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HOME

PARAMONOS CONSULTING SERVICES

TALENT

HOW TO START YOUR ATHLETE SPONSORSHIP JOURNEY

FOR ATHLETES OF ALL LEVELS AND IN ALL SPORTS

Introduction to Sponsorship

It's really important to understand what sponsorship is...and what it isn't! It isn't about getting something for free, that is called charity and while it may appeal on some levels you would be missing out on a host of benefits that sponsorship offers.

So, what is sponsorship?

It's a mutually beneficial relationship where a business provides product, service or finance in return for commercial benefits such as endorsement, promotion and media coverage for their brand.

Think of it as a relationship that exists to provide agreed benefits and, like any relationship, if it's nurtured it can develop into something very valuable and long lasting. Conversely, just like any relationship, if it's taken for granted and neglected, or there is dishonesty, then it is unlikely to grow and likely to end.

What sponsorship isn't

Sponsorship is not a donation. A donation is where the benefit goes one way, with a sponsorship you receive benefit in return for giving a comparative benefit back. The reality is that once you see the incredible range of benefits from being a sponsored athlete that go beyond purely financial gain, you will not want to take 'donations'. The opportunities and unexpected benefits of engaging in sponsorship relationships will far outweigh the short-term gain from receiving donations.

Sponsorship is not about getting something for *free*. Sponsorship relationships should be developed, negotiated, and strategic so that both parties receive maximum gain.

What may start off as a simple exchange, such as 5 pairs of running shoes a year in return for branding on your website or apparel, may in time develop to be a financial sponsorship worth thousands of dollars in return for you becoming a brand ambassador.

Expelling some MYTHS about Sponsorship

There are so many misconceptions around what sponsorship is, what it isn't, who can get it, who can't....and they really are just myths.

Expelling the Myths

MYTH #1 THERE'S NOT ENOUGH

The biggest myth is that there isn't much sponsorship around because of the 'current economic climate'. There is an ABUNDANCE of sponsorship available here , it's all about connecting with the right companies in the right way, and being able to offer valuable return on their investment. Sponsoring an athlete can be an effective marketing investment for all types (and sizes) of business's, and when done correctly can bring incredible return on investment for the business!

MYTH #2 I DESERVE IT.....I DON'T DESERVE IT

There are some athletes who believe that their athletic achievements automatically qualify them for being sponsored, they have a sense of entitlement and think that companies should be knocking down their door with offers, and that just being a good athlete is all they need to offer their sponsors.

The reality is, even David Beckham and Usain Bolt have to do more than play football or run 100 meters.... they attend media events, photo shoots, is involved in marketing campaigns....and many other activities that are what provide the true commercial value for their sponsors.

Then there are those athletes who don't think they're good enough to get sponsored.... that someone who is a better athlete deserves it more, or that they won't get a look in because they aren't ranked number one.

One of the biggest challenges athletes face is getting them to see their own worth and value to a sponsor, that they are a valuable investment! Humility is something that is ingrained in athletes, and while it's an

endearing quality, at some point it becomes detrimental and may in fact hold them back from engaging in the level of sponsorship they need and are worth!

So, we need to find a middle ground. We need to understand, that as athletes, no one is entitled but that everyone is capable and has value to offer!

Types of Sponsorship

There are many types of sponsorship and despite what you may hear people saying there is more than enough to go around. Businesses in Australia are starting to understand just how powerful sports sponsorship can be and the direct benefits they receive from these relationships.

Sponsorship is abundant, and it's available to athletes of all levels from elites to beginners as well as clubs, sporting organizations, businesses and individual professionals. Now more than ever before, sponsorship is about the benefits you can give to your sponsors off the sporting field. Media, social media, social networking and brand ambassador activities are what companies are looking for in return for financial, product and service sponsorship!

As a sponsored athlete, you could have one or more of the following arrangements with your sponsors (of course there are many other variations of the below, but this is just an overview):

- **Financial** – You receive payment for your engagement as a sponsored athlete, this may include product and service also!
- **Product** – Your sponsors provide you with the products that you use in your sport or your everyday life.
- **Service** – This can be anything from physio and massage, right through to accounting or graphic design!
- **Affiliate** – Based on your performance on or off the sporting field, your sponsor provides you with either payment or product/service when you achieve certain targets i.e. you have a code that you can share with all your followers to make purchases with your sponsor and you get a percentage of that.
- **Ambassador** – You are the representative for that company or organization (perhaps a charity) and while you may be paid, one of the greatest benefits will be a boost to your profile and network.

The Benefits of Being a Sponsored Athlete

(yes, this is in MUCH bigger text.....because it's just too exciting a topic to be in anything smaller!)

Athletes seek sponsorship for various reasons, with the main one being to reduce the financial strain of participating in their sporting activities.

The reduction of this financial strain can mean that the athlete may be able to work reduced hours, or not at all, to focus on their training and events, or it may mean that though they continue employment, they can now set their sights on even bigger or more frequent event participation.

Athletes are capable of and actually benefit greatly from engaging and managing their own sponsorship.

Athletes can learn the skills they need to identify their sponsorship needs, identify potential sponsors, create engagement strategies and powerful sponsorship proposals, and how to manage and retain the sponsorship once they've got it!

At some stage in their sporting life many athletes find themselves in a catch 22 situation where they are getting more and more active in their sporting activities, but to financially support this they need to work.

The time and financial constraints can seriously impinge upon the development of athletes as they have to give up some of the time needed to train, travel, compete etc. or they put financial strain on their family who financially support them during this time.

The really great thing about being a sponsored athlete is that it's about so much more than simply getting your costs of being an athlete covered.

The benefits spill out into all areas of your life, and it can be a truly uplifting and even life-changing experience.

The relationships you create, the opportunities that arise, the experiences you have as well the great skills you will develop are just some of the great rewards on offer.

The benefits of sponsorship include:

- Reducing the costs of your sport.... taking financial pressure off you (and your family!)
- Being able to use the products and services you want i.e. the very best equipment that's just right for you, or getting a great coach or regular massage and physio
- Option to reduce your work hours – and train (and recover!) more
- Financial freedom
- Ability to participate in all the events you want to not having to choose because you can't afford to attend them all

Create strong networks and opportunities!

The Unexpected Benefits of Being Sponsored

There are so many tangible benefits, but there are also some that are not so obvious but equally if not MORE valuable such as:

- You open doors to new opportunities and networks
- Your professional and personal skills will be developed

- All of the things that you offer sponsors as benefits to them actually benefit you (increased media and social media activity and increased audience)
- You will increase your own network (fans and followers) and grow your profile as an athlete
- You will find it easier to get more sponsors, as you have experience and proof that you are a great investment!

There may be career opportunities that arise during or after your sporting ‘career’

On a personal level it’s incredibly exciting, confidence boosting and ironically quite humbling to be sponsored by a company who can see the true value that you offer them through your sporting and non-sporting activities.

- The stress that is alleviated for those athletes seeking substantial sponsorship (which may then mean they only need to work part time or not at all) can have an incredible effect on their performance and may be the difference between competing in their sport at the highest level.

Why Companies Sponsor Athletes

- All companies have money to spend on sponsorship (they may currently spend it on advertising and marketing), particularly those companies who have recognized that it can be a powerful marketing

and advertising medium. As such, these companies have budgets allocated for sponsorship.

- Unfortunately, some companies still think sponsorship and charitable donations are one and the same, but the culture is changing thankfully, so these companies are a minority.
- Athletes generally have some pretty outstanding abilities! In the business world, the very skills that you use in your sport, breaking through pain barriers or even just getting out of bed for a 6am training session, are the kind of skills they want to impart on their staff; commitment, focus, drive, determination, persistence and an ability to work towards goals big and small.
- Sponsoring an athlete allows a brand to communicate with their target market in a way that is engaging, efficient, entertaining and educational. It allows companies to deliver a huge amount of information in a very short space of time, and in a way, that is willingly received by their audience. This information is presented in fun and engaging ways, either in face to face (at events, races, expo's etc.) or through social media, advertising or traditional media.

There are many reasons for companies to engage in sponsorship of athletes, which typically fall into the categories of marketing and advertising.

Here are some of the main motivators for sponsors:

- Increased Brand Awareness and Customer Loyalty

- Increased Sales and Traffic
 - Community and Public Relations
 - Improve their image (brand perception) and engage with them customers
 - Increase awareness and knowledge of specific products or service
- There's a rapidly increasing trend of people seeking out information and recommendations from other people, on which they base their purchasing decisions. By providing a relatable and inspirational personification of their brand, they are able to influence their audience in ways that they are receptive to. There are so many ways you can give value back to your sponsors, and it really comes down to what other skills and activities you can offer beyond just your athletic achievements, and tailoring what you offer to suit each sponsor. The key with this is to ASK what they are looking for, not just assume, and really get creative with your offering to them. You will find that once you know what your value is to them, that the concept of 'asking' for sponsorship becomes a lot less scary, because you are actually offering something up front! It always feels better to give than to ask

A QUESTION FOR YOU

So far, does this make sense? Do you feel like sponsorship is potentially something you would like to explore? What are the next steps for you?

(There's some more reading to do.... but why don't you take a moment for yourself now and think about the question above.....maybe you'd like to write down some of your thoughts and ideas!).

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The Sponsorship Process

Knowing where to start is the stumbling block of so many athletes who are interested in engaging sponsorship. It can feel quite daunting, and for some it never gets past this point.

When we think about sponsorship as a relationship, then we can start to see that like all relationships, it has a lifecycle. It has a start, a middle, and in some cases an end.... but those relationships that are right for us, and are maintained well, can last and continue to grow over time.

The 3 Phases of Athlete Sponsorship - Overview

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Phase 1 OBTAIN

The initial phase is where all the groundwork is laid, and requires the most effort.

It is during this phase that requirements are identified, potential sponsors are identified and researched, and sponsorship proposals are created. Once sponsorship has been engaged, we move into Phase 2.

This phase is revisited when contracts end, or additional sponsors are sought.

Phase 2 MAINTAIN

Using the information generated in Phase 1, athletes will activate their relationships with their sponsors, and this will typically coincide with their competition season....so being organized and having a plan to work off is crucial!

It can be incredibly simple and not too time consuming (a single social media post for example can tick the box for several sponsors at once!).

Phase 3 RETAIN

Typically, at the end of the contract term, this phase is a time to reflect, review and hopefully if all has gone well, renew the arrangement for another year.

If additional sponsors are required, then we begin the process at Phase 1 again, but continue Phase 2 Maintain with the sponsors we retain.

An Overview of the Process – example Diagram

The 3 Phases of Athlete Sponsorship - Detailed

Let's look at each phase in more detail:

Phase 1 - Obtain

You can really make a great impact on your sponsorship seeking efforts in this initial phase.

This is the phase where you work out exactly what you are looking for out of sponsorship, identify potential sponsors, develop an engagement strategy, prepare sponsorship proposal documents and pitch your sponsorship requests to sponsors.

The main focus of this phase is doing research and planning.

Too many people create a sponsorship proposal that is basically a lengthy athlete profile, and then think about who they might send it to. It's really important to know about your sponsors before you even think about creating a proposal, so resist the temptation to start

creating that document.....do your homework, and when it comes time to sending your proposals you'll be confident that you're sending the right content, to the right companies in the right way.

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Identifying your needs

THIS IS AN ACTION YOU CAN TAKE RIGHT NOW.....IT'S THE FIRST STEP IN YOUR ATHLETE SPONSORSHIP JOURNEY!

Paper. Pen. Daydream. Yep, it's as simple as that to get started!

Write down ALL the things you could possibly get sponsored for (think beyond sport!) by simply identifying what it is you already spend money on.... or wish you could spend money on i.e. weekly massages, a strength coach, a spare biked.....don't hold back!

I always encourage athletes to think big. It's not about making do with the bare minimum that you need, it's about painting the picture for what it would look like if money were no object and you could fully immerse yourself in your sport to the level that you want to!

During this process, you'll be looking at what you really want out of sponsorship, beyond products, services and finance. Are you looking to increase your profile as an athlete in the media?

Are you looking for partnerships with companies who share your vision about something? Perhaps you're thinking ahead and wanting to develop your professional skills and networks for a career during and after competitive sport.

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I'm a massive believer in visualization....and then taking action! Many athletes use this technique in their sport. Kerry Pottharst visualized winning the gold medal at the 2000 Olympics, and she and Natalie Cook went on to win despite Brazil being the favorites.

So, use this as a chance to imagine your life as a sponsored athlete and just how great that would be, and the doors it can open up for you.

Take a moment.....and visualize it. Close your eyes if it helps, and just imagine yourself as a fully sponsored athlete.....what would your life look like?

OK, let's keep going.....go to the next page for one of the most important pieces of information (it's the answer to the most common question I ever get asked!)

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Identifying potential sponsors

You will be amazed at how many companies you have some kind of connection with, and chances are your potential sponsors will be ones you are already connected with.

Use the following categories to create your initial list:

- Brands and services, you currently (or would like to!) use
 - Companies that your friends and family are connected with
 - Local business's in your community
 - Business's that you are already a customer to....and may not have anything to do with sport i.e. beauty products, groceries, transport etc.
 - Businesses who sponsor your sport, your events, or other athletes in your sport
- Your list of potential sponsors may be 2 pages long, so while it's important for you to identify every single potential sponsor, you then need to go through the list and refine it, think about who you'd actually like to work with, which products, services and brands you truly believe in and would feel proud to represent. Then look at who you already have some kind of connection with, be it through a personal or business relationship or simply the fact that this is the product you have always used and wouldn't use anything else! Some people don't feel comfortable asking for sponsorship from existing contacts because they think they are asking for a favor! When it comes time to sending a sponsorship proposal you will be offering great benefits in return for your sponsorship request, so there are no favors

or donations, this is a business proposal and will be a valuable investment for your sponsors!

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Research

Find out as much as you can about the companies you've identified as a good match, and get an understanding of what they're about; what does their marketing activity look like, do they sponsor other athletes, do they participate in any corporate sporting events or do they have any employee health programmed?

Find out as much as you can via the internet and your existing contacts, and then get in contact with the marketing or sponsorship manager to get any other key information to ensure your proposal really hits the mark!

Creating a list of benefits

It's my belief and experience that your results on the sporting field have little to do with getting sponsored, and that it's OTHER factors that make sponsorship a valuable investment for companies.

It's social media, brand promotion, media coverage, verbal endorsement at events, having a brand ambassador and a heap of other benefits that you can offer sponsors.

Perhaps you're good at public speaking and can offer a few hours of your time during the year, or you could offer to run a team building

session for your sponsors staff (or to their clients!).

Social media is brilliant when done right, so look at how you can offer an increased platform for your sponsors through your existing or soon to be increased networks!

Get creative, step outside your comfort zone, and look for unique and valuable ways to give back to your sponsors!

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Through your research you should have a fairly clear idea of what the company may be looking for, so your benefits should align with this and of course should be commensurate with what you're asking for from the company in terms of value!

Creating sponsorship proposals

Make sure the focus is always on the company, not on you.

Be clear and concise, let them know why you are contacting them specifically and how it will benefit them to sponsor you. Outline your achievements and future plans, and paint the picture of just how awesome it will be to work together! Use great photos and make the document look fantastic, and really represent you and your style! No more than 6 pages, ideally 2-4...and always tailor each document to each sponsor.... generic proposals are just lazy!

Be clear on what you're asking for and what you're offering. Make sure that you make it as concise as possible because the aim is to get them to read all of the document.

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If you're not good at design or writing or you don't have any killer photos of you in action, get help! Ask around, you've probably got people in your existing network who ARE good at this stuff and will be happy to help you!

Sending proposals

Make sure you have already spoken to your potential sponsors.... face to face is optimal, over the phone is good, email is a very last resort.

Make sure they are expecting your proposal, and once you've sent it (usually via email) follow up with a phone call to confirm they've received it and to find out when they'd like to discuss it with you.

Following up proposals

Successful – We now move into Phase 2 of Sponsorship, the Maintain phase where contracts get negotiated and signed, and we start putting into action all of the benefits we have offered our sponsors. It's a busy phase and typically coincides with your competition season, so the key is getting organized and creating a plan to ensure you can fulfil ALL of your obligations and not get stressed out in the process!

Not successful – go back to your list of potential sponsors and see who else you can approach (and go through the same steps to get to the point of sending a proposal!).

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5 Dos'

1. Give yourself plenty of time to engage sponsors, at least 3 months!
2. Treat sponsorship as a business relationship
3. Spend time figuring out exactly what you need sponsorship for
4. Research potential sponsors and only align with brands that are a good fit with you based on your needs, ambitions and values...and what you can give back to the company!
5. Find out what your sponsors want by asking them

5 DONT'S

1. Don't send a proposal without making contact with the company first (face to face is gold, over the phone is good, email or other social media is ok but really a last resort if phone or face to face aren't possible).
2. Make your proposals too long....or too much about you – the focus should be on the sponsors and how this will benefit them
3. Rush into sponsorships with company's you know nothing about or are not aligned with your values

4. Worry if some of them say no. Be thankful that they have given you a straight answer and that you are moving closer to getting a YES from another company...the RIGHT company!

5. Just send your proposal documents and wait for a reply...be proactive (but not a total stalker!) and follow up a few days after sending.

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Phase 2 - Maintain

The Maintain phase is the busiest as the actual activities that you have sought sponsorship for will be happening. It may be that you are sponsored for a one-off event or ongoing activities so there is no real-time limit on this phase.

During this phase, you will begin to action all your plans such as social media (i.e. Facebook posts, Blogs, YouTube videos etc.) and create newsletters. You will be trying to obtain media coverage, so will potentially engage in interviews either over the phone or face to face.

It's important to stick to your plans, just as you stick to your sport training regime and by doing this you will reduce stress and be able to stay focused.

Communication during this phase is the key.

You don't need to be on the phone to your sponsors every week, but by agreeing at the outside what the preferred communication method is

and the frequency, you will be able to schedule in your contact and take away the guess work!

Even when you're not involved in any events or competitions (perhaps you are injured, or it's the off season), it's important to stay in contact with your sponsors through newsletters and the odd phone call.

You should also invite your sponsors to speak honestly and openly with you about any concerns they may have so that you can make any necessary adjustments to how you are working with them.

This feedback process also opens up conversation about where the sponsorship relationship may be heading and what increased benefits and offerings can be introduced from both you and the sponsor.

Now is also the time for gratitude. Be thankful to your sponsors, they are an important part of your journey, and although you are giving great value in return for their investment in you, saying thank you is good for you and for them. We live in a country with a strong economy and sponsorship is not so readily available for athletes in less affluent societies, so gratitude is a reminder of how lucky you are.

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