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Sponsorship: collaboration between marketing and development teams

Ask a handful of fairly senior corporate executives what their perceptions are of cultural, or arts, sponsorships and the chances are that some, if not all, will still talk about canapés and private views. This will seem old fashioned and out-dated, however, the reality is that a lack of cross-functional working and planning is enabling this perception to persist.

There are pockets of excellence, but in the main, there are still huge opportunities for increased collaboration between marketing and development, both within the arts industry and businesses, when it comes to delivering visionary, clever and results-driven sponsorships. Development teams thrive when aligning closely with marketing teams. After all, when a business invests in an arts organisation, it is fundamentally aligning with the vision and values of that organisation and buying in to the audience that supports that organisation. Marketing holds the data and evidence, which demonstrates the value and potential future value of that relationship to the sponsor. It's not just about presenting sponsors with numbers of attendees per production/show, and demographics. It's about detailed analysis of audience segments, real understanding of target groups and how by working together through a creative partnership, the power of the partnership can speak volumes about both organisations. The whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

Partnerships between business and the arts also offer potential for the arts to foster new audiences, by harnessing opportunities to reach out to the sponsor's internal and external stakeholders. Too often this is an add-on, once the core sponsorship activation programme has been set in stone. Marketing and development teams should sit down early on in the relationship with the sponsors marketing and sponsorship teams and discuss goals and aspirations. What are the businesses specific business objectives over the coming year/s? How can the arts organisation support these through their marketing campaigns? How can the sponsor support the arts marketing goals? By sharing core business objectives up front, there are usually surprising 'wins' which not only reap tangible benefits for both parties, but which also serve to weave the marketing campaigns of both organisations more closely together, and underpin the sponsorship with a robust platform of joint objectives and crucially, joint commitment.

Silos within organisations are counter-productive, and so too are they within sponsorship partnerships. Share specific marketing campaign objectives as well as longer-term business objectives with your sponsor. Their marketing people may be able to add value and advice as well as support you in your efforts and augment your campaign. Ask your sponsor what their specific marketing objectives are and discuss how you can support these and tailor the sponsorship activation plan accordingly.

As part of the getting to know each other phase get the senior marketing people on board – ask both the arts and business head of marketing to present to all the teams who will be working on the sponsorship (including production, curatorial, education and learning, commercial etc) what the vision and values are and about their brand. Then, ensure you include marketing in the regular team catch-ups with the sponsor – marketing and development should be working together on an on-going basis. By getting the marketing representatives from both organisations together on a regular basis, there will be more tactical wins.

Evaluation – if this happens at all, it's often brought up a long way down the line, once the objectives are set and the activation programme's created. Sponsors increasingly need to demonstrate value i.e. what is there to show for their investment? Why invest in arts sponsorship rather than say, direct marketing, advertising or indeed sports sponsorship? They need the arts marketing professionals to help them demonstrate this value. But not just by audience numbers and audience satisfaction measures. Those measures don't demonstrate to a busy CEO that his investment has benefitted his bottom line or depth of understanding of his brand. Sponsors should be encouraged and supported to undertake proper evaluation of the sponsorship. The evaluation should be discussed early on and should inform the development of the sponsorship objectives. This will ensure that the objectives are realistic and crucially, measurable. Depending upon the businesses specific motivation for the sponsorship, the evaluation may focus on brand awareness, depth of brand engagement, or be much more focused on specific business objectives. Whichever, by working on the objectives, and how to measure success, the marketing function will need to be involved up front and will have the opportunity to shape activity and contribute towards the overall sponsorship programme development.

So don't sit on the side-lines – get involved in your organisation's relationships with corporates. Be involved in proposals, pitches, presentations and programmes. Businesses may seem to speak in a different language and culturally they can feel very alien, but the language of marketing is universal and is a crucial shared foundation to successful sponsorships.

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