

Stand by Your Brand

Speakers: Kate Dixon, M&C Saatchi
Tanya Menzies, Arts and Community Sponsorship Manager, Optus

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By Tracy Ellis

The May SAMAG Seminar focussed on the relationships between arts organisations and their sponsors, with two key representatives from the sponsorship side of things to give some insight into what they look for in a successful arts partnership and how, as an arts organisation, you can identify and develop your “brand” to better appeal to sponsors, communicate with them, and work effectively with them to create successful campaigns and partnerships.

The first speaker was **Kate Dixon** from **M&C Saatchi**. **M&C Saatchi** has a roster of blue chip business and corporate clients and part of their responsibility to those clients is to assess and manage the various sponsorship opportunities that are presented to them. They are constantly looking at hundreds of proposals from a range of organisations and being asked to decide which are the most viable and valuable.

“M&C Saatchi is all about simplicity,” says Dixon. It’s their job to simplify the offers on the table for their clients and they are experts and whittling things down to what is essential. The same formulas they use can be applied to arts organizations to define their brand and better present themselves to a sponsorship prospect. “It’s all about identifying and isolating what is unique,” she explains.

The steps include preparing your brand to present to a potential sponsor, developing your communications in a package that has the best chance of getting through to the right people in a competitive environment and matching your brand to the sponsor’s needs and audience.

Dixon’s advice is that you should be able to give a name to your product or service that exists outside the actual art form, performance or experience you represent. When defining your brand it helps to think about your organization as a product or service and then think about your objectives, your mission, your position in the market, your values, personality, product benefits, emotional benefits and, finally, your target market. It is the latter – your audience – that is most important. “It’s the number one thing you have to offer,” says Dixon, “a live data base.”

Kate uses a six-step “Brand Pyramid” to arrive at a brand essence which she suggests applying to your arts organisation as a way of developing your sponsorship package. She demonstrated the Brand Pyramid using a commercial product as a case study – the **Mini Cooper** car.

The first step is to define the product features, and “there’s nothing emotional about this,” says Dixon. It’s a straightforward assessment of the most obvious and basic features of your product, which in the case of the **Mini Cooper** would include such statements as “the reinvention of a classic design”.

Second, you look at benefits rather than features. Some of the functional benefits of the **Mini** might be fuel efficiency and high performance.

Third come the emotional benefits. “Things coming from the heart,” says Dixon. Here’s where it is perhaps easier to start applying the formula to an arts product. Looking at the car, the emotional benefits might be something like ‘the nostalgia and excitement of owning a **Mini Cooper**’.

Fourth are the consumer values, harder to isolate, they might be “a sense of independence, confidence and individualism,” that the **Mini** can give its owner.

Fifth is the personality of the product or service, which can best be answered by posing the question, “If your product was a person, how would you describe them?” The **Mini Cooper**’s personality might be described as “stylish, witty, youthful, independent, confident and powerful.”

“From an agency point of view, or anyone trying to put together the communications, those things are really the springboard,” says Dixon.

Finally you can begin to distil a “brand essence” from this process. Dixon summed the essence of the **Mini Cooper** up in two words: “Feisty fun.”

If you’re going to take on the task of identifying your organization’s brand this way you need to take it seriously and take the time to get it right, because once you establish your brand and start to market it you can’t then deviate from it. For example, **Mini Cooper** couldn’t now start selling itself as “conservative and classical” – at least not without a major re-branding exercise.

Sponsors are going to be interested in your audience, your “live database”, so when you’re approaching sponsor prospects “you must have a point of view on your target audience,” says Dixon. And you have to be prepared to communicate who they are. “The kind of person they are, the mood they’re in, how they feel about your brand ... Can you sit there, hand on heart and say in that meeting or on that cover letter ‘your guys are my guys’.”

You also have to consider whether your audience will be willing to accept the sponsorship that you’re proposing. You should always assess the suitability of various sponsors and only approach those that will also have credibility with your audience. For example, you probably wouldn’t approach Peter Jackson to sponsor a health education program.

Part of your sponsorship research should also be looking at your competitors. “If I’m **Bell Shakespeare** I’m going to look at all the other competitors ... That might be **Opera Australia, Australian Ballet**, and you start to knock off some of your sponsor prospects,” says Dixon.

You might consider what kind of car your audience might drive and look up that car’s website and see who they sponsor. If they sponsor other types of products, “you can go to them and say, ‘we know you sponsor this and do these ads, what you really need is an artform’,” says Dixon.

To match your brand to that sponsor in your proposal, look at all the ways that you can align your organization’s qualities with their needs – your values, personality, target audience, consumer benefits – even your geography.

“If you can offer them a little pocket of Sydney or a little pocket of Melbourne that they can’t otherwise get to, such as ‘we’ve got the inner west covered and we happen to know that 85 per cent of our attendees are all from the inner west’ ... If that’s what they are missing they’ll pay gold for it,” says Dixon.

Arts sponsorship is close to **Tanya Menzies** heart and something she really enjoys working on. She’s been the community sponsorship manager at **Optus** for four years and previously worked in the arts.

At **Optus** “everything is about our brand,” says Menzies, explaining that, essentially, there is not a lot of difference between the various telecommunications companies and the range of services they offer, “so it’s really important that your brand stands out to differentiate you from your competitors, and sponsorship is a very widely used marketing tool that addresses and solves peoples’ brand objectives.”

Menzies receives about 100 formal written sponsorship proposals a month and not once, she says, has she ever had someone describe their organization as a personality or describe the experience of a night out. She points out that this makes it really hard to differentiate one from the other, because they all ostensibly say the same thing.

She suggests you “share some of your passion and enthusiasm” in your sponsorship proposals when you talk about what your organization does.

In the case of **Optus**, they know that just throwing dollars at something is not going to achieve their brand objective. “If you simply pay the right to acquire the sponsorship and hope that the arts company or their board is going to do the work it’s not going to happen,” says Menzies.

Optus became the Australian sponsor of **Cirque du Soleil (Cirque)**, but beforehand, “we did a lot of work on brand synergy,” says Menzies.

They spent a full 18 months mapping out the framework of their program before agreeing to sponsor them. “It’s a considerable amount of work but we invested a considerable amount of money and we had very strong objectives and goals.”

Cirque have built up a brand that stands for an amazing experience and that’s what **Optus** wanted to align with. “People buy on the **Cirque** experience and that is because they clearly articulate what their brand stands for,” says Menzies. “We drew up a plan of what our brand positioning would be within that program, we clearly articulated our objectives, how we would measure them, and designed a fully integrated marketing plan which included how our partners, such as franchisees, how our staff would be involved, how our communications would work – to the public and to our customers.”

Merely securing a sponsor is only part of the work, especially when it’s a big sponsorship deal. Once you’ve teamed up with an appropriate partner it can pay to work together to come up with a specific campaign the markets the partnership to your mutual benefit.

Optus went to their ad agency and said ‘we need to find a single essence or core proposition for our communications to be successful, “so that every time a customer sees a TV ad, a piece of direct mail, an invitation, anything onsite ... anything to do with that sponsorship has to be derived from that plan,” says Menzies.

To express the synergy between **Cirque** and **Optus** the agency came up with the slogan “people are amazing creatures”. **Optus** uses animals as metaphors in their advertising and **Cirque** is a circus without animals so they were able to switch the idea of a traditional circus and have the **Optus** animals watching the amazing humans for their campaign.

“We track our brand and our communications pretty much every day of the year,” says Menzies. “This scored the highest sponsorship recognition ... than any of our other sponsorship properties”

“If you want a campaign to be successful and achieve the best possible result, integration is absolutely imperative,” she adds. “We were really forthcoming with our media schedule and so were **Cirque** so we both really ended up saving money and being really cost-effective in our ad spend because we were making sure we didn’t double up.”

“That can be really rare. Partners feel really nervous about sharing – some corporates feel really nervous about giving company information. We had both of our media agencies actually swap schedules and our agency mapped all of those together and we did that for every marketplace.”

The comprehensive campaign included TV, print, outdoor, online and direct mail and **Cirque** also benefited with high ticket sales and they “very much attribute that to having a pro-active sponsorship party to leverage the campaign properly,” says Menzies.

As an example, the direct mail campaign, which offered early purchase of tickets to **Optus** customers, sold over 8,500 tickets, representing an advance revenue windfall of over \$800,000 to **Cirque**. “So if you’re picking the right partner that has the right segmented base and the right customers that you want to be talking to you can really achieve great things, just with a simple direct mail piece,” says Menzies.

Summing up, Menzies says, “know your brand and be absolutely fanatical ... show your synergies and people will get it. You won’t have to work so hard to explain why you’re doing it.”

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