

To Sponsor or Not to Sponsor

By Jennifer R. Rupkey

Law firms and attorneys often are targets for organizations seeking sponsorship funds. As administrators and marketing professionals, we are tasked with everything from selecting the sponsorship level for the attorney, to processing and sending the money to the organization, to providing the firm's logo and other items required for the sponsorship, to recruiting attorneys to sit at the firm's table. After diligently completing all necessary procedures, we are often faced with the questions "was it worth it?" or "what did we get out of this sponsorship?" Those questions are easily answered if we first take the time to solicit answers to key questions that will allow us to make a strategic recommendation regarding the sponsorship.

The development of a form may be the easiest way to compile the information in a manner that is consistent for all sponsorship requests and as a way to file the information to allow for future strategic planning and budgeting. Suggested questions for a sponsorship request form follow.

1. **Are any of your firm's attorneys a board member for the requesting organizations?** It is very important that your firm support organizations for which an attorney is a board member. Involvement in community, art and other non-profit organizations is one of the best ways to develop business relationships.
2. **Are any of the firm's clients significant supporters of the organization?** Demonstrating support for an organization that your client supports creates a common interest bond between the firm and the client. Some very strategic thinkers seek out organizations in which their clients are involved for this reason alone.
3. **Will the firm entertain clients at its table?** Using sponsored functions as a way to entertain

clients or prospects can be very effective. Not only does it help strengthen the existing relationship, but it also provides a natural forum to introduce another partner to the client, thereby promoting cross-marketing. If the firm is not using the opportunity to entertain clients, I suggest sprinkling the attorneys throughout the room at other tables. The attorneys have plenty of opportunities to network among themselves at internal firm functions. Also, introducing clients to others with whom the client may do business in the future is a value-added service that attorneys can provide to their clients.

4. **Does the event allow for ample networking?** Networking is essential in any successful relationship business. I often say, "potential clients can't hire you if they don't know you". A sub-set of this question might be: "If there is sufficient networking time on the agenda, who will be in attendance?" As attorneys develop their network, it can be

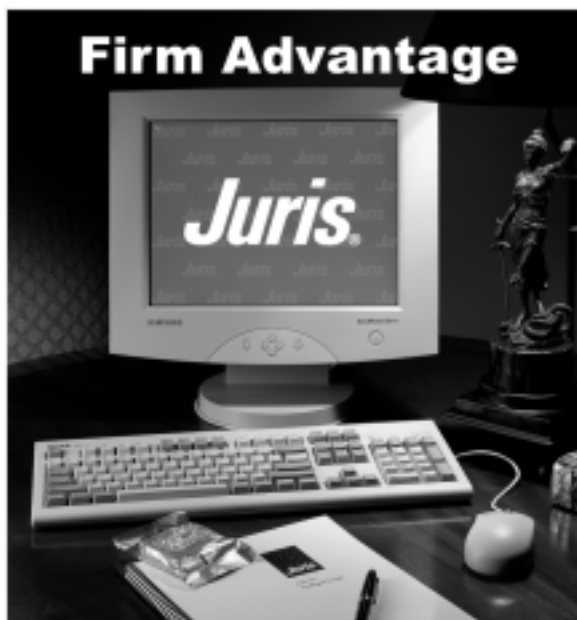
very beneficial to become a known commodity among the right circles. After all, the number one source of new business for law firms is through referrals.



5. **Have you sponsored the event in the past?** It is important to note whether you have sponsored the event in the past, not because this is justification for sponsoring it in the future, rather because if the event has been a successful business development opportunity in the past, it should be considered in the future. Attorneys often approach us with a sponsorship opportunity and state, "we do this every year." When this occurs, we should respond by asking how successful our sponsorship has proven in years past.

After the event, it is important to follow up with the attorneys who attended. You may even ask the attorney to rate the event on a scale of one to five as to whether they would recommend sponsoring the event again. This tactic will assist you in future planning efforts.

The next time you are privileged with the task of handling a sponsorship request, be proactive by asking these five questions and conduct follow up, and you will have no problem developing a strategic answer to the question, "was it worth it?"



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