Sport Sponsorship Prospecting

Prospecting for Potential Sponsorships

Over the years, the sales process has been defined in many different ways. It has been, and still is, an essential part for every individual person in a sales position within the sport organization. It is especially important for the sport executive responsible for sponsorships, and those that report to that specific sport executive. As we will discuss in this course, the first step in the traditional sales process begins with prospecting and identifying partners to align within your organization for sponsorship. As previously discussed in the first module, the brand of your organization is of the highest importance as it truly defines how you will be seen in the eyes of the consumer. In order to brand your organization in the right way, you will need to be able to execute branding to go along with sponsorship sales. The sponsor acquisition must happen with precision and excellence along every step of the process. Just as there is a plan to create the marketing mission and marketing mix, there is a process when developing your qualified prospects and leads for each individual sponsorship you are trying to sell. In this module, we will discuss:

- Different phases of the sales process.
- Reasons why prospecting is essential.
- Prospecting methods.
- Applying the prospecting plan.
- Qualifying prospects.

At the end of this module, you will be able to prospect with an advanced level of precision. With this advanced level of knowledge, you will be able to improve your personal brand as a sport executive. You will also be able to train and manage others through the prospecting process to achieve successful results because of the high level of expertise achieved through knowledge and practice.

2.1 Different Phases within the Sales Process

Although it has a strong base and foundation in established methods, the sport executive sales process can vary as it comes to the individual client. This variation can depend on a number of differentiating variable factors, and it will be determined by the speed and agility of the sport executive. The speed of the sale, as well as the ability to adapt to each individual client, will determine the length of the sales process. These previous spoken of factors of speed and adaptability will also allow for the sport executive to execute the stewardship and implementation of the client once the sale is executed. The following phases are stages of the

sales process which should be looked at as a general cycle for the sport executive, and not one that directly relates to each client as they often have different characteristics. When we cover the closing of the sales process of each client in the next module, it will be more focused on the individual case. For the sport executive, we will look at the sales process in seven different phases:

1) Discovering prospects and identifying leads.
2) Qualifying prospects.
3) Preparing for the sale.
4) Presenting the proposal.
5) Overcoming objections and negotiations.
6) Closing the sale.
7) Maximizing and growing the relationship.

As with the different steps in creating the marketing plan for your organization, every step in this process is essential and cannot be overlooked as being less important than the others. With that being said, if you build a strong foundation at the beginning of your sales process by prospecting and engaging the client, you will have a much higher success rate when closing the sale. It is similar to the foundation of a house. Without the foundation of the house, it does not matter about the number of extravagant accessories, because eventually they will crumble if the foundation is not secure. In this module, we will start building our foundation by focusing on the first two steps of this process.

Why Prospecting is Essential

Prospecting and identifying clients for sponsorship is important for many reasons. The truth of the matter is that without good prospecting practices, an organization will never realize its full potential in its growth process. Prospecting should be done in every level of an organization's growth, and it is something that is a constant process.

The first reason of why prospecting is essential is that when the variables around your client and/or your organization change, the clients you are looking for often change as well. Part of these changes can be when a client's needs change, or the market you or your client are currently in. The need for constant and diligent prospecting practices is ever-changing as well because so many of the variables within the sport business are evolving at such a fast rate. These changing variables, both internal and external, can cause some clients to be temporary as the needs of their businesses change. In this ever-changing business cycle, organizations are agents of change with their ability to restructure and adapt, which in turn can positively or negatively impact their resources as well. For example, you may have a current client that has the need and the ability to be a partner for your organization, but going forward the growth and opportunity that your organization may experience can push out a long-time partner who does not have the resources necessary to adjust to the current price of partnership for what your new market desires. This is a time when you as the sport executive will have to rely on your process of constant prospecting, as you now will have to adapt and proceed to go after

organizations that are now within your new scope. It is imperative and essential that you have ready-to-go leads to build your new book of business, so you may realize maximum profit from the value of the sellable assets you now possess. The last part of the client that may change is the actual client itself. This happens when a client is taken over by another entity that is not currently within the industry and/or when an established relationship leaves for another competitor within the industry.

The second reason why there is a need for constant prospecting is that some partners might be a one-time partner to fulfill a short-term need. This need and/or desire for it to be a one-time exchange of partnership can arise out of the need of the partner or your sport organization itself. As discussed in the first module, this is not ideal, especially when it comes to building your brand, but it is sometimes necessary. If you are a sport organization, some revenue streams cannot be denied if they are still in line with the organization's marketing mission. These revenue streams must be considered even if they are on a short-term basis. An example of this would be if a sport organization was in the beginning stage of growth and needed an influx of cash to boost other areas of the business. Although the organization wanted to promote a certain brand image, they also need to be able to survive financially. In order to survive financially, this organization decides to take a sponsorship deal that would benefit them in the short term, but they know it would not be a long-term partnership for them as the years go on. As long as neither brand of the entities will be affected negatively, the carpe diem mindset should take place and a deal is able to be done. This can also apply to individuals who are their own sport organizations, and who have achieved a level far exceeding their previous expectations. By constantly prospecting for their agency, they might be able to land temporary deals that can benefit them greatly. Below is example of how a sponsor came in to capture exposure and benefit the entity (the horse and its owners) at the last minute.

Wheels Up Deal Is Easily Justified If Justify Wins The Belmont Stakes And The Triple Crown

2018 Kentucky Derby and Preakness Stakes winner Justify will be riding into the Belmont Stakes with an exclusive sponsor on board. The horse whose breeding rights have already allegedly been sold for $60 million has been sponsored by private aviation company Wheels Up. The sponsorship deal also includes an association with Justify's jockey Mike Smith, who will have Wheels Up marks on his pant legs, boots and turtleneck as Justify aims to score the coveted Triple Crown.

The one-race deal between Wheels Up and Justify is believed to be worth seven-figures in compensation, per a source with knowledge of the situation. It is understood to constitute the most expensive single race sponsorship in the history of horse racing.

> Wheels Up has had success in sponsoring horses and their jockeys in the past, including its sponsorship of American Pharoah as the horse won the Triple Crown in 2015. Leverage Agency, which brokered the deal between Wheels Up and American Pharoah, is also the agency of record for Justify. Additionally, Wheels Up previously sponsored California Chrome, another horse represented by Leverage Agency, when Chrome won the Dubai World Cup in 2016.
>
> Part of the justification for sponsoring Justify is based on a research study conducted by Joyce Julius & Associates, Inc., that focused on the exposure that Monster Energy received from its sponsorship of American Pharoah in 2015. It was found that the exposure value between event television, Internet news and social media was roughly $6.7 million for the brand… (Heitner, 2018, https://bit.ly/2YyiDxS).

As evidenced by the example above, constant prospecting is important to not only the sport organization, but also the business within other industries. This is shown by the need to take full advantage of any growth opportunity, even if it is only for a one-time need.

The last reason for constant prospecting we will focus on is an unfortunate, but yet inevitable, event that happens in every aspect of business, not just the business of sport. That reason is that you need to be constantly prospecting because sometimes your relationships with partners who are sponsors sour for one reason or another. This is an evitable event that will not happen often, especially if the stewardship and cultivation of the relationship of the sponsor is maintained properly, but it still can happen to even the best sport executive. There are two things that a sport executive has to remember during this process. First, to act professional until the end, even though a relationship may sour to the point where the sponsorship ends. The second thing to remember during this unfortunate time is that the truth always seems to come to light eventually. It is not looked upon as being positive to your brand or the sponsor's brand when a relationship goes sour in the public eye. This is why it is especially imperative in this process that your prospecting for others continues to be focused on building positive relationships with others sponsors, even when current ones are going awry. Also, it is important to point out that other sponsors will take notice as to how you are treating your current clients, especially after you have already obtained their business, because they want to preview how they will be treated in the future. This also fits in to the category of stewarding relationships, but it begins in the prospecting phase of the sales process. Now that we have covered the *why* there is a need for constant prospecting, lets dive into the *how* by looking at different prospecting methods.

2.2 Prospecting Methods

When starting the prospecting phase of the sales process, the sport executive should utilize two different methods of prospecting to obtain new clients. Utilizing these two

prospecting methods involves different tactics within each method, and can be executed simultaneously with great effort and precision. In order to maximize the prospect pool, and to deliver the best results when it comes to growing the organization, the sport executive must maintain discipline within these methods with themselves and anyone in which they manage. The two prospecting methods that we will focus on have different strategies and tactics within them, but ultimately, they will both deliver results when done effectively. These methods are random prospecting and focused prospecting.

Random Prospecting

Random prospecting is often thought of as the hardest of the two prospecting methods, as well as being the most uncomfortable. The reason for this general feeling is because random prospecting involves the sport executives putting themselves at risk for the greatest amount of rejection, and sometimes it does not lead to instant results. With that being said, the sport executive and the sport organization itself, must remember that growth may come from many different avenues. Sometimes, the best source of growth is outside of the familiar territory of the organization. A few examples of random prospecting are:

- Cold calls.
- Email blitz.
- Direct mail blitz.
- Traditional advertising.
- Social media advertising

We will take a brief look at each one of these and define some strengths and opportunities in each tactic.

Cold calls are done by many individuals within the sales business, and they often are referred to as something the “newbies” of the organization will do. This is because the experienced or senior-level executive may have their book of business already established with their own client list. The truth of the matter is that cold calls can, and should, be made by any sport executive on some level because they may provide opportunity for growth. The logic behind that line of thinking is that if you could choose someone who will best represent your organization to a potential client, would you rather have someone who is very familiar with your brand and have years of experience in the industry, or would you rather have someone who is brand new to your organization and is not as familiar with the end game of the business and marketing mission? The understanding that cold calls can be seen as a waste of the senior-level executive’s time and it can be spent better on stewarding and cultivating new clients does have some merit to it, but the process of cold calling, and the training that goes into it, is something that every sport executive should have experience at.

Doing an email blitz from an organization is something that can be done through any sort of mass emailing system. This kind of random prospecting can be done without spending the quantity of time that you would spend making calls or having meetings. It is important to realize that during this form of random prospecting, you will have the greatest impact by

having your brand exposed to many of those within the business community. Email blitzes can be especially effective if they are interactive in a way that can be followed up on depending on the analytics tracked by most mass email programs. Utilizing this random prospecting method will be extremely valuable when you have a multi-centered marketing mission approach that can appeal to many demographics and market segments across all industries.

Along with the email blitz, a direct mail blitz can be effective, especially if they are done in conjunction. By doing both of these blitzes at the same time, your organization will have a greater rate of double exposure to the potential prospect and will provide a greater impact. This double blitz method will also appeal to different demographics of clients, because some clients are more apt to be respondent to different lines of communications. This makes your organization able to reach clients by operating in many different channels.

Traditional advertising can be done, but the factor that has to be considered in this process is the cost associated with this method. It should be noted that a key indicator of return on investment (ROI) should be attached to every form of prospecting, but especially this one. Traditional media can include putting ads in local print media, national print media, traditional television (TV) advertisements, as well as radio advertisements. Having partners and clients within this arena is also helpful, because that can facilitate the possibility of being able to use "trade" or discounts to be able to maximize your exposure for less that you would if you were not partnered up. Although bringing in a sponsor from traditional media alone is not very probable, it is something that definitely puts you in the eye of the sport consumer, whom the sponsor would be going after. It is all part of building the bigger brand as mentioned in the previous module, but traditional media is definitely an effective way when it comes to random prospecting.

The last tactic of random prospecting that we will cover is the tactic of social media advertising. With the explosion of social media on the global industry in general and sport industry specifically, social media advertising has been more prevalent when it comes to prospecting. Think of yourself as a prospective client and business partner with an organization. Now think of how much time you dedicate to each of the previous random prospecting tactics mentioned. Now think of the time that you utilize your social media accounts, however many they may be, and how much impact they have on your mindset of who you would want to partner with. Organizations are always after the next great progressive idea, and they are always looking to be on the train first before someone else is. This is often the case with new companies who make a splash on social media. The social media explosion also can be attributed to some of the growth and rise in popularity among sport and its consumers. By having this powerful channel and seeing a sport organization that has such a powerful presence on social media, you are immediately making an impact on your next potential sponsor. It is because of this reason that the implementing and tracking of your own sport organization's social media platforms can lead to you utilizing social media advertising as a great tool for random prospecting.

Focused Prospecting

Focused prospecting can be defined as prospecting with an idea of segmenting leads into groups and having a plan of how to utilize tactics to achieve contact. Although you will have different focuses for different levels of sponsorship and clientele, the process of focused prospecting is fundamentally similar in nature. The goal of focused prospecting is to make available the resources you have on hand in order to gain easier access to those clients and organizations you want to partner with. This can be done by prospecting in your already established sphere of influence or by creating a new sphere of influence to prospect from. During this process, the sport executive will have to be creative and tactical in their approach to their sphere of influence. The reason for this is that focused prospecting does require the ability to maintain a current professional dealing with organizations, all the while feeling them out to see if there are prospecting aspects to each individual's sphere. The sport executive and sport organization will use a combination of direct spheres as well as indirect spheres from which to accumulate prospects from.

The organization's sphere can include some of the following entities within the market segments list below:

- Current and former clients.
- Industry partner information databases.
- Networking organizations.
- Government organizations.
- Organizational surveys and feedback channels.
- Associates and executives within the organization.
- Professional services agencies and organizations

Any of these spheres are great segments to gain access to organizations you want to partner with.

One thing that sport executives must realize is that they might be prospecting an organization while being prospected at the same time. For example, a sport executive may join a local government-run business or government-run association in order to gain access to some of the top business leaders within that community. At the next networking event that the association is holding, the sport executive plans to gather prospect information and data to determine who might have a sponsorship affinity toward his/her organization. At the event, an industry leader approaches the sport executive about forming a partnership with their organization because they have like-minded interest in reaching the same consumer. The sport executive at this point thinks they now have a prospect because of the relationship that is formed. Although this might be true, an alternative to that idea is that the industry leader that approached the sport executive is thinking along the same lines, and the executive is now a prospect in their sphere. This is a delicate balance the sport executive must pay attention to. Sometimes this relationship does not become a mutually beneficial deal in which an exchange of goods happens. The reason for that is because it does not bring in any net positive revenue,

because the money coming in from this partner organization is not equal in value to what is going out from the sport executive's organization.

We will get into sponsorship management later as we progress, but it is important to be cognizant of the fact that you would need to be aware of your sphere and what their intentions are when dealing with focused prospecting process. The advantage of building a great sphere is that everyone will be able to help you get one step closer to your next sponsorship, if you are doing it correctly.

The other aspect of focused prospecting is to have segmented methods in which you are able to contact individuals who are not currently within your sphere. This can be done in two separate methods. The two methods imply doing some quality research and having personalized correspondence sent out from your organization with the goal of contacting a very specific person for sponsorship purposes. This is similar to the random method, as discussed before, with utilizing the different channels, but it has a much more focused approach which will be done with specific qualified segmenting analytics behind it. For example, a corporation can apply the same defining characteristics it would in a marketing segmentation for consumers, but to organizations. The factors that would be looked at would be the demographics and characteristics of each organization, as well as their current behaviors within the industry. In order to do this type of prospecting effectively, the sport executive must have an internal team doing the research for them or rely on a quality third-party company in which they can trust. Having accurate and quality data is key in many aspects of an organization, but it is especially important when trying to prospect efficiently in a focused manner.

2.3 Prospecting through CRM and its Benefits

When sport executives are out prospecting for themselves, or when they have a team out prospecting for them, one of the most important factors is to have accurate data. Having this accurate data and a quality Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system is the way your sport organization can go from being an average sales organization to an efficient sponsorship selling machine. The CRM system that your organization can have will likely depend on the size of your organization as well as on the budget for your organization. Just like the brand and marketing mission, it is important to have a solid foundation of data and a CRM when starting your organization. This is so that when it grows, your organization will be able to sustain and maximize profit during that time of growth. The four main benefits of your CRM when it comes to sport sponsorship prospecting and sales are:

- Efficiency.
- Data accuracy.
- Teamwork.
- Accountability

Efficiency – When prospecting for sponsors and partners for your sport organization, you have the world at the tip of your fingers, and you can go after anyone. Unless you have the budget to hire, train, and develop a staff of thousands of salespeople, you will need to be efficient while prospecting. Efficiency from the proper CRM can come from the utilization of its tools to segment sponsors due to geolocation, specific demographics, previous relationships, and societal trends, just to name a few. An example of this is when the sport executive is looking for a corporate partner for the naming rights to a suite and hospitality area in their stadium that caters to its high-end consumers. By using the focused prospecting method, the sport executive could then research the Internet to find hundreds, if not thousands, of companies that are gearing themselves towards high-end consumers that are willing to pay a premium for quality goods and services. Once these potential sponsors are found, they can be filtered into the CRM to find which sponsors have previous relationships within your organization and/or other organizations within your immediate industry. You can also look into the CRM and find sponsors that maybe did not have a relationship of some sort with your organization or your competitors, but that are within a 1000-mile radius and would have an impact in the local community. This is a key factor when you remember what sellable asset you are trying to have them sponsor. A corporation would be more likely to sponsor something like a suite area if they were local, or if they were looking to penetrate the local market. The thought behind this is due to the fact that they would be assuming that the majority of the patrons in that area are local or have business associates with local ties that they would be trying to derive business from. This is just one of many examples in which the efficiency of a CRM can save you from having to do more legwork than necessary when finding and qualifying prospecting for sponsorships. In order to have this efficiency with the CRM, the CRM system must have accurate data.

Data accuracy – When prospecting, as when in creating an organizational marketing mission, the sport organization must have accurate data information. The collection and validation of this information is going to be key when selecting sponsors, and also when running your organization as a whole. The application of data and analytics has been gaining momentum as a tool for the sport executive to use when projecting players' performance for the last 15 to 20 years, but it is now being increasingly applied to the prospecting and sales side of organizations. This is not only evident by the crossover of data mining agencies and marketing research firms being hired by sport organizations, but also by the hiring of data analytics within the front office of organizations. When applying these new data and analytics aspects to prospecting, the organization must realize that selling and acquiring prospects is a little bit of art as well as a little bit of science. It is not, as once thought, the *art of a sale* that is always the most effective; it is with strong data and prospecting that an efficient transaction is born. Having the proper CRM is essential for this efficient transaction to take place. To go along with this accurate and proper data collection system, the sport organization must also utilize proper teamwork.

Teamwork – Teamwork is an essential part and a very familiar term for most sport organizations. Teamwork is often the motto that every team must operate under as one cohesive unit in order to succeed. This is especially true when prospecting for sponsors for

your sport organization. To refer back to the concept of focused prospecting, the sales executive must rely on his/her data and analytics team to provide him/her with accurate reports on who to go after. In return, the sport executive must give accurate feedback and information back to the data and analytics team for them to correctly input into the CRM. By having this two-way street of communication and data flowing, the CRM can operate like a well-oiled machine. Not only is teamwork essential in the initial prospecting process, but it is also very important into the sales process when you are writing the proposal. In the world of sport, you always want your brand and organization to look first class, especially in the eye of the consumer. If there is one sport executive proposing a small sponsorship for a local radio rights deal with a company, while a senior sport executive is proposing a larger national TV rights deal to the same organization, your organization now looks like it is a second-class operation. This is especially important in larger organizations where there are multiple executives with individual goals when it comes to sponsorship sales. By having one central CRM system, and having everyone with the ability to access it, it will provide the ability to see what others are doing in the organization. This is done to avoid the mistake of cross prospecting and selling by two executives to the same organization. With this ability to see what everyone is doing when it comes to sport sponsorship sales, the senior-level sport executive can use the CRM system for accountability.

Accountability – By having different sellable assets within an organization, the sport executive will usually have multiple people working on different projects. Keeping in mind this large workload, the senior-level executive does not have the time to be micromanaging all of them. In fact, the true prospecting and selling professionals should be out of the office more than they are in, so the actual reporting and accountability factor for sales executive will be heavily managed through the prospecting CRM system. With each sale, you will be able to see the individual metric set by each executive and what they are accomplishing on a daily, weekly, monthly, and even yearly basis. This will give the senior-level sport executive a way to track not only the prospects for sponsorship that the organization is working on, but also the individual sales actions on those prospects. If there were actions being made on a certain prospect without any results, the executive can take the appropriate actions and/or steps to assume the responsibility of the deal themselves. One of the main keys for a sport executive to have successful prospecting tools is to be out in the field gaining interest and assessing capacity of prospects. By being able to track this process, the organization will save money on time, travel, and the HR (human resources) costs of turning over employees who do not produce. With these four important factors of prospecting being led by the CRM system, the sport organization is now ready to enact the prospecting plan with its sport executives that will provide the maximize revenue for sponsorships.

2.4 Establishing and Applying the Prospecting Plan

Establishing a prospecting plan for a sport executive is similar to establishing a marketing plan for a sport organization. Within this prospecting plan there will be steps that have to be followed. This prospecting plan will be repeated many times over by the sport executive when looking for potential sponsors to match to the organization's sellable assets. Having a

structured prospecting plan and being able to apply it to all aspects of the sponsorship selling process, is essential to maximize the profit and growth of the organization. The five essential features for excellence within a prospecting plan are:

- Allocating time.
- Establishing goals.
- Tracking progress.
- Evaluating progress.
- Establishing consistency

By mastering these five essential features, and also utilizing the CRM system discussed before, the sport executive will be able to thrive while prospecting for potential sponsors.

Allocating time – Allocating time is an extremely important function in the sport executive's role, especially when it comes to prospecting, because often times, the sport executive has to deal with a multitude of other issues that have nothing to do with prospecting. The growth of the sport industry has exploded so quickly that organizational structures are often still being developed and growing. This leads to the situation in which sport executives will often have many different roles when it comes to management, administration, stewardship, and selling. Think of your role right now within the organization you work for, or even the potential role you would like to be in. Now think of what you are supposed to be responsible for compared to what you actually do. If you are spending over 50 % of your time on your actual responsibilities, you would be ahead of most of the sport executives in today's world. Often, there are tasks and projects that take up an enormous amount of time that are not normally accounted for when it comes to everyday functioning. It is not only because of this overload of responsibilities, but also because of the emphasis on closing deals that prospecting sometimes falls by the way of not being of chief importance. As the sport executive, you must realize how important it is to spend the proper time not only on your sales process, but also within the prospecting part of that sales process. Anything of substance usually requires an investment of time. Prospecting for sponsorship leads is one of those things.

Establishing goals – To be able to establish accurate goals when prospecting, the sport executive has to be mindful of the previous feature of allocating time and determine what the goals should be. All goals should be SMART goals:

- Specific.
- Measureable.
- Attainable.
- Realistic.
- Time based

These goals will be different depending upon the executive's experience, organizational factors, demographic factors, and behavioral factors. The goal-setting practice should be done by the sport executive with their direct supervisor not only for accountability purposes, but also

for realistic expectation purposes. This will be explained further when talking about managing the prospecting plan.

Tracking progress – The tracking progress of the prospecting plan will be managed mainly by the sport executive and the CRM system. The key to tracking for the prospecting plan, as mentioned before, is the accuracy and precision of the data being input into the CRM system. A tracking system helps sport executives abide by their prospecting plan, because it helps them accomplish the SMART goals set forth. It also helps sport executives track their own performance independently without supervision, and it provides a sense of security for the organization, which in turn will cut down on micromanaging. Micromanaging your sport executives and their prospecting plans can be detrimental for the sport organization, as it may lead to the case of paralysis by analysis. This is the unfortunate situation where organizations become so entrenched in the numbers that they are not truly getting out into the field and reaching prospects. Finding this balance between data and field research is a key for both the organizations' and sport executives' success.

Evaluating progress – Along with the tracking of progress, the evaluation of progress is key, especially when it comes to the bigger picture of sponsorship. An organization should have a clear, set objective as well as a marketing mission that is set forth when it comes to its brand and aligning that brand with sponsors. When evaluating progress is applied to the prospecting plan concepts for an organization, it is more of an overview of how the plan itself is working on a macro level along with its CRM system. The ability to manage and guide the individual sport executive will come from within. This is only true if the executives have been properly trained and have bought into the organization's internal branding and marketing mission. When evaluating progress is applied to the individual sport executive, you must realize how important it is to know the personal data of what it takes for you to produce results. These numbers will differ with each sport executive, and will differ over time depending on sponsorship size, organizational experience, and the number of sellable assets. It is much more imperative that the sport executives themselves pay very close attention to their individual numbers, as it is a process that will be a foundation of them maximizing and thriving within the world of sponsorship sales.

Establishing consistency – Although the previous four aspects of the prospecting plan provide great structure around what to do for success, there may not be one that is more important than establishing consistency. By establishing consistency, sport executives will make sure that they are set up for success when prospecting for, and selling, sport sponsorships. Another contributing factor of the successful sport executive, and the sport organization with consistency, is that it will be part of the branding of your organization. Although things are moving faster than ever in the world of sport, the sport consumer is still very appreciative of the consistency its favorite sport organization provides. This comes into effect when prospecting for sponsorships. Your organization will benefit from these same principles because senior-level sport executives set the tone for the organization. This tone is set by being able to deliver consistent results and sending positive messages to sponsors that are existing clients, along with potential prospects when prospecting.

When using this prospecting plan, sport executives must apply it to themselves and use the prospecting methods and concepts mentioned previously. Once the prospecting plan is customized and implemented, the sport executive and the sport organization are both set up for success. The final step of the prospecting process is being able to turn a lead into a prospect.

Qualifying Prospects

Now that we have set forth best practices of how to gather all the different potential prospects into a pool that you as the sport executive can draw from, the next step is to be able to develop the leads you have into true sponsorship prospects. In order to make this happen, and to not waste essential time on meaningless tasks, every sport executive and sport organization must qualify each prospect to make sure they are a good fit for their organization.

Why Qualify?

When you are qualifying prospects, there are specific questions you have to ask of yourself, and of your prospects, in order to correctly identify and place the right prospects in the pipeline. We will first look at a few reasons of why it is important to qualify prospects, and then we will look at how to qualify prospects.

When you do not qualify prospects, and there is no substantiated reasoning for why you are talking to someone about a sponsorship, you are essentially going into the process blinded. This will hurt your individual performance, as well as your organization's performance on many levels. You are essentially wasting your own time, money, and energy, as well as the organization's time, money, and energy, by mindlessly chasing after some imaginary deal that is never going to come to fruition. As a senior-level sport executive, your batch of leads for sponsorship can be so large that there should never be a shortage of qualified prospects. This leads to the question of *why would you waste time on those who are not qualified?* Not only are you wasting time during the sales process, but you are not spending the quality time necessary with the right prospects that will be most valuable to you when closing large sponsorship deals.

The second outcome of not qualifying prospects is that you will be missing opportunities from those qualified prospects, and the opportunities to engage more people into your network. Some of your best prospects might only be found when you are managing your network efficiently. As we discussed before, there is only a limited time in which you have to prospect because of the other duties that come with the job. As a senior sport executive, you must spend it wisely and not miss the golden tickets when they come along.

The third result of not properly qualifying prospects can be even worse than missing opportunities. This is the result of closing deals that are burdens on the organization. Missing opportunities are a lot easier to recover from, as they are intangible items in which the lost revenue can be made up, depending on the scale of the miss. But closing a bad sponsorship

deal can damage, and even sometimes kill, organizations. It is not only the sponsor that looks bad when these deals go bad, but your organization feels the negative impact as well. This image deeply impacts the branding that you have with the sport consumer and the position it is placed in when it comes to assigning allegiances and/or purchasing power. Often times, sport organizations can deflect the attention elsewhere from one bad sponsorship deal. However, if multiple bad deals happen, it seems to become a trend letting the consumer know that you are willing to partner with anyone, even if it means turning a blind eye to financial or moral realities. Take a look at the article below of how some sponsorship deals have gone bad in the past.

The five times sponsorship failed and blew up in the faces of brands

Zoopla

When online property listings platform Zoopla became the principal sponsor of English Premier League team West Bromwich Albion in 2012, the company was probably thinking that it was aligning itself with an ambitious, Midlands-based club which was going to do wonders for brand exposure.

The £3m two-year deal saw Zoopla plastered over the front of West Brom's shirts, a big move as part of the company's plans to usurp rival Rightmove as the market leader.

However, that branding exercise came to a screeching halt less than two years later when Zoopla pulled its sponsorship after West Brom striker Nicholas Anelka made what was deemed to be an anti-Jewish gesture after scoring a goal.

The French footballer unveiled a "quenelle" gesture as his celebration, prompting outrage from the football community and Jewish organizations.

To make matters worse for West Brom, the founder and CEO of Zoopla, Alex Chesterman, is Jewish himself. After demanding its branding was taken off shirts if Anelka was fielded in the next match, Zoopla ultimately decided to pull out entirely and "focus its attention" on other marketing activities.

This example shows that, despite football being a great way of introducing a brand to a wide range of people, it's always a risk when you have no control over the players who essentially serve as ambassadors….

Virgin

…When a business decides to sponsor a lower league club, the dream is that said team will manage to play themselves to a big stage and give the brand national exposure.

So, when Preston North End made it to a televised League One play-off final at the mighty Wembley Stadium in May 2015, shirt sponsor Virgin Trains must have been doing a bit of lip licking.

But it ended up being too much of a good thing when the very Virgin trains that were supposed to be ferrying Preston fans back up north after the game were suspended due to engineering works.

The game ended up being dubbed the "replacement bus final" – pretty embarrassing for Virgin. As a way of winning back fans, Virgin announced a special offer for those staying in London on the night of the game and then returning the next day…

National Guard

Our final embarrassing moment comes from the US, and goes to show that spending millions of sponsorships doesn't necessarily get you the results you're after.

The National Guard, the US equivalent of our Territorial Army, appear to have a big marketing budget and spent $88m and $38m on sponsorships of motor racing series NASCAR and IndyCar.

Describing it as a branding exercise that "helps create a fundamental awareness of the National Guard as a career option", it was pretty embarrassing that $126m could only secure a handful of applications, and even fewer actual enlists.

It just goes to show that a company can pick a popular event or pastime to align its message and branding to, but that doesn't actually mean it will be targeting the right people – as the National Guard found out to its financial detriment. (Ruthven, 2015, https://bit.ly/2HputEO).

As seen above, this situation happened for a multitude of reasons, but one of the main reasons why this happens is because of improper prospecting. Now the sport organization has to spend additional time and money on obtaining new sponsors, as well as repairing its branding from the negative impact these events produced.

The fourth and final result that we will focus on of what happens when you do not qualify is probably the most frustrating and time consuming for the sport executives themselves. It happens to every sport executive at some point, and especially to the ones in the beginning of their development when they do not properly qualify prospects. This is could be referred to as being a crocodile instead of an elephant. What is meant by this is the fact that an elephant has a very small mouth and two large ears, while a crocodile has a very large mouth with small ears. The metaphor is meant to explain that as a strong sport executive in sales, you should be gathering information from your prospects (listening) and not just broadcasting information at your prospects about what you are offering. We will get more into this during the process of making the sale, but it is also very important to remember that when creating a prospect pool, listening and obtaining information about your prospects is infinitely more important than anything you will say. When you are more like a crocodile with a large mouth, just talking in circles and not properly qualifying, you do not know how to sell to your prospect. This ends up being a useless exercise and waste of time for everyone involved. Be more like an elephant by taking in and processing the information to know how to properly qualify the prospect and sell to your sponsor.

Qualifying Questions

When qualifying for your sponsorship proposals, or any proposal for that matter, it is important to ask the right questions in order to get the client to respond correctly. These questions should allow the client to speak about 80% of the time as the qualifying process is ongoing. This will also greatly benefit the sales process when presenting the proposal. Qualifying questions need to be asked of yourself as the sport executive, but also asked of the organization you are trying to partner with. The questions revolve around four basic principles. These qualifying principles and questions are listed below in two separate lists. One is the list of qualifying questions to ask a prospect, and the other is the list of qualifying questions to ask yourself.

Questions to Ask the Potential Prospect

Budget

- Tell me about the budget you had planned for the sponsorship?
- Is this of top importance to the organization?
- What other initiatives are you spending money on?

Authority

- Who is making the final decision in this deal?
- Who else will be involved in the sponsorship agreement decision?
- How have you made sponsorship agreements with sport organizations similar to ours in the past?

Need

- What is the primary need you want this sponsorship to fulfill?
- What part of your organization would you like this sponsorship to improve upon? Revenue? Image? Culture?
- Why is this sport sponsorship your answer to fulfill this need?

Timeline

- Is there a deadline or timeline for this sponsorship need fulfillment?
- Are you evaluating any other similar products or services?
- Do you have the ability to go ahead with this sponsorship right now? If not, when?

Questions to Ask Yourself

Budget

- Do they seem financially stable enough for the sponsorship?
- Is this a same tiered organization financially?
- Do I have multiple sponsorship options for this organization?

Authority

- Am I speaking to the deal maker?
- Who else could/should I have contacted to help make this decision?
- What external factors/ groups could play a role? (Government, community, etc.).

Need

- Can we fulfill their need?
- What is the best way to fulfill their need?
- What other departments/players within will I have to collaborate with for their need?

Timeline

- Can we meet the deadline?
- Does this deadline impact any other part of our business?
- Do we have the capacity to go ahead with this sponsorship right now?

It is important to remember that this is a discovery expedition that you are on, and sometimes it requires much more digging than others. Clients, especially those who are not well versed into the sport arena, may be reluctant to join in and could be cautious at first. Do not take a client's uneasiness or close to the vest communication style as a bad sign. This sometimes means that they are just taking it slowly. Clients often do not want to completely vet out who they are doing business with and how they operate. Qualifying a prospect is not like

interrogating a criminal, so even though you are asking questions, it should be more of a conversational tone, rather than an interrogating one. By keeping it conversational and letting the sponsorship prospect do most of the talking, you will have a great informational discovery session. During this session, you will be able to qualify, and sometimes disqualify, the prospect.

Once you have properly qualified the prospect, you will be ready to prepare for the remainder of the sales process. Some executives within, and outside of, sport are under the belief that this is the point when the sales process begins. With that being said, the true sales process for each sport executive began a long time ago, especially when you are looking at it from a macro point of view. The examination, determination, and qualification of a verified number of prospects will set you and your organization up for success. This success will not only be with the initial batch of sellable assets, but for many future initiatives and campaigns down the road. As always, the truly successful numbers will show in the end. A good prospecting process will lead to productive executives, successful clients, precise forecasting, and a profitable business sponsorship. To achieve all of these, the sport organization must account for all steps within the sales process, but demanding quality and precision when prospecting is essential in the beginning.

Referencias

Heitner, D. (2018, June 08). Wheels up deal is easily justified if justify wins the Belmont stakes and the triple crown. Retrieved April, 2019, from https://www.forbes.com/sites/darrenheitner/2018/06/06/wheels-up-deal-is-easily-justified-if-justify-wins-the-belmont-stakes-and-the-triple-crown/#5f591bbf54b7

Ruthven, H. (2015, August 25). The five times sponsorship failed and blew up in the faces of brands. Retrieved April, 2019, from https://realbusiness.co.uk/the-five-times-sponsorship-failed-and-blew-up-in-the-faces-of-bran