



'SELL' YOUR TEAM TO A SPONSOR

By Warren Mersereau

"Show Me the Money," the chant from the movie "Jerry Maguire," is similar to the appeal many soccer organizations make to potential sponsors. Unfortunately, it often is not heeded and the rejected organizations wonder why.

One of the key struggles in the movie is agent Jerry Maguire's attempt to get his client, Rod Tidwell, to be more than a statistic. Jerry keeps telling Rod that if he will present himself as a person, instead of just his statistics as a wide receiver, he will be worth more. The point is to get Rod to connect to his teammates, the fans and the media in order to add value to his statistics and, consequently, to generate a better contract and more endorsements.

This same approach can work for soccer organizations. They must present themselves, demonstrate connections to their target audiences, and, consequently, share value with prospective sponsors in order to generate sponsorship revenue.

At SoccerSolutions, we use a practical three-step process to help soccer organizations illustrate their value and increase their revenue opportunities. Shifting from movie terms to business terms, we believe that brand development leads to community development, which in turn leads to sponsorship development, in that order.

Step 1, brand development, has to do with having the soccer organization clearly describe itself. Sometimes this also includes defining itself. The logic behind this first step is that it is very hard to sell something if you cannot

clearly describe it.

We think that each soccer organization should consider itself a brand. This is not as intimidating as it may sound. The essence of a brand is to be able to show differentiation from competitors.

It is fair to say that most soccer organizations, including youth clubs, tournaments, coaches' associations and professional teams, consider themselves distinctive and different from other, even similar organizations. Each soccer organization probably also has a sense of pride about how it does things. Therefore, soccer organizations are brands, albeit sometimes small brands.

In order to describe itself, we advocate that each soccer organization — each soccer brand — explicitly address the following topics:

- **Mission** — What is the purpose of the organization?
- **Vision** — What is the longer-term goal (aspiration) of the organization?
- **Values** — What principles, both ethical (e.g. integrity) and operational (e.g. safe environment), are most important to the organization?
- **Target audiences** — Whose needs are you going to serve?
- **Identity** — What are the factual elements that clearly identify the organization (e.g. legal entity, board of directors, name, official affiliations, logo, colors, geographical location, etc.)?
- **Differentiation** — What makes the organization stand out (from competitors)?
- **Positioning** — What attributes (e.g. family oriented, winning, developmental, etc.) are used by the organization to present itself to its target

audiences?

- **Image** — How is the organization perceived by its target audiences?

Hopefully, the positioning of the organization and the way the organization is actually perceived (image) by its target audiences are well aligned. If not, work should be done to create alignment before sponsorships are solicited.

It is important that these topics be addressed in writing. Why such "formality"? Because the membership, even leadership, in organizations changes and there needs to be continuity of intent and action. Written and visible descriptions also give members of an organization rallying points and reminders upon which to build the organization's unique character. In addition, written descriptions encourage the same description being used by all members when "selling" the organization. These written descriptions are ready-made for PowerPoint and other presentation formats.

Step two, community development, has to do with satisfying the needs and interests of a soccer organization's target audience(s). If a soccer organization can demonstrate that it is both reaching and positively impacting its target audience(s), then it is creating value for itself and for potential sponsors.

The initial sponsorship proposition is simple. Potential sponsors are seeking effective and efficient ways to connect to and influence their own target audience(s). If a soccer organization has the same target audience(s), a potential sponsor might actually become a sponsor if the soccer organization can demonstrate strong relationships with the target audience(s). This means that



the soccer organization can deliver value to the sponsors' brand and sales efforts.

Community development, therefore, is about making sure that a soccer organization is strong, first, because it takes care of its own members and, second, because it can "deliver" this satisfied membership to sponsors who target the same audience(s).

Following are elements for developing a responsive community development program:

- **Target audience(s)** — Who is the soccer organization serving?
- **Needs and/or interests to satisfy** — What needs and/or interests of its target audience(s) are the soccer organization going to address?
- **Resources and capabilities** — What resources and capabilities does the soccer organization have available to satisfy its target audience(s)?
- **Programs offered** — What are the programs offered by the soccer organization to satisfy its target audiences?
- **Goals for programs** — What is the soccer organization trying to achieve with each program offered?
- **Marketing and execution** — How do the programs get developed and implemented?
- **Evaluation** — Which programs successfully meet their goals (and

which programs are unsuccessful)?

- **Planning process** — How does the soccer organization manage the community development process?

Each of these elements is important to potential sponsors because they allow the potential sponsor to assess a soccer organization's focus, ability to deliver positive results vis-à-vis their target audience(s), and ability both to effectively use the sponsor's resources and respond to the sponsor's management requirements.

From a very practical perspective, it is important for soccer organizations to make a concerted and organized effort at community development. Many soccer organizations always will rely primarily on their own community for support, so this home base must be kept strong. For those soccer organizations that want to attract sponsors, it is essential that they realize that the "product" they are selling (their organization and its community) must be in good shape — provide value — or there will not be any buyers (sponsors).

Step three, sponsorship development, has to do with actually making presentations to sponsors and, hopefully, establishing mutually beneficial partnerships with selected sponsors. This step will be the subject of a future

article because it involves a number of distinct phases:

- Identification of the soccer organization's needs (financial, services, products, facilities etc).
- Identification of potential sponsors.
- Developing sponsorship packages.
- Establishing "win-win" sponsorship programs and proposals.
- Developing the sales presentation.
- Making the sales presentation.
- Negotiating.
- Implementing and servicing sponsorship programs.
- Evaluating sponsorship programs.
- Deciding on future steps.

In summary, soccer organizations seeking to obtain sponsorship support must clearly describe what they are about and then show how they effectively reach their target audiences and, thus, can provide value to sponsors interested in connecting to the same target audiences.

Once these steps have been taken, a soccer organization can join Jerry Maguire and Rod Tidwell in asking potential sponsors to "show me the money!" ⚽

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Coaches Named for High School Games

The six winners of NSCAA/adidas National High School Coaches of the Year awards have been selected to coach in the inaugural Powerade McDonald's All American High School Soccer Games, to be played June 15 on Daniel Island, Charleston, S.C.

Named to coach the boys teams were Michael Coulter (Brookwood High School, Snellville, Ga.), Don Ridall (Manlius Pebble Hill High School, DeWitt, N.Y.) and Bob Vroom (Swansboro High School, Swansboro, N.C.). Selected to coach the girls were Bob Bigelow (South Side High School,



Rockville Centre, N.Y.), John Burke (Catholic Memorial High School, Waukesha, Wis.) and Hank Tenney (Hanover High School, Hanover, N.H.).

These six coaches will be joined by two coaches from the host state of South Carolina to round out the coaching staffs. Players selected to the NSCAA/adidas All-America teams are eligible for consideration to participate

in the Powerade McDonald's All American High School Soccer Games, which will divide the 36 boys and 36 girls into 18-player teams representing the East and West. Final team rosters will be

announced in mid-May.

The games will be played at Blackbaud Stadium, home of the Charleston Battery of the USL's A-League.

Proceeds from the game will benefit Ronald McDonald House Charities and the Rotary Gift of Life, who non-profit organizations that provide health care services for children. ⚽