NETWORKING & MEETING SPONSORS

# INTRODUCTIONS: LET SOMEONE ELSE OPEN THE DOOR

Hemmings, Fifth Third Bank, EPIC Racewear, Horizon Hobby, K1 RaceGear and Eibach explain why a warm introduction beats a cold pitch, and how to get one through the people you already know.

By Alex Striler · 5 min read · Read online at sponsorshiptactics.com/library/introductions-let-someone-open-the-door

A cold email to a marketing director lands in a pile with hundreds of others. The same racer, introduced by someone the marketing director already trusts, gets a phone call. Same racer, same program, same deck. The only difference is who opened the door.

Looking back, most of the relationships I have in this industry came through a mutual friend who made an introduction. The marketing executives who spoke at my Sponsorship Summits and PRI seminars say the same thing about how they find partners. The good news for racers is that you probably already know the people who can make those introductions.

## SPONSORS PAY FOR WARM INTRODUCTIONS TOO

If you want proof that introductions carry weight, look at why some brands sponsor racing in the first place. David Morton, senior vice president at Fifth Third Bank, explained that the bank's race partnerships exist largely to get introductions: to other teams, tracks, co-sponsors and suppliers in the sport.

"If you're the bank down the street and you're not involved in motorsports, you go call on them, it's a cold call. You don't understand their business," Morton said. "And that's where our sponsorships with race teams helps us, because they can give us that warm introduction that we can have, and they help us be an authentic part of the motorsports community." ▶ WATCH DAVID MORTON EXPLAIN THIS

A bank with a long history in the Midwest still wants someone to vouch for it before it walks into a supplier's office. A racer approaching that bank should expect to need the same thing.

## ASK FOR THE INTRODUCTION, NOT THE EMAIL ADDRESS

Kathryn Reinhardt, executive vice president of marketing at Hemmings, raced herself and had to find her own sponsors. Her method started with research. She would look up the person she wanted to meet, find their social media, learn what they cared about and, "a step away from stalking them, I would go make sure that I had something in common with these people that I could now relate to them on."

▶ WATCH KATHRYN REINHARDT EXPLAIN HER METHOD

Then she looked for someone who could connect her. "I would also ask for introduction," Reinhardt said. "If I knew somebody that had a common friend with this person, I would say, 'Hey, could you introduce me? Don't just give me their email or their phone number and then let me just cold call them. That doesn't work. But introduce me, tell them that you know me and that I'm a good person.'" ▶ WATCH HER ANSWER

That distinction matters. A phone number turns a warm lead back into a cold call. An introduction transfers a little of your friend's credibility to you. Ask your contact to send a short note or make the call, and make it easy for them by telling them in two sentences who you are and why the connection makes sense.

## START WITH THE SPONSORS YOU ALREADY HAVE

Your best source of introductions is the companies already on your car. Chris Dickerson of Horizon Hobby, the radio-control company behind Losi, told the PRI seminar audience what networking means to him.

"To me, networking is about building connections and building the right connections that carry through," he said. "And I mean, Jacob and I met less than an hour ago. And we realized that last year at the Chili Bowl, we actually worked together indirectly sponsoring one of the teams." His advice was to "look at what you're already running. Do you have partnerships there? Can you extend those partnerships beyond that? That's what networking is, is trying to figure out the connections from kind of point A to point B."
▶ WATCH CHRIS DICKERSON ON THIS

Many racers hesitate here. They worry that asking one sponsor for an introduction to another is an imposition. JR Twedt, president of K1 RaceGear, said that worry is misplaced. "We all know each other, we all know somebody... So don't be afraid," he said. "Trust me, introduce everybody. Get a good network going." ▶ WATCH JR TWEDT'S ADVICE

## ONE PHONE CALL CAN TURN INTO ELEVEN TEAMS

Dan Bailey, founder of EPIC Racewear, described how far a single introduction can travel. "We had one driver years ago pick up the phone while he was with a NASCAR Cup driver," he said, "and that phone conversation led to us providing racewear for his Cup team, his Xfinity team, and then through going to the events we developed relationships through the garage, and we now deal with 11 teams based on one phone call." ▶ WATCH DAN BAILEY TELL THE STORY

For Bailey, introductions are also what he wants back from the racers he sponsors. "You have to put me in contact with other people and ask me what else you can do," he said. When a sponsored team connects EPIC with its own business partners, he can see the return immediately. "We just need you to make that introduction to us." ▶ SEE THE FULL ANSWER

That's the loop to aim for. A sponsor introduces you, you deliver, and then you introduce that sponsor to your other partners. Each introduction makes the next one easier to ask for.

## SALES CAN WALK YOU TO MARKETING

When you don't know anyone at a company, the sales team is often the side door. Julian Gill, CEO of Eibach Springs, said his company routes sponsorship inquiries through sales on purpose. "We train our sales people, because that's our main funnel," he said at PRI. "We don't have a receptionist… You come straight into our sales department. The sales people will give you the email address to send it to."

▶ WATCH JULIAN GILL ON THIS

I met many of the accounts I worked with at Lucas Oil and CORE the same way. At VP Racing Fuels, for example, I got to know the person who ran sales first, and he introduced me to the marketing director. Salespeople have every reason to help. They want to sell more product, and good marketing helps them do it. If your program can genuinely move product in their territory, the regional or local rep can get you in front of the national marketing team. Just don't treat that first salesperson as a target to pitch. Treat them as someone to get to know.

## THE TAKEAWAY

- List every sponsor, supplier, series official and fellow racer you know, and note who they know at the brands you want.
- Ask for a real introduction, not a phone number or email address, and give your contact a two-sentence summary to pass along.
- Ask your current sponsors which of their partners might fit your program. Most are happy to connect people.
- Get to know the local and regional sales reps of your target brands. They can walk you to marketing.
- Return the favor. Introduce your sponsors to your other partners and to anyone who can help their business.

**VOICES IN THIS ARTICLE:** Kathryn Reinhardt — Executive Vice President of Marketing, Hemmings · David Morton — Senior Vice President, Fifth Third Bank · Dan Bailey — Founder, EPIC Racewear · Chris Dickerson — Horizon Hobby · JR Twedt — President, K1 RaceGear · Julian Gill — CEO, Eibach Springs

---

*Alex Striler runs SponsorshipTactics.com, a video library of motorsports sponsorship sessions with the brands that write the checks. Quotes come from recorded Sponsorship Summit sessions and interviews, lightly edited for clarity and length. Click any "Watch" link to see the speaker say it.*

More free articles and brand guides: **sponsorshiptactics.com/library** · Every full session: **all access, $90 a year**