

How To Get Sponsored For Fishing Tournaments

Volume I – <http://www.fishforfree.com>

Volume II – <http://www.fishforfree2.com>

Presents

Sponsorship from a Tackle Company's Perspective

In this FREE Report you'll gain an appreciation of sponsorship from one tackle manufacturer's point of view. It is the advice that Secret Weapon Lures® provides to aspiring tournament anglers and event organizers who contact them and request sponsorship.

Before you contemplate contacting the fine folks at Secret Weapon Lures about any type of sponsorship, keep this in mind: to be considered for sponsorship, the company requires the anglers be very familiar with their product lines. And when they say "familiar," they mean that the anglers has bought, used, and gained confidence in their products. Their rationale is simple: if someone doesn't buy and use Secret Weapon spinnerbaits and buzzbaits himself, what chance would he have of influencing others to do so?

For more information about this company and their products, visit the Secret Weapon Lures Website:

<http://secretweaponlures.com>



Introduction

So, you want to secure sponsors so you can live the dream and achieve your goals. Marvelous! Good luck. It takes vast resources to compete at the top levels these days, and most serious tournament anglers need some help. If you approach your pursuit for sponsorship thoughtfully and creatively, you should be able to get it.

Seeking sponsors is a lot like fishing. Prepare yourself. Learn the terrain. Take stock of your capabilities – your strengths as well as your weaknesses. Make a game plan, and then point yourself in the right direction and start casting. Don't get discouraged if most casts return unproductive at first. Remain positive, observe, keep notes, learn from each cast, adapt, keep plugging away, and eventually your efforts will be rewarded.

The purpose of this letter is to help you learn the lay of the land, benefit from others' experiences, and offer advice that may help you land a few good sponsors.

The first step toward winning sponsorship takes place in your mind. Before you set a pen to paper or make your first solicitation call, it is imperative that you have a realistic understanding of what sponsorships are all about... what sponsors can realistically be expected to provide, and what you will have to give in exchange.

So, what do you need? Is it a boat, tow vehicle, tackle, or gear? Tires, clothing, or lodging? And do you require financial backing to cover travel expenses and entry fees?

In what ways can you create value for your sponsor? How much time and effort are you willing to devote to a sponsor in return for his help in meeting those needs? What are your assets?

Sponsorship involves advertising, marketing, promotion, and participation. If you are sponsored, expect to work the trade shows, help with catalog layouts, visit tackle or boat dealers and appear at their promotional events, contribute your expertise to lure and rod designs, give interviews, and promote the sponsor's products whenever it's appropriate. In short, you devote some of yourself to their success.

In return you should expect to be rewarded (paid) in different ways. You might have signature rods and lures that provide income. You could get your entry fees paid and be supplied with product. You may also receive bonuses for tournament wins... the larger the win, the larger the bonus. Some sponsors also pay outright for the hours you spend promoting them in show appearances and seminars.

The view from the sponsor's side of the desk

I've read about five hundred requests for Secret Weapon Lures sponsorship this past year. Most are pretty much the same. I will give serious consideration to you only if you prove by a personalized, focused proposal that you give our sponsorship a high priority. Generic form letters or e-mail inquiries that appear to have gone to every tackle manufacturer in the U.S. end up in the trashcan.

When I spot a diamond in the rough – a likely candidate who merely did a poor job of promoting himself – I may ask what it was about our company and products that made you think we were a good match or that caused him to single us out as a potential sponsor.

Don't try to con me. I can usually tell from the answer — if I get one — whether you had to scramble to even learn what kind of lures we manufacture. If you request sponsorship but have never even used our lures, you have little chance of persuading me that you would be a good promoter for Secret Weapon Lures. After all; *if you don't think our lures are worth buying and using, how can you hope to persuade other anglers to do so?*

So, what does persuade me?

Every sponsor is in business to make money, and for you to participate in any profits we enjoy, you must contribute to those profits. In short, you are paid in proportion to your accomplishments. Isn't that pretty much like any other job? How much you will get "paid" is directly related to how good you are and how well you produce (and, of course, to our ability to pay).

Secret Weapon Lures exists to make profits. We're looking for people who can help us achieve that. If you have done a thorough job of preparation, have learned about us, use our lures, and have already shown some initiative in promoting us, then you have my full attention. I'll be glad to read your mail, take your calls, and even meet face-to-face so you can convince me that sponsoring you will make money for us.

Impress me...

There are a few points to keep in mind as you try to land a sponsor. From our perspective, you're coming out of nowhere. You may be a local legend, but you're an unknown quantity to us. Your introductory envelope or e-mail will be only one of dozens that we receive each week. You need to be sure yours stands out somehow and that you make a good first impression. Don't force us to speculate whether you'd be a good investment; create a marketing campaign that shows off your credibility, effectiveness, organization, enthusiasm and knowledge of our product and what you can do for us.

Have you worked in some sort of sales position? If not, at least you've seen a bazillion effective TV pitches, right? Then you should have a good handle on how to market products in ways that convince others to buy. That skill transfers nicely as you shift to the pro fishing ranks. If you like All Pro Rods or Triton boats or Driftwood Lures and you want to promote them, or if you like Secret Weapon spinnerbaits and want to use and promote us, then put together a sales campaign and start selling.

Your product in this sales campaign is... *you*. The **only** reason we are willing to sponsor an angler, or even throw you a handful of free products a few times a year, is that we feel you can help increase sales.

If you're serious about securing a sponsorship, go all out. Take a lesson from the Desert Storm campaign in Kuwait and Iraq: build up your forces and then go in with an overwhelming campaign. Don't be timid.... just make up your mind that you are going to win and keep pounding away until we agree.

Campaign Tactics

Begin by identifying your goals. Set specific, quantifiable objectives. Next, evaluate your assets and liabilities. Then it's time to plan your campaign – your plan to get where you want to be.

Pick your targets carefully. If you pursue the same sponsors as hundreds of others, you may get lost in the pack. Instead, look for new ground to plow: don't assume because you want to fish professionally that you need to limit your search to companies in the tackle and boating markets. Sure, every anglers needs fishing tackle, but what other products do outdoorsmen buy? Who makes them? These are your best prospects; whether they are local suppliers (restaurants, auto dealers, sports medicine clinics, etc.) or multinational corporations (tire manufacturers, auto manufacturers, energy drink bottlers, snack food distributors, etc.).

What does a corporate sponsor want?

1. For starters, we want to be associated with winners. Not only fishing tournament winners, but people whom others respect, admire, and want to emulate.
2. People who can carry our flag – who exemplify the ideals and values that we are trying to portray through other marketing channels. For us, that's innovative, reliable, adaptable and successful.

If you're going after a truck manufacturer, project an image of yourself as honest, rock-solid dependable, hard working, determined, good-looking, strong/vigorous... these are some of the terms I think the trucking manufacturer might use to describe itself. How can you exemplify those same attributes? The idea here is, when people look at you, they learn something about the company you keep – your sponsors.

3. Representatives who are articulate and eager to brag on us and look for opportunities to promote us with . For other sponsors, it might be their great tow vehicle, and who look for opportunities to promote them. "I drove my Dodge Truck all night to get to the lake, and that ride was so comfortable that I wasn't a bit tired... in fact, I ready to hit the lake as soon as I got there!"

How do you prove you have what we're looking for?

1. **Your track record with other sponsors.** Who is already sponsoring you? Having a boat or other major account will probably be a huge benefit to you here. Can you get referrals or a letter of recommendation from you sponsors' presidents or marketing directors? *Endorsement letters are gold.*
2. **Accomplishments.** What have you done for your current sponsors? Shows, promotional events, wearing their logos and hats, publicity shots, catalog shots, decals, public speaking, articles you may have written, interviews, articles about you... list them all.
3. **Assets.** Are you a recognized authority in any field? If not now, maybe you can be. The quickest way to do that is to get published. The higher your profile, the more influence you can have for us. Not everyone can write and express himself or herself well; if you're one of those, then enlist the aid of a friend or spouse who will serve as your editor.

Make a list of five or ten article ideas with a paragraph describing each. These should be on topics that you have a unique perspective on, or that you are well qualified to write about. For example, women anglers might write an article that helps men pick out tackle and equipment for their wives or girlfriends. Or write about differences in some equipment that make them easier or better suited for women than men. Women anglers are more aware of these than most men authors. I bet many magazines would welcome the perspective of competitive women anglers on a host of topics.

Bounce your ideas off a few friends. Consult outdoor writers. Then float the ideas up to magazine and newspaper editors to see if any will bite. If they are interested, then write, polish, and submit the article. *Presto!* You've just become an expert.

What is your specialty or unique perspective? Coach? How about articles on fishing-related sports injuries, how to train in order prevent them and exercises anglers can do to avoid them? Physical therapist or nurse? Offer advice on rehabilitating from the stress and injuries experienced by tournament anglers.

Your grandpa taught you how to use a shuttle and knot your own seines and fishing nets? Excellent! You're probably one in 10,000, so write about that.

There is something you're better at than most, and that other anglers would benefit from. Discover it, and write about that!

4. **Visibility.** How often are you in the winner's spotlight at tournaments? When and where have you been featured as a seminar speaker? A Web site that promotes you and showcases your sponsors would be real impressive. Two Website examples are:
 - a. Jack Dalzell, fishing guide and instructor: <http://jdbass.com>
 - b. Randy Howell, tournament competitor: <http://www.randyhowell.com/>

Elements of your campaign: Pre-meeting

1. **Third party referrals.** For instance, ask a current sponsor to write to your prospect to say, "One of the bass anglers we sponsor will be contacting you in a few days. He has done well for us. It would be worthwhile for you to take a look at him. Here are a few things about him..." If you have a really good relationship, it wouldn't hurt for you to provide the current sponsor with a sample note or two so they get the idea what you're looking for. They might even pick out a few phrases and reword them so they express their own experiences with you. Make it as easy on them as you can. Be sure to set a deadline for getting that letter back from them: "I need this by Thursday."
2. **Personal note** from you (*not* a generic form letter) that briefly explains your interest and offers an overview of what you bring to the table.

- a. Pay attention to spelling! You would be surprised at how many requests we get butcher the word "sponsor" (e.g., sponser, sponcer or even sponcor). It couldn't hurt to spell the name of our company correctly, too. Extra points for accurately spelling the name of the person to whom you're writing.
- b. If you say you use our products, at least mention them by name. "I use your products with great success," smacks of generic form letter phrasing. If you claim you have used them for many years, I know you're blowing smoke, since we hit the market with them only a couple years ago.

It makes a stronger impact if you can honestly say...

"I really feel that Secret Weapon's Buzzrbait sets the standard for lures of its type. I have relied on it as my go-to bait for a top-water bite since I discovered it last spring." Or...

"My last three tournaments I placed in the money, most of my fish were caught with your spinnerbaits." Or...

"I have a reputation as a spinnerbait fan, but I gave away all my other brands and now have nothing but Secret Weapons on my boat."

Just make sure you're telling the truth. Lies often come back to haunt you.

- c. Close with an invitation to get together in person or via teleconference in order to answer questions, provide more details of your plan, and present your sponsorship proposal. State that you will call to set an appointment.
3. **Initial phone call.** Brief, professional, businesslike. Convey that you are respectful of my time and would like a few minutes to meet to discuss some ideas on how you might be able to help Secret Weapon Lures as a Prostaffer. If a face-to-face isn't possible, set up a time to call back for a longer phone call. If our next conversation will be by phone, let me know you will send a portfolio and proposal that I can review before the call to make better use of the time. (See Q&A later in this document for components of that packet.)

I may tell you I have a couple of minutes to spare and ask you to go ahead and take your best shot now. Frankly, it would be better for your sake to make an appointment, send me your packet, and then schedule time for a longer call or face-to-face meeting for the sales pitch.

Elements of your campaign: Meeting**4. The sales meeting or conference call.**

- a. *Dress professionally* — as you might when you represent us at a sports show, or in business or business-casual attire if you meet at corporate headquarters.
- b. *Be on time*, well rested, neatly groomed, energetic, and enthusiastic. Assume you are being evaluated from the moment you enter the parking lot.
- c. *Offer your business card*. This demonstrates that you mean business and suggests how you will present yourself to people on our behalf.
- d. *Relay personal greetings* from the person who referred you, if the person you'll be meeting knows him. That establishes rapport.
- e. *Get to the point*. Don't beat around the bush or be bashful. Say, "Thanks for clearing time in your schedule to meet with me. The reason I'm here is because..." and then state your objective.
- f. *Provide an outline* or presentation graphics so the prospective sponsor can follow along and make notes. Rehearse a convincing presentation, with visuals, that lasts no more than five minutes. A lot of it is basic sales technique. Ask questions that you anticipate I will answer affirmatively to get me in the "yes" mode. Mention the things you know I want (the company's goals) and how you can make them happen or at least move the ball down the field.
- g. *Show me the money*. Convey that you are sensitive to business pressures, and that you will be able to deliver a good return on the company's investment. Business people love positive ROI.
- h. *Emphasize promotion opportunities* you bring to the table. For example, "I typically speak at four or more bass club meetings each winter, as well as working at sport and outdoor shows. I'd enjoy promoting your products at these events; and of course I would make myself available to assist your sales or promotional staff whenever the need arises."
- i. *Present your proposal and portfolio*. Do this *after* you've spoken, not beforehand. I'm easily distracted and may start leafing through your documentation and miss what you are saying.
- j. *Summarize*. "And that's why I think working together would benefit both of us."
- k. *Learn from your attempts*. If you don't score a knockout in round one — if my answer is no — find out why. What would you need to add to your package or skill set to make you an attractive candidate? What am I looking for that you didn't offer? You may already have it, and it just didn't come out in the presentation. Learn from the experience so you will be better prepared in round two.
- l. *Plan your next move*. No matter what happens after that, be prepared with "next steps." If I say yes, be prepared to lay out in detail what you will do next. Present a list of resources that will help you be more effective in promoting us (e.g., tackle, caps, logo-wear, brochures, business cards, boat decals, etc.). Ask for events or opportunities in your region of the country where you can help promote us, such as dealers' customer appreciation days or grand openings, trade shows, company-sponsored fishing tournaments and events.

Elements of your campaign: Post-meeting

5. **Follow-up note**. Have a "Thank You" note card in the truck with you. Ones with a fishing theme emphasize how much into the sport you are. Before you leave the parking lot, write a short, personal, hand-written note expressing your appreciation for my having given you my attention and time. Mention something specific about the meeting so I won't

think it was pre-written, then drop the letter in the nearest post box so it will be delivered the next day, while my memory is fresh. Do this no matter how the meeting turns out. Even if I say forget it... in Sales, "no" doesn't mean "not ever;" it just means "not now." Your follow-up letter lays a foundation for your next assault.

6. **Persistence.** Touch base periodically. When a magazine or newspaper article mentions you, when you place well in competition, or when you get a good photo of you promoting a sponsor, send it with a one or two-line note to your company contact. For instance, write that you're doing well for yourself and your sponsors and hope Secret Weapon Lures is prospering, too. You might mention that you're still interested in working together... although the note says that clearly enough. Take a lesson from Luke 11:5-10. Do you think the neighbor would have received the bread he requested if he had given up after the first knock? The squeaky wheel does get greased.
7. **Try, try again.** When you have something significantly new or different about yourself to offer, call again and say you would like to remind him of your continuing interest in the company, and update him on your accomplishments and new ideas for promoting it.

Do you have to follow this advice to win a sponsorship? No... of course not. I'll admit there are excellent anglers out there who do a terrific job of promoting their sponsors, yet who never did what I suggested and probably would have trouble doing so. Things seem to just work out well for some folks; they get a few lucky breaks and capitalize on them. If you catch some breaks, too, that's great; but don't count on them. You're not competing with the top pros, who are courted by manufacturers — you're competing with 10,000 other guys in the employment line. So pull out all the stops, promote yourself first, and you'll increase your chances of promoting others.

Helpful Resources

Here are some other resources you may find useful as you prepare to market yourself.

- Rauber, Scott: How To Get Sponsored For Fishing Tournaments – Volume I: <http://fishforfree.com>
- Rauber, Scott: How To Get Sponsored For Fishing Tournaments – Volume II: <http://www.fishforfree2.com>
- Levinson, Jay Conrad: *Guerilla Marketing Handbook* (1994). Make people take notice of you. Be creative in presenting yourself and your proposal. Guerilla marketing is "a body of unconventional ways of pursuing conventional goals; a proven method of achieving profits with minimum money." The ideas you glean from this site and the Guerilla Marketing books by Jay Conrad Levinson apply whether you're selling lures, widgets, or yourself. Other titles include
 - *Guerrilla Marketing : Secrets for Making Big Profits from Your Small Business*
 - *Guerrilla Marketing for Free: Dozens of No-Cost Tactics to Promote Your Business and Energize Your Profits* (2003)
 - *Guerrilla Marketing in 30 Days* (2005)

Learn more about Levinson and Guerilla Marketing at: <http://www.qmarketing.com>

Q&A

Q: What materials should I provide to prospective sponsors?

A: One element of your marketing campaign should be a professional-looking presentation packet or portfolio that includes:

- Your resume, emphasizing your credentials as a successful tournament angler and evidence of your ability to influence people
- News clippings, club standings, past achievements
- Photos that show off your camera-appeal
- References from reputable people who can convince prospective sponsors that you have good standing and possess the virtues they're looking for in people who will represent them.
- Plans for upcoming year. Or even better, a 1-3-5 year plan. Sponsors may not want to lock into a long-term commitment to unknowns, but we are more interested in people who have a plan that shows their intent to be in the running for several years at least.
- A business plan, including financial summary and projections. Outline what we, as sponsors, should reasonably expect in terms of ROI. This enhances your image as a businessman, and as businessmen ourselves, we will find some reassurance in that.

Just creating the packet, in and of itself, will put you heads and shoulders above 98% of your competitors for sponsorship. It will create the impression that you will put the same energy, thought, and professionalism in promoting them as you do yourself. If you can't promote YOU, why should they believe you can effectively promote them?

Q: How can I make my presentation or mailing stand out?

A: Be creative. Become a Guerrilla Marketer. (The books of that series will jump-start your imagination. Also subscribe to their newsletter.)

Present your story in a unique way that makes people pay attention. For example, send an envelope with three smaller envelopes inside, numbered sequentially. In envelope 1, have an empty lure package (interesting, but of no great value empty). In envelope 2, enclose a lure (effective, good quality, but not properly presented to buyers). In envelope 3, present yourself -- maybe a good photo of you holding up a winning bass at a weigh-in, wrapped around lure, visible through the packaging sleeve) and make the point that you complete the process that they intended when they put thousands of dollars into packaging design — i.e., establishing a strong, favorable impression of their products. You're the answer to their problem... not merely a guy with problems of your own that you're hoping they can fix.

Q: How can I get a sponsor to provide a boat or tow vehicle?

A: Fast, reliable, functional transportation, both to the lake and on the water, is a huge asset to any tournament angler. A very few anglers can swing deals where a boat dealer or manufacturer will provide a new boat or SUV each year at no cost. Most anglers with boat or vehicle sponsorships receive a boat or truck at a discounted price, use it for a period of time, and then attempt to sell it at or above the price they pay.

There are several different ways this can be structured. One is a straightforward, discounted sale, where a dealer or manufacturer simply sells you a boat at or below dealer cost. You're free to keep the boat or sell it the next year when it comes time to buy another. You own the title to the

boat or vehicle until you sell it. When the buyer acquires your boat and motor or vehicle, it's one year into the warranty.

A common arrangement is a "memo-bill" or "due-bill" deal, where the pro is considered a very low volume boat dealer or salesman for the boat manufacturer. Usually the pro uses the boat for one season, and then he must sell it at or around cost in order to be granted a boat the next season. He must sell the boat or pay for it out of pocket.

If you're fortunate, you might find a buyer who agrees in advance to take your used boat or vehicle from you before you even pick it up. If you settle on a price at or above what you owe, then you essentially get free use of the boat for a season. In many cases, the person who buys it from you is the first title-holder. He gets the full factory warranty on the boat, motor, or vehicle, too, because until he buys it, they're considered demo units.

Q: How about rods, reels, lures, and other tackle?

A: At Secret Weapon Lures, we provide three levels of sponsorship. In tier one, Prostaff and Field Staff can purchase lures at discount, or they earn points that they redeem for tackle. In tier two, we provide lures to the Prostaffer at no cost. Those lures are for his use and for use as promotional samples. Tier three involves free lures, plus sponsorship cash payments or entry fees.

Besides tackle manufacturers, consider picking up other sponsors to defray your expense for lines, reels, rods, lures, apparel, foul weather gear, and so on. A large fishing tackle retailer or chain might provide those to you directly in return for your promotion and marketing work. Or, a company that agrees to sponsor you, but which provides no goods or services you use, might pick up the tab for those expenses. For example, a sports medicine clinic, insurance company, or real estate developer that seeks to attract outdoor enthusiasts might provide a tackle allowance each year in return for the business you drive their way.

Q: Should I wear only logos of companies that sponsor me? If I wear a lot of logos, won't I improve my image as a well-connected Prostaffer?

A: A salesman and successful tournament angler asked me about the appropriateness of wearing the logos of companies whose products he uses, but which do not sponsor him. That trend seems to be as popular among tournament anglers as it is among NASCAR fans. The answer depends on whether you want to be a fan or part of a company's professional staff. To be successful in business, you sometimes are forced to make distinctions between business and personal preferences.

If I owned a billboard, I'd be looking for companies that wanted to advertise, convince them that my billboard is where a lot of people will pay attention to it, and rent space only to companies that were willing to pay me. That way I'd make a profit on my investment. Until I had all my bills paid, I would postpone offering free billboard space for public service announcements.

In the professional fishing tournament arena, *you* are the billboard, and there is just so much of you to go around. The better you perform, the bigger you will grow, and the more space you will have to offer. But at the outset you'll be operating on extremely slim margins, so you can't afford to give anything away. My advice is to not dilute your effectiveness in promoting your sponsors by also promoting companies that don't sponsor you.

Q: You make tackle... I use tackle... why won't you sponsor me?

A: I may, if it's economically feasible. In most cases, it's not. Let me give an illustration. Suppose I make 50 cents on each lure I sell. If I agree to pay you \$100 each month, in one year, I have to sell 2,400 additional baits before I break even on the relationship.

To stay in business, manufacturers must make a profit. For our illustration, assume a 25% return on investment. I should expect to increase my sales by 3,000 units to break even *and* make a profit. Can you do that for me? How?

You may be a great angler, with several BFL, Federation, or ABA tournament wins and a couple of top-10 finishes in BASS or FLW. By hard work and vigorous self-promotion, it's possible for you to pick up a number of sponsors. Before you approach a potential sponsor, ask yourself if you can increase sales for this company. Will your influence increase sales to more than pay for your sponsorship? If not, the sponsor will lose money on the deal.

Compliments of

Secret Weapon Lures

<http://www.secretweaponlures.com>

Read "Eight Reasons why Secret Weapon is the Best Spinnerbait Available" at
<http://secretweaponlures.com/swa10.htm>)

and

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