



# IEG SPONSORSHIP REPORT

The latest on sports, arts, cause and entertainment marketing.

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## Selling

### Helping Sponsors Prospect Among Members Leads To Success For Association Program

This just may be a record.

Within ten days of opening the doors to its new sponsorship program in September, the National Electrical Contractors Assn. saw success, selling its three top-tier sponsorship packages.

That quickly, the trade group saw its total annual sponsorship revenue jump from mid-five-figures to at least six figures for each of the next three years.

NECA's membership consists of roughly 4,500 companies in the electrical construction industry. Its new partners are parts distributor Graybar Electric Co.; Milwaukee Electric Tool Corp.; and Westex, Inc., a manufacturer of flame-resistant fabrics.

The association started down the sponsorship road several years ago as a way to boost non-dues revenue. Like many other membership organizations, its initial sponsorship efforts largely centered on selling exposure opportunities at its annual convention, including signage, inclusion in goody bags and other passive benefits.

"That was okay, but we thought we could offer more to sponsors," said Daniel Walter, vice president and COO.

The organization also "took a couple of passes" at using outside sales reps to sell sponsorship, "but we really didn't have a good feel about it. It seemed too fragmented," Walter said.

In fall '07, on the recommendation of other trade associations, Walter reached out to Mel Poole, president of consultancy SponsorLogic, and subsequently hired the firm to develop a new sponsorship strategy and sell the resulting packages.

Below, the steps SponsorLogic and NECA took in creating and marketing a comprehensive sponsorship program.

#### WHO

National Electrical Contractors Assn.

#### TAKEAWAY

Focus on providing contact and meeting information for B2B marketing leads to fast sale of top-level packages

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- Hot Category

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- Ask the Editor
- FAQs

## Helping Sponsors Prospect Among Members Leads To Success For Association Program

**Establish organizational context for sponsorship.** Prior to developing sponsorship benefits and packages, Poole spent several months studying NECA's position in its industry and relationship with members, as well as the reach and impact of its annual convention, magazine, Web site, continuing education events and other assets.

He also met with NECA senior staff to gauge commitment to a new sponsorship program and to servicing sponsors.

**Set ground rules.** The above due diligence prompted two non-negotiable requirements for every NECA sponsor.

Sponsors cannot communicate price information, comparisons with their competitors or other "buy now" messaging in their outreach to members.

"We want to keep it high minded, collegial and peer-to-peer like a National Public Radio sponsorship," Poole said.

In addition, NECA requires the dollars each sponsor spends to purchase sponsorship packages to be incremental to their existing expenditures for magazine ads, conference exhibits and other select inventory.

"We don't want to encourage people to abandon the magazine in favor of a sponsorship," Walter said. "We think they present different opportunities, and we're trying to build what we're doing, not just move money around."

**Allocate benefits to appropriate sponsor levels.** Poole bundled NECA's benefits into three packages: premier partner, official partner and official supplier.

The primary feature of the three-year premier package is one-to-one marketing opportunities with targeted NECA members on a year-round basis, including the annual convention and trade show, and more than 300 smaller events.

"They can tell us who their prospects are, and we will find a way to put them in the same room as often as possible," said Poole.

The focus on business-building opportunities over signage resonated with prospective partners.

"The sponsorship gives us a way to develop and deepen relationships in a context that is professional and respectful. That's very big," said Dave Moeller, Graybar's national market manager-construction.

In addition to business-building opportunities, premier partners also receive category exclusivity and messaging in NECA's newsletter, on its Web site and through other member outreach efforts.

NECA restricted the number of premier partners to three to reduce clutter and add value to the packages, Poole said.

NECA's three-year official partner packages do not afford category exclusivity, and NECA will limit the number of official partners to ten.

Recognizing properties must be flexible in working with corporate partners, NECA specifies roughly 70 percent of the deliverables in each package. The remaining 30 percent is identified based on each sponsor's needs.

**Establish pricing benchmarks.** To help determine the going rate for association sponsorship packages, Poole commissioned IEG Research to analyze the fees paid for partnerships at other trade groups and membership organizations.

"The toughest question from a potential sponsor is 'how did you come up with these numbers?'" Poole said. "You gain an advantage if you can back your numbers up."

**Open program to prospects all at once.** NECA hosted a conference call in September to introduce the new program to the prospective corporate partners among its members.

"As a trade association, you have to be aware of the competitive situation when it comes to certain types of members," Poole said. "We thought the fairest way to announce the program was through a conference call."

In addition to explaining the program, Poole offered the call's roughly 400 participants the opportunity to discuss the program one-on-one at NECA's annual convention two weeks later.

The strategy paid off: NECA sold all three premier packages by the second day of the conference. NECA also is negotiating several deals in the official partner and supplier categories, Poole said.

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