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FMAV

How CPHR Reinvented The Sponsorship Experience

FMAV interviews Erin Roddie, an association planner at CPHR BC & Yukon, on how they redefined value for their sponsors.



How CPHR BC & Yukon Reinvented The Sponsorship Experience



Erin Roddie
Conference and Event Manager
CPHR BC & Yukon

Erin Roddie has over 20 years' experience in professional events and project management. Her specialty is the strategic planning of conferences and tradeshows in both Europe and North America. Erin's broad operational experience, strong organizational skills, and natural ability to connect with people to identify ROI, value and goals has enabled her to create unique, profitable and impactful events for diverse stakeholder groups.

Tell us about your association and your role.

ERIN: The Chartered Professionals in Human Resources of British Columbia and Yukon (CPHR BC & Yukon) is a non-profit professional association. We have 5,700+ members primarily throughout BC and the Yukon, but also internationally. Our association is a grantor of the national designation of HR professionals (CPHR). We provide education, advocacy and networking opportunities to HR professionals, small business owners, executives and those who manage all things related to an organization's human capital.

I have been the conference and event manager at CPHR BC & Yukon for the past 8 years, and my role includes providing support and mentorship to co-workers who organize smaller events throughout BC & Yukon.

The members of CPHR BC & Yukon are about the business of people: they are very social and having face to face personal connections is critical. Over 90% of business in BC are small businesses with lean HR teams, so when those HR professionals attend one of our events it's important to make them feel like they are part of the larger HR community. We promote HR best practices, provide valuable resources as well as quality networking, and offer numerous professional development opportunities.

Tell us about some of the challenges that your association has faced, and how you used technology to combat them?

ERIN: Being a non-profit association, we work with a limited budget. It is an ongoing challenge to provide quality opportunities to a diverse and geographically broad membership with limited financial resources. CPHR BC & Yukon covers many remote areas, and we

need to ensure we are continually fulfilling the needs and providing value to all members.

When possible, we live stream or record our events for our online Knowledge Center and Professional Development On-demand services. This enables our members to access the professional development they need, when, where and how they want it. We also make our content accessible to other HR associations across Canada, which broadens our scope and highlights value on a large scale.

To reduce costs and provide continued content, we try to host as much information as possible online. Event handouts and presentations are available online for download, and we use social media to create sponsorship and advertising opportunities to engage our attendees.

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We continue to enjoy annual increases in registration numbers and profits for our annual conference. This is in part thanks to an increased involvement of our sponsors and speakers who help build anticipation online before the conference by providing content such as articles, podcasts, blogs, etc.

This year we got a sponsor to pay for WIFI at our annual conference, so we invested in a new app with live polling capabilities. The ability for speakers to create live audience surveys and ask questions during their presentations created a more personal and engaging connection with the delegates. Integrating live polling activities at our opening keynote resulted in a significant increase in the number of delegates who downloaded and used the app over previous years because people wanted to be part of the group fun and have their voice heard. The app helped to create a greener and more streamlined event, saved on printing costs and eliminated the need to hire a survey company to collect event and speaker feedback as everything was in one place for our attendees. Sponsors and exhibitors were happy because they were able to upload coupons and sell sheets as well as customize their content.

A common challenge is getting people to download and use an event app, so we had a staff member walking around with a t-shirt that said, 'ask me about the app' and he intentionally interacted with people in the registration line. Our roving app support provided a friendly person to answer questions face-to-face, troubleshoot technical problems and demonstrate some of the cool

features of the app. After the event, the feedback from the attendees was given to the app provider and will be used to help improve the app for next year. At the end of the day, the app saved money and provided great opportunities and engagement for all our stakeholders. True success comes when you link human connection with a technology solution.

Every year there are always new technology solutions available. By asking vendors to keep you in the loop, you will stay innovative and make your event more engaging and cost effective.

What are some successful ways you have delivered value to your stakeholders?

ERIN: Sponsorship is one of the strongest contributors to an event, and a PDF outlining your sponsorship packages really doesn't deliver significant value to anyone.

We work closely with our sponsors to find what they really want. We ask them to identify their primary goals, objectives for brand integration, and have them share with us what the best-case scenario looks like.

One example was when one of our sponsors wanted to stimulate all senses. Their goal was for the audience to eat, live, and breathe their brand, and for everyone to know who they were. A sign featuring the sponsor logo beside a table full of coffee and muffins did not represent the sponsor brand and culture, so we organized a flash mob inspired cinnamon bun parade. A team of 20

volunteers wearing branded t-shirts walked from the main stage through the ballroom carrying trays of hot cinnamon buns while a high energy sponsor video played on the screens. Delegates were immediately lead into our tradeshow for a break of hot cinnamon buns and coffee. We successfully created a fun and high impact 'event within an event' for the sponsor and delegates alike. After the event, attendees remembered the name of this new company in a highly competitive industry because they had experienced their brand, message and culture. We created an environment where the attendees didn't know what to expect, resulting in an element of surprise and fun. It was a win-win scenario for all stakeholders.

Another example was when we wanted to host a cocktail hour for an event, but with our limited budget it couldn't happen without a sponsor. We approached a sponsor who refused because they said people just drink and it would be a waste of money. After further discussions we learned that 'value' for the sponsor was to collect leads and to gather attendee information. Since we can't provide delegate lists due to privacy laws, we offered to create a Happy Hour Game for attendees that would be based in the sponsor's booth. Delegates will be invited to play the game which results in the sponsor collecting contact information as well as having a chance to interact with attendees at their booth - suddenly, they were onboard!



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As event professionals how do you allow risk?

ERIN: This can be an uncomfortable concept to many planners. Do your research and make calculated risks. With any new event or change, you generally don't see the result until year 2 or 3, so set the expectation appropriately. My advice is to understand the pros and cons of doing something different. Know the consequences and make sure your team and management are onboard to try something different.

What advice would you have for an association facing similar challenges?

ERIN: The first step is to talk to other people about your challenges. Have a focus group to breakdown what the problem is and understand what your stakeholders are really feeling. Understand where you need to support them better and what can you build on? We often get caught up in our own heads, but when you invite others to the conversation, especially your stakeholders, it makes them feel engaged.

Be willing to address the truths, prioritize and be honest enough to let go of things that are not working. When you are a small lean organization, using technology can free up resources and time; automate activities as often as possible.

Keep fresh and stay diverse to have a voice that represents your whole association by bringing new ideas to the table. Talk to your vendors, colleagues, members, and find out how you can work together to bring your event to life. Be willing to truly collaborate.

Sponsors don't want a logo on a poster anymore. They are looking for more engaging and unique opportunities for their dollars. When speaking to sponsors, ask them why they are interested in your audience, why they are a stakeholder for you and what are their primary objectives. It gets the sponsor excited!

Event planners are responsible to creatively meet the needs of a diverse group of stakeholders that include both sponsors and attendees. Don't be afraid to step away from traditional ways and remember that people learn more while they are having fun.

