

Guide to Sponsorship

Introduction

Building a good combat robot is always easier with some commercial sponsorship behind you. This doesn't need to restrict what you do, control how you work, involve selling your soul to the devil or get in the way of fighting your robot.

However, getting sponsors is not easy, and does involve work. Do not think that all you need is a sponsor and your life will be plain sailing. Sponsorship is not about being at the top of the sport, it does not have to involve getting on TV.

Each company out there will have its own reasons why it might or might not want to get involved with a team, choosing companies to sponsor you is the easy bit – it is working out which buttons to press that's the hard part.

Experienced or Inexperienced?

It doesn't matter whether you're a new team, or old hands – there are still good messages that can encourage sponsors whatever the situation. New teams offer sponsors the chance to get involved in something growing. The chances are you will improve quickly in your competition performance, and ability. This represents a good return for a sponsor. Do not assume just because you're not the a 'top team' that people wouldn't be interested in you.

If you're an inexperienced team you need something to show. Some teams have managed to get sponsorship before they've even got their toolkit out. Cardboard models, sketches, cad models all help explain what you want to do, and help enthuse your sponsor. But bare in mind, they probably don't care how many wheels your robot has – they want to understand what the opportunity for promoting what they do with your assistance is! Don't drag them down with 'its going to do this that and the other' when all they really want to know is how many events do you go to, and could you promote their welder/motors/wheels/whatever while you're there? Or could you come along with them to a trade show with your robot?

The reverse of this is the problem that faces the experienced team. You have to demonstrate to a sponsor that although you may have 'peaked', there are still more directions for you to go, and for you to take their brand at the same time. You risk having a shorter shelf life than a new team, as once you're at the top; sadly the only way is down.

What the experienced team can offer though is a more certain return – the risks are lower. You'll already have a well-known, reliable robot that people recognise. Your sponsors don't need to wait for a return on their investment!

Understand your sponsor

Before approaching a sponsor, think about what they might want from you. Ignore what you want from them – put yourself in their shoes. Why would they want to sponsor you?

Research your sponsor, go online, look at any information about them, not just on their website, but search the Internet for other references to them. Read their press releases – what activities do they get involved in? Have they even done sponsorship work before? If they're a local shop or company, try to find out what they do in the local community, do they advertise in the local paper for example?

Does your sponsor care that you might get them on TV? Would they prefer the fact that a local paper might be interested in running an article on you that could carry information about their involvement? Do they have an educational mandate, and would they be more interested in what you could offer them in that arena as a vehicle to promote what they do? Also don't scattergun every sponsor that you think might be able to help. Choose the one that you think you can offer the best deal to, and that could offer you the right product. Concentrate on them – tell them you are concentrating on them because you believe in their products, and you would be proud to have them as a sponsor.

Help them understand you

You need to explain to your sponsor why you're asking for product X or £100. It's always useful if you can put things in context. For example if you're entering a competition, perhaps part of the cash could go towards entry fees. If you have decided on your motors, and they make them – explain what benefits you believe their product offers you. If you can explain this to them, they'll see why you using them will allow them to explain the benefits of their products to their customers!

What should I ask for £££ or parts?

It depends on who you are talking to – have a think about it. If you approach your local model shop and ask them if they could sponsor you with some RC Control gear. How easy is it for them to give you this? Even though they're giving it to you, they're going to have to buy it from the manufacturer, costing them money. Also think about the scale of what you have to offer your local model shop? Will they really benefit from the potential of you advertising product across the UK at events and on TV?

If you're after parts, find a manufacturer. They will sell to a far wider area than just a single model shop could, and will benefit from the exposure that you can bring them. Also, as they make the goods, their costs will be lower than the retailer – its actually cheaper for the manufacturer to sponsor you then it is for your local model shop.

Parts are always easier to get than cash, because for companies giving you parts is cheaper than giving you cash. Remember, although you might be asking for something that has an RRP in the shops of £500, it might only cost £100 to produce!

Services are the easiest thing for companies to offer. For a local engineering company to fit in turning some axles and other parts for you in between their other work isn't much effort, and needn't cost them much money, particularly if you've managed to source the material!

Remember all the time, the sponsor is thinking "Why should I do this"

Don't rely on doing X or Y for your sponsor.

Your sponsorship agreement shouldn't be bound by agreeing to do things that are outside your control. For example, don't promise you can get them on TV. You can explain that you're going to a filmed event, and there's a chance you can get them on TV, but don't over-stretch yourself. Make sponsorship deals that cover more angles for a sponsor than just TV or just carrying a logo.

By approaching a sponsor with a number of options, they can choose which way they want to go, and you're able to offer them a wide range of opportunities which will be far more appealing to them. Oh, and never never never just say to a sponsor "I'll put you on my website"!

Final Words

Hopefully this has given you some food for thought. It's not meant to be an idiots guide to getting sponsorship, just something to point you in the right direction. Think carefully about your sponsors, talk in your team about how you want to approach them and whom you want to approach. Remember, if you don't ask – you don't get!

Don't get upset if people say no, but if they do – politely ask them why, and learn from it.

Good luck!