

Blog Conference Newbie's



Sponsorship 101 Series

Guide to Finding Blog Conference Sponsorships



SPONSORSHIP 101: HOW TO GET A SPONSOR

As we gear up for [2011 blog and social media conference](#) season which is approaching almost as fast as the holidays are, the topic of gaining conference sponsorship continually pops up. Earlier this year, *Blog Conference Newbie Guide* published various posts on the topic of conference sponsorship:

- [Personal Sponsorship Guidelines](#)
- [What Companies Want in Sponsorship Pitches](#) (viewpoint from a brand)
- A [blogger's experience with getting conference sponsorship](#)
- A [blogger/marketer's perspective on sponsorship](#)
- [Creating an Advertising/Sponsorship Kit](#) (important step in marketing yourself/blog)

Even with these resources, there are still tons of questions and confusion regarding what to offer potential sponsors in exchange for sponsorship and what conferences will allow when it comes to personal sponsorship. Hence, the need for this “**Sponsorship 101**” series. Let’s start the series by delving into how to get a sponsor. That is, how to approach them, what to say, and where to go from that point.

Where To Begin

Who: Start brainstorming which brands you’ve worked with in the past and obviously start with them. If you’ve never worked with a company before in any capacity, then think about brands you’ve conversed with via Twitter, Facebook, or email, even if it was merely a simple and brief exchange consisting of a few words. Also brainstorm products you already love using and consider reaching out to them. In addition, consider reaching out to local companies who may be looking to gain more exposure nationwide via social media. *Another tip:* don’t always go for the biggest brands. If you’re a “smaller” blogger (and I dislike that term), try to find a brand that might be newer to social media or isn’t huge. While they might not be able to cover all of your conference expenses, they might be able to provide a partial sponsorship – plus a new, budding partnership!

Like I mentioned above, start thinking of sponsorships differently. You will come across desperate and overly focused on money if you try to approach just any brand that comes to mind. Work on starting genuine conversations with companies versus making your first (and possibly only) interaction all about sponsorship.

How: Once you’ve decided on a company you’d like to officially pitch to, you need to decide *how* you will do so. Here’s the truth: there is no right or wrong way to pitch for sponsorship. There are many methods and not one works for everyone. Your main options are....



- Send a link of your “sponsorship package” blog page to the potential sponsor via a DM on Twitter
- Email the potential sponsorship with your official pitch and possibly even your [advertising/sponsorship kit](#)
- Give the company a call. You can utilize Twitter to connect with the brand and find out who you can contact to talk in more depth. Sometimes it’s someone at the company or it might be a PR person.
- Create a vlog instead of a written sponsorship pitch

What To Include In Your Sponsorship Pitch

Again, you need to write a pitch that works for you, so copying someone else’s won’t come across authentic. Here is an [example blog conference sponsorship proposal email from Deal Seeking Mom](#). Keep it brief and to the point, at least initially – many companies receive tons of pitches, so don’t make them read pages upon pages. Here’s what you should include in it:

- **Introduction.** This includes introducing yourself and your blog, stats on your [social media reach/influence](#), other sites you blog for, groups you’re active in online or have started, and any other information that illustrates how you can help increase exposure for their company. Even if the company is familiar with you, you’ll want to provide this information again.
- **Costs associated with the sponsorship.** Now, this is where you have to decide what you feel most comfortable including. Some people don’t include any figure in their initial correspondence and instead focus on connecting before naming the price. Others break down and list the costs (*i.e. travel, ticket, hotel*). Still others [give them the grand total of costs up front](#). Another option is to [create a tiered-package with details](#) on what the sponsor will receive in exchange for various price points. If there is anything else you require from the company (*i.e. promotional products for a giveaway or Twitter party, etc*), you’ll want to state this up front as well.
- **What you’re offering the company in this partnership.** The goal is to offer your sponsor as much exposure and promotion as possible. Get creative and let them see that you’ve researched and are knowledgeable about their company. List what you will do to promote them before, during, and after the conference. (*The next couple of posts will get into more detail on this topic*). You can list out a generic list of promotional options and tailor a package with them once you’ve connected or you can decide what promotional techniques you will offer specifically in your pitch without discussing this with them. In the tiered-package option, you can show how your promotional efforts depend on the sponsorship amount.
- **A brief description of the conference you’re hoping to attend and why it’s valuable to attend.** Many brands aren’t aware of all of the blogger conferences yet, so inform them with details and a link to the conference website. Also inform them why it’s valuable to attend the conference, both for you and the potential sponsor.



- ***What insights will you provide the company after the conference?*** Companies want to know what their return on investment (ROI) is for sponsoring you. Let them know up front that you will provide them with stats, pictures, and any other relevant information in a follow-up report. Within it, you can include stats from the [bit.ly links](#) you used to show how much traffic you drove to their site, screen shots from tweets pertaining to them, stats on how often their personalized hashtag was used on Twitter, and pictures of promotional efforts. Include whatever you think will illustrate how you've enhanced their exposure. This information may help the company decide if they want to continue working with you in the future.
- ***Closing section.*** Include your contact information, and any closing statements.

What To Do After You Send Your Pitch

If you don't hear back from the company right away, don't panic. You know how hectic your inbox can get, so it may take a few days for them to get back to you. If a week to ten days has gone by without any word from the company, feel free to contact them again to follow up and ask if there are any questions you can answer to help them with their decision.

There may be many emails or phone calls exchanged during the discussion process, so don't be alarmed if a decision isn't made immediately.

What To Do If You Don't Find A Sponsor

Don't take it personally! The reality is that not everyone will find a sponsor. Most of the time it's a financial issue – the company may want to sponsor you, but just can't afford to. In the meantime, start saving to attend a conference! Sell items on Ebay or via an Etsy or Opensky shop. Sell ad space on your blog. Ask for a ticket for the holidays or a birthday present. Make sure to [stay on top of when early bird rates end](#) in order to save money on the ticket and track good travel rates – any way you can cut back on costs if you have to foot the bill yourself. In addition, some [conferences ask for volunteers](#) in exchange for a discounted or free ticket. Whatever you do, don't let it discourage you from trying again for other conferences.



SPONSORSHIP 101: PROMOTING YOUR SPONSOR APPROPRIATELY AT CONFERENCES

The second post in this "**Sponsorship 101**" series on *Blog Conference Newbie Guide* delves into how to promote your brand at blog conferences while still adhering to personal sponsorship guidelines. (If you missed the first post in the series, go back and read [Sponsorship 101: How To Get A Sponsor](#))



"I've read the personal sponsorship guidelines for the conference I am hoping to attend. It says I can't hand out swag or brand items in official conference areas."

The bottom line is that conferences depend on their event sponsors to help keep costs down for attendees. From what I've been told, the price to attend conferences *without* this assistance would be astronomical! Therefore, most conferences make it a mandatory guideline not to promote your personal sponsor in official conference areas. I think everyone sees the importance and reason behind this, but many bloggers are left unsure how to promote their sponsor at the actual conference.

Instead of handing out sponsor swag/promotional items, consider adding your sponsor's name/logo/tagline to your [business card](#). You can take it a step further and write a sentence about why you love the products from your sponsor on the back of your card - something catchy and engaging. You may be thinking "*How is having their name on my business card more helpful than handing out swag?*" There are a couple of reasons. Since you can't hand out items in official conference areas, that means you will be standing somewhere removed from the event trying to give items to people passing by - you won't be in the heart of the crowd spreading the word. Some will take it because it's free and others will take it to be nice. But chances are the item or literature will be put aside and not investigated. If you put the sponsor's name or info on your business card, an item that you know bloggers will be looking at once they return home, the likelihood of them remembering the conversation you had about your sponsor is greater and the chance of them checking out the brand increases as well. At the end of the day, it's not about the free items or swag that makes people want to check out a company - it's the description of the products and the purpose it will bring someone that makes them seek them out.





"What about wearing a branded t-shirt promoting my sponsor? That's technically not handing out items."

True. It's not handing out personal sponsorship items. However, it's still a form of personal sponsor promotion. Even wearing a t-shirt with your sponsor's logo on it is frowned upon and not encouraged at most conferences (*you'll want to refer to the conference's sponsorship guidelines to find out for sure if this is a guideline at the conference you're attending*). If you are going to wear clothing or other items from the brand, try to wear something that isn't slathered in logos. Rather, wear clothing or items from the company that are colorful or cute and will spark a conversation about its style versus its logo.

You may be thinking that this is a bit strict, but let's think about this one in terms of your goal of promoting your sponsor. Sure, wearing a t-shirt branded with your sponsor's name is an easy way to spread the word, but once the person walks away from you, that t-shirt is no longer a promotional item. Meaning, out of sight, out of mind. Having the logo on your business card will leave a longer-lasting effect as it will be promoting your sponsor even after you leave the conference.



"Can I host a sponsor-branded party to promote my sponsor?"

I sound like a broken record, but again, not in official conference areas. What does this mean? Technically, you *can* host a party in your hotel room or at a different location, but is this worth it though? Let's investigate.

Having a party in your hotel room obviously limits things quite a bit: lack of space, seating, and visibility can make it hard to execute the kind of gathering you may be envisioning. If you decide to host a party off-site to promote your brand, there are also some things that may limit the success of the party that you need to give some thought to. The obvious is that people will require transportation to your party location, which will deter some people from going because they don't want to leave the hotel or pay money for transportation. In addition, because most conferences are booked with sessions all day and official conference parties/gatherings at night, you're competing with those for attendance. Conferences are usually jam-packed with activities. That's not to say no one will come, but it's important to think of the logistics before you commit to this plan with your sponsor.





"I've seen people run contests at conferences were they encourage people to find them to win a prize. Can I do that?"

Sure you can, but something to keep in mind here is that you don't want to spam the conference-specific hashtag. That is interpreted as tacky and usually annoying. *(As with any hashtag on Twitter, it's frowned upon to use it just to promote yourself unless it has relevance to the hashtag).* You can send out some tweets using the conference hashtag, just as you would when promoting and thanking your sponsor for helping you to attend, but just be careful not to cross the line into "spamville."

If you are going to orchestrate something like this, be creative, but make sure to stick to personal sponsorship guidelines. If you're bringing the item people can win to give out at the conference, have the winner come back to your room to gather it rather than using official conference space.



SPONSORSHIP 101: PROMOTING YOUR CONFERENCE SPONSOR ONLINE

In this **Sponsorship 101** series so far, we've looked at [how to get a sponsor](#) and [how to promote said sponsor at blog conferences](#). Now let's look at ways you can promote your sponsor online before, during, and after attending the blog conference.

In all honesty, most of the ways you will promote your sponsor will be via social media and blogs. Utilize your influence and voice to increase exposure for the company by using various social media platforms and creative marketing concepts. Think outside of the box for ideas and start believing in the fact that you have something to offer companies.



Promoting Sponsors Before *and* After Conferences

- **Ad space:** Offer advertising on your blog for a determined amount of time. Be specific regarding size and placement of this ad, keeping in mind that advertisements above the fold (*i.e space you can see without scrolling down*) are usually more valuable than those below it. Also make sure they are in accordance with the [IAB Ad Unit Guidelines](#). Determine the length of time the ad will be placed based on the sponsorship amount. Therefore, if you're receiving a full sponsorship, that ad would obviously be up longer than if you're receiving partial sponsorship. (*Note: If you belong to an ad network, be sure to check with their guidelines regarding hosting private ads as some networks don't allow it*).
- **Twitter and Facebook:** Bloggers usually think of using these social media platforms when considering how to increase exposure for their sponsor, and rightfully so because they are excellent avenues to accomplish this. However, it's important to take the thought of being authentic one step further. It's not only important to be authentic with your sponsor, but also to be authentic with your community. Spamming your subscribers/followers on Twitter and Facebook with constant messages about your sponsor will most likely result in the complete opposite of your goal and turn people off. Instead, a handful of authentic tweets and Facebook mentions about the company, their products, and gratitude for their sponsorship are generally received better and more effective. You can specify the number of tweets/Facebook messages you will send out up front in your pitch.



- **Posts on Your Blog:** You can write posts about your sponsor and their products and/or include a note at the bottom of posts with conference-related content that states the post was sponsored by the company (i.e. sponsored posts). Inserting a *"Thanks to ____ for sponsoring my attendance"* and link to their site in your post is a natural fit when writing about the conference you're attending. Again, remember the goal is to promote without spamming your community, so don't try to work your sponsor into every post you write! You can specify the number of posts you will write about them/that include reference to them up front in your pitch.
- **Posts on Their Blog:** Many companies now have blogs on their website. Offer to write a post or two for their blog about why you enjoy their products, how you/your kids utilize them, or anything else relevant to the content on their blog.
- **Sponsorship Page on Your Blog:** Once you've found sponsorship, use your "sponsorship package" page on your blog to highlight your sponsor(s) via a list.
- **Host a Twitter Party:** This option is a bit more complex, but can be a great way to highlight your sponsor(s). The theme of the party could be to discuss your sponsor(s) products/services, how they would benefit people, etc. To execute this, you'll need to create a personalized hashtag for your sponsor(s) or themed party for people to follow and join the party. You will also want some products (*or even a conference ticket*) to giveaway during the Twitter party. If you've never run one before, chat with someone who has hosted one before to find out how to have a Twitter party. I also strongly suggest checking the [Twitter party calendar](#) so you don't plan yours at a time you'd be competing with others (*note: not everyone uses this calendar, so you will most likely find another party happening around the same time anyhow, but using it helps decrease chances of overlap*).
- **Vlog:** Just because you've never done a vlog before doesn't mean you can't! Break out (or buy) a [webcam](#)* or [hand-held video camera](#)* and vlog about your sponsor instead of posting. People enjoy vlogs because they feel connected to the blogger, so use this method to show your sponsor's products, how you like to use them, and anything else you feel will increase exposure and interest in the company. This is often an option that people forget about.
- **Company Logo on Twitter Page:** You know how people have background images on their Twitter pages? Why not post the company's logo as your background image for a specified time period to help increase exposure? You can also add their website URL to the bottom of your Twitter avatar or do that instead of using their logo as the background of your Twitter page. (*Note: Whenever using company logos, remember to get permission before using it in any capacity*).





Promoting Sponsors Online *During* Conferences

- **Run a "Live" Giveaway or Contest:** If your sponsor has items or services you can giveaway (or a [blog conference ticket](#) to future conferences), think about running a live giveaway while at the conference. An example of this was when BookieBoo asked attendees at a recent conference to find her for the chance to win a ticket to that conference in 2011 and also extended that option to those at home following on Twitter. But if you choose to use this method, be sure you don't spam the conference-specific hashtag and don't overtweet about it. People will most likely retweet for you anyhow and excessive tweeting about your promotions will only annoy people. Consider coming up with a personalized hashtag for the promotion and/or your sponsor instead of just using the conference-specific hashtag.
- **Live Blog or Tweet:** If you're one who said they [like to bring a laptop to blog conferences](#) (although you can just use your smartphone), consider keeping your readers/followers updated on the info you're learning with real-time tweets and blog posts. If you're live-tweeting, insert the occasional thanks to your sponsor (*i.e. a few times is plenty!*). If you're live-blogging, post information sometime during the conference, again thanking your sponsor for helping you attend. But before you decide on this promotional method, think about the implications it may have on your ability to stay present and really absorb the information during sessions.
- **Take Videos or Pictures For Company:** If you do decide to hand out promotional items (in non-conference areas), take videos and pictures of people using the item for your sponsor to use on their website or just as a source of information. Ask people to sit for a short video telling the brand what they think about their products. Again, this is hard to execute due to the busy conference schedule and the inability to do this within conference areas, but you can orchestrate this in your hotel room/other non-conference area.

Final Thoughts On Promoting Sponsors Online....

There are other ways to promote your sponsors online, but hopefully these ideas have sparked some creativity and have you thinking. Sponsorship is about relationships that are mutually beneficial and many times, fabulous promotional ideas come to mind when you sit and think about how you and the potential sponsor are a great fit.

Remember to stay true to yourself, your blog, and your blogging philosophy. Don't sell your soul or commit to things too far out of your comfort zone to get a sponsor because it will leave you feeling uncomfortable, the company feeling unfulfilled, and people thinking you're extremely desperate just to get sponsored by anyone regardless of fit. Also remember to respect the conference personal sponsorship guidelines and the general rule of blogging: *no spamming*.



SPONSORSHIP 101: WORKING WITH SPONSORS ISN'T JUST ABOUT PROMOTION

Blog Conference Newbie Guide's ["Sponsorship 101" series](#) continues with the topic of how to work with your sponsor in ways you might not have previously thought about.

Many seem to focus solely on promotional efforts when it comes to partnering with their sponsor. However, doing so glosses over another important way to bring value to your relationship with your sponsor: *being a source of information*. Sponsorship partnerships shouldn't just be about increasing the company's exposure; you're attendance at a blog conference makes you into a proverbial "information highway" for your sponsor to tap into.



Compile A Report About The Blog Conference

Your sponsor might benefit from a detailed report about the conference to gain insight into the importance of attending (as a company) or sponsoring bloggers. Or perhaps the company would be interested in considering sponsoring the event in the future.

Your report can include a background section on the conference, noting who the conference is geared towards, who the coordinators/creators are, and how many years the conference has been happening. Other important facts are: how many people attended, an outline of sessions, networking opportunities (*for bloggers as well as brands to network*), and your thoughts on your experience. If you have ideas on how the company may benefit in the future from partnering with the conference or increase their visibility by attending the conference, let them know this information.

Some companies have never sponsored bloggers to attend conferences before and may not even be aware of many (or any!) blog conferences. Your insight might possibly open up a door that the brand didn't even know was there.





Suggest Other Avenues For Marketing To Moms or Bloggers

When you're at the conference, keep your ears open in conversations with others for insights into how to better reach bloggers or others via social media platforms which you can then share with the company. After talking with other brands at the conference, ideas may pop into your mind about your sponsor's products and new ways to promote them. Present these ideas to the company since you, the blogger, may very well be their target market. Offering them insider information on what people want to see can help them shape their marketing techniques to better reach consumers.



Consider Your Network of Friends

Have a conversation with someone about your sponsor's products who seemed interested in learning more about them? Met people who you think would be a good fit with the company for future partnerships? Your ability to introduce your sponsor to other trustworthy and reliable bloggers is another asset.

Sometimes working with a company isn't just about increased exposure. There is value in providing them information that they may not otherwise have been privy to. Since many people focus on efforts that revolve solely around product promotion, step outside the box and offer them these options to set yourself apart.



SPONSORSHIP 101: PROS & CONS OF SPONSORSHIP

Because many are unable to fund the fees associated with attending solely on their own, attaining sponsorships becomes an attractive idea. But here's the truth about sponsorship: *many pitch for it, yet few actually attain it*. So if you feel like you're the *only* person who doesn't have a sponsor, I am here to tell you that's not the case. Plus, there are pros and cons associated with personal conference sponsorship.

Here's what some of you had to say when I took this topic to Twitter:

@CharmedValerie: Only con is that it's an EXTRA thing to do & may take away a bit from the experience (I find it totally worth it tho)

@MainlineMom: No obligation to anyone but yourself. Possibly more likely to pay close attention to get value for YOUR dollar.

@RobynsWorld: Pro of not being sponsored is that I don't have to "work" for anyone but me while I'm there, con is obviously out of pocket costs

Pros of Sponsorship (the "obvious")

- Alleviates all or part of financial commitments
- Builds a connection with the company, which may lead to future partnerships
- Can be a learning experience for you, which may create more confidence in your brand and blog

Cons of Sponsorship (the "less thought about")

- Researching [personal sponsorship guidelines for conferences](#)
- Brainstorming or searching for possible sponsors that are a good fit takes time if you don't already have working relationships with companies
- Creating your pitch letter can take a good deal of time if you really want the company to see you've researched them and personalized the letter (which you should).
- Possibility of sending multiple pitch letters, which again can be time consuming to personalize all.
- Sponsorship obligations before conference can create a lot of extra work
- Sponsorship obligations during the conference can be distracting or take away from your ability to truly experience the conference due to be focused on making sure you promote your sponsor



The point of this post in the *Sponsorship 101 series* was to reiterate that along with personal conference sponsorship comes work. Many immediately think about the positives of having a sponsor, and while the pros are incredible ones, it's important to be realistic about the time and work commitment that comes along with having a sponsor.



Sponsorship 101: BLOG CONFERENCE SPONSORSHIP TIPS

- ***Be careful with stats.*** When bloggers reach out to brands for sponsorship, many instantly think about how they can get the products in front of 300-2000 people, because of course, those numbers sound awesome to potential sponsors. But be careful how you package your sponsorship pitches. The last thing you want to do is promise something to your sponsor that you can't deliver or over-step the boundaries at conferences to do so.
- ***Timing and purpose.*** While you want to promote your sponsor, you don't want to come across desperate and overly-focused on doing so. Word-of-mouth marketing is a great thing, but there is nothing like going on-and-on about your sponsor to turn someone off from a conversation. Finding ways to casually work your sponsor into a conversation is key as the message will be better received and remembered.
- ***Stay out of Spamville.*** Remember to respect the conference hashtag - don't spam it with your sponsorship tweets. Authenticity and a handful of nicely-timed tweets are received better by both the attendees and conference coordinators.
- ***The earlier the better when it comes to pitching for sponsorship.*** Why? Because you want to give potential sponsors time to think about the proposal without being rushed. Plus, many companies set their budgets in the fall/winter for the following calendar year. But don't freak out if you haven't started pitching yet...that doesn't mean you're out of luck!
- ***Consider partial sponsorship options.*** Many times, companies can't provide full sponsorship because it's simply not in their budget. Instead, consider pitching to a couple of non-competing companies for smaller sponsorships, which together may cover all of your costs.
- ***Twitter shouldn't be your only method to finding a sponsor.*** Sure, you can use Twitter to help you identify and connect with one, but unfortunately, too many rely solely on sending tweets to get sponsorship. When conferences are approaching, you're bound to see zillions of tweets saying something such as "*Want to get your product in front of ### women? Sponsor me to attend ___ conference!*" Your tweet is being sent out there in the sea of saturated sponsorship tweets. I'm not saying it *can't* happen via this method, but why not utilize Twitter in a better way: create a sponsorship package page on your blog & tweet out the link rather than just a generic sentence. Better yet, direct message (DM) that link directly to a brand you'd like to connect with. Or start by simply using Twitter to start a genuine conversation with a brand which then can move over to an official pitch via email or phone. You can also DM a company to find out who to email your pitch to. Deb Ng said it well in her post on this very topic called [Why You're Not Going To Find Conference Sponsorship on Twitter](#).



- ***Do what you say you're going to do when it comes to sponsorship.*** I recently heard of an example of a sponsorship gone wrong. At one of the conferences this year, a blogger who was attending thanks to a sponsor did not follow through with what she promised she would do to promote the brand at the conference. When the brand found out, they decided not to sponsor anyone for *any* conference in the near future. If situations like this happen frequently, it can impact whether or not brands will even consider sponsoring bloggers at conferences. So be sure that what you're agreeing to is something you can actually execute.
- ***Don't pitch to just any company.*** Think about it; you're asking a brand to invest money so you can attend a conference, so why would they even consider doing so if your blog/brand doesn't fit with their philosophy? If you're someone who only eats organic food, then don't pitch to fast food restaurants. Step back and think about whether or not it makes sense to work with the company you're approaching because if you can't figure that out, they definitely won't see the need to sponsor you.
- ***Think of sponsorship differently than others.*** Most people are focused on how to "sell" the conference or trip to the potential sponsor in order to get sponsorship. Instead, focus on different aspects of sponsorships or partnerships. Think less about the exchange of money and more about the potential partnership and benefit not only for YOU, but also for THEM! Per @VelveteenMind's tweet last week: *...Rethink sponsorship: Cover EXPOSURE not expenses. Invite sponsors of your BLOG not your trip.*

Final Thoughts On The Sponsorship 101 Series....

Hopefully *Blog Conference Newbie Guide's Sponsorship 101 series* has been a helpful resource for you. Should you have other questions on this topic or other related topics, check out other resources and tips on <http://www.blogconferencenewbie.com>, including a blog conference (and general blogger) forum.

Thanks to those who encouraged me to write this series and those who lent me an ear during the creation of it! Big thanks also to those who engaged in conversation about conference sponsorships in the last month, helping me add topics *you* wanted to learn about into the series. Now, go get 'em bloggers!

**Amazon-affiliate link*

