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How to secure major sponsorship: 'Spirit of the Jaguar', a case study

In 1999 Chester Zoo secured an agreement with Jaguar Cars worth some \$3 million, funds which were used to build the 'Spirit of the Jaguar' exhibit, as well as support outreach work in Belize and Brazil.

John Regan, formerly Development Manager at Chester Zoo, distils for us the principles that led to this success.

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There are two radically separate sets of requirements in the search for major sponsorship. The first, the idea of marketing 'fit', is readily available from mainstream marketers, and indeed understood by professional fundraisers from outside the zoo world.

However the second, the need to position one's organisation effectively in the minds of decision makers, and to build a network to these decision makers, *is* much less widely understood or practised, and is perhaps the main reason why sponsorship overtures from our zoos fail.

But let us look at the (..relatively) easy bit first

'The Fit'

Sponsorship is a marketing activity. It has, in a strictly logical world at least, *nothing* to do with philanthropy, with the giving of money for altruistic purposes.

The Sponsor is looking to deploy their finite budget in a cost effective alternative to buying advertising space on TV or in the papers. In order to persuade them to this, we must offer them exactly what they want. And what a sponsor wants, in general, boils down to exactly two things:

1. *To endow their brand with a new positive and appropriate association ('a transfer of values' from sponsored to sponsor).*
2. *To gain access to a well-defined market or audience*

And that is pretty much it. So let us see how this worked in practice with Jaguar Cars.

On the face of it the 'transfer of values' logic was rather obvious. Sir William Lyons had chosen the Jaguar cat as a symbol for his new car back in 1936. Jaguar, in the throes of launching a new model, now wanted *'to put the Jaguar back into the Jaguar'*. The car buying public were to be reminded of all of the positive qualities shared

by the car and the cat “grace, strength, poise, the exotic and a sense of controlled power”

However, the positive brand alignments went much further than this. Frankly, the strongest attribute our zoos can offer to the commercial world is *not* conservation, but rather the image of happy families having a good time together, an association which fits perfectly with the perfect context for car purchase – a family outing.

There was more. The entire automotive industry is quite rightly under scrutiny from the environmental lobby. By aligning itself with conservation of its own threatened corporate symbol, Jaguar Cars went some way to ‘greening’ their brand.

One could go on to list other alignments, but let us move instead to *the second* thing a sponsor wants, access to an audience.

Walk into any large branch of WH Smiths these days and marvel at the array of special interest magazines (this is less than 1 % of the titles *actually* available in the UK through specialist outlets or by subscription only).

All of these publications exist largely as vectors for advertisers to access otherwise hard to reach niche audiences. They are the equivalent of sponsorship seeking organisations that can prove who their audience is.

In the case of Jaguar Cars, Chester Zoo was able to substantiate a very large geographically and demographically defined group, significantly matching the projected audience for the new ‘affordable’ X-type Jaguar.

However there were audiences *other than the consumer* that mattered intensely to Jaguar.

The transformation of workforce culture in Halewood on Merseyside from Ford employees (with a reputation for industrial unrest) to Jaguar workers (with all the pride in product and heritage that implied) was a major issue. Thus the ‘Spirit of the Jaguar’ sponsorship (... special ticket deals for the Halewood plant... Jaguar assembly line workers invited to be ‘a keeper for a day’... Halewood staff choosing a name for the new cats arrivals... and a stream of other involvement promotions on offer) constituted one element in the Ford to Jaguar toolbox of ‘culture change’.

Then there was how *Government* regarded Jaguar and their parent company, Ford. Chester Zoo’s development office had worked long and hard to develop excellent governmental relations (a strategy that also ultimately reaped massive benefits for a number of our zoos a couple of years later in the recent breakthrough on VAT). Thus Jaguar Cars knew their benevolence and community spirit would register at the most senior level, impacting positively on all kinds of strategic ‘macro’ issues.

So much for the straightforward marketing logic of sponsorship for Jaguar Cars, now for the tricky bit...

'Getting to the table'

I have lost count, earlier in my fundraising career (in the Health Service, in the Arts, etc), of the times when I followed the above advice to the tee. Having thoroughly researched the prospect brand, I had produced immaculately tailored marketing proposals. These would speak eloquently of the alignment of both attribute and audience. A covering letter would emphasize that this was a *marketing* overture, and not a request for philanthropy.

In the majority of cases, *if* I received a reply at all, this would politely explain that the 'request for funds' had been passed to that company's charity committee or similar. I would hear nothing more.

It took some time for me to realise that, in order to establish a solid platform to explore marketing partnerships at all, one needed to build up a very elaborate network of contacts and 'door openers'. One also needed to more generally imprint consciousness of one's organisation within the appropriate decision making community.

The overall strategy devised at Chester in the late 90's was too multi- stranded to recount here. However in the instance of Jaguar Cars, once the fit was evident (in outline only – the details would only become focused in later dialogue with Jaguar), it was clear that only a face to face meeting with the most senior UK based decision maker would suffice.

This aim was reached strategically through the creation of a completely new group associated with the Zoo.

The 'Chester Zoo Advisory Board' was a voluntary group of senior business figures all with huge experience and extensive networks, whose remit is to use these to forge the necessary contacts for the Zoo's various ambitions.

The successful formation and careful development of this group was the *real key* to the Jaguar sponsorship (and to many other major breakthroughs with the business and political decision making community). One particular distinguished figure, since an Honorary Fellow of the Society, was approached to join, in part because of his overall experience, but also in the knowledge that he had excellent contacts in several high level circles. Critically and specifically, these included the automotive industry.

Most particularly we were aware that our 'door opener' was a long-standing friend of the then Chairman and Chief Executive of Jaguar Cars.

Once an introduction had been effected, it was a relatively simple matter to secure a meeting with the Chairman, gauge his level of enthusiasm and design a proposal as above that fitted Jaguar's needs.

Before closing, I should mention one final key element in securing such major funds:

teamwork and the support of the Chief Executive.

All of the above would have been for nothing, but for the technical support of **Chris Vere**, then Marketing Manager at Chester, the involvement in certain crucial meetings of Chief Curator, **Chris West**, and the overall patient support and encouragement of Director **Gordon McGregor Reid**.

ENDS

Anyone interested in copy of the full article: 10 steps to major sponsorship success for zoos should email John Regan at John Regan Associates Ltd; JohnRegan@freeuk.com

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