Preparation and Closing of a Sponsorship Sale

When sport executives have a strong base of qualified prospects, they are set up for success and have the ability to maximize sponsorship dollar. While going through the prospecting process, sport executives will have gathered information about their prospect and will be fully engaged into the sales process. When discussing the sales process for the sport executive, we will look at it 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.
6) Closing the sale.
7) Maximizing and growing the relationship

In this module, we will focus on what happens after the prospects are qualified. We will start by focusing on preparing for the sale. After the preparation for the sale takes place, we will take you step by step along the process by providing the steps that will get you to your sponsorship acquisition, as well as the examples of how to apply each of these steps to your own organization. Keep in mind that by personalizing and applying this process to your organization, you will be able to have a standard of excellence set. This standard of excellence will drive business for the foreseeable future.

3.1 Preparing for the Sale

When looking to build your book of business and maximize the revenue via the avenue of sponsorships, you must realize that it is essential to have ultimate preparedness when going into the sale. The failure to plan is often a plan to fail. This is never more true than when dealing with high-level executives of other industries that you are trying to bring into your network of partnerships. Even the most senior sport executive with many years of experience must prepare for each sale as if it was the most important thing at that exact time. To properly prepare for the sale, we will look into three separate phases which will leave us ultimately prepared to present the proposal, as well as to close the sale. The three steps in preparing the sale are:

1) Investigation.
2) Engagement.
3) Cultivation

Although some of these steps can be partially done while in the qualification process, these steps are truly essential elements that need to happen when preparing for your sponsorship sale.

Investigation

When going through the qualification process, there will be a lot of information being gathered and put into the Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system if the qualification process is being done properly. This information will be based on the BANT (budget, authority, need, timeline) metrics and can be used to decipher who your true prospects are. Once that is decided, it is imperative for the sport executive to start to investigate the individuals they are going to be doing business with. Performing a true prospect investigation is a very important step in the sales process, and it is often skipped over because of time and the impersonal nature in which a lot of individuals are doing business in today's modern world. When building your sponsorship portfolio, it is important that you are very familiar with not only the companies you are doing business with, but also the individuals. This is a form of creating a personal relationship and bond with the decision makers of each organization. Creating this bond will allow you to create an atmosphere which is conducive for the easiest sale going forward. This method of selling is referred to as relationship selling. In order to create this relationship-selling technique, the tools below and their uses are readily available in today's world. These tools can be used to create an immediate bond with the individual.

Internet Sources

Google – This is the most wide-ranging, and sometimes misleading, way to investigate someone, but it can be very useful. This method of investigation is useful in finding when your prospects have been in a positive light within the news cycle recently. In addition to positive aspects of the client and its business, this may also reveal some red flags that you would want to steer away from.

LinkedIn – By reviewing someone's LinkedIn profile, you are seeing what they are most proud of professionally and scholastically. Common bonds can be created from a LinkedIn profile through:

- What school they went to.
- What subjects they studied in school.
- What companies they worked for.
- What positions they have held.
- What articles they have liked.
- What groups they are a member of.
- What mutual connections they have in business.

By having this crucial and sometimes very personal information, you will be able to know more about your prospect and be prepared to bond with them on many levels. These levels can, and often do, lead to a bigger connection because some of this information tugs at the heart strings of an individual. The following is an example of using LinkedIn and how it helped in not only creating a relationship, but also making a sales appointment.

Build an Authentic Relationship Before You Pitch

Once you've identified a prospect and have been successfully introduced by a mutual connection, what do you say in your initial outreach? Don't start with your sales pitch–it will immediately rub your prospect the wrong way and shut down the chance of establishing a sales relationship. Barbara Giamanco, CEO of Social Centered Selling and co-author of "The New Handshake: Sales Meets Social Media," shares the following example of a LinkedIn sales message "gone wrong":

"A major cloud CRM company sent me a few emails with their sales pitch for a new product telling me about how great their company and product was. They wanted to demo it for me. I ignored it because it was spammy. Then I received a LinkedIn message from one of the company's salespeople with the exact same message. I ignored it again. A few days later the salesperson sent me a LinkedIn message with the exact same message. I couldn't believe it! I marked it as spam at that point."

The company in this example was clearly interested in telling prospects about the benefits of their new product, but failed to tell their prospect what they really cared about–how the product can actually help them. Launching right into a sales pitch communicates you don't understand your prospect's needs and are only interested in the sale. Giamanco says you have to earn the sale by first being genuine and making an effort to learn how you can help a prospect. "Social selling is less about selling and more about giving," she explains. "Only then will you be a salesperson someone actually wants to work with." Here are a few creative ways to show a prospect you want to help them:

- Offer to introduce your new connection to someone in your network who could also be helpful to them;
- Boost their visibility in your network by sharing a piece of their content in your groups;

- Send a handwritten note congratulating them on a recent business achievement; and
- Connect them to a conference opportunity that increases their visibility with leaders in their field.

When you give with sincerity, you demonstrate credibility, which helps establish trust with your prospect. You also prove that you're interested in more than a sale–you're looking to cultivate a relationship, which means prospects are more likely to be receptive when you ask them to become a customer.

Ask for the Sales Appointment

Many experts actually advise against asking for sales appointments via LinkedIn. As Giamanco explains, sending impersonal, unsolicited messages to any profile you can find is a sure way to strike out. But, if you smartly approach a prospect and find they're receptive, you can absolutely land a sales appointment via Linkedin. Shaver experienced success when he found he shared connections with the prospect he was targeting; the VP of sales at a technology company:

"I contacted him through a LinkedIn InMail message. I mentioned our common connections and asked if new customer acquisitions was a high priority for his new sales team. He acknowledged that it was so I explained that I worked with a number of companies like his teaching sales teams how to leverage LinkedIn to reach decision makers. He said he was interested, so we scheduled a meeting. Two months later, I was hired to speak at his company's national sales meeting."

If used properly, LinkedIn can be a nice compliment to a salesperson's arsenal. And the information in Sales Navigator can give you meaningful insights into an immense pool of potential buyers. But access to that information is only an advantage when you bring value to the community of prospects you're targeting. As Tietje sums it up: "LinkedIn and Sales Navigator take to a different level what we do everyday. We want to be efficient. We want to leverage our knowledge and resources. We want to connect. The most successful salespeople are those who have a helping mindset" (Finch, 2017), https://goo.gl/ubkbLV).

Government websites – This may seem like a bit of personal invasion of privacy to some, but it may be helpful in finding more about a client you have very little knowledge about. Just as more and more companies are using credit checks and background checks on employees before they do their hiring, it is important for you to be aware of any political or governmental information in relation to your prospect. This is definitely more of an area to know about, and not necessarily to discuss, but it will allow you to have all of your information in alignment before engaging with your prospect.

Social Media Sources

Although the Internet sources will likely provide a lot of the professional accomplishments of the individual, social media will provide you with information that you can relate to them outside of their work and school. Using the sites such as YouTube, Facebook, Snapchat, Twitter, and Instagram will help you know a multitude of things about the individuals you are going into a meeting with. Maybe you both compete in triathlons? Maybe you both like fishing? Maybe you even see them at multiple different points of travel that you have been too? This is important information to know about and build a relationship on, because people often form the deepest bonds over the things they are most passionate about. This information can also be helpful by serving as an icebreaker for your initial contact points with the prospect.

Engagement

First impressions are the crucial element that stays with someone for a lifetime, especially within the business world of sport. This is why the correct branding of your organization and yourself before your meeting with your prospect is so important. Branding, as mentioned before, is responsible for putting you into a position within the clients' mind before they have even met with you. It is your job as a sport executive to continue to hold that positive placement in the prospects' mind when you are having your first engagement with them. Often times, you will not, and some would argue should not, close your sale in the first meeting because there is a feeling-out process that needs to take place that goes much deeper than in the prospecting phase. Once the baseline has been laid in the prospecting phase, the deeper engagement of the client must occur. This deeper engagement is crucial to driving home the sale. Often times, executives will reference that sales presentation and/or sales pitch are the most challenging parts of the sales process, because the sales presentation is most likely when the deal is being *closed*. We could argue that if you have properly prospected, investigated, cultivated, and engaged your client, the *closing* meeting is just a review of the terms which have already been agreed upon. This *closing* meeting can and should be the easiest part of the process if prepared for correctly.

The following steps should serve as a guideline to establishing a code of professionalism and warmth when engaging with your sponsorship client.

Before the Meeting

1) Establish the agenda with the client beforehand – This will establish a proper expectation of the allotted time of the meeting. Establishing the agenda is also used to make sure you are meeting regarding the right reasons and there is a mutually agreed-upon objective. This will prevent you from having a meeting with someone whom although you may have already qualified, may not be a true sponsorship prospect.
2) Prepare with a few personal contact points – This is done by having a proper collection of personal information during the investigation phase. Although this is a prepared conversation piece, it is not meant to write a script for a meeting as it should flow naturally into the conversation. With that being said, the seasoned sales executive should be adept in learning how to steer the conversation to where they want it to go, all the while making the client feel like they are running the meeting.

3) Early bird gets the worm – This has a double meaning when engaging with the client. The first meaning of this phrase is to meet at the earliest date possible once a prospect is properly qualified, and you are thoroughly prepared. This is done to not allow any unforeseen variables of the data you gathered in your prospecting phase to change, and it will start the sales proposal cycle to gain momentum earlier. The second meaning of this phrase is to schedule your meeting as early as possible in the day. As executives' days go on, their schedules get busier and other issues seem to come up. Although you can have a successful meeting late in the day and you should meet at your clients' convenience, it is better to be earlier on the schedule. In this circumstance, you are more likely to have their full attention and have less likelihood of the meeting being cancelled.

Once at the Meeting

1) Start with the personal touches and humor – As mentioned before, this serves as an icebreaker and relaxes the conversation to a point of familiarity. By getting to this familiar point sooner, you will allow your client to open up more about the questions you are going to ask them. This will also have the client trust that you are also interested in their business and its success. Once the client you are dealing with thinks there is a vested interest by you on your part, and that you are not just trying to sell them something, they will start looking at this as an "us" idea and not a "me and you" idea.

2) Be positive – No matter what is brought up and what kind of questions are asked, it is always crucial to maintain a positive tone throughout the meeting. This will not only show that you are a positive company who focuses on success in the future instead of mistakes in the past, but it will

also reflect on your personal brand as well. Great leaders are ones who can be realistic while staying in a positive mindset. This is the same for sport executives when trying to sell sponsorships. If you cannot be positive about your own organization and the value it will bring to the client, who else is going to be? This does not mean you should avoid anything negative, especially if addressed by the client, but it does mean to keep the focus on the future progress and profitability of both organizations.

3) Keep the client talking – As mentioned before in the crocodile vs. elephant example, a sport executive should keep the 80/20 ratio in mind when engaging with the client. One of the phrases the sport executive should stick to is "You don't know what you don't know". The meaning of this is that if you are the one talking throughout the whole meeting, you are only going to fill the air with information you already know. It is important in all meetings, but especially in the first engagements with the client, to be finding out information you do not know already. To keep them talking and to gather as much information as possible, start by using the phrasing of:

   - *Tell me about…*
   - *Share with me your views on…*
   - *What is your take on…?*

   These examples provide an open-ended way of gathering information and not the usual closed-ended defaults of

   - *Do you…?*
   - *Have you…?*
   - *Will you…?*

   These closed-ended questions should be used for clarification and nailing down details, but they are not the opening questions that will lead to the client opening up.

4) Gather inquiries – After your initial discussion with the client, ask them if they have any additional questions about yourself or your organization that you did not already answer. Doing this provides two things for the client. It allows them to come back around to a concern they may have had when originally discussing an item, and it also shows them that you have nothing to hide. Sport executives who allow themselves, and their organizations, to be viewed through a completely transparent lens show their clients that they are trustworthy and worthy to do business with. This is especially important if there has been any sort of scandals and/or recent issues with the organization in the news. This is sometimes the case with sport organizations, especially within the 24-hour news cycle.

5) Review and establish next steps – Although this may be seen as a basic step in your first engagement with the client, it is often one that is not defined and can lead to trouble down the road if not done properly. Poor communication and misunderstanding are deal killers, especially when it comes to relationships with big-time clients. You must realize that you are going to be proposing them a solution in which you will have vested interest in each other's business going forward. It is important to establish right away what the communication schedule, channels, and next steps are going to be. Some first-engagement meetings are very productive and can lead to the next meeting being the closing of a deal. Other first-engagements meetings lead to further discussions, and even others lead to more work being done on both sides before the next steps are taken. When everyone walks away from the meeting, it is important that everyone is on board with what is happening next and when it is going to happen. These next steps can, and often times do, include the cultivation of a client in order to get to the closing meeting.

Cultivation

The cultivation of a client is simply put as being the extension and deepening of a relationship after the first. In order to properly cultivate a client, you will have to utilize the information gathered during the organizational and personal investigational phases. Cultivation of a client can include such things as inviting the client to participate in, or be your guest at, an event that has a direct tie to your organization or an interest they personally have. Some examples are:

- A meal at a favorite restaurant.
- A sport match or event.
- An industry-related event.
- A community gala.
- An exclusive entertainment event.
- An exclusive government function.
- A trade show.

These are all opportunities to deepen your relationship with the client, all the while maintaining points of contact along the way. We will dive deeper into these events and the use for them when we discuss about maximizing the relationship after the deal is signed, but they can be viewed as building blocks along the way to making a deal. One thing to keep in mind as a sport executive, though, is to not get stuck into the cycle of constant cultivation without doing any business. Although it is good to make the relationship deeper, the objective of selling and maximizing the sponsorship for your organization must always be in your mind.

3.2 The Proposal

As in the other parts of the sales process, the preparation part of the proposal is just as important as the actual presentation. Because of this reason, we will look at the two steps of the proposal separately: the development of the proposal, and the delivery/presentation of the proposal.

Developing the Proposal

When developing the proposal, the sport executive must keep in mind the 6 key sections of the proposal:

- Opportunity – This is very similar to the executive summary of a marketing plan. It should basically be an overview of what you are all about, what your company mission is, and how it ties into the sponsor.
- Objectives – The objectives are a review of the points discussed in the initial engagement and cultivation phases of the sales process.
- Measures of success – The key performance indicators (KPI) of how the objectives will be measured. This section includes both quantitative and qualitative objectives agreed upon by the sponsor and your organization.
- Value to the sponsor – This is the true selling part to the sponsor and shows them the "What's in it for me" section of the proposal. This will assign specific ways in which the sponsor will benefit from this sponsorship.
- Personalized "WOW" factors – These should be personalized to the sponsor and something that will surprise them in a good way. Although it can be thought of as being an extra way to impact the sponsor, you should utilize this section to show how much you have learned about their business, and to creatively design things that they may not have previously thought of.
- **Terms and agreements** – This is a reiteration of the terms already agreed upon verbally and should reflect those numbers. It MUST specifically address legalities and items that can include investment amount, payment schedule, breakdown of sponsorship value, and many other special conditions that are included in the agreement.

As discussed above, the key elements and terms are variable and should be tailored to each individual prospect you are planning doing business with. However, as a sport executive, it is also useful to have a general sponsorship template that you can distribute at a moment's notice as a leave behind with clients for them to share with people within their network. This is also very popular among organizations and institutions that have a large base of clients that may not have ongoing relationships with the sales staff. It should be noted, though, that for every major sponsorship deal, the previous steps discussed being personalized for your client is necessary. There is a value to having a general template like the one below to attract sponsors from a large audience, such as a larger sphere of influence within the community. Below is an example of the generic proposal format highlighting the opportunities available, while leaving options of details to be discussed once the client is identified.

To see annex 1, click here.
https://www.nba.com/resources/static/team/v2/heat/media/PartnershipOverview.pdf

Another proposal that is often seen within the world of sport is a direct proposal to the public with the specifics drawn out. These can be directed for a specific event, individual, or organization, as can be seen from many examples throughout the world. Below is just one of many examples available as a direct proposal to the public with specifics.

To see annex 2, click here.
https://www.aphroditehills.com/Aphrodite-hills/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/AH_Sponsorship_proposal.pdf

Presenting the Proposal

Now that the proposal is set, it is time to present it. When presenting the proposal, the sport executive should remember the tips and personalization that is set forth in the already prepared proposal and highlight those points. For a successful presentation, it is imperative to remember these 7 key tips:

- Lead with the vision – This is what you are selling the client. There are many organizations that have marketing opportunities for your client, and the idea of exposure to them is nothing new. You have to focus on why your sport organization is the right one for them. The vision you have of a long-term partnership is the key ingredient in making them buy in.

- Be concise with your points – The attention span of society in general is growing shorter and shorter because of different societal factors. The time value of the high-level executive is even greater. Being concise and getting to the point in an efficient way shows them that you know exactly what they want and also that you value their time.

- Cut the fat – This refers to the use of your proposal document and PowerPoint for your presentation. A good practice to keep is to create the PowerPoint to your presentation and then trim it by at least 25%. Only the necessary ingredients for success need to be mentioned. The strategic and specific details are in the strategically prepared proposal document. Keep your proposal to the *wow* factors that most appeal to your client.

- Use data sparingly – Although key data metrics can be helpful, especially when highlighting a large ROI for the client, the story and the vision is what the client is buying. A large quantity of numbers within a proposal will often lead to *majoring on the minors*. This term is meant to show that the minor details and numbers are not nearly as important as the overall vision in most circumstances. This a generally standard rule, but this may differ depending on the client. If your client prefers to have hard numbers, you may include more, but it is advisable to steer clear of having a whole proposal full of data.

- Stick to the schedule – As with the first engagement, having a clear agenda and sticking to it will show the client that you mean business. This is not a social visit as the ones mentioned in the cultivation phase of the sales process, but rather the time when deals are being done. This is the time to stick to the schedule and get the deal done!

- Be confident and stay positive – This can be the most important part of the proposal, because often times, the client is becoming a partner with you just as much as he is becoming a partner with the idea you are presenting. If you do not believe in your proposal and your vision, your client will not buy into it either. Being assertive and confident in your proposal is key for success.

- **Ask questions** – Although the preparation and diligence of your actions should lead to covering all your bases with your client, there will inevitably be questions. Anticipate questions in advance and have solid answers for them when presenting. Being prepared for the potential questions is a good way of showing you have thought deeply about the partnership, and you can be a trusted partner going forward. With these questions, you might come into some objections that the client may have. Being able to overcome these objections is the next step into closing the sale.

3.3 Overcoming Objections

Although many sales professionals think that being able to overcome objections is the key to being a successful sales executive, it can also be argued that if you have done the proper preparation during the sales process, there should be little or no objections when it comes time to close the sale. Being prepared for objections, as well as knowing how to overcome them, is a valuable part of being a sport executive selling sponsorships. The first thing to keep in mind when overcoming objections is the vision of the partnership and the objectives that have already been discussed. If the objection is in direct conflict with the main part of the objective of the partnership, there would need to be a reassessment of what the two organizations are trying to accomplish, and where the breakdown of communication took place. If the objection is regarding a detail in relation to the agreement of the sponsorship, then it has the ability to be dealt with by simply following the steps listed below.

Listen and gather – In this part of the process, the sport executive must be able to have active listening skills and wait until all parts of the objections have been completely stated. It is important to remember not to cut the objection short, because then you might not be able to address the whole solution as needed. It is also important to listen and gather this information because, as stated before, it shows you are truly caring for their input as a partner in the business relationship. With the right engagement and cultivation, this should not be a point of contention, but if not handled properly, it can lead to contention going forward.

Questions/clarify – It is important for the sport executive to know exactly what the client is stating when they are making an objection. If the objection is clear, then you may not need to ask questions. If the objection is not clear, it is imperative to clarify what the objection truly is before you move onto the next step of confirming your understanding.

Confirming your understanding – This is simply put as condensing and restating what the client was objecting to. This step in the process is done for two reasons. The first reason this is effective is because it shows you were actively listening to their objective. The second reason is to show that you have an understanding of exactly what is going to need to be addressed before they feel comfortable going ahead with the deal. While doing this, it is important to use the exact language the client was using while creating your next step in overcoming objections of assessing the need.

Address the problem – When addressing the problem, it is most effective to use the original needs/wants of the client that were discovered during the engagement phase. The reason for this is because you are using their language and their words, which will provide familiarity with them. If their original need was to *Gain exposure to 25-45 year-old males in the region*, a good way to address the problem is to start with the phrase *In order to provide the most exposure to 25-45 year-old males in the region we will…* This is an effective way of using the client's words to resolve the issue and to check for agreement as well.

Check for agreement – This is as simple as gaining permission from the client to move onto the next objection, if needed, or move onto closing the sale. While going through the whole objection process, agreement is sometimes assumed. This can be a fatal flaw of the deal being done, and a simple check for agreement can go a long way in continuing to build the relationship with your client.

3.4 Closing the Deal

After the objections are all overcome, and you have agreement from your sponsor, it is imperative that the logistics are completed:

- Make sure all documents are reviewed and signed by the appropriate parties.
- Log all agreements electronically.
- Immediately notify any impacted parties within your organization.

Now that all your hard work paid off, it is time to say "Congratulations, you have now gotten to the finish line!". But actually, that statement could not be further from the truth. It is a great victory when a deal is closed and signed, but it should be looked upon more as the beginning of the partnership rather than then end of the sales process. Acquiring sponsorship clients is essential for any successful sport organization in today's modern world. Being able to maximize and grow the relationship after the deal is closed is the true sign of being an elite sport executive and sport organization. It is with this knowledge, and the impact you make with this knowledge, that a true organizational icon can be created.

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