with a large employee base in the area, which led her to Windowmaster, a window and door maker that has its headquarters and sole manufacturing facility in the city and is owned by its 300-plus employees.

Haber further researched the firm; including talking to ECPAC contacts in the local business community who were able to identify decision-makers at Windowmaster and confirm that the education component would be an attractive hook. **Cont'd...**

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Haber followed up with a phone call to the company, in which she had “about 15 seconds to state my case,” she said. “Windowmaster responded favorably because it wanted to invest in its employees, many of whom have children and are concerned about arts education,” Haber said. She negotiated a \$250,000 sponsorship: \$100,000 for title of a year-long concert series starting in September and the remainder to underwrite ECPAC’s education program, including its outreach efforts with local schools. The series title affords tickets for employees as well as proprietary classes for employees and their children. Ron Walker, Windowmaster CEO, signed off on the deal.

WHO East County Performing Arts Center

TAKEAWAY Targeting companies that have never sponsored yields positive results for property and its sales agency.

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