



How to Get Canoe Sponsorships

..... Angus M Mackie

Getting sponsorship takes work

Looking for a race sponsor for the next upcoming race, the local or national championships, or the entire season can be about as exhausting as the actual training and racing you do. As with your training, persistence pays off. Make sure you are well organized in advance of the "Ask" — by far the best way to get and keep sponsors is to get and keep yourself organized. You can expect to spend about as much time looking for sponsors as you do training for the year's first race.

What does it take to be organized and well prepared? It will help to start with a good assessment of your needs: What will be the length of your season? How many races are you doing? How far will you be traveling? What will your expenses be for each race (gas, food, lodging, entry fees, equipment)? Are you taking time from work to train and travel to races? If you are, you might want to factor in your "lost income opportunity" too.

OK. Now you have an idea of the time commitment and expenses associated with your racing season. Get this down on paper. If you know how to use a spreadsheet program you'll be ahead of the game, because you can prepare professional looking printouts for potential sponsorship presentations. Remember the word "professional" because, in the end, asking your sponsor(s) for cash is in essence asking them to divert a portion of their marketing budget to other "professionally operated" media purchases. That's right, the cash you ask for could buy your sponsor a few more radio spots, or a newspaper ad, or a TV spot. The more professional your presentation, the better the chance of winning your sponsorships.

Pricing, and value to your sponsor

All advertisers want value from their advertising commitments. That's where you can really differentiate the benefits of a boat or team sponsorship. The outline below will help you organize your "advertising exposure" for your potential sponsors. But first, let's talk pricing. Your ability to raise cash will depend on what you are offering (boat signage, ads on the clothing you'll wear, public speaking, etc), your relative "endorsement/name value" (pro racer, local hero, amateur top finisher, etc) and the length of the proposed sponsorship (one race, a series, the entire season, etc).

It might help to ask other paddlers who have sponsors how they price their sponsorships. You can be creative in pricing too. You might ask for a base fee for placing a company logo on the boat for one race, with a bonus paid if you're a top finisher. A winner can ask for a bigger bonus!

The basics

The following outline is a guide to help you think about what you can offer your sponsor and how you should price/value your services.

What you and your partner offer; what to stress in your presentation

- Time commitment to sport
- Visibility in the local community
- Estimated number of "impressions" for sponsor

- Race schedule, locations, training schedule
- Potential sponsored clinics for kids and rec paddlers

What do sponsors want?

- Association with a Sport
- Inexpensive exposure
- "Public share of mind" (product brand awareness)

What should you ask for?

- Cash: a specific amount or range, depending on the sponsor deal (logo, clothing, appearances, etc)
- Sponsor logos (boat decals, bumper stickers, etc)
- Press back up, TV Radio, Internet web site, Print local paper or magazine exposure
- Personal appearance backup
- Direct mail back up (sponsor mentions your name in their mailings)

When to seek sponsorship

- Fall is usually the time when most organized advertisers review their past media schedules and begin planning for the coming year
- Anytime
- When the sponsor says they plan the next (monthly, quarterly, yearly) advertising and marketing budget

Who should you target?

- Current sponsors of other boats or teams
- Sponsors of non-canoeing athletic events
- Local firms with large advertising budgets
- Local media companies (newspaper, radio, TV, etc)
- Local sports shops, massage therapists, sports medicine physicians

How to ask, what to include?

- Call and make an appointment to talk about sports sponsorships.
- Follow up the phone call with a short note confirming the time and date of the meeting. ("Cold calling," just showing up at a place of business and asking for the owner/manager always yields low responses)
- Send a picture of you /partner and boat
- If you have access to a computer put text on the image (your name, date of event, place of finish,) etc

Gather your credentials, track record, and other past sponsors

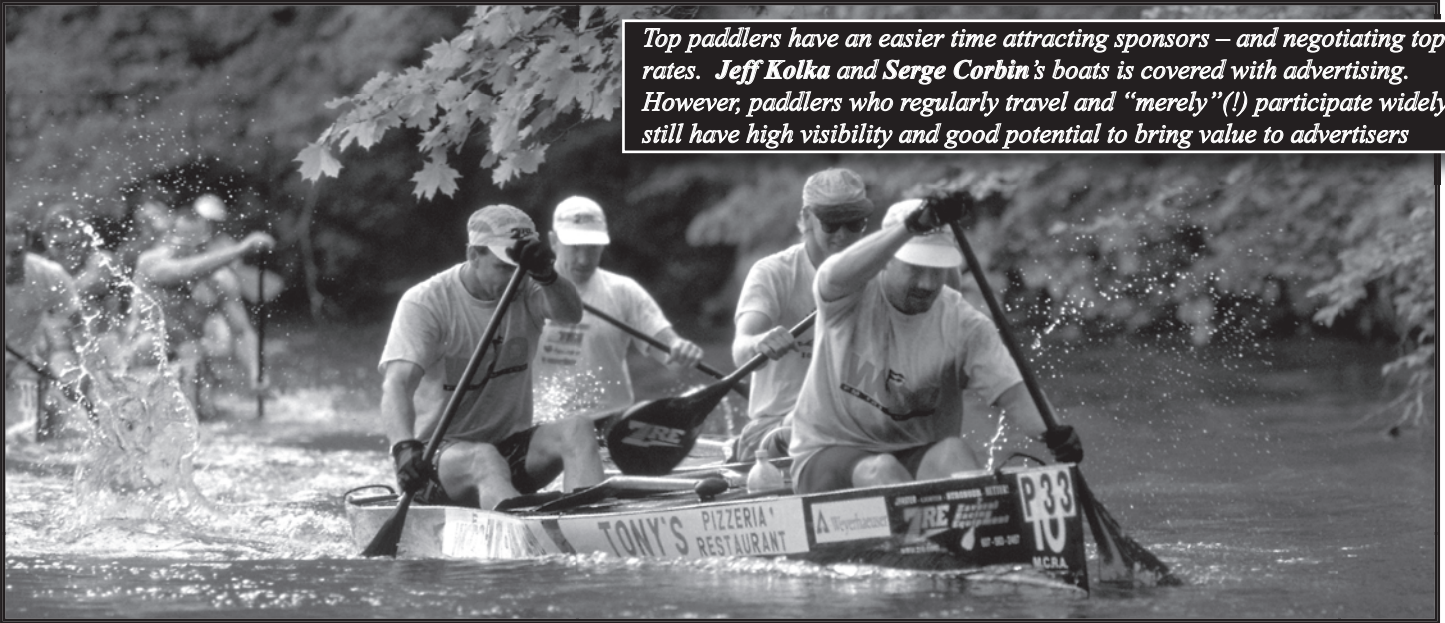
- Personal bios ready for press including training schedule, what makes you unique
- Pictures in action and with trophies
- Recommendations from coaches, race directors, etc
- Past press, video, radio interviews, etc
- List of awards, major races, championships (won or participated in)
- Equipment list, boat type (s) paddles, life vests

Put your request in writing!

- Write a short cover letter with your logo, team name, boat name, etc
- Detail the event, (s) season dates.
- Specify the time frame of the contract, number of races and any details for a renewal or extension
- Negotiate a "bonus" if you do well (place or win) in the race
- Estimate number of spectators at each event, total for the length of sponsorship
- Detail the type of sponsor signage you will: wear, place on boat (size and location of decal or lettering), clothing, hats, and car bumper stickers or glass decals
- Offer sponsor options/packages, levels of participation (\$25, \$100, \$500 +)
- Detail the specifics of each package. Alternatively, but takes a little creativity and more work, you could offer a "menu" of options priced according to the relative level of sponsor exposure.
- Attach your credentials, track record, and other past sponsors

How to Get Canoe Sponsorships

Top paddlers have an easier time attracting sponsors – and negotiating top rates. Jeff Kolka and Serge Corbin's boats is covered with advertising. However, paddlers who regularly travel and "merely" (!) participate widely still have high visibility and good potential to bring value to advertisers



Be as professional as possible in your sponsorship requests

Make sure your presentation package is typed, neatly organized and includes a cover letter outlining the proposed offering. If you are making the presentations yourself, show up for your appointment on time and be neatly dressed. You will want to prepare a simple contract that you and the sponsor will sign to close your agreement.

It's a tough job, but someone has to do it . . .

One final word on selling yourself, it's tough for most people. You can expect rejection, objections, and negotiations. *If you can find someone to help you make the sponsor pitches on your behalf go for it!* You'll certainly be called upon to "close the deal", but if you can find someone to help do the prospecting, it will make for more time on the water, and that should turn into better race results, which your sponsors should appreciate!

Fay's Motel (in Grayling, MI – a major marathon canoeing center) has developed a broad association with the sport of canoeing, including offering discounts to paddlers. Fay's Motel sponsors a number of teams in the AuSable Marathon: their advertising is consequently carried nationwide (here shown in Warren, PA at the USCA National Championships, Holly Reynolds paddling)



Have fun looking for sponsorships!

Remember that as an ambassador of the sport, you are in the best possible position to share the enjoyment of paddling. As you make your presentation make sure you remember to stress why you got into paddling to begin with, it's a fun, family friendly, environmentally sound and sure, while you're out on the river you pick up the trash!

Hopefully you'll land your sponsors and develop a lasting relationship. Don't forget to tell them how you do at the races! Send photos of their ads at work (and crowds!) – and thank them in writing!

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Gareth Stevens, shameless editor of this fine magazine, a participant (tailend of the midpack) in many, many races and a winner in some local races (if no one else faster turns up), carries the Lake Express Ferry's advertising atop his car as well as on the river while traveling both sides of Lake Michigan (the Lake in question) . . . here competing in the Callie Rohr Memorial canoe race in northern WI, big photo and coverage in local paper, etc . . .

