

Sponsorship How-To Last Published Baffled Muffler 2004

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After last BM I was surprised at the positive feedback that I received regarding the article that I wrote. I am sincerely glad that so many enjoyed reading about Team Free Flow's endurance racing exploits.

That said I was speaking with Steve Bond at the East GTA meeting and he expressed a need for BM material (filler) . Being that I have always considered myself pretty reasonable in the filler department I volunteered to write some general interest articles and see how thoroughly I can embarrass family, friends and myself. So here goes.

Since 2000 I have been teamed with George Osmond in a team that we dubbed Team Free Flow. We have enjoyed a little success but are very realistic on who and what we are. We are a pair of middle aged kids that dabble in road racing. We are somewhat successful at the club level and lately vintage and endurance racing.

That said we have quite a bit of support (sponsors), by and large a lot more than most. It is always a topic of interest with our fellow competitors. Every year I get telephone calls and emails asking what the secret is. So if you're ready I am about to let y'all in on the "secret".

First thing I did was sit back and take an honest look at who we were as a team and what we had to offer. That's right I said offer. The biggest mistake most people make is going to potential sponsors with hat in hand and no game plan as to why someone should invest in you. Lets face it most companies have to see some return on any advertising dollar they spend. The trick is to convince them that it should be spent with you. It is not good enough to send a "resume" detailing every podium finish you have had in every backwater track in the land. THEY DON'T CARE. I say that in all seriousness, there are 1000 other guys doing the same thing. So why you?

We had great success in cross marketing. That meaning using one sponsor to sell another. We went out and secured a Toronto FM radio station as a sponsor. Using that station we explained in our mail out that we were going to do all kinds of PR work with them therefore exposing our sponsors to a wider market. How did we get the station? By making it hard for them to say no. George approached the marketing director with the idea that we would run the stations logo for free. We would appear at shows and events with their remote unit and they can use us to promote that event. We in turn use the event to promote ourselves and in extension sponsors. They jumped at it and since then we have done appearances with them at various shows, their Canada's Wonderland Day and the NBA All Stars game at the ACC. Of course we snap pics of our set up at each event and use that in correspondence with existing and potential sponsors with great success. We have also done a one hour live call in show with the sports director of which I taped and sent to our sponsors.

This is just one example of cross marketing. It is human nature that people want to belong to an exclusive group and our sport is certainly exclusive and exciting especially to non-knowledgeable fans. It does not need to be this elaborate. We also have a long distance telephone carrier that asks us for one appearance a season. Just one street festival. We bring the bikes and hand out flyers for them however in turn we showcase our graphics (sign company's) guy's work. He just happens to live in the area and likes the exposure.

That brings me to another long overlooked aspect of sponsor seeking. Racers tend to live in their own little world. They have a hard time looking past our own bubble. I sat down and really thought about where I spend my money. I like you have a never ending array of ways to vacate my wallet of disposable income.

That being things like household expenses, car repairs, kids etc. So why not try to tap into things that are not traditionally associated with racing. We sent out some three hundred "packages" (I will get back to this later) and a great many of them went to non-traditional companies. What we managed to secure out of this was a long distance provider which has given us free long distance for the past four years, a paint shop who offered to paint the bikes, a welding company, a sign guy who does all the graphics, and even a national muffler company who gives us cash as well as a 15% discount on car repairs. All of these things do little to get the bike on the track but all save cash out of our pockets that can now go towards racing, and isn't that the goal here?

The next target was the traditional sponsors. For whatever reason we have had little success with Canadian motorcycle parts suppliers. I feel that is likely due to the very small market in Canada and the abundance of racers willing to do anything for a small discount. On the other hand we have had great success with dealing with American manufacturers and importers. A great many of them look at Canada as another state or territory just ready to market. Take advantage of this.

Do your homework. Try to get actual names of people within a company and don't be shy about going to the top. We currently deal directly with a vice prez at both Mothers Wax and K & N. This despite being shot down by thier marketing clerk initially. It was just a matter of tweaking the interest in the right place.

Look at it this way, worse case scenario your package is addressed to an upper management person in a multi national company. You know that it's unlikely he/she will get your stuff without it being pre-screened by an assistant. Bad! Right? Well maybe not, little (insert name here) executive assistant cuts you off at the pass before you waste Mr.Big's valuable time and redirects your letter to marketing/advertising department. Now it's a letter coming from Mr.Big not some faceless, nameless racer. It will merit more than a quick glance and a toss into the round file. I have letters at home from both companies offering help as long as we want it.

Ok now we know who we are targeting. So how do we close it?

Lets look at what they want. They want as much exposure as possible for as little cost as possible. Why should (insert company name here) give you money to put

a sticker on a bike in a race where there is little spectator levels? They shouldn't especially when there are 100 guys that will do it for nothing (DO NOT ADVERTISE ANY COMPANY THAT DOES NOT GIVE YOU SOMETHING) this kills the goose that lays the golden egg. You will need to be a little more creative. We have devised such things as a revolving T-Shirt program where we as a team wear a particular sponsors T on non race days (Friday or Saturday) We ask them for enough T's for everyone and wear them in a revolving order. Even if they do not want to participate it shows that you think outside the box. We also ask them for handouts that we can use at shows and non race events (back to cross marketing). We always make ourselves available for that companies events, and by and large they are a lot of fun. I have had letters from companies thanking us for small things like including the company in an official sponsor list (that I ALWAYS include in every correspondence) or chatting up a person at a show. You never know who you are talking to. I have a letter at home thanking me for telling a certain person at a car show about the companies product. That person then called the company in California and became the Ontario distributor, so always be on. The things listed here are just an idea, try to think of ways that you are going to include this company in the exciting racing world. I realize that we by and large are a collection of old fat guys having a blast on vintage bikes (some of us older and fatter than others) but to the majority of the world we are exciting daring racers. Stop grinning..... like I said earlier people like to be included.

Ok so now we know who and some idea of how lets look at what. What do we want? Cash right! That is a tough one, cash is very hard to get, but I didn't have to tell you that did I? I generally do not ask for anything. I set up three cover letters that are somewhat personal but generic where I can just plug an address into a template and print. One is for cash (generally sent to completely non related to the industry companies), one is for product (sent to industry companies), and one for both. That said you will be amazed at the results in our first year. Before we had any track record at all we had three different brake companies, each offering a different level of support from a cursory discount to free stuff (guess who we are with?) I generally just toss them out and see what comes back. Keeping n mind it's a numbers game. The greatest number of them will be negative or wont respond at all but some will.

Now we know the who, how and what lets start on the actual package. Again if you only get one thing out of this, get this. Try to hold back from sending a list of your accomplishments to a sponsor (that is what everyone is doing). Unless your last name is Haydon or Duhamel nobody cares. If it is, then chances are Honda is calling right now anyway. For the rest of us we need to find the top of the pile before the budget runs out for 2005. I like to start with a very pleasant letter detailing who we are as a team and what we are looking for out of them (the three letters). I like to include a couple of our cross marketing ideas to peak some interest but not in detail. Second we include a list of events that we want to do for 2005 always include the org VRRR,RACE,WERA etc. Also if you plan on

attending races outside your local area be sure to note that on your calendar. Page three is generally a collage of photos. be sure to show off your professional look. Not too professional? Why not? You don't have to be serious about racing as a career to look the part. But you can't expect a company to become part of a team that's a mess so spend a little effort to look the part. If you have some podium shots of checkered flag shots here is the place for them.

Now that I have ranted and ranted I do realize that this is not for everyone. There a great many in the club who have no interest in all this but I wrote this for those who do and who in the past have asked me for help in this. If you follow these simple suggestions I am confident that you too will be successful at attracting interest into your racing program and in turn some support.

Once you get some sponsors do yourself and racers in general a favor. Look after them be sure to send the updates and photos that they require. A bad experience with a racer who takes and gives nothing back is very hard for the next guy to overcome. Sponsorship is a two way street and has to be treated that way.