ORANGE MUD

Sponsor and brand partnerships - creating synergies between race directors and sponsors

How many of truly feel you have a mutually beneficial relationship between your brand and your sponsors? For those of you that do, you're awesome. But I'm sure you all realize that so much more could be done to increase sponsor partnerships that provide a win for both. I'm going to apologize first, as I'll be blunt with what we see as a brand, but I hope it's clear that I want to support the trail market that we love, but we need your help to get there.

1. Let's first look at what each side is looking for. *Hint, it's the same thing.*

Wants	
Event	*Sponsor*
Money and/or products	Return on investment
Exposure – Event value and purpose	Exposure – Values, product, service
More activations - registrations	More activations, product or service
Event credibility	Brand credibility
Social media and email content	Social media and email content

Data we often get presented with
- Logo on website - this is ok, though it's usually buried on your site
- Logo on race shirts – these rarely get worn after an event
- Booth option to sell or market product/service – great if the brand can be present, not if we can't.
- Product in racer bags – Out of 50,000 coupons given to races last year, how many we're used? 147, for $16k in revenue on $1000 in cost for cards and shipping. An ROI? Yes. But a lot of paper waste for a small return.
- Money

Here's where your pitch is wrong. Ok, some of you probably do an awesome job at it. But speaking as a brand, and one that gets sponsor decks sent to me daily, here is what I see.

- Asking for lots of money without a clear definition of how and why a brand will see a return. Most push for the presenting sponsor right out of the gate. For some events this could be as little as donating a few products, some it's going to be $50k+ per event. The reach of the race of course impacts this and

some of the major events have the reach and marketing power to pull it off because of size, brand, reach, etc.

- Tier 1, 2, 3, 4, and somewhere way down the line there is a cheap option that offers no value.
  - o Can this work? Sure, but you have to really articulate this. Generally after tier 3 you're so far down the list that it's doubtful to see a return so why bother right? Read on.

Data a brand wants to see – What is your audience and how can we engage with them?
- **Race date and location.** As simple as this is, sometimes I have to really dig to find it. Yes as a brand we should invest the time to look this up. I get it, but we also get multiple request per day and when we have to work to figure out when the event is and it's already a strike against the race.
- **What type of event is this?** Trail, road, relay, tri, what distances. So many sponsor decks are missing this information, especially the distances and multiple categories.
- **What is your reach?** If you have an overly active audience in a channel let us know. Total likes is neat, but engagement is awesome.
  - o Facebook - Reach
  - o Instagram - Reach
  - o Twitter -Reach
  - o Email – How many emails are on your list, what is the open and click rate? How often do you send emails? How are sponsors noted in them? Do you have an example that shows you are giving them a good partnership highlight? That would be unique, often it's a very subtle mention.
  - o Web stats (total and unique visits, page views, average time on site, and if they are visiting your sponsor pages strongly then note that!). Rarely ever presented, but hey you have some good things going on here. When is the peak spike (maybe some vendor emails throughout the year will keep your race fresh in people's minds and get an extra signup or two), or is traffic steady throughout the year?
- **Demographic of your audience.** This data can really help most brands. Poll you audience, you might be surprised at what they'll tell you so you can make your event even better.
  - o Age
  - o Income
  - o Interest (brands, products, services, foods, aid station, bathrooms, massage, etc.)
- **How many racers do you project?** I often have to ask for this. The more data we have, the less argument we have for supporting your event. Win for you!

Let's look at some options

- First off, most brands aren't big enough to invest $500k with a major event like the LA Marathon, Ragnar, etc. I commend them for getting sponsorships that big for presenting, it's just not in our bandwidth and not in most brands budgets. But by all means go for cash, it seems most races that we see do it best with regional banks, car dealerships, and insurance companies. So I'm here to talk about how we have best partnered with the trail running market that generally have races in size of 75 to 1000 runners.

- Let's do a podcast. It's a bonus for both of us. You get to spread the word about your race, you help us to generate content for our audience. We started our Orange Mud Adventure Channel specifically for helping to grow the endurance community with ride and run. Our audience is amazing, and we like to share that with you, and you with them. Give us a pitch, tell us why your race is special, what it does for the trails, community, your back story.

- Will you have an ad in a magazine? Will our logo be a part? Many races have ads in magazines, if you're going to do this and give us a descent logo placement, that has value.

- Cobranded on course event signage? We rarely see this, but certainly love to. Pitch this to your sponsors. We like things like this.

- Race day pictures. Some races do this amazingly well. One of my favorites is mile 90 photography in Kansas. Their quality is amazing, and they partner with races like the Hawk 100 to provide free photos to racers. I don't know the specifics, I'm sure the Hawk crew pays them, but the marketing reach is amazing afterwards as they make all of us runners look amazing in their shots. This keeps the race activated, the racer engaged, and sponsors happy. If you work to partner with a photographer like this, I'd get the watermark to add "presenting by BrandX" below this too.

- Provide content to brand or work with your brands to market pre-event to the brands audience. If we sponsor your event, it's because we believe in it and want to show that. Make a cobranded piece that the brand can share out and talk about your event. For some, you don't need extra reach now as your race always sells out, but it may not always be that way. Why not market it to the masses to build a bigger following? Your sponsors will thank you.

- Provide content post event. I love to see pictures videos of our banners, people wearing our product, finish line shots with our brand tied to it, etc from your event. It's so rare to ever get a single piece of content from an event, that sharing even one picture would make you stand out. Certificates, plaques in appreciation are awesome too as many companies love to put them in their lobbies. This isn't near as common, but always well received.

- Share our pictures in your media throughout the season. Instagram has been the king of reach in social media for quite some time now. Even with recent algorithm changes that drastically cut back the organic reach, it's still winning. Commit to sharing some of our content, mutually agreed upon of course, throughout the season. Maybe once per month, or whatever. Keep in mind if you have 50 followers the reach, from an advertisers perspective,

doesn't have much value but if you have 10k, or 50k we're in a different level. Remember engagement is even more important than followers. I've seen events with 500 to 2000 followers with amazing engagement that outperforms races with 50,000 followers.

- Do you have a private Facebook group for sharing sponsor discounts? We like those as they keep the discount offline of the mainstream media and provide a chance for more direct contact with your audience.
- Cobranded merch. For us it's water bottles, buffs, Transition Wraps, and even packs. We often work with events to put both of our logos on a product for race goodie bags, podium spots, or for random giveaways. Depending on the event reach, sometimes this is part of our agreement to provide, and with many we split the cost with the event.
- Event activation.
  o On site presence. This one is huge, if we can get there. There are many events where most brands simply won't have the bandwidth to have onsite activation. That's on the brand of course, not your fault, but it's a challenge to work through when asking for sponsorship knowing the brand can't be on-site.
  o Do you have an app for live tracking we could be a part of?
  o Do you post race day updates throughout the day? Will we be mentioned on your site during race day?
  o ***Email. Email. Email and Email***. This continues to be the #1 mechanism for activation. Let's really look at this. Where have we seen the best success?
    ▪ Don't be overly salesy. Work with the brand to make a piece that is marketing focused, informative, not a straight sales pitch.
    ▪ How many emails can we be a part of?
    ▪ I just signed up email. I'm amazed that so few events take advantage of this opportunity. It's when we as a racer are the most excited and often we just get a receipt. Using an email automation tool like Klaviyo can automatically send an email thanking them for signing up, referring them to the race day schedule on your site, and you could refer them to learn more about the sponsors and sponsor deals of the event as well.
    ▪ One month out email. Ok, it's one month to race day. Are you prepared? Do you have the proper shoes, hydration pack, fuel, socks, lube, car, insurance, whatever.
    ▪ The post race email. We don't see many events activate this channel, but it's a great place to thank your racers for coming out, and also feature a section about your sponsors. Something to the effect of, "Thanks for running in our event this past weekend! Next years race will be XXXX date, and to better prepare for it now, checkout these offers from our sponsors below."

Deliverables – It's not you, it's me. Really.
- Ok, the contract is signed, now what's the next step?
- Deliverables…….. Brands suck at this too and we need your help to make sure that what we agreed upon actually happens. A successful event partnership in year 1 means a happy future together.
    - o Date you need product/cash.
    - o Date you need our logo and link data.
    - o Date you'll put logo and link data on your site.
    - o Date you need email template.
    - o Date you need banners for the event.
    - o Date you need pictures for social media and when you'll post them.
    - o Your social handles, and ours, so we can tag each other on posts.
    - o Date you will be stuffing goodie bags.
    - o Address to deliver all of the above.
    - o Setup time and location for pre/during/post race.
- Conduct a PRA (Post Race Analysis). As soon as your race is over, think about what you did great for your sponsors, what didn't go as planned, and what could be improved. Then update your offering, firm up your deliverables, and start working on next years sponsorship while weaknesses are fresh.
- Did I miss some above? Review your sponsor offering and ensure any tangible piece in there has a deliverable to address once inked.

2nd year sponsorship proposal – Once we partner with an event, we plan to always be with the event, assuming year 1 goes well.
- o Start as soon as possible once your event is over. Locking up early means you're not scrambling last minute, and nor is the brand.
- o Set clear timelines of when you expect deliverables and where/how to send them.
- o Provide ROI data to the brands post event. Content, email clicks, social clicks and engagement data, web clicks, sales, etc.
- o Are the brands providing you a utm link so they can measure the link clicks?
    - o I always provide a UTM link for our website to you so I can measure reach from your site or social post. I'm guessing most don't do this as many brands, especially smaller ones, might not know how to do so. It's easy to find though, so just recommend they google making a trackable link.
    - o If you have the data to show that the brand received 1000 link clicks through the year then show that. If you see it's only 3, then maybe you have some work to do on your site with getting activation up.
- o Provide pictures and video of brand activation from your event. The more the better.

Challenges we have as a brand when it comes to partnerships. First off, some brands just suck at working with you to ensure good activation. That's not your fault, but it's your challenge. Make sure the brands do their part to have a mutually beneficial relationship so they can't justify "not" being a sponsor every year. Keep in mind there are over 6000 trail running events in the US.

- Poor ROI
- Poor deliverable planning (see above).
- Poor sponsorship execution. Racers get a prerace letter, make one for your sponsors too. Often we're the last to know of race morning schedules, or pre-event activities that are often assumed that we know.
- Poor interaction
- No clear plan
- Mentioned in a race email, but buried in content
- No communication on content.

When to reach out to a brand.
- Not 5 days, or even 2 months before, rather as far out as you can!
  - We'd like to talk right after your event is over or as far out as possible before it comes. This way we can really work together and not just give some product freebies away that will have nearly zero effective reach. All to often we get the "our event is in 2 weeks, did you want to sponsor it again"? No bueno.

Have feedback from here? – This is just my take on a sponsorship proposal. You have to fill in the blanks and value levels. I'm sure you'll want to make tiers that go all the way to big big money, but keep in mind that it's likely going to turn off many of us when your event doesn't have the reach to justify a $25k investment or whatever it may be. We get decks that start at $5k per event when they are brand new, maybe only have 300 racers, etc. It's an instant turn off as our meager 3 or 4 pack donation is presumed to be worthless compared to the other sponsor levels and expectation on return is nill. Let's keep things reasonable for both.

Want to partner with us? Hit us up at sales@orangemud.com and ask for the Sponsorship Coordinator or the CEO, Josh Sprague.