



*Making Music South East
Hot Topics #4:*

*Finding the right sponsor
for you*

When talking about sponsorship with members, I have sometimes heard people say 'businesses aren't interested in small arts organisations: what can we offer a business sponsor?' Whilst it may seem that only high-profile arts venues and festivals attract sponsorship, those are only the most visible examples of what is increasingly seen by businesses as a valuable marketing tool.

The key is to think about who you are and what you can offer, and then think from the perspective of a local business how that might be valuable to them.

A good 'fit'

What do you stand for as a group? Is your aim to bring elegant classical music to as many people as possible, or to entertain people with fun programmes and striking presentation? Are you involved with educational work or social inclusion projects? What do your publicity images say about you: are you refined, classic and have a long heritage in the local area? or are you a fun, funky new band looking to make an impact?

Now look around your local area: which businesses seem to embody the same values, self-image and appeal? What can you find out about them from their websites, literature or talking to staff? The businesses to approach are those with which you share common values and complimentary images.

Another area of common interest which you should think about is your target audience: who and how many people see your concerts and publicity in a year? Do you know what the demographic of your audience is? Are they mostly parents, professionals, retired, musicians? What age range are they? An audience survey can furnish you with this kind of information, and thus armed, you can start to approach businesses that are likely to be interested in promoting themselves to this section of the local population.

Think about what you could offer them in return for their generosity. Can you display their logo on your website, publicity materials and programmes? How many people could they reach through you in this way? You could offer them free tickets for staff to attend concerts, or to provide music for events like their Christmas party, a launch party or staff dinner. You could offer to sing or play Christmas carols in their premises for staff and customers, or a summer light music concert. Staff might be interested to come along to rehearsals or workshops and join in the fun.

Also think about what non-financial benefits you might ask for to develop the relationship between your group and their organisation: can they provide your committee with marketing, legal or financial advice, can they provide catering or printing for your concerts and events? In return, can you offer advice or training on performing and presentation skills? The closer a relationship you can develop with a business, the more long term that relationship is likely to be.

Ask around your group to find out which organisations your members work for. Having a personal connection is the best possible starting point, and they may know or be able to find out who in the organisation makes the marketing decisions and who might already have an interest in music or the arts more widely.

Case Study:

Why do some businesses sponsor the arts? What value do they see in it for themselves?

According to Henmans, an Oxford based law firm who sponsor the Ashmolean Museum, they dedicate nearly 1/5 of their overall marketing budget to sponsoring the arts. There are several reasons for them to do so: they want to invest in their local community and prove their commitment to the city where they operate; they like the 'feel good factor' of helping the arts, and the increased pride it creates in the firm; they feel that a thriving arts scene brings people to the city, and vibrant arts and business communities both help each other to thrive in turn; they see a strong arts sector as a signifier of a healthy local economy; they like to support staff leisure activities and social networks.

Once you have identified your target organisations, decided what you can offer them and what you would like from them, then make an approach. The personal touch will always be harder to refuse and ignore: call and arrange to visit them, an offer of coffee or a drink and a break from the office would probably be appreciated. Put together a package of information for them about who you are and what you do, what audience their sponsorship is likely to reach, what impact their support would make on your group. Give them an idea of what your plans are over the next few years and what benefits that will have to the community in which they work and their image within that community: emphasise some of the factors in the case study above. Use a business-like style in your approach to them – speak in a language they will understand!

Offer them options with different levels of benefits to them depending on how much money they would like to commit, or how many years they would like to sponsor you for. Be polite, friendly, professional, specific and persistent! Keep going until you speak to the person who can make a decision, and try asking them what they are looking for in a partner.

Remember that not all companies you speak to will be in a position to help, they all have their own budgets and financial timetables, so don't be disheartened by a few refusals. If they are not interested, ask them for feedback – why do they not want to get involved with your group? What might persuade them to do so? Use their feedback to refine your offering for the next organisation you target.

Many larger companies will have a community charitable budget which will provide donations of small amounts on a case-by-case basis. It is well worth looking into these, again look at which larger companies have a strong presence in your area and call them or look at their website.

Through our association with South East Arts and Business, if you find a sponsor who has never sponsored an arts organisation before, you can apply to A&B and they will match the funding which you have received, so it is well worth pursuing!

Good luck,

Joanna

With thanks to Arts & Business South East. For more information about Arts & Business and the sponsorship seminars they run, visit www.AandB.org.uk.

Making Music
The National Federation of Music Societies.
2-4 Great Eastern Street, London EC2A 3NW
Tel. 0870 903 3780

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