



Conference Canceled? There's Still Opportunity in Sponsorships...Really!

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For those of us in the association world, the cancellation or postponement of an annual or special focus event is a new, shared reality. The impact reaches every aspect of our professional lives...revenue generation, member recruiting, engagement and retention, the morale and well-being of our own teams... and yes, there's the impact on those all-important sponsor and supporter relationships. A recent ASAE survey found that over two thirds of the associations noted that disruption in sponsorship solicitation is significantly impacting their daily operations.

A close colleague said just days ago, "...cancelling our conference brought on feelings I can only describe as a little bit like grief."

As we all work through the stages of picking up the pieces, figuring out what's next, what's best and what's possible, we are donning our "sponsorship" hats. In this "new normal" what are the options for keeping sponsors connected to our associations, helping them address their changing business realities, reinforcing our relationships to support ongoing opportunities during these tough times and anticipating a future when we will begin to live and work more normally.

So here are some 'starter' ideas and yes, we'd love to keep the list growing, evolving and the ideas and inspiration of our colleagues across the association ecosystem:

- 1. Stay in Contact:** For many sponsors, their affiliation with your association builds brand, pipeline, visibility and industry knowledge. These values can continue – and even be strengthened — in virtual settings. When applicable, let sponsors know you're working on new and innovative programs and opportunities to help them stay in touch with and serve your members. Ask for their ideas, needs and what would help them going forward and share those ideas.
 - 2. Be Helpful & Human. Press Pause on Promotion and Marketing.** Help, reassurance and human connection is the best branding right now. Encourage sponsors to reach out to you personally and share their needs and opportunities and provide honest information and insight into how your association is planning and operating going forward. Sponsors are our colleagues and partners...not just our customers.
 - 3. Add Some Value. Corral That Creativity. Tap Technology.** Can you provide some industry or market insights that are valuable for sponsors? How about a virtual panel discussion with some of your more innovative members? Would sponsors be interested in hosting virtual roundtables, round-up emails, or other helpful online sessions for your members? Give your sponsors a path forward and some smart reasons to retain and even increase their sponsorship commitment with you.
- 1. There's A Light at the End of This Tunnel and It's NOT a Train. It's the Future!**
None of us ever want to see something like this again...but the smarter we become about using virtual tools, digital communications and innovative sponsorship programs now...the more prepared and ahead we are for future success.

Let us hear from you and share some of the innovative steps you're taking to protect and grow your association's sponsorship strategies and success. We will emerge from these days stronger and stronger.

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