

Freeman⁷

Sponsorship strategies for live experiences

Use this cheat sheet to navigate today's event landscape

Sponsorship is always a hot topic. As events shapeshift to meet changing audience care-about, it's important to revisit your sponsorship program so it's a triple slam dunk for audiences, sponsors, and your organization.



Here's your quick guide to what successful sponsorship looks like today — along with some smart tips and must-haves to make your program relevant, up to date, and competitive.

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Crush it with CONNECTION



Share Your Thoughts with A GIF

Sponsorship strategies for live experiences

Quality over quantity.

Personalization is the name of the game, so brands want smaller events offering deeper, more memorable connections: *“The way we connect people matters. And that means delivering more targeted experiences that offer high-touch opportunities that truly resonate with attendees while still meeting brand goals.”*

Hellena O'Dell, Senior Vice President, Freeman

From sponsorships to partnerships.

Building relationships builds better experiences. *“Big corporations are looking beyond sponsorship. They want a partnership that brings them into the attendee experience and allows them to be integrated into the event in a way that’s very genuine and personal.”*

Bridgette Vanderlaan, Vice President, Sponsorship Engagement, Freeman

Tee up turnkey options.

Instead of shipping heavy materials or structures, turnkey booths provide a popular and practical option. These help exhibitors minimize costs, are more eco-friendly, and help ease staffing challenges. Potential partners can explore alternative options to sponsor high-traffic activations like coffee and treat stations, lounge spaces, or engaging photo ops.

Authenticity builds trust.

Research shows that ~9 out of 10 people (88%) say they like and support brands that are authentic. 90% of consumers and 93% of employees are more loyal to brands they trust. Build on your partnerships by being upfront, transparent, and honest about what you’re offering and about what your organization prioritizes beyond profits.

Beyond butts in seats.

“When looking at a sponsored keynote, for example, ROI shouldn’t be based on how many people were in the room. Instead, brands should focus on how many people watched it in the partner booths, activated your content on the show floor, or watched it on demand later. Numbers are much bigger and broader now.”

Courtney Aguilar, Vice President, Sponsorship Engagement, Freeman

Prioritize play.

Encourage playful engagement and collaboration to cultivate community and a happier environment. At any age, play energizes the environment, builds connections, increases productivity, and maintains well-being. Playful bonus: Engaging in play relieves stress!

Less “stuff,” more sustainability.

Sustainability is on everybody’s wish list, which means rethinking not just booths, but swag. Work with sponsors to brainstorm cool swag they’ll actually use — like water bottles customized on-site by local artists — and won’t end up in the landfill. (Donation boxes for unwanted swag are also helpful.)

Community before, after, and beyond.

Marketers are realizing the importance of customer journey planning — once-a-year engagement only works for Santa Claus. To stay connected with audiences throughout the year, brands are offering ongoing live and virtual opportunities, apps that last beyond the event, and even dedicated community platforms to share content and more.

What do brands want from sponsorships?

STRATEGIC,

PERSONALIZED,

and INTEGRATED connections with targeted audiences.



XLNC: A matchmaking framework for attendee and sponsor needs

Based on our research and decades of experience, we've found that each attendee's true purpose for attending a live event tends to fall into one of four categories:

(X)perience:

These attendees are looking for a memorable event that will take them out of their day-to-day life and transport them into an exciting, immersive experience that they can look back on fondly for years. Stimulate their senses in a positive way that creates a greater affinity for your brand, products, and/or services.

(L)earn:

Whether it's attending multiple product demonstrations or dashing from session to session, these attendees want to wring as much learning as possible out of the time and financial investment they've made in the event.

(N)etwork:

Armed with phones full of new digital contacts (and maybe a few old-school business cards), these attendees want to make connections, meet key industry players, raise their profile, and/or close deals with the leads they've been nurturing.

(C)ommerce (to do business):

Everyone wants to bring success to their organizations, but this type of attendee is coming with specific business goals (and sales numbers) in mind. They want to network and have fun along the way, but closing the deal comes first.



Sentiment

Location

Design



Inspiration

Discovery

Education



Find new

Broaden

Deepen



Awareness

Evaluation

Order/Purchase

Perhaps attendees mainly want to learn, but also have some fun after hours. Or perhaps they want to have fun, but also wish for networking opportunities. Marketers must understand what the mix of these goals looks like on a deeper level to develop the right sponsorship activations.

6 tips to glow up your sponsorship program:

- 1. Be an attentive matchmaker.** Tailor the experience to the audience. Event sponsors are now interested in quality over quantity, so help them better understand your community care-about and then build the sponsorship activation from there. The closer you can get to marrying (sorry, we had to) attendee wants with sponsor activations, the better.
- 2. Align activation with need.** Map sponsorship opportunities to the attendee journey. What do different groups of attendees want from the event, and how does that align with event KPIs? From there, you can determine the right solutions.
- 3. Strategize virtual inclusion.** In-person gets the spotlight, but digital and hybrid events provide flexibility and accessibility for attendees. “To have a well-rounded DEI program, event marketers should pay attention to what happened during the last few years. Virtual events are a key component of maintaining diversity goals moving forward.”
Ken Holsinger, SVP of Strategy, Freeman
- 4. Go beyond the numbers.** Using the XLNC framework to determine outcomes (what you want audiences to think, feel, and do) and priorities can help define your measurement plan that will deliver against audience expectations. So, instead of asking *How do we measure this event?*, inform your strategy by measuring the success of the event touchpoints that are based on sponsor + attendee wants.
- 5. Update your acronyms.** ROI remains top of mind, especially in today’s climate. But focusing on ROE (return on engagement) is a more consultative approach. Explore audience objectives and then offer connection opportunities between attendees and sponsors (for their return on opportunity) that they can maximize at the event.
- 6. Think outside the event.** Help brands get more value from sponsoring areas or activities off the event grid such as a pre-event golf tournament.



Testing tip: Interstitial encounters

Experiment with activations in unexpected, in-between spaces like venue entrances, hallways, patios, etc. Test different options and ideas to expand exhibitor options and drive sponsorship revenues.

Your sponsorship checklist: Prep for the wow!

- Establish specific criteria to better segment your audience (they've been shifting a lot, so do your homework!) based on their objectives.
- Determine how to align those groups' wants with your event goals.
- Create opportunities for sponsors and attendees to connect with these groups in smaller, more targeted ways.
- Seek out integrated sponsorship opportunities and customized packages.
- Help sponsors be more sustainable with turnkey booths, earth-friendly activations, and swag that's worth taking home post event.
- Offer ways to engage attendees year-round, even if it means bringing sponsors to the attendees instead of the other way around.

Ready to refresh your sponsorship program for better results?

Let's connect

