



4. How to make a good first impression



What's covered in this chapter

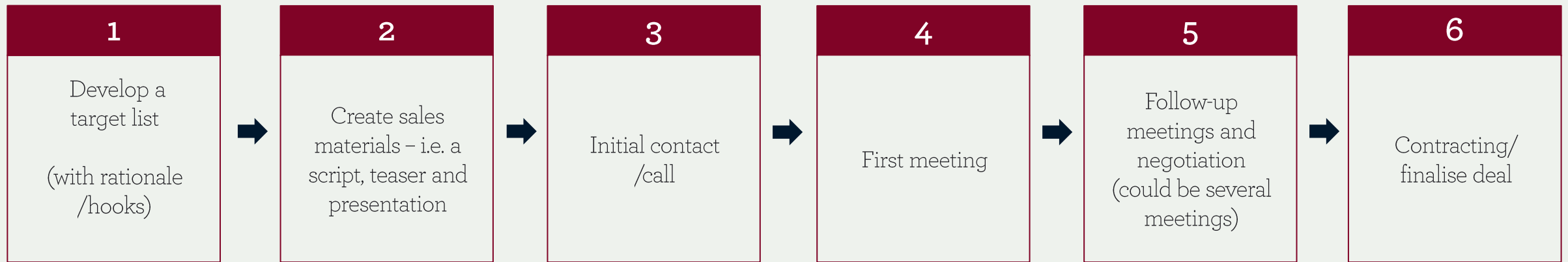
Once you have established your sponsorship strategy and determined your unique selling points, you are ready to begin preparing for the sales process and talking to prospective sponsors.

Making contact with brands for the first time can be nerve-racking. This chapter looks to help with that, outlining the steps needed to develop a sponsorship target list, create engaging sales materials, hints and tips on what to say to brands and, ultimately, a step-by-step overview of the sponsorship sales process, so that you can achieve sponsorship success.



The six stages of selling sponsorship

In essence, there are 6 stages to the sponsorship sales process:



Sponsorships, especially Main Club sponsorships, won't be secured over one phone call and, in some cases, can take a number of meetings, so it is recommended that this multi-stage process is followed.



Develop a target list - which companies to approach

It is very rare, if ever, that brands will approach you to become a sponsor. Indeed, this is also the case with some of the major international teams and clubs in rugby.

Therefore, you need to have a proactive approach to speaking to potential sponsors. Depending on the resource that you have available, you should prepare to undertake one or both of the following routes to get in front of brands:

- Use your or your club's address book and contacts – or those of players, members and fans (N.B. speaking to people you know or who are very familiar with the club should be the starting point in any case)
- Cold contacting other appropriate brands – whether local, regional or some cases national brands

The time taken to secure sponsors can be extensive, especially if you don't know the brand, so patience, planning and a focused and strategic approach is vital.





How to make use of your network

Once you have an idea of what you can offer a sponsor you can start to think about how to find a sponsor.

There is no magic formula, but it will more likely be down to hard graft, a lot of legwork, time and effort.... and patience.

Sometimes it's a case of not what you know but WHO you know; relationships and networking are critical, particularly at club level.

Your network of contacts should always be your starting point – who do you know who works for, or perhaps even sits on the board, of an appropriate/local company? Can you get an introduction to the company via:

- A member of your club's committee
- Members/fans
- Friends of friends
- Family - especially parents or guardians of junior members
- Neighbours
- Your children's friends' parents
- Local Chamber of Commerce or business networks

Any of these routes could be very helpful, so try these first.



Building a target list of people you don't know

So, where to start

Think about all the brands that may suit your club based on location, your values, target audience/fan demographic, characteristics and USPs.

Be realistic. For obvious reasons, in many cases, most of the interest from brands is likely to come from those based or who have a major presence in your region.

Therefore, it is an idea to try and find a list of the largest local companies, whether that's based on staff and/or turnover. Often this can be Googled or can be secured, for free, from a local Council, Chamber of Commerce or Business Network. (It will cost money to get a comprehensive database with contact details). LinkedIn can also be a hugely useful tool for getting the right name.

Once you have this list, investigate the company/brand in more detail. Find out whether the company has ever sponsored anything before and, if so, what areas were they involved in? Look up their annual report and research their website carefully. What areas are of interest to them?

Once you've identified some of the bigger organisations in your community or region, focus on any that share a natural link or characteristics with your club, for example, a local brewery or company undertaking corporate entertainment, who may be interested in having hospitality as a major part of their sponsorship with you.

Recommendation:
You should constantly add to your target list based on continued research and insight.



Target list considerations

When thinking about which brand and industries to target, you should consider the following:

Does the brand have a good reputation? You need to think carefully about working with a sponsor whose brand or industry is constantly in the press for the wrong reasons.

It is worth agreeing with colleagues/board members industries and brands that aren't appropriate, some being more obvious than others, such as tobacco and arms, but some are less so, such as fast-food companies (and the obesity crisis).

Does the sector have a good natural fit with your club?

Does the sector have a brand sponsorship heritage?

If not, your sales job could be more difficult.

Is the sector's product or service relevant to your sport?

For example, performance clothing.

Does the brand's product or service represent a significant cost to your club?

Most clubs require a lot of kit so a deal with sports apparel company could save you some money.

Does the brand appear to invest marketing activity in general?

If they don't, sponsorship is less likely to be a consideration for them in the first place, and they would be unlikely to spend much resource on promoting your partnership.

Are there opportunities to share messaging with the brand?

Consider the attributes of your club and how they dovetail with that of the industry sector, for example community focus, teamwork, agility, strength, speed.

How similar is the brand's audience to your own?

Does your club offer them an opportunity to talk their consumers.

Does the brand have a personality, i.e. could it use your club to give it a public 'face'?

Financial, legal and insurance sectors work hard to achieve a human touch with their consumers and rugby is a great way to do this, particularly with good use of imagery.



Finding the right person to speak to

Finding out the best person to contact if you don't know them can be difficult...

Remember, each company structure is different, so it's worth trying to do a bit of research on each one to determine who it may be appropriate to contact.

If an organisation has been involved in sponsorship before, check to see whether you can find any press releases on the internet, which might have a contact name at the end.

Otherwise, try and find out who are the best people to talk to either through research (LinkedIn can be useful for this, depending on the size/profile of the company) or by simply calling their office and asking who the most appropriate person would be to approach – it may simply be the office manager, or they may have a marketing, sponsorship or community manager.

Alternatively, you can go to the top and approach the MD, Chief Executive and/or business owner – but ensure you make a professional approach.





Creating sponsorship sales materials

Whether you know the contact or don't they are likely to want to see an overview of the opportunity, so you will need to prepare sales materials. Successful sponsorship sales people will tend to develop three elements, as follows:

1. A short introduction (or two or three paragraphs) that can be used as the body of an introductory email or script for a phone call
2. A short (two or three page) 'teaser' presentation that can be sent as attachment or potentially a short (no more than 90 second) video

The aim of these two elements are to get meetings. As previously outlined, sponsorships are rarely, if ever, secured over the phone or email.

3. A 10-12 slide presentation that can be presented in person and used as the basis of a proposal document

A downloadable suite of sales template presentations can be found here:
<https://www.englishrugby.com/participation/running-your-club/funding/sponsorship>





Email and phone script

Whilst sales approaches can still be made over the phone, and is still a very effective way of engaging with potential sponsors, email now tends to be the most used and acceptable method of making contact, especially if you don't know the target.

Whatever the method of contact, whether phone or email, a short and concise email and phone script needs to be developed, which can then be tailored to suit the perceived objectives of any sponsor.

This should include:

- A short introduction to who you are
- A summary of the USPs
- A line or two on potential benefits, specifically aimed at the target brand
- Recommended next steps, including a suggested meeting

The script/email should be supported with a short teaser document.

At this early stage, you don't need to mention prices or fees.

It's important to get an idea of their objectives first, as they will influence the final package of benefits and therefore what you should charge.



Template: Email and phone script

A downloadable Script Template is available here:
<https://www.englandrugby.com/participation/running-your-club/funding/sponsorship>

Eye catching Subject to get them to read on

Subject: Become a Key Partner of the Largest Sports Club in the Region; Reaching 1,000 People Each Week

Introduction and summary of USPs

Dear XXXX,

I am writing to you regarding <INSERT NAME> Rugby Club. We are the largest sports club in the area and have been promoted twice in the last 4 seasons. We now play in the <League> and have a loyal fan based of 1,000 people attending all of our 1st XI home games. We also have a fast growing Women's and Mini's division.

An outline of why they're right for the club and why you're speaking to them

Given your involvement in the local community sports scene, we would like to review the potential of you becoming a high profile Official Partner of the club. We can provide a number of benefits to support your own objectives, which could include:

Example benefits, which can be changed depending on their perceived objectives

- Association with the largest and best sports club in the county – supporting the best in your local community
- Brand exposure and promotion, including on shirt, perimeter boards, website and social media
- Tickets and hospitality at every home game
- Invitations to our own networking events, plus the opportunity to host your own events at the club
- Invitations to other club events, including End of Season Dinner and Golf Days
- Promotional stand at the ground on match days

Demonstrate flexibility

There is a significant degree of flexibility in how we could work together. Therefore, I would very much welcome the opportunity of organising a time to speak to you further about our sponsorship programme and our exciting plans for the future.

Next steps, call to action

If you are interested, please suggest a time for us to meet at your offices, alternatively, I'd love to welcome you to the club on matchday and you can experience the club at its best.



Creating an introductory ‘teaser’ document

A ‘teaser’ should be created, which can be used to send to prospective partners either by means of first contact (to accompany an initial email) or as a follow-up after a call. The objective is to get a meeting.

The following should be included in the teaser:

- ✓ A brief introduction to the club with facts and figures i.e., league standing and history etc.
- ✓ The Unique Selling Points
- ✓ Brief overview of the ask/opportunity
- ✓ Recommended next steps i.e., a meeting in person or a video call
- ✓ Contact Details

These documents can be created in Microsoft Word or PowerPoint but are generally sent as a PDF.

It is very easy to make these documents too heavy on copy. In this instance, less is more - it’s about getting interest and pushing for a meeting, so it doesn’t require a huge amount of detail, which may not be read in full anyway.

They should also be pleasing on the eye, so use imagery and bullet points to break up text and more digestible. You also don’t necessarily have to include costings in the document, it’s about getting interest and subsequently building a package based on their objectives.

Once you have sent the teaser, and if you haven’t had a response, you should leave it about a week before sending a polite follow-up email or phone call to see if they have had a chance to review the initial email and see if you can organise a meeting.



Initial contact/call

Once you have a target list and sales documents prepared, you are ready to make contact with prospective sponsors. As mentioned, in most cases, it is acceptable to make contact by email even if you don't know the individual. Here a few things to remember:

- Use your script, whether for email or phone calls – referring back to your USPs
- Keep the first contact short, clear and concise and make sure you have a call to action in your mind i.e. progress to a meeting - the objective is to get a meeting, not necessarily do a deal straight away, so be patient
- Research their brand and demonstrate an appropriate understanding of their objectives
- Be polite and professional, even if they say no – you may think it's a great potential partnership but they sometimes won't... you are likely to get many rejections – also proof read any emails!!!
- If they don't respond to your initial correspondences do try again – but perhaps stop after 3 or 4 attempts. You could also consider contacting someone else in the company or using tools such as LinkedIn
- If they ask about money, it is advisable to give a rough ballpark but say that *“it will depend on your objectives and the final package”*



How to deal with objections

As outlined, successful sponsorship sales is not an easy task and you do need to be prepared for brands to say no - most sponsorship sales people have a very thick skin! It very important to not take any objections personally... you will get many more rejections than deals done and are likely to get many before the golden yes.

There isn't a formula as to how many people you need to speak to before being successful BUT it is important to use any rejections or objections to help develop your strategy further...and, where possible, attempt to counter objections. Traditionally, reasons brands give for not becoming a sponsor are as follows (we have also provided some potential responses):

- Lack of budget: Outline that, if they are interested, there is an opportunity to build a payment schedule or introduce incentives. Possibly find out when their financial year starts and finishes and work around those timings
- Doesn't fit with our objectives: Try to learn more about what they are looking to achieve as a business and how you can potentially help. For example, if it's increased sales, perhaps provide them with sales promotional space in a programme/newsletter or a promotional stand at matchdays. If it's brand awareness, logo placement on kit or ground or website.
- Not currently looking for sponsorship opportunities: It might be that a company has a full sponsorship programme (and therefore no capacity for more) or that they simply aren't considering sponsorship at this time. Either way there is an opportunity to build a relationship with the brand and review them becoming a partner in the future. Ask when is a good time to speak to them again, potentially invite them to a game.

Much of sponsorship is about forming relationships with relevant, often local, businesses. Even if they say 'no' now, they may say 'yes' in the future. Without being too overbearing, stay in touch and build a closer connection with them, perhaps through entertaining them at games and or inviting them to events etc.

Task: Develop your own script

Using the recommendations and guidance in this document, create your own 3 or 4 paragraph email and phone script.

Think about:

Why you are contacting them. How are your businesses aligned?	What makes you different and stand out?
What are you look for? Naming rights, official sponsor, vehicle supplier	
What you can give them in return?	What you would like the next steps to be?
Being clear and concise!	Being and coming across as professional



Chapter takeaways and top tips

Initiating contact and the whole process of securing partners can be hugely rewarding but equally does require a thick-skin and a strong degree of patience. The Top Tips to remember are as follows:

<p>Listen Listening to feedback is one of the most important things you can do. Use this feedback to get deals done.</p>	<p>Be professional and organised Stick to your strategy and research. There is no such thing in sponsorship as being underprepared</p>
<p>Don't take rejection personally All sponsorship opportunities get turned down</p>	<p>Review your sales strategy If you hit a dead end with one person, change your tack – e.g. maybe try and speak to someone else if you're being ignored or try LinkedIn etc.</p>
<p>Be creative and use your assets Sponsorship provides a licence to be creative both as regards the sales process and activations</p>	<p>Be Realistic For example, only approach brands who you think can afford the sponsorship and have a genuinely clear reason for a partnership. However, just because you think it's a good opportunity, it doesn't necessarily mean that everyone will!</p>

