Four Keys to Selling Event Sponsorship in a Digital World

and 12 new things you can sell now
Getting money from event sponsors used to be easy. You’d find anything that costs money at your event — from floor space to show guides to coffee carts — and get someone to sponsor it. And that’s very much the same thinking that went in to early digital sponsorships.

The thinking has been… “Get an app. Get it sponsored.” Or, at best, “Get an app. Sell banner ads.”

Demands of sponsors have changed quickly, though.

B-to-B marketers, who are now used to automated and highly measurable campaigns in every other medium, are more skeptical of sponsorships. Whether they’re paying for a logo in the ballroom or ads in your app, marketers are asking for measurable results and meaningful returns on their investments.

Those new demands, in turn, have left event producers scrambling for solutions. But, there is good news for events.

Event producers who execute digital event sponsorship correctly have been able to do more than pay for things at their events. They have been able to create better value for sponsors — and generate digital revenue stream for their events. As a result, two things have happened:

1. Events have delivered better, more measurable results to sponsors.
2. Technology investments have shifted from a cost center to a profit generator.

Doing both of those things for your event is a lot easier than you think.

Here are the four key things to consider as you build your sponsorship plan with technology in mind.
Key #1: Sell anywhere, any-time and on ANY device

Most digital sponsorship opportunities are currently focused on mobile apps. Yet, data shows that 85% of your audience prefers to spend time on their personal computer when they’re exploring, planning and networking prior to the event — and again when they consume content after an event. In fact, the average conference attendee comes to a web application seven times, spending 21 minutes a visit. That’s more than two hours of engagement per attendee before the event even starts.

In addition, web portals tend to have more pages, content and functionality, allowing for more sponsorship opportunities. So, mobile-only solutions both limit the effectiveness of sponsorship and reduce the number of sponsorship opportunities at your event.

To get the most out of digital sponsorship, create sponsorship packages that work throughout the attendees’ event lifecycle, focusing on using delivering ads and content in a way that is appropriate. For example, when someone is reviewing a sponsors’ digital collateral before an event — or sharing it after an event — they are much more likely to do it on a personal computer than a mobile phone. So, make sure if you sell that as an opportunity, you don’t restrict it to mobile.

Three Things You Can Sell:

1. Digital Lead Generation:
As attendees begin to search for the right solutions ahead of your events they give them a way to follow sponsors and download content. And then turn that interest into qualified leads, notifying sponsors each time someone expresses interest. Sponsors not only love these qualified prospects; they’re also willing to pay for them.

2. Collateral and Handout Distribution:
Allow sponsors to disseminate digital collateral and on demand video before, during and after the event. It gives sponsors a way to extend their reach and it improves their sales results while at the same time making your event more environmentally responsible.

3. Meeting Scheduling:
Nothing makes sponsors happier than meeting with qualified prospects. As attendees begin to plan their event schedule, empower them to set up meetings with your sponsors. It’s a feature your attendees love — and a result your sponsors will pay for.
Key #2: Sell Contextually

No form of marketing is getting more press right now than content marketing. On average, B-to-B buyers review seven pieces of content before making a purchase. Yet, while events are, at their core, all about content, few events truly marry sponsorship to that valuable asset.

Instead, sponsors are most often relegated to a tab on the website or a menu item on a mobile app. While it seems logical to handle sponsors this way, data tells us people ignore links to sponsors. Instead, attendees look for ways to connect with the right people, content and solutions to achieve their goals at your events.

So, event producers have a new opportunity to sell sponsorships that work better by placing sponsors in context with appropriate content.

For example, one service industry association recently sold sponsorship for key sessions and discussion topics. So, when an attendee went to a session on refrigeration, for example, it would associate Bosch as the sponsor and have a chance to download related whitepapers from that sponsor.

When you put sponsors in context with that process of connecting and learning, attendees find more solutions and sponsors get more results. And that means your events are more valuable and more profitable.

Three Things You Can Sell:

1. **Sponsored Content:**
   At many events, sponsors provide content. Whether their experts are speaking at sessions or the companies are merely providing solutions that are mentioned in educational context, sponsor solutions are part of your event. Event producers can monetize that through branded sponsorship of sessions and by allowing session sponsors to include a piece of digital collateral that is delivered to every attendee interested in that session.

2. **Mobile Messages:**
   Put your sponsors in context with your attendee’s event experience by selling opportunities to notify attendees about in booth sessions, demonstrations or sponsored social events. Scheduled broadcast messages, which are generally pushed to a mobile device, are powerful and an effective way to generate exposure for sponsors. Try selling messages individually or as part of a package to create additional revenue to your event.

3. **Streaming Video:**
   In addition to putting sponsors in context with content, sponsors can actually create content. It’s common practice to have in booth sessions or product demonstrations. Now, you can give those presentations more reach through live or on demand video that can be viewed on any device. Sponsors are happy to pay for the reach – and attendees are happy to learn on their own schedule.
Key #3: Sell Quality Over Quantity

The common thinking in sponsorship is that sponsors buy exposure. But, if your sponsors were selling, for example, widgets, would they rather be exposed to 9,000 people who could care less about widgets or 100 people who are searching for widgets?

Obviously, your sponsor would choose the latter. In a world cluttered with advertising, marketers are searching for ways to get in front of — and interact with — the right people instead of the most people. In B-to-B marketing, quality is now much more desirable than quantity.

As an event producer, that should be good news. Instead of selling sponsorship for one audience with limited results, you now have a chance to sell results-focused sponsorships to more segments of that audience.

That’s better results for sponsors — and more things for you to sell.

Three Things You Can Sell:

1. **Personalized Recommendations:** Attendees come to events to find solutions. That’s what your sponsors provide. When attendees browse for the right solution or look at interest-based recommendations, sponsors can — and love to — pay to appear at the top of that list just like they do in online search advertising.

2. **Interest Tag Sponsorship:** When you apply digital applications to your event, your attendees tell you about their interests as they try to find people, content and solutions. That gives you an opportunity to put sponsors in front of people who have expressed interest in their solution. Commonly, event producers will sell sponsorships to “interest categories” in applications, allowing sponsors to display ads or send target messages to people with specific, relevant interests. Of course, all those communications are controlled and monetized by, you, the event producer.

3. **Targeted Advertising:** The most popular form of sponsorship in mobile applications has been splash page advertising (ads on the screen that appears as the app is loading) or banner ads, which appear at the top or bottom of the app. Now, with improvements to digital technologies, try selling ads based on target segments of your audience. Those can be based on interests, session preference, company name, title or any other characteristic. Targeted ads put sponsors in front of the right people, leading to more meetings and more sales.
Key #4: Sell Sales Results

Sponsors pay money to be at events because, in theory, the investment generates sales. Yet, it’s a delicate balance for event producers who want to support their sponsors without interfering with the event experience.

This isn’t a challenge unique to events, though. Over the past decade, advertising has moved quickly from disruptive (ads that interfere with an experience like television advertising) to permission-based advertising (advertising directed by buyer interest).

Untargeted banner ads that link to a homepage, which are common in mobile apps for events, are disruptive. But, there are new options that put your attendees in the driver’s seat, allowing them to opt in for advertising and take action to find solutions that will help them get more value out of the event experience.

For example, as attendees hunt for information on solutions, they create lists of vendors and compile collateral. Meaning, they find solution providers and express interest in those providers. When they do that, they expect to receive follow up from those exhibitors or sponsors. This is called “opting in” to communication. Event organizers can enable this type of permission-based marketing by providing a lead management and communication app for sponsors and exhibitors.

This is a new technology that allows sponsors to generate more leads — and follow up with them in real time. And sponsors are willing to pay for it.

Three Things You Can Sell:

1. Lead Generation Apps: With the emergence of digital advertising in events, a new class of software has emerged. Lead generation apps allow sponsors to generate and manage qualified leads in three ways: a) When attendees express interest online or on a mobile device. b) When attendees scan a QR code at the booth to download collateral. And c) When sponsors or exhibitors scan a QR code of an interested attendee at the show. These technologies can generate an additional $200 to $800 per sponsor or exhibitor. The most powerful benefit to sponsors and exhibitors is the capability to connect with qualified attendees outside of the booth, before the event even starts, or after the event is over.

2. Sponsor Profiles: The latest digital applications give sponsors a new, media-rich way to present themselves and their solutions. These profiles tend to include elements like product descriptions, digital collateral, video and even streaming video. You likely already have tiers for sponsors. Try using different profile elements to charge more for existing tiers or create new ones.

3. Linked Banner Ads: Standard banner ads can be disruptive – and ineffective – when they link to outside links. Those links don’t work offline, and they often link to homepages that don’t convert to sales well. Instead, consider linking all ads to sponsor profiles that are tied to show-specific lead generation. Not only does it perform better for your sponsors, but it gives you an easy way to tie every sale back to your show.
In summary, event producers have a new opportunity to both expand sponsorship opportunities and improve results. To do so, however, requires re-thinking some of the most common practices in event sponsorship.

Focus on selling sponsorship that is appropriate for any device your attendees choose to use and make those sponsorship opportunities contextual, personally relevant to each attendee and tied to a sales result.

As you develop your digital sponsorship strategy, the Zerista team is available to help. You can reach a digital strategy expert at info@zerista.com or by calling +1 720 230-6801.