Integration

When looking at the sponsorship acquisition process, it is important for the sport executive to realize that the actual *selling* process will be greatly facilitated by laying the proper groundwork. This starts at the organizational level by having a clear and defined organizational mission. This organizational mission is of extreme importance, because it will define what you are aspiring to be, and it will also give your organization a true purpose for existence. Aspiring to have a certain presence and having that presence are two very different things. There are certain steps that need to be taken to achieve this presence. One of the main factors that lead to your organization's ideal presence within your industry, as well as your ideal personal presence within that organization, is the process of branding. Developing and maintaining a successful brand is a key factor in an organization's financial health as well as its success when compared to its competitors.

A brand is simply put as the consumers' feeling about a product, service, or organization. When thinking of the brand, it is important to know that there is no solid answer that can be truly given by the individual itself about their own personal brand. The reason for this is because you can try to manage your brand, but it is decided by those around you, not yourself. This is also true when you are thinking about the brand of your sport organization. A brand can be made up of many different elements. It is important to note that within sport, they are often determined by internal and external factors. The brand for your sport organization is made up of:

- Organizational actors.
- Personalities.
- Catchphrases.
- Promises/agreements.
- Logos.
- Iconic names.

When considering these factors, a sport organization must establish criteria for choosing its brand. To establish the proper position within the mind of the consumer, as well as be progressive in nature, the criteria for choosing a brand should answer the following questions.

Is the brand...

- Serving a purpose?
- Likable by the consumer?

- Memorable to the consumer?
- Adaptable in nature?
- Unique?
- Transferable?

After a brand is created by a certain criterion decided by the organization, the ongoing process starts to occur. It is important to realize that this process of brand management is something that will be an ever-evolving cycle and will contain the four steps of:

- Creating the brand.
- Implementing the brand.
- Measuring brand performance.
- Growing the brand.

Once this brand management process is done successfully, and the organization has established itself in the correct position in the mind of the consumer, the organization will start to align itself with partners. Aligning itself with the proper partners is necessary to successfully acquire sponsorships and truly create a mutually beneficial relationship. The relationship created, which is profitable for both organizations, will result in sustained excellence for your organization within the sponsorship realm, and it will drive additional sponsorship partners your way. To maximize the likeliness of aligning yourself with the right partners, and to establish a brand of excellence, the prospecting phase of the sales process must be done with precision and diligence.

For the sport executive, we 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.
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 other. 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.

Prospecting should be done in every level of an organization's growth, and it is a constant process. The two methods of prospecting that are equally essential for success are random prospecting and focused prospecting. These methods of prospecting are reinforced by the sport executive and their organization utilizing

data and a top-notch Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system. It is important to have a solid foundation of data and a CRM when starting your organization. The reason for 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 the CRM when it comes to sport sponsorship prospecting and sales are:

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

Once your leads are gathered and you have the correct processes in place for your sales process, the qualification of prospects must be done. This is an essential step in the sponsorship sales process, and it will ensure that you are always operating in an efficient and productive manner. 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. 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 vetted 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 initiatives and campaigns down the road.

The next step of the successful sales process will focus on preparing for the sale. When preparing for the sale, your first engagement of the prospect is essential and must be done with the same precision and efficiency as the prospecting process. In order to achieve this efficiency, the sport executive must follow these three steps:

1) Investigation - Performing a true prospect investigation is a very important step in the sales process and it is often skipped over. This step is 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.

2) Engagement - 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 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.

3) Cultivation - The cultivation of a client is simply put as being the extension and deepening of a relationship after the first engagement. 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.

Once the sport executive has properly prepared for the sale, it is now time to write the proposal and close the sale. When developing the proposal, the sport executive must keep in mind the 6 key sections of the proposal:

- Opportunity.
- Objectives.
- Measures of success.
- Value to the sponsor.
- Personalized *wow* factors.
- Terms and agreements.

Presenting the proposal and closing the sale are the last steps in order to get the business. During the presentation you should:

- Lead with the vision.
- Be concise with your points.
- Cut the fat.
- Use data sparingly.
- Stick to the schedule.
- Be confident and stay positive.
- Ask questions.

During this proposal, you may have to overcome objections and address concerns the prospect has. It is essential to keep in mind that the client is buying the vision that you agreed upon, and that should be stressed over any detail. Once you have completed this process, you now have turned a lead into a prospect, into a client. Having this process down to a science while remembering that it is personalized to each client is essential for every true successful sport executive. Having these tools and being able to utilize them in an effective way will lead to the acquisition of many clients. Now you are ready to begin being a true sponsorship selling machine expert.