



John Dietrich

The ultimate balancing act

Leaner economic times require you to do more with less. Are you ready?

You're 200 feet above ground, walking across a tightrope and everyone in the arena is watching your every move. They need you to entertain them, but they also fear for you may lose your balance. As the head of marketing, you realize these are tough times, but not impossible. On one hand, you are balancing the need to market your company and tell its story. On the other hand, you are balancing senior management questioning every single dollar you spend. It's a balancing act.

ASK THE QUESTIONS

When deciding whether Ulteig should sponsor this year's Denver Film Festival, the marketing team asked five fundamental questions:

- Are potential clients attending the event?
- Will the media be available at the event?
- Is there a sustainability or green opportunity at the event?
- Can we brand our company with excellence to the desired audience?
- Is there an opportunity for thought leadership?

Many of you can relate to these leaner economic times and the pressure to do more with less. The symbolic balancing act reminds us of the circus and how the spectators "ooooohh" and "ahhhhh" as we watch in amazement from our safe seats. But, high up on the wire, it can be scary.

The good news is the overarching goal of a company needing to market its services and tell its story has

remained intact. Every expert or analyst I have encountered concludes with the same message: companies that cut back on marketing efforts during tough economic times will have more difficulty climbing back into competition when the economy improves. The secret in leaner times, however, is not to become polarized by the balancing act itself, but rather welcome the idea of adopting "balance" into your decision-making processes.

Ask the fundamental question: in order to justify the spending of marketing dollars to senior management, what five things

can our company gain from this marketing campaign?

When deciding whether or not Ulteig should sponsor this year's Denver Film Festival, our marketing team approached this decision with balance and thoughtfulness. We literally asked five fundamental questions, each centered on providing value to our shareholders:

- Are potential clients attending the event? Yes.
- Will the media be available at the event? Yes.
- Is there a sustainability or green opportunity at the event? This year's theme is focused on green living.
- Can we brand our company with excellence to the desired audience? Yes.
- Is there an opportunity for thought leadership? No. (Actually, we created this opportunity and turned it into a "yes." I will share how in just a moment.)

Sponsorships are usually suspect and questionable. Sponsorships usually permit the company to brand its logo and receive complimentary passes and meals. Sometimes companies sponsor an event because the competition is also sponsoring (a silly reason, if you want my opinion. Never let another company dictate your agenda or strategy.).

Sometimes companies simply want to be associated with the event itself, and therefore demonstrate their passion for the event by sponsoring at high levels. If you are a gold sponsor, you must REALLY care about the issue, right? And so on.

Every company has its reasons. What's important is the balancing act of advancing your company's message, while demonstrating results.

I challenged Ulteig's marketing department to think three-dimensionally about the Denver Film Festival opportunity, and to fully recognize the company's potential by identifying the five areas highlighted above.

We found out that sponsoring the event at a reasonable level provided our employees with VIP tickets to the event and, if possible, to potentially bring clients along for the evening. Networking is where the rubber meets the road, and quite frankly

this opportunity alone made the sponsorship interesting. We also knew that an estimated 40,000 to 50,000 people were expected to attend the event, and therefore media coverage was certain.

We made it a point to contact the media in advance to inform them we are a sponsor of the Film Festival, and invited them to interview our engineers at the event.

Since it was a green film festival, our investment provided Ulteig the opportunity to sponsor one film. We chose a film on water/wastewater, which is a pivotal and strategic market that Ulteig serves. The sponsorship allowed us to hand out promotional items, so our marketing manager decided to provide a brilliant, cost-effective, eco-friendly popcorn holder with our company's logo. Everyone who watched the film received a free eco-friendly popcorn holder, a big hit with our attendees.

Lastly, we lacked the thought leadership opportunity. So, we came up with the idea from the Denver Film Festival of hosting a roundtable discussion and Q&A from the audience regarding the impacts of sustainability in communities.

The idea worked, and they adopted the roundtable discussion immediately following the movies. The roundtables provided our engineers a seat at the table, and an opportunity to lead the discussion and serve as thought leaders.

Marketing was positioned to communicate all of these value propositions to our senior staff, and it made it almost impossible to argue the notion that Ulteig marketed itself effectively in one of America's most vibrant, growing cities. **E**

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