The Guide to being a Meetup Organizer:

How to Obtain a Sponsor

By

Ronald Purvis
The Guide to being a Meetup Organizer: How to Obtain a Sponsor

Introduction 3
What Do You Need from a Sponsor? 3
What Do You Have to Offer a Sponsor? 4
Who Should I Approach about Being a Sponsor? 5
How to Contact Sponsor? 6
What Should I Say? 7
Conclusion 8
Introduction

As an organizer, one of the biggest issues that you have to face is money. You need money to cover the cost of the fees that Meetup.com charges. There will also be costs for flyers and stationary. You may have charges for the meeting venue, advertising, gifts, t-shirts, etc.

Unless you are going to pay all these expenses out of your own pocket, you have three choices. First, you can ask the members to pay. You could do this through dues or donations. The problem with this is that it tends to drive many members away. It can also cause hard feelings within the group.

Second, you could raffle or sell things to both members and non-members. This has the same problem as the first choice. It has a further problem in that you have to get the materials to sell or raffle. One method that some organizers use is to sign up for an affiliate program such as the one from Amazon.com. This allows you to sell items from Amazon on your group’s site, without spending money to purchase the items. The problem is that you have to earn enough commissions to meet their minimum payment before they will send you any money.

The third choice is finding sponsors for the group and its events. The only downside to this is that you need to contact different people and businesses to find the sponsor. On the positive side, this is the easiest way to get long term funding for the group, and it doesn’t tend to cause strife within the group. Since I believe this is the best method long run for a group to obtain the funds, this guide will focus on this method of raising funds.

I would like to first address what we have to offer the sponsor. These are things that I currently offer sponsors or will be doing within the next month. I hope that others can add their own ideas to this list. You can also give suggestions on how to improve the ideas that have already been listed.

What Do You Need from a Sponsor?

The first step in finding a sponsor, is deciding what you need from the sponsor. Until you know how much you need, and if you can use services and/or merchandise in place of money, it makes no sense to ask the potential sponsor.

First, take a quick look at what you have spent in the past. How much have you had to pay in fees to Meetup.com, the venue where you meet, the stationary store, the copy center, and any other place that you spend money for your Meetup group. Count it all up both in dollar amount and in merchandise and services.

Next we need to look at where you would like to be with your Meetup group if you could afford it. For instance would you have t-shirts or bumper stickers for the members? Do you need business cards? How about funds for materials used during the Meetup? You may also want to
host a dinner party for the members? What ever your plans, you need to list how much money and merchandise and services that you will need.

Once you have the total list of what you need for both current and planned expenses, you need to separate these expenses by recurring and one time expenses. Now that you know what you need in order to accomplish what you want to do, we need to see what we can offer the sponsor.

What Do You Have to Offer a Sponsor?

The sponsor is either looking to sponsor you because of what you can do for him, or because they want to support the cause that the group supports. Since obtaining sponsors that support a particular cause is going to be something that most groups will not be involved in, we will not be discussing that here.

The biggest thing that a business is going to look for from your group is advertising. He wants to get the word out to as many potential customers as possible. More importantly, he wants to get the word out about his products and services to those who are most likely to purchase. For instance, the owner of a nail salon is much more interested in advertising to the members of a women’s group than to a group that is involved with boxing. That means that you have to focus what you have to offer based on the products and services that put your group into the business’ core group of customers.

The first thing that you have to offer is listing the website and logo of the sponsor on your About page. I suggest that it not be just a simple link. Providing a blurb about the companies products and services that would interest you and your members will make this much more effective.

Adding the sponsor’s information to your monthly flyer that you drop off at various locations is an excellent advertising tool to offer your sponsor. The flyer typically describes your Meetup group to some degree and tells about the events. If the sponsor has a logo or internet address, you should list it on the flyer. Additionally, this is an area that you should remember the sponsor’s core group of customers. For instance if the sponsor is someone that produces tools for authors, it would help both them and you to make sure the flyers are distributed to all of the book stores in the area.

Each month the system emails and asks for the RSVP. You also have the chance to email the members with other messages at various times of the month. Listing the sponsor, in the description of events and in any emails that you send out is an excellent way to advertise for the sponsor.

You can also use posts on the message board to advertise the sponsor where possible. Some organizers make a specific thread on the message board that lists the sponsors. In order to keep the thread visible whenever anyone uses the message boards, you can pin the thread to the top of the message board.
You can also allow the sponsor to make a presentation at the monthly meetup. At my group’s monthly meetup, an employee of Boardwalk and Park Place is given a few minutes to tell the group about new products that they have available at the store. The employee does this at the same time they are presenting the door prizes that they provide to the members. So far they have given several hundred dollars worth of prizes to the members in exchange for this advertising. The president of 3am Games has also given a presentation about one of their products. He gave a very well received presentation of how to design adventure scenarios that used one of their adventure scenarios as an example. These presentations put a human face on the sponsor and make it much more likely that the members will purchase from the sponsor.

**Who Should I Approach about Being a Sponsor?**

Any salesperson or fundraiser can tell you that this is a numbers game. The more people that you approach who are legitimately potential sponsors, the better your chance of having someone sponsor your group. I am not saying that you will necessarily have to go through a lot of people before you get a sponsor. That is not what I am saying. After all every single person that I have approached as a potential sponsor, has agreed to sponsor our group. What I am saying is that it may take you a few tries before you get the sponsorship that you need. Every area is different, and the groups are different. That means that the number of people you talk to before finding enough sponsors will be different.

To find those potential sponsors, you need to start a list of potential sponsors. First, make a list of those businesses that sell products or services that anyone involved in your Meetup group would need in order to participate in your activity. For example, a group that does knitting would need knitting supplies in order to participate in that activity. These businesses are your core group. They will be the ones most likely to sponsor your group, so they are your first priority to contact.

The next category is businesses that sell things that the group could use but are not their main business. For instance a book store will sell knitting books, or a stationary store selling pens, pencils, paper, etc to writers. These potential sponsors sell things you need but they are not focused on your activities. While they have a good chance to sponsor you, it is not as likely as a business as one that focuses on your activities.

The third category is those businesses that sell products and services that all of your members are more likely to use than the general population, but doesn’t focus on your activities as a group. A Stay at Home Moms group is going to be composed mainly of women with children. These women will be much more likely to use the service of a pediatrician or a children’s entertainment complex than the general public. This is because the general public includes singles, married couples without children, retired couples, etc. None of those are likely to need the services of a pediatrician.
To find businesses in this category, simply think about the different businesses that you patronize and family members and friends might not visit. Also ask your group members which ones that they patronize that family members and friends might not. This will give you a list of those establishments that your group is more likely to use than the general population.

Between these three categories, you will have a large number of businesses that you can contact to sponsor your group. Start with the first category and write or call each business on that list. If you still need more money or services to meet your objectives, then you need to go with the next category. Continue this process until you have gone through each category. This should enable you to meet all of your financial objectives.

**How to Contact Sponsor?**

There are three ways to contact a potential sponsor: in person, by phone, or by mail. Of these methods, the best ways are by mail and in person. I like pitching to a sponsor in person because it is harder for most people to say no in person. It also helps you to negotiate with the sponsor to offer what they need from your group in return for the sponsorship. One important thing to keep in mind is this gives you a chance to read body language. This can be important in negotiating with a sponsor. Finally, it gives you a chance to answer any questions they have.

Mailing a potential sponsor a letter requesting a sponsorship is the best method to contact the largest number of people in the least amount of your time. It can also be better for those who are uncomfortable talking about such things. When using this method, always make sure that you present a professional appearance. That means use good stationary and print it with a good printer. If the printer is almost out of ink/toner, change it.

If you do decide to contact potential sponsors by phone, be prepared for the consequences. Some people will assume you are a telemarketer, and treat you as such. You may also have to play phone tag repeatedly. Lastly, you may not have the person’s full attention. If you do decide to use this method to contact businesses, there are some things that you should do. Try to be as upbeat and enthusiastic as possible. Make sure that you smile while talking to the person. This affects your voice and is picked up by the other person. If you say that you will send material to the person, do so. Keep notes of the conversation, to make sure what terms are agreed upon.

No matter which way you contact the potential sponsor initially, you should send a thank you letter. Thank the person for their time and if they agree to sponsor your group thank them for them that. I recommend adding a personal note to the thank you letter. This is appreciated by the person receiving the letter, and will help to build your reputation with the business. This may make it easier to get an approval from the company next time.
What Should I Say?

The most important things to tell a potential sponsor is what your group is about, what you need from the sponsor, and what you are willing to do for him. You want to keep it as short as possible, yet give all the important information.

It is also important for you to tell the potential sponsor how to contact you. This can include your address, email, and phone numbers. You should also give the address for the group’s About page. This will allow the sponsor to look around a little bit before making a decision, if he decides to do so.

Here are a couple of other recommendations for the letter. Personalize the letter as much as possible. If you know the persons name, use it. If you know the products and/or services that he offers that would interest your members, mention it. Give a date that you will call if you do not hear from them before hand.

Here is a sample letter that you can use to prepare your letters or sales pitch.

Dear Don,

I am the organizer for the local Dungeons and Dragons group: the Greenville Dungeons and Dragons Meetup. Our group is composed of 100 members who are devoted to one of the greatest role playing games ever invented. Since your company makes accessories for Dungeons and Dragon, and other role playing games, I wanted to propose a partnership.

Our group is looking for sponsors in order to cover the costs that are incurred in the process of our meetings. In return, we are willing to help promote your company and its products. Since all of our members are really dedicated to using the gaming products that you sell; this seems like an excellent opportunity for a win-win solution.

What we offer to you and your company is the opportunity to have a dynamic and growing group of gamers assist you in promoting your products. Our membership has grown dramatically over the last year. More importantly we have become one of the most active Dungeons and Dragons Meetup groups in the world. This means that you have the opportunity to sell to a motivated audience that is growing in size almost every month.

We are offering the following specific promotional help to your company. First, we will post your company’s logo and a link to your web site on our group’s web site. You can see the link we have for a current sponsor at http://dnd.meetup.com/29/about/ and at the top of http://dnd.meetup.com/29/boards/. Second, we will place your name and logo on all of the flyers that we distribute to advertise our gaming events. Third, our monthly email communications with members will detail your sponsorship of our group. Fourth, we are willing to allocate time for you or your representative to give presentations during our meetings. Imagine the sales opportunities from being able to give a presentation on
what makes a good adventure scenario while showing the members your products as examples. Finally, we are willing to consider any other promotional ideas that you may suggest in the future.

In return, we are asking that you sponsor our group by making a small donation of just $10 a month. We would like you to agree to sponsor our group for a period of six months in order to give us time to work together. After that six month period, if we both agree that the partnership program is working successfully we would ask that you continue this successful partnership.

I look forward to talking with you and answering any questions that you might have. You may contact me by calling me via telephone 864-xxx-xxxx night or day. I will contact you the week of the 18th, if I have not heard from you before then.

Looking forward to a successful partnership,

Ron Purvis
Organizer, Greenville Dungeons and Dragons Meetup

You should be prepared to answer the following questions for any potential sponsors. How many members do you have? How many members are local? How often do your members actually attend a Meetup session? How often do you send out emails to the group? How much usage does the message boards get? Is the group growing, and if so how fast?

The answers to these questions will help the potential sponsor decide if this advertising opportunity is what they are looking for or not. If you do the in person sales pitch, bring along print outs that show as much of this information as possible.

**Conclusion**

While all organizers have expenses, you don’t have to pay them out of your own pocket unless you choose to do so. You can find sponsors to cover all of the costs for your Meetup Group. Finding sponsors is easy to do but does require a plan. If you follow the steps in this guide, you should have no problems with gaining enough sponsorship to cover the expenses for your group.