



# **USOC Athlete Marketing Handbook**

An Athlete's Guide To  
Pursuing Marketing Opportunities,  
Sponsorship, Networking and Promotion

# Athlete Marketing

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## INTRODUCTION

### How to Use This Document

This document is intended to provide an introductory insight into the sports marketing environment and present ideas to help developing athletes initiate sponsorship opportunities. This guide will **NOT** guarantee sponsorships, but it will present ways for you, the athlete, to build opportunities for yourself and increase your chances.

You will see many examples and suggested formats for you to use. It is recommended **NOT** to use/copy these samples identically, but develop your own material and use the examples as a guide for your reference.

### Definition of Marketing

Marketing is simply an exchange of a good or service that satisfies the needs between two distinct parties. There are four main principles involved when Marketing is utilized:

#### The Four P's of Marketing:

Product – What you have to sell (Your likeness)

Price – The value of the product (How much your likeness is worth)

Place – Where you intend to sell the product (Your market)

Promotion – How the product is advertised (Creating awareness for yourself)

### USOC Marketing

The most important asset to the United States Olympic Committee is the athletes. Through USOC research the US Olympic Team *is viewed positively against athletes from other amateur and professional sports, and specifically, over 85% of Americans believe that Olympians exemplify excellence and are better role models to children.* In fact, research data supports U.S. Olympic athletes as ranking higher in perception when the Americans are shown the following words against other sport teams or organizations: **Athletic, Achievement, Inspiring, Sportsmanship, Respectful, Exciting, Trustworthy, Relatable and others (See Appendix B).**

With this in mind, it is the role of USOC Marketing to:

...**Grow** interest in the Olympian/Paralympian/Hopeful by heightening Team USA's profile. It is not enough to celebrate your stories and efforts every two or four years. It is important that fans keep Olympians/Paralympians/Hopefuls in mind through USOC driven National Marketing/PR campaigns, events and activities. When we accomplish this, we cultivate future fans and inspire future athletes (our next greatest asset).

...**Enhance** the image of Team USA - When we are able to tell the stories of your accomplishments and struggles, the Olympian becomes more relatable to all of America. It is the core values of *hard work, perseverance, sacrifice, fair play, respect and sportsmanship* that you exhibit every day that makes you stand out and when America is aware of this, it only strengthens that bond between the public and you.

### Athlete Marketing

USOC Athlete Marketing is the conduit between you (and/or your agent) and Sponsors. When a Sponsor is looking for an Olympian/Paralympian/Hopeful to represent their product/service, they are looking for someone who has exemplified the Olympic Ideals mentioned above. An Olympic/Paralympic Medal is one representation of this however the story of the struggle, medal or not, is what Sponsors want to "leverage" with you. The more USOC Athlete Marketing knows about you (via performance, appearances, events, social media, PR) leading up to the Games, the better we can effectively fit you with the appropriate sponsor opportunity. Your

performances, personality and communication skills will play a large role in the fees that you will command before and after the Olympic or Paralympic Games.

USOC Athlete Marketing and Athlete Services and Programs work to bridge the gap between athletes and sponsors to create great programs for both parties. We make sure athlete involvement is done with the highest of representation. The department provides service to both athletes and sponsors by helping integrate Olympic advertising and promotional programs with the U.S. Olympic and Paralympic movement.

### **Athlete Marketing Examples**

Examples of athlete involvement in advertising and promotional activities may include:

- Appearances at corporate sales meetings, conventions, trade shows, press conferences and other company events
- Keynote speeches at Olympic and Paralympic themed special events
- Image use in sales publications, brochures, broadcast commercials, etc.
- Store appearances where products or services of a sponsor are exhibited

## **DEFINE YOUR PRODUCT (YOU)**

When corporate sponsors select you to be their spokesperson, they are in essence buying you as an athlete, a personality, and all that surrounds you. So when you are putting all the necessary information together about you as a person/athlete, you are selling yourself as a personality. In the next few paragraphs, you will learn how to best represent yourself as an athlete. You will hear what sponsors look for in athletes who can help promote their brand. This is a time when you need to define your goals and your selling points.

### **Understanding What Sponsors Want**

When sponsors associate themselves with your personality it is important to understand that they are not creating a relationship with you just because they like you. They are doing it because they want the public to perceive their company as a winner. Think of the relationship between you and the sponsor as a strategic partnership that establishes a win-win situation.

#### **Why companies associate themselves with athletes**

- Enhances corporate image to gain visibility for their products and company name
- Creates a positive image within the community or sporting environment
- Companies associate themselves with athletes/celebrities to reach a target market
- Try to increase sales
- Motivates employees

### **Self-Analysis**

The next step is to evaluate yourself as an athlete by listing your strengths and weaknesses. Your strengths will evolve into your selling points when pitching a potential sponsor. It is important to be honest with yourself about your athletic accomplishments, so you are able to set realistic goals when looking for a sponsorship.

### **Skills and Abilities**

List all of your positive attributes, both as a person and as a competitive athlete with a desire to excel. This can include such things as public speaking and your ability to conduct demonstrations about your sport. You will also want to discuss how your skills and abilities can benefit a potential sponsor.

### **Accomplishments**

The next step is to list all of your accomplishments as an athlete and person. What are the top three things you are most proud of and why? This is where you highlight your success. It is important to include at least one achievement that is not sport related, as sponsors like a well-rounded individual. Whether it is an educational accomplishment or something within your community, you want to highlight all you can.

### **Budget**

Every athlete needs to develop a budget to assess his or her own financial situation. A budget is a projection of your revenue or income and your expenses for a given time frame. Budgets show where your money is being spent and where additional funds are needed. Please refer to page 24 for a budget worksheet.

## **Your Selling Points**

### **What Could You Do for a Sponsor, Based on Your Self-Analysis**

Select the strengths from your self-analysis that display value to the potential sponsor. The more visible you are as an athlete in the public's eye, the better chance you will have to create opportunity for a sponsor. You want to discuss your potential to reach many fellow athletes, spectators, and other businesses, which are all potential customers of the sponsor company.

It is also very important to be unique in your delivery. The exposure and image you present are beneficial to sponsors, but you must separate yourself from the many other groups and individuals competing for sponsorship dollars. Remember that being an athlete is your greatest and most unique selling point.

## **Defining Your Needs**

### **Financial Needs**

When talking to a potential sponsor it is critical to show them how their financial contributions support your athletic success. Training and equipment are so important and the financial implications are constantly present. Be honest with the potential sponsor and do not rely on one sponsor to cover all your expenses.

### **Needs vs. Wants**

Needs are essential elements that must be available for you to continue your training and development. Wants are additional items, or your 'wish list'. The difference is "need to have" vs. "nice to have." Sponsors are more likely to commit to athletes who are in 'need' rather than to athletes who 'want'. State that you need the sponsor's product or service or financial support to reach the next level of success; without it, you will experience only marginal growth.

It is important to always define what you need before asking for it. Whether it is equipment, services of the sponsor or cash, you always want to define a game plan so your needs are taken care of.

### **Cash Versus In-Kind Contribution**

It is always more desirable to have direct cash support from sponsors than product. However, companies are less generous with direct cash partnerships. One can still receive support through In-Kind Contributions, a free product or service that owns a specific value. Generally, sponsors include these services in almost every deal they sign, as it cuts down on sponsorship costs with athletes. They are able to pay out of pocket less and include product of the athletes' choice. It is important for athletes to try and work both ends of the situation. Free product is always good, but you cannot spend it. The ideal situation is to receive both product and cash.

## **CREATE SPECIFIC GOALS**

It is important for any athlete to set specific goals. Realistic short and long-term performance goals give an athlete focus for his or her career, as well as providing a gauge to measure how training and results fit with expectations.

The same is true with goals for sponsorships. First, an athlete needs to decide why he or she wants to have a sponsorship. Is it to help financially and to increase the amount of time spent on training? Is it to receive product to assist with training? The athlete must also decide what level of sponsorship to pursue, such as how much money or product is needed. This can be done through the self-analysis stated above. At this point, it is possible to begin looking for potential sponsorships.

Performance and sponsorship goals will probably be interrelated. If an athlete is competing at a very high level, then he or she will be able to increase the amount of money or attention sought from sponsors.

## **FINDING A POTENTIAL SPONSOR**

When it comes time for you to start looking for potential sponsors, the first thing you will want to do is some company research. Create a couple of lists of sponsors. One list should include companies you would like to create a relationship with because you use their products or equipment. A second list should be companies you might not utilize, but ones that do support athletes.

### **Networking**

Networking is making contacts through positive relationships you have developed both personally and in business. It is also a good idea to talk with friends and family to see what contacts they may have. Chances are these people may refer you to others they know who have more knowledge. For younger athletes, it's a good idea to start in your hometown and work your way out, nationally. Many local opportunities are often overlooked.

Discuss your ideas so they can steer you in the right direction. Look for people who have successful backgrounds in business and that are well connected within the community, or are involved in sports. These people will be able to give you some great advice and contact information.

It is important to always be persistent but polite. You will find most people are willing to help because you are an athlete in need. The more interest you show them the more interest they will give back to you.

### **Researching A Prospective Sponsor**

Before going to meet with a prospective sponsor, you will want to do your homework. Research the company values and what they pride themselves on in the business world. When it comes time for your pitch it will help to talk about how a relationship with you would benefit their company. You can do research on many companies over the Internet.

Also, it is a good idea to research the people you are meeting with. Know who the key decision makers are and know their names. When talking with them, it is a good idea to state their name. By doing this you will establish an immediate connection and begin a favorable relationship.

Asking the receptionist is one way to find out who the key decision maker is and who is responsible for sponsorship requests or applications. In most large companies, this is usually someone in the marketing or community relations department. In a smaller company, it could be anyone from the Sales Manager to the President.

### **Olympic / NGB Sponsors**

For Olympic athletes, it sometimes is difficult when it comes to securing sponsorships because of the exclusive contracts the USOC already has with sponsors. Any company that is not a sponsor of the Olympic Movement or U.S. Olympic or Paralympic Team will have some specific parameters to follow when utilizing U.S. Olympic/Paralympic athletes (especially during a Games period). Visit <http://www.teamusa.org/content/sponsors> for a complete list of USOC Partners.

When creating your list, it might be a good idea to only select companies that the Olympic movement has a relationship with. Another idea is to pitch companies that work with your specific

NGB. Do some research with your NGB's marketing director; he or she will be able to give you some good direction that benefits both the NGB and you.

## **PUBLIC SPEAKING OPPORTUNITIES**

Practicing public speaking is necessary for an athlete who hopes to represent any company. Sponsors usually require an athlete to make a specified number of speaking appearances at company functions throughout the sponsorship. Athletes with good speaking skills are more likely to get sponsorship opportunities, as well as have sponsorships renewed.

To become better at public speaking, it is important to create your own opportunities. This means speaking to schools, church groups, and civic groups. This is great practice and it develops goodwill in the community. While speaking to these groups, develop a consistent message that you effectively deliver every time. In conjunction with the message, also try to enhance your speaking skills. If you do this, your speaking experience will be attractive to potential sponsors and you will have increased the number of sponsorship opportunities available to you.

One way to practice speaking before getting in front of a group is to speak in front of a mirror or video camera. That allows you to self-analyze your presentation, eye contact and body language.

Try and remember to have every presentation taped for sponsor reference. It might be a good idea to send a copy to the Athlete Marketing Department at the USOC. Many times, sponsors want to see your public speaking ability before they give you the opportunity. Develop your own message or platform (something you believe) and create a presentation for your message.

Visit page 25 of this handbook for information about the Athlete Speaker Referral Network and the Adecco Career Program.

## **ATHLETE/SPONSOR RELATIONSHIPS**

### **Benefits of Sponsorships**

Sponsorships can be advantageous to both sponsors and athletes. This is why athletes are so often seen endorsing the product or service in advertisements and at appearances on behalf of the sponsoring company. Sponsors usually want an athlete to endorse a line of products or services, not just an individual product. On rare occasions, a sponsor will only use athletes at appearances.

The benefits to an athlete from a sponsorship deal may include:

- Increased exposure for the athlete because the sponsor will send out press releases about the company and the athletes representing it.
- Help in development of the athlete's brand, which may lead to other sponsorships
- Financial assistance so the athlete can focus more on training
- First class travel and hotel accommodations, as well as product VIK (Value-In-Kind)

The benefits to a company from a sponsorship deal may include:

- The company can have a physical face/athlete to assist representing it
- Increased exposure for the company
- It helps the company's image by associating with the Olympic Movement

The most important thing in the athlete-sponsor relationship is for there to be a good fit between the two. Success in the sponsorship deal will only come with a good partnership.

## **Sending a Proposal to a Prospective Sponsor**

### **Best Time to Send a Proposal**

The best time for an athlete to send a sponsorship proposal to a company is in August or early September. Most companies are usually setting their budgets in September and that is the time that they will consider a proposal.

### **What to Include in a Proposal**

Sponsors are interested in seeing several things from an athlete:

- A bio with not only statistics, but also personal information and human interest stories
- Personal experience with the sponsor company and its products (this can be included as other relevant material)
- The type of sponsorship the athlete is looking for
- The athlete's public speaking experience/video tape of an actual speaking engagement

The sponsors also like to know the moral values of the athlete. A sponsor likes to have an athlete with similar values represent its company to ensure a better match and a stronger relationship. They also want to know other organizations the athlete is involved with, and products or services he or she uses that may conflict with the sponsor product. This information should be included, but stated briefly as to not overwhelm the sponsor with too much information.

The athlete should also be fairly specific in what they are asking for from the sponsor. It should be a ballpark figure that is realistic because sponsors are only going to pay what they feel athletes are worth. **Be realistic and ask for what you need.** You will know what you need through self-analysis.

### **What a Sponsor is looking for in an Athlete**

One thing larger companies are looking for is an athlete that has achieved success. In most cases, this means an athlete that is an Olympian/Paralympian or is a strong Olympic/Paralympic Hopeful. After having achieved success or demonstrating potential greatness, the athlete must be able to expose the company to enough people. This is one reason that sponsors usually select athletes from mainstream sports. The mainstream sports provide the athlete with the ability to gain more exposure. Otherwise, the athlete must be noteworthy enough to command attention from the media and the public. This is not the sole deciding factor, but it is important.

Another factor that sponsoring companies consider is whether or not the athlete has a compelling story. A good story can draw media and public interest, which can give exposure to the athlete as well as a sponsor. But a compelling story is only good if the athlete can relate it in an inspiring manner. Communication skills are very important. Athletes that are gold medalists may not have many sponsorship opportunities if they have poor speaking skills. When an athlete is speaking on behalf of a sponsor, he or she is the face of the company and must represent it well. This comes with good communication skills.

### **Selection of an Athlete**

Companies use the following criteria in selecting a potential athlete to sponsor:

- The appeal of the athlete's story
- How recognizable the athlete is to the general public
- The cost of the sponsorship
- If the values of the athlete are aligned with the values of the company
- If the athlete currently uses the products/service provided by the company
- Anything else that may be unique about the athlete that is marketable

Once the company has looked over the criteria, the selection process for an athlete may take anywhere from one week to three months or longer, depending on the level of the sponsorship proposed. The athlete will be notified when a decision has been reached, a letter will follow, and the contract will usually be included.

### **Follow-Up**

After a deal has been reached, it is a good idea for the athlete to follow-up with the sponsor. Some sponsors like to hear from the athlete constantly during the duration of the contract, and some like to hear from the athlete once a month. It is important to ask the sponsor when signing the contract to avoid confusion and help create a healthy relationship.

## **CREATING YOUR PROPOSAL**

This is probably the most important part of your sponsorship quest. You must position your selling points in such a way that they appeal to and satisfy a potential company. Each proposal will be different based on the fact every athlete is different.

### **How to Convince Potential Sponsors They Will Sell More of Their Product**

Ultimately, a sponsoring company wants to sell more of its products and/or services. They also want to create goodwill in the community. If you can satisfy these two objectives you will be successful in your sponsorship quest. Be confident and enthusiastic. To help you, a list of benefits is provided below. The best thing you can do is develop your own ideas and share with a potential sponsor company, as it will create greater value for you and your sponsor.

#### ***Benefits to Offer a Sponsor***

- Determine a number of specific appearances at company events
- Autograph sessions
- In-store appearances to boost sales promotions
- Public speaking opportunities
- Company logo recognition on competition apparel (the potential number of people you are reaching at your events) (check with your NGB for any rules that may apply)
- Introduce the sponsor to your sport offering "how to" opportunities (sport demonstrations)
- Mentioning sponsors name and support in media interviews
- Sending emails to the sponsors decision makers about your progress

## **Assembling Your Portfolio**

Now it is time for you to assemble your written sponsorship portfolio. Located at the back of this guide you will see several tasks that should help you construct your portfolio. The purpose of the proposal is to get you a face-to-face meeting with a decision-maker. The proposal alone will probably not secure a sponsorship for you. The process of looking for a sponsorship is very similar to a job search.

### **Last Minute Tips**

- Spell check is never perfect. Make sure your work is proof read several times.

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**If you are including a person's name from a potential sponsor in your portfolio, make sure that it is spelled correctly and use the correct title (Mr. Ms.) for their gender.**

- Try to make each proposal specific to the situation and sponsor.
- Make sure all your material includes your email-address and at least one phone number, also a website URL if you have a site.
- All written material should be laser-printed, and with some color (photos accomplish this).
- Your material needs to look professional and organized.
- Make sure you stress mutual benefits for you and the potential sponsor.

### **Available Assistance**

There are many avenues of assistance to help reduce costs when putting together your presentation. If the cost is relatively small, it may be faster and easier to simply pay for a product or service, rather than invest a great deal of your valuable time in sourcing it through sponsorship.

It is important to be aware that for limited quantities (up to 200), color copying is less expensive than color printing.

When it comes time to proofread your work, it is always best to have another set of eyes. It might be a good idea to ask two people who have a strong writing background, i.e. an English teacher, public relations professional, newspaper editor, etc. These people have a great eye for grammar and will assist you to make your portfolio more readable.

### **Internet**

Athlete Services and Program Multi-Media Coordinator can assist you in developing a personal website and provide information on blogging for Athlete Services and/or [teamusa.org](http://teamusa.org).

One of the easiest and least expensive ways to promote yourself as an athlete and a personality is through the Internet. Your website can be the one stop where sponsors can get a variety of information about you.

Most Internet sites include the following:

#### **Athlete Bio**

An athlete biography is typically included in a well-constructed athlete website. It should include key information about you, such as your hometown, hobbies, family information and perhaps some interesting characteristics about you. Include information that makes you stand out from other athletes and personalities. What makes you different?

#### **News & Notes**

This section should include every relevant article that has been written about you since you began to compete. Collect both competitive and human-interest articles about yourself and post them to the News and Notes section.

## **Photos**

In terms of click-throughs (number of people), this continues to be one of the most popular areas of any website. It is important that sponsors are able to see you in competition. A good way to source photos of yourself would be to contact your NGB. Most of them maintain photos of their athletes and are posted on-line. Be creative with your photos, let users download them as wallpaper onto their screens. Let them create a buzz.

Check with Athlete Services to get access to Getty Images, which will allow athletes to use their professional photos for personal use only.

## **Sponsor Recognition**

If you decide to create a personal website, then you must have a sponsor recognition page. This will allow you to thank all of the companies who have financially assisted your athletic career. The easiest way to do this is to simply put together a page with all the logos representing each company.

## **Contact Information**

Always give the most up-to-date contact information, including e-mail, home and cell phone. You will need a professional email address that is appropriate to give to any contact. We recommend a `firstname.lastname@mailaccount.com`.

## **Social Networking**

While social networking is a great way to reach your audience, make sure that you and your contacts have appropriate photos, requests, and information posted as your facebook or myspace pages and twitter feeds will reflect on your character.

# **THE INTERVIEW PROCESS**

## **Preparing for an Interview**

Since you don't go to interviews every week, being interviewed is not an everyday skill. Most people would happily skip the interview part of the sponsorship process if they could. The following information is some basic information on the art of interviewing. Another resource is to contact Athlete Career Services, and they can direct you to Adecco, the USOC's official career services supplier. An Adecco consultant can assist you with the interview process. Athlete Services and Programs can host a practice interview session and videotape the session to provide immediate feedback.

It is important to remember that at interviews you are an applicant, not a potential servant. You are presenting yourself, not selling yourself. Your role is to help the interviewer appreciate that you have all the skills, competencies, and experience necessary to effectively represent a product/service.

Interviewers do not have a crystal ball that shows them your experience and abilities and how good an athlete and person you are. Consequently, it is up to you as the interviewee to make the interviewer's job as easy as possible. That means talking fluently about who you are, and more importantly, what you have done. This is not difficult or complicated, but it takes practice and patience. Stay relaxed.

To help prepare for an interview, ask yourself the following five questions:

- What competencies would they be looking for in this sponsorship relationship?
- What experience do I have against those competencies?
- What makes my candidature special over and above the other people on the short list?
- How can I quantify my selected achievements, so that I can talk about them?

In addition to this, you should practice your answers by talking yourself through the standard interview questions that get asked at almost every interview, such as:

- What are your strengths/weaknesses?
- What do you think you can bring to this sponsor/company relationship?
- What motivates you?
- What are your career aspirations, both sport and post-sport career?

And, of course, almost every interview concludes with: "Do you have any questions for us?" Always prepare at least two or three questions about the company to show that you have done your research. Also, always clarify the next steps, deadlines, timelines, etc.

Remember, if you do not tell the interviewer what you have done, he or she will have no reason to offer you sponsorship. This is not "selling" but "presenting". You must pass on as many relevant facts about yourself as possible to allow the interviewer to make an accurate assessment of you.

### **Application Procedures**

When writing to a potential sponsor, the following is recommended to be included in detail:

- Relevance to business – what is the link?
- Outline of value to money – what can you bring to them?
- Background information on yourself and your sporting performance
- Specific project information (upcoming events, TV audience, spectators, etc.)
- Budget details – how much do you need? (Be realistic and don't expect one sponsor to cover all of your expenses)
- Sponsor benefits, strategies to promote the project and opportunities for the sponsor

### **Interview Skills**

#### **Before the Interview**

Obtain as much knowledge about the company as possible. Use the internet, annual reports, the Athlete Services Centers at the OTCs, newspapers, family, friends etc. Plan your answers to commonly asked questions. Practice on friends. Know your calendar or program for at least the next 12 months and type it up.

#### **Phone Interview**

Many companies will conduct phone interviews. Prepare as if you were doing an in-person interview. Make sure to smile as this will come across over the phone. Be sure to take notes and ask for clarification on any questions.

#### **Dress the Part**

Always be clean and well groomed. Pay special attention to your hair, nails, and teeth. Your image may become the face of their company!!

Never wear too much jewelry or makeup. Dress appropriately for the meeting – if it is in a formal meeting environment, wear a shirt/tie/suit. If it is a more relaxed surrounding, make sure clothes are ironed and clean. Never go casual. If you are unsure of the environment, it is always better to error on the side of dressing too formally.

In a formal meeting, never take off your suit jacket, unless you have to. The jacket gives you more authority.

Remember to turn off your cell phone! Better yet, don't even bring it into the meeting.

#### **At the Interview**

- Arrive about 10 minutes early – leave plenty of time for traffic/transport problems
- Walk in and smile.
- Shake hands (firmly) and introduce yourself. Look people in the eye.
- If there is something in the room/office that you notice, make a (positive) comment about it – especially if it relates to your sport. Five minutes of relaxed chitchat may be the icebreaker needed to build a good rapport with the company.

### **Talking About Yourself**

The purpose of a sponsorship interview is to convince the prospective sponsor that you are worth the investment. Your success at the interview will be determined by your ability to market and promote yourself, as well as your possible sporting achievements. Therefore, you have to present yourself at the interview in the right way, tell them what you have done in the past, and what you could do for them should they choose to sponsor you. Some people find it difficult to talk about themselves and feel uncomfortable while doing it. Learn to talk about yourself without false modesty, but without boasting either.

- Only say good things about your previous relationships with other companies – if you are willing to be negative about them you may be negative about the current company.
- Be future-orientated with the company you are speaking with – do not say you are thinking of retiring in two months time.
- Select words carefully.
- Listen carefully.
- Let the interviewer talk about themselves if they want to – if they think they are good at your sport, offer to take them training.
- Develop and use your own style.
- Never argue with the person you are meeting with.
- Be prepared to talk about any mistakes or shortcomings you might have, but be able to turn it into a positive.
- Place a high value on yourself – they want to know they are making a good quality investment.

### **Some Common Questions**

- Tell me about yourself.
- What do you know about our organization?
- How do you see a fit?
- What can you do for us?
- How often are you overseas?
- How long will you stay in the sport?
- What are your strengths?
- What are your major accomplishments?
- What are your limitations?
- What public speaking/media experience do you have?
- What do you think of our competitor?

### **Body Language**

Only about 25-35% of the messages we give to people are transmitted through what we say. That means that about 65-75% is given non-verbally. Trained interviewers will be on the lookout for what your non-verbal body language is saying, so you need to know what they are looking for. No one piece of body language should be taken in isolation, you need to look at the cluster of gestures to really assess what's going on in someone's mind.

Pay close attention to your arm gestures, hand gestures, leg movement, and any mannerisms that may be considered irritating.

## **Irritating Mannerisms**

One thing to avoid is distracting the interviewer(s) with irritating mannerisms. Not many people display these, but nerves being what they are, even the calmest of us can sometimes act in unusual ways.

Some examples:

- Fiddling with jewelry
- Saying 'um' a lot
- Twiddling hair
- Clearing the throat often
- Fidgeting

## **Eye Contact**

Although eye contact seems so simple, it's a highly complex and sophisticated set of movements that facilitate smooth conversations. We unconsciously pass messages to the other person about where we are in our speech by our tone of voice and eye contact. Most people know these "rules" and so know when it is their turn to speak.

- Good eye contact shows interest and understanding. However, too long a gaze can make the other person feel uncomfortable.
- The listener maintains more eye contact than the speaker. This eye contact, along with nods, 'mmms' and other gestures, encourages the speaker to continue.
- The speaker glances away whilst thinking of what to say next. This means that the speaker is alternately looking at the listener and looking elsewhere.
- Speakers who do not maintain enough eye contact can appear shifty, untrustworthy or lacking in confidence.

## **Post Interview**

During the interview be sure to get a business card from your interviewer so that you have the proper address and title for follow-up. Send the person(s) you met with a 'thank you' note. Thank them for their time and say that you would enjoy working with them in the future. Try and ensure this arrives within two to three days of the meeting.

## **Sponsorship**

A sponsor will have measurable marketing or corporate objectives and targets that they will set for all sponsorships. Performance (on and off the field) should be measured regularly against the agreed targets (athletes should be proactive in providing this information).

Targets for the company may include:

- Improved product awareness and increased sales
- Increased market share for their industry – beating their opposition may be just as important to them as any athlete
- Improved employee relations – athletes can provide a positive and a personal link to an event for employees
- Enhanced corporate image – good, clean, wholesome, community-minded, caring, patriotic, positive, goal orientated, etc.

- Greater appeal to customers
- Relevance to services to be promoted – sport link with image
- Possible media coverage for activities on and off the field
- Promotional opportunities – point of sale, appearances signings, etc.

Athlete can provide:

- Signage, the promotion of the sponsor by wearing caps, etc., check on the logo size and regulations for your sport. Consider camera angles, photographer locations, etc.
- Promotional and merchandising opportunities.
- Hospitality – attendance at functions, guest speaking, hosting tables, participation in corporate days in your sport.
- Publicity and advertising opportunities – photographs in local media, etc.
- Employee achievement awards – presentation nights, attendance at employee functions, etc.
- Exclusivity – this should be the only sponsor with this type of product or service.

### **Sponsor Servicing**

When successful, establish regular contact and feedback with a key member of the organization. Develop a personal relationship so that you are familiar and comfortable with each other. If you are overseas, send news via emails, providing an update on your performance or short anecdotes of your trip. Whenever you are mentioned in any article, newspaper, etc., endeavor to mention (and thank) your sponsor and wear sponsor clothing. Always send a copy of the item to the sponsor.

Try not to be photographed in front of a rival sponsor's logo (always look behind you to see what the shot will be)

Remember to maintain your training and competition schedules. However, try to attend as many sponsor functions as possible, and act as though you are part of the company family.

### **Risk Management**

Before committing to a sponsorship, it is crucial to check that the company has:

- An acceptable past sponsorship record
- An acceptable financial and business record
- An acceptable public image
- Responsible policies and practices

Make sure you are aware of any requirements from your national or international sport governing body, including the USOC, before committing to provide services – e.g. size and location of logos, personal sponsorship and event sponsors.

Always obtain a legal opinion on any contract/agreement you are about to sign.

## **AGENTS**

### **When should an Athlete Sign with an Agent?**

This is the biggest question for many Olympic and Paralympic athletes. An athlete should consider hiring an agent when one or more of these factors are present:

- When companies are contacting the athlete.
- When the athlete is competitive on a World Cup level.
- When the athlete has recently had international or large domestic success.
- If the athlete competes in a high profile sport (swimming, skiing/snowboarding, figure skating, etc.).
- If the athlete has an endorsement and feels that they could have gotten a better deal.

- If the athlete is struggling with time management.

If any of these are occurring, then the athlete may want to consider working with an agent. If none of these factors are affecting an athlete, then he/she will probably be fine without signing with an agent. One agent offered this advice to athletes who are not sure if they need an agent, "Talk to other athletes that do have agents. Other athletes can offer their opinions and their own advice. Those with agents know whether or not signing with an agent was a good choice."

### **Choosing an Agent**

Determining which agent to hire as a representative is critical. Do not just sign with any agent. Choose one that understands you, what your needs are, and what you want to do with your career. Here are some questions to ask a potential agent:

- What kind of proposal can you provide me with that will explain how you can assist me in developing my career and post-career?
- Do you know who I am and what I have done, have you asked anyone about me as a person?
- Who will do the day-to-day work?
- Do you charge commission on trade or barter?
- How easily can I get out of this contract if it doesn't work out?

Be sure to ask for references and a resume, how long has the agent been working in the industry? What deals have they secured in the past?

Tell the agent what you expect and what your goals are. Then ask the agent how this can fit in with what he or she does. The most important thing to consider is how comfortable you feel with the agent. Establishing a good relationship with your agent will help both you and the agent to be successful.

### **Agent fees**

Most agents charge anywhere from 10% to 20% for sponsorship deals they have negotiated. Some may also charge commission on product received. Ask about the policies before signing with them.

### **Agent and Athlete Responsibilities**

An agent has several responsibilities in representing an athlete. Agents should first develop a strong relationship between themselves and the athletes. This creates the comfort level that is necessary to both parties. The agent should also assist the athlete in time management of training, working, and addressing sponsor requests.

Another responsibility is training the athlete in dealing with the media. A positive relationship is recommended because the media can be a powerful partner in marketing.

The most important job for an agent is securing sponsorships and creating relationships between the athlete and sponsors. In getting sponsorships, the agent will cover the specific benefits allotted but the USOC and the athlete's NGB, and will also see what is available through the athlete's given skills, such as motivational speaking. The agent can also provide ideas on how an athlete matches a company's target demographic, design possible marketing campaigns surrounding the athlete, and come up with creative ways other than signage that could be used.

**The athlete has to do their own work first.** By being successful competitively, like having podium appearances, an athlete can help an agent maximize sponsorship and other financial possibilities. An athlete should also listen, learn, and pay attention to the media, the agent, and his or her respected peers.

## **Benefits for Athletes and Agents**

These are the benefits for athletes from hiring an agent:

- Financial gains through more sponsorship, if the athlete is marketable.
- The agent can create more sponsorship opportunities.
- Information provided to the athlete.
- The athlete has more time to focus on training and competing.

These are the benefits an agent receives from representing an athlete:

- Financial benefits, this is the agent's occupation.
- The agent's reputation can be bolstered.
- Referrals to other athletes.
- Allows the agent to be part of the Olympic or Paralympic Games.

## **ASSEMBLYING YOUR PORTFOLIO**

The following task outlines a standard format for a written proposal. One does not need to follow the format exactly, as each athlete or sponsorship situation will require adjustments.

The written proposal has only one real purpose, to get you an interview with the potential sponsor. Partnerships are not made by paper documents. They are made in person, face-to-face. You must obtain the opportunity to meet with the company, express your qualities, and convince them you are a worthy investment.

Page 1 – Title Page plus best color action photo

Page 2 – Cover Letter to Sponsor

Page 3 – Athlete Profile plus photos (one or two)

Page 4 – Ultimate Success

Page 5 – Sponsorship Agreement

Page 6 – Other Relevant Info...media clippings, event schedule, results, letter of reference

## SPONSORSHIP COVER LETTER

Here is a general example of a sponsorship cover letter that can be used as a guide in creating your own. As with all pieces of the sponsorship proposal, the cover letter should be unique to you and the potential sponsor you are sending it to.

September 1, 200\_

Kelly Smith  
Vice President of Marketing  
Widgets, Inc.  
250 Main Street  
Omaha, Nebraska 99999

Dear Ms Smith,

I am sending you a portfolio of my pursuits and successes in curling, and a collection of ideas of how I can promote Widgets, Inc, both locally and nationally. I believe that we could form a partnership that would be successful in advertising and selling Widgets, Inc products.

My pursuit of excellence in the sport of curling is a quality that is similar to the needs of your company. Recent successes of a fourth place finish at the Toronto World Cup and podium finish at the Iceland Invitational has heightened my exposure within the media and public. My anticipated continued success could potentially enhance the image of Widgets, Inc.

I am an advocate for active living as well as competition. I see sport as a tool for self-development and believe it plays a crucial role in the development of young people. To this end, I volunteer part of my summer to children's summer sports camps in an attempt to spread 'fun and sports' to children within Omaha's community.

I am committed not only to my own sport development, but also my own personal development. While training full-time, I have managed to balance university commitments, and currently in my third year of studies for a graduate degree in Agricultural Business from South Platte College.

The level of commitment for high performance athletes requires not only an investment in time and energy but also financial support. Although sport governing bodies provide some support, athletes must secure other sources of money in order to get by. I have attached an outline of sponsorship opportunities that may be appealing to Widgets, Inc., while fulfilling my financial needs. Please review the enclosed material.

I look forward to discussing this partnership opportunity with you and will follow-up with you in one week. Please feel free to call (999)555-1414 or email ([kenny.rogers@gmail.com](mailto:kenny.rogers@gmail.com)) if you have any questions or concerns.

Thanks you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Kenny Rogers  
U.S. Champion  
Curling

## WRITING YOUR ATHLETE PROFILE

This is a brief review of what you have accomplished, not only in sport, but also in the areas of education, employment, and community activities. It may be easier to write your athlete profile in third person, so it doesn't sound as though you are bragging (event though that is the intention)

Answer these questions to develop and outline:

- How, when and where you started your sports.
- Brief description of sport, if necessary.
- Why do it.
  
- Awards and achievements
- Other pursuits
- Special interests
  
- Athletic results and future goals
  
- Summary

### **Athlete Profile Sample**

Check with your NGB to see if they have an athlete profile on you that you can utilize.

Born and raised in Omaha, NE, Kenny Rogers first began playing little league baseball and summer league basketball. Kenny first saw curling at the 2002 Winter Olympics in Salt Lake City. Immediately following the Games, Kenny signed up with the local curling club and began competing in regional competitions. He was a member of the Midwest's top-ranked junior team while competing for the Omaha Curlers. Kenny now competes with the U.S. National team and is the team captain, competing all over North America and Europe.

Kenny Rogers' total dedication to the sport is matched by his other achievements. He is currently into his third semester of a graduate program in Agricultural Business at South Platte College. During the summer, Kenny find times away from training and competition to volunteer at the Omaha Curlers youth camp.

Kenny, aged 23, captained his team to a fourth place finish at the Toronto World Cup. He followed that up leading the team to a podium finish at the Iceland Invitational, he first time for an American curling team in 11 years. Now, his energy is focused on the upcoming season and posting even more impressive results. His ultimate goal is to win a medal in Vancouver in 2010.

Until then, sponsor support will help make the important 2009-2010 training and World Cup season a success.

## WRITE YOUR DEFINITION FOR SUCCESS

Unless otherwise expressed, the public and media will define your success as gold medal performances. This cannot always be the case. Therefore, it is important that you communicate your own expectations of success. Define your success not only as competitive goals, but also by the core values by which you live.

Ultimate Success

For \_\_\_\_\_ (Name) \_\_\_\_\_ in the \_\_\_\_\_ (year) \_\_\_\_\_ competitive season

List three or four season goals

List key values by which you live

### **Ultimate Success Sample**

Ultimate Success  
For Kenny Rogers in the 2007-08 Competitive Season  
Curling

- Finish in the top 10 in the World Cup standings
- Win the U.S. Curling Championships
- Two podium finishes in World Cup events

Kenny Rogers is committed to the pursuit of excellence in curling. He defines success not only in competition results, but also in the quality of the effort, whether it is in training or in competition. Kenny's commitment is not just a narrow-minded sport focus. He believes that the foundation for success is a balance between sport, education, work, family and healthy living. Kenny's advocacy of drug-free sport and fair play demonstrates these values.

### **SPONSORSHIP AGREEMENT**

From your selling points, clearly outline what you will offer your specific sponsor in exchange for their support. This is also the opportunity to present specific values to your proposal. It is always difficult to know how to ask for money, so group your offer into three or four different levels of commitment. This gives the sponsor options of different levels of participation to choose from. But be prepared to negotiate.

Gold Corporate Sponsor - \$2,500 cash or in-kind contribution in exchange for:

- Primary spot on competition uniform
- Personal appearances at company functions (number of appearances to be discussed)
- Two fantasy days with company employees to teach them the sport
- Post cards/emails from every competition or significant training camp where you may be traveling and representing the sponsor
- VIP passes to local competitions
- Top billing on personal website and blog.

Silver Corporate Sponsor - \$1,000 cash or in-kind contribution in exchange for:

- Secondary spot on competition uniform
- In-store appearances for various promotions
- Email updates from competitions
- Recognition on personal website and blog

Bronze Corporate Sponsor - \$500 cash or in-kind contribution in exchange for:

- Email updates from competitions
- Recognition on personal website and blog
- One in-store appearance

Uniquely package the gold, silver and bronze level of sponsorship accordingly, depending on what you have to offer, your own personal perceived value and the amount you are asking for.

### **Other Relevant Material**

If you have any other useful information that you believe will help strengthen your proposal, feel free to add it in. Such things may include reference letters, media clippings or event schedule. However, try to keep it brief. Remember, you do not want to overload the potential sponsor with information they might not have time to read.

## **THINGS TO THINK ABOUT**

Here are some questions you may want to review after attending the USOC Athlete Sponsorship Workshop. These questions are designed to get you, the athlete, thinking about all aspects of sponsorship and to gather materials and ideas for your own sponsorship journey.

1. What are my sponsorship needs? (List all finances, equipment, travel and day-to-day needs. Also see the budget information in this workbook). Remember-sponsorship can also include goods and services.
2. What are my current sponsor relationships and how have I continued and cultivated those relationships? (Monthly emails or reports, photos, thank-you notes, etc.)
3. What relationships (friends/family/church/work/school/hometown businesses/volunteer organizations/sport organizations) do I have that could lead to a potential sponsorship opportunity? List all that may apply.
4. What community service and speaking engagements have I done that can be added to my resume and marketing materials? Is there a potential sponsorship opportunity?
5. When thinking about athlete representation, sometimes it's helpful to make a list of all of your resources, time and needs. Questions to ask yourself include: How could an agent help me with sponsorship marketing? How much time do I have to devote to my own sponsorship marketing?
6. What networking and media opportunities are available in my community? How will I get involved?
7. Marketing Materials: What do I have? (List all articles, photos, websites, press releases/results, etc.). What do I need to get and how can I get these materials?
8. What are my personal sponsorship goals? (List all that apply). What is my plan of action for accomplishing these goals?

## "Things to Think About" - Budget/Expense Items to Consider

Listed below are several examples of the types of expenses you incur every month. The list is not all-inclusive, but provided as a starting point to get you thinking about how you spend your available dollars, and how to best ask for assistance

### THE OBVIOUS:

	Monthly Expense	Annual Expense
<b>Travel to Competitions &amp; Training</b>		
Air		
Ground (cabs, shuttles)		
Rental Cars		
Parking		
Mileage		
Hotels		
Meals		
Tips		
Laundry/Cleaning		
Shoes		
Equipment		
Apparel		
Entry Fees		
NGB Dues/Fees		
<b>THE NOT SO OBVIOUS:</b>		
Housesitting		
Utilities		
House Payment (or rent)		
Child Care		
Pet care		
Homeowner/rental insurance		
Car Payment		
Car Insurance		
Gas & upkeep of car		
Food		
Telephone/Cell Phone		
Cable TV/DSL		
Medical Insurance		
Medical Co-Payments		
Dental Insurance		
Entertainment		
School/Tuition/Books		
Clothes (incl. coats)		
Trips home		
Personal Care Items		
Umbrella		
Computer		
Haircuts		

## Networking and Athlete Speaker's Referral Network

### **Networking**

Networking can help you move forward with your career and sponsorship goals.

- Get your message out and get referrals.
- Meet with others and accumulate information about your target organizations.
- Get advice and ideas.

Networking is a natural process that we do all the time in our personal and professional lives. Networking is simply talking to people!

Why should you attend networking events?

#### **To meet with new contacts and prospective employers/sponsors.**

- Can lead to future conversations about your career or sponsorships.
- Opportunities may be available that are not advertised.

#### **To promote yourself and sharpen your presentation and job/sponsorship-hunting skills.**

- Raises your comfort level in presenting yourself to employers or sponsors.
- Improves your confidence by increasing exposure to potential hiring/marketing professionals.

To learn about networking, sign up to attend an Adecco Athlete Career Program Networking Seminar, or call Keith Bryant at x2238 to register for the Athlete Career Program.

### **Athlete Speaker's Referral Network (ASRN)**

The ASRN is an on-line resource located on [usolympicteam.com](http://usolympicteam.com) for the general public to request an athlete speaker for school appearances, corporate events, motivational speaking opportunities, etc.

How does the ASRN work?

- Athlete speakers complete bios and register for the ASRN through [teamusanet.com](http://teamusanet.com).
- General public accesses speakers via [usolympicteam.com](http://usolympicteam.com).

To learn more about the basics of public speaking or to set up a meeting with Adecco's Athlete Career Program contact:

Keith Bryant  
Athlete Career Services  
719-866-2238  
[Keith.bryant@usoc.org](mailto:Keith.bryant@usoc.org)