

Swing your Partner

Partnership has recently enjoyed some renewed interest from many different arenas, including community economic development and business marketing. Partnerships are popular because they can provide an organization with value and not necessarily at a financial cost.

Partnerships go by many names. In business, we often call it sponsorship. Indeed, a fashionable word for sponsor this season is *partner*.

Partnerships, including sponsorships, are one of my favourite marketing tools. I recommend and encourage them for clients whenever possible. They are tremendously flexible promotion tools: they can have long term benefit or short term impact, and they can be multi-member, including more than two organizations. In broad strokes, here are some options:

Ad hoc Partnerships – a single-purpose pairing.

Sustaining Partnerships – a long term relationship, think beer and football.

Evolutionary Partnerships – in which the partners actually become one. This can happen in stages, perhaps starting with an alliance.

But while I am a fan of partnerships for so many different reasons, partnerships are not a call for the worst of inclusive behavior, such as trying to wrangle those who do not want to be in your group. A “forced marriage” if you will.

Drawing the analogy to marriage is a no-brainer. Marriage is known as a time-honored partnership arrangement. But unlike marriage, most partnerships are not entered into with “death do us part” as part of the arrangement. Many are intended to be time-limited, perhaps focused on a single cause or goal. (Minority alliances in politics are not uncommon.)

Sometimes partnerships simply don’t work out. It happens often enough that we have some common expressions for it, such as “uneasy alliance” or “strange bedfellows.”

Here are some ways to help your partnerships provide value – for all the partners. First, if you’re looking to sponsorship for business marketing, make sure the match is a good fit – with your value proposition and with your customers. Second, make it a formal arrangement, in as much as the twin values on the table – money and recognition – need to be clearly identified. The giving and the getting need to be explicit. Additionally, both parties may want or require some form of measurement – to assess the value of the partnership. Keep in mind that like any good plan for measurement, you need to establish those metrics at the start, so that data collection is built into the project.