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SPONSORSHIP BEGINNERS CAN'T GET A BREAK (NOR SHOULD THEY)

I get emails all the time from people who read my blogs or watch my tutorials. Most have specific questions or just want to thank me for the information. But all too often, I get emails from someone who has read a couple of blogs – with all of the details and angles and advice – and their heads have exploded. They say, “I’m a beginner. Surely, I won’t be expected to do all of this?!” And I’m thinking, “All of this?? What you’re referring to is about 1% of what is expected of a sponsorship seeker!”

I get one-line emails saying, “How do I get sponsorship?”

I get dozens of emails a week asking me to review and provide input on their attached sponsorship request letters (for free). I respond saying that I’m happy to give them one huge piece of advice for free, and that is that a letter of request is not going to get them sponsorship. They need a proper proposal to be considered, and if they need a template, there’s a good one in *The Sponsorship Seeker’s Toolkit*.

Most people appreciate the blunt advice, as they’d rather know than fail. I have, however, copped an alarming number of whingy responses about how they don’t have time to learn all that stuff and do all that work, and their brother-in-law said they only need to do a letter, and besides, companies have huge profits and should be supporting them.

The implication in all of this is that there should be some other set of standards for beginners, because doing it properly is all too hard. Well, there isn’t some other set of standards. You don’t need “bullet points”

or “input on your sponsorship letter”; you need an intervention. So, welcome to your come-to-Jesus moment.

Seeking sponsorship is a profession, not a sideline

Thinking that the sole qualification required for seeking sponsorship is... well... needing money... is not only unrealistic, but is selling the huge number of highly skilled sponsorship professionals short. This is a sophisticated industry, which requires at least some expertise, tools, and dedication to be successful.

You don't want a lawyer representing you who got all they know about contract law from a few bullet points in an email. You don't want an unlicensed electrician rewiring your house. And you don't want someone writing you a prescription who is too busy or nonchalant to diagnose what's wrong.

Sponsorship is no different, except that the damage inflicted will be on your property, as you waste an enormous amount of time, fail to hit budgets, and burn your sponsor bridges for next time.

There is a ton of competition for the money

Companies don't care if you're a beginner. They really don't. They get dozens, hundreds, often thousands of unsolicited approaches every single month. Ask any sponsor, and they'll tell you that maybe – *maybe* – 1-2% of those are worth any consideration at all. And one thing that every one of that 1-2% have in common is that they're not

letters. They're proper, fully customised proposals that have been carefully crafted to provide maximum strategic benefit to the sponsors.

Your offer is competing against organisations with a proven track record of delivering amazing sponsorships for sponsors. You're competing against people who understand the objectives and challenges and angles of sponsors as well as the brand managers do. You're also competing for the same brand budgets with social media, advertising, promotions, and so much more, also professionally represented.

This doesn't mean that you or your proposal has to be perfect, but you do need to give it a red-hot go, and absolutely cannot phone it in.

If you can't make time to seek sponsorship properly, don't bother

Companies don't care if you're busy. So are they. And they know if you can't be arsed to make the time to do the research, understand their brand, and create a great offer for them, that speaks volumes about your professionalism and the kind of partner you would be.

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Sponsors don't owe you anything

First off, successful companies have huge profits because they (mostly) make strategic decisions. They're not going to make hard choices about consolidating divisions, extending or reducing product lines, rebranding, or whatever, and then turn around and say, "This guy seems nice. Very enthusiastic. And his grammar is excellent. Let's give him \$50K!"

That never happens. Never.

Second, companies don't *owe* sponsorship to you, your community, your sector (eg, the arts), or anyone else. I don't care how profitable they are. That doesn't mean sponsorship in the community or of the arts, or even of your property, might not be a good idea, but they are under absolutely no obligation to do it. The onus is on you, the property, to provide an offer that's good enough to consider.

The upshot

Seeking sponsorship may be only part of your job, but it requires knowledge and skill to be successful. There are no training wheels; either you ride or you fall.

The good news is that there are plenty of great resources available, and that getting the basic building blocks of modern sponsorship and learning to apply them isn't that difficult. Your starting place should be one or both of these:

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