

Winning Pandemic Busting Corporate Partnerships for EFN

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Introduction

In this Webinar we explore five key elements of winning corporate partnerships:

1. **Pick a strategic top ten:** that you can help and can help with your pandemic challenges
2. **Find ways to get 'Test Drives'** – don't focus on money today focus on building relationships and momentum with your prospects
3. **Use allies and ambassadors** - seek advice and connections from the people and senior influencers already known to you
4. **Invite them to engaging virtual events** and talks. Uptake to CEO Zoom briefings has surpassed all expectations, and led to better relationships and more 'test drives'
5. **Use the phone** – email is not the answer, be brave pick up the phone - seek insight – understand how coronavirus is effecting them – and be prepared to respond in kind.

What we mean by Strategic Partnerships

Now, building strategic corporate partnerships is more important than ever because:

- Other ways companies have been giving, namely staff engagement type events, are nearly impossible to do. they've also slipped down the priority list
- Companies are far less likely to just write you a cheque (ie give in a purely philanthropic way; or want to do ever more sponsored events – partnership are far more about shared purpose – and it's helping companies more than ever before.
- In some cases the way of delivering your projects has to change – these changes may need the help and expertise of companies. Where before charities have been reluctant to change – now it is the norm,

Two kinds of value

If we are to make use of the opportunity that genuine partnerships present, our job is to work out:

- a) how to access the *value* (ie not only money, but also the company's reach and expertise) to help our beneficiaries – especially as the pandemic has changed how you may be delivering your work.
- b) and also how to *add genuine value* to them, so that it is in their interests to want those partnerships to grow and grow

Roxanne talked about why companies want to work with Camcycle, it is not a purely philanthropic decision, rather they are 100% aware the work they do together will appeal to a certain type of audience on Cambridge. One they are keen to attract.

Roxanne has secured more awareness, growth and support from partnerships than she could have got from income alone.

This kind of extraordinary shift in a charity's ability to achieve its mission is entirely different compared to what would have happened if they had merely sought a donation or some employee fundraising.

Roxanne's steps:

- 1) **Focus on companies that can help solve challenges or grow** their biggest projects, campaigns and events. If Continental were on the 'top ten' because of how they could support her biggest cycling event with equipment, reach and expertise.
- 2) **She spent time building relationships with people at those companies first**, helping each other to understand how both Camcycle and Continental back decisions. Those conversations are paying her back now as she receives gifts when they need support the most.
- 3) **Deliberately focussed on the audience most likely to care for their cause**. Both using events to engage them, like family cycles – through to targeting specific cafes and shops to promote their magazine. This focus on who is most likely to be interested in you will come in handy when convincing the likes of Continental it's worth investing in you.
- 4) **Shifting her mindset** – "We can help them". Notice the way Roxanne spoke of their award winning magazine, the fact their charity is at the fore front of the change needed right now, never more topical, never more in demand. About how it helps local families, how companies can be seen to be looking after their people and customers more by partnering with them. In the manner of how she spoke, and examples she used, in many ways it was her mindset change that helped to spur the other actions on.

Choosing which companies to go for - The Dream 10 strategy

As in many other areas of life, you increase your chances of success by narrowing your focus. There are several reasons for this, but two of them are:

- Unless you make your list much shorter, you'll never be able to persevere in seeking meetings / inviting to your events / building relationships with any one company for long enough to develop a really strong relationship that can turn into something valuable.
- If you do make the list much shorter, it becomes possible to signal to your colleagues, 'ambassadors' (well-connected business people who like your charity) and potentially your trustees, which companies you'd love to get an introduction to. Time and again participants on the Corporate Mastery Programme have told Ben and I that when they are very specific in seeking introductions to a relatively small number of companies, some of their contacts become surprisingly helpful in suggesting possible introductions.

Steps for working out possible Dream 10 Companies

Step 1. *Today, (possibly Coronavirus related) what are your charities' problems / barriers to achieving our mission (other than money) – what are your charities' biggest headaches? What are key barriers to making a difference to (more of) your beneficiaries? And which ones would cost your charity the most money?*

- A) For example, had we asked this question about the NSPCC (a large children's charity in the UK, where Ben works) two years ago, one answer we might have come up with is: a big barrier is how hard (and expensive) it is for us to reach children with our advice about keeping safe in how you use your phone. (We only reach up 50,000, which is far too low, given that our remit is to do what we can to protect all children in the UK)
- B) A fundraiser from a charity supporting schools in South Africa initially could only suggest that what her charity needed was money. When Ben and I asked her what are all the things her charity needed to spend the money on, she in the end realised that one expensive / difficult thing for her charity was travel – they used hire cars to reach the schools in remote areas...
- C) Someone from a medical charity initially did not know answers to this question, so she went and asked her senior colleagues responsible for delivering the services. (We recommend you go and talk to your colleagues responsible for achieving the charity's mission). She discovered that one barrier to their success was the need to conduct a human drug trials, for which legal cover would be very expensive.

Your answers.

In the space below, go beyond saying 'we need more money' or 'its only salaries that the money to pay for'. Think more broadly - what are the range of things that are difficult or expensive for your charity, but which, if you could do them, would enable your charity to do far more good?

Step 2. *Useful companies - What companies or category of companies are in a position to help your charity overcome any of its key problems outlined in Step 3, and so better achieve its goals?*

Even if this thought process can be initially hard, and require further internal conversations, we have found that persevering with Step 3 almost always gives ideas for companies that merit a place in your Dream 10 List because they would make such a big difference. For example:

- A) For NSPCC one answer, that is one kind of company that's able to help the charity reach far more children with its messaging, is a phone company. This seems so

obvious in hindsight, but none of Ben's colleagues had come to him asking for such a partnership, because few service delivery colleagues are likely to be thinking this way. If your colleagues think about companies at all, they probably would think of them as a source of cash, (or indeed, as part of the problem), not as part of a game-changing solution.

- B) For the South African schools charity, one answer to this question was hire car companies. The fundraiser said to us 'are you saying that rather than going to ask for 5000 rand from another company, I should just go to a hire care company to ask if they would donate use of a car for free, so they get partner status, and we don't have to pay out 5000 rand per week?
- C) For the medical charity having discovered about the importance of legal cover, she realised that a couple of law firms needed to be on her Dream 10 list, and she had a really specific and interesting ask to make to them. Within two months she had secured pro bono support from a law firm worth over £100,000.

Your turn. In the space below explore this question. What companies / kinds of company are good at the area that your charity is weak at, but that would make a powerful difference if you were helped in this area?

To refine your Dream 10 company ideas, you might some of the following ideas. But the most important thing is to first get started with the brainstorm questions above.

Further research to polish and hone the list

When you carry out further research, the following may be useful criteria to understand which companies should make it into your final Dream Ten list:

- Size / reach / resources (could they make a BIG difference?)
- Reason for partnership - (ie clear reason(s) why such a partnership would deliver value to both parties)
- Fit - their current brand / message / 'direction of travel' / values has some overlap with yours

Some other useful issues to research when planning what and how to build a relationship with this future partner

- Current contacts / links to the company. If none now, how could you find the existing ones you are unaware of, or work out how to build them?
- Timing. If Charity of the Year still exists and is appropriate for us, what process and when?
- CSR Policy
- Past partners – and which could you call?

5) How to build relationships with your Dream 10 companies.

These are not the only ways to get a first informal meeting, but they are a really powerful start. However sophisticated your techniques become, these fundamentals are still likely to be part of what you do regularly to secure 'test drives'.

- A) **Your existing stakeholders.** As mentioned earlier, it's amazing how often someone in your board or within your organisation, knows someone who works at one of the target companies. Seek their help in getting an introduction.
- B) **The ambassador strategy.** Draw up a list of supporters / donor / allies who are also probably well-connected business people. Call three of them and ask to meet for coffee 'for some advice'. In the meeting, explain the rationale of the Dream 10, and ask if they know anyone who has influence in any of these (or similar) companies.

Get their advice about the Dream 10 you've chosen. If the meeting proves helpful, ask if they'd be willing to act as an ambassador, helping you implement the Dream 10 corporate partnership strategy, especially in terms of introductions.

Your turn...

Pause for two minutes now and write down the names of 3 – 5 people you can already think of who like your charity and seem to be well-connected business people. Then (assuming you have some sense of your Dream 10 partners) I dare you to call them up and offer to buy them coffee. (Note this exercise is also worth doing with your colleagues in other teams).

C) **Use events as part of your corporate strategy (ie rather than to make money).**

- i) **Existing events.** Could you look at the events your charity is already running, that will now be virtual - but invite senior people from your Dream 10? If necessary, could you add a VIP / partner networking session onto an existing event like a carol concert to make it special, so you can design the experience and messages to suit potential partners.
- ii) Put on an exclusive '**croissants**' / **glass of wine zoom with our chief executive**' type of event. Not only does this give you a great reason to pick up the phone, even if they can't make the date you can still offer to set up another Zoom instead. If you have enough lead time and are brave in picking up the phone, you should be able to get a dozen or more people to come, but even if only three or four people come and connect with your CEO / head of programmes, that's three or four valuable steps towards building a partnership.

- iii) **Events to inspire.** [Check out this podcast with Lynda](#) who has brought in three extra gifts in the first three weeks of the pandemic. You can hear how she's used these 'project visit' type webinars to connect with and engage her prospects. For some organisations this is easier than others, but with a little creativity most charities should be able to offer potential partners a chance to connect with the inspiring work your charity does. What I have found interesting is, given the enormous power if you get these right, how often they can be a little under-whelming (eg because your most inspiring project worker couldn't make this date etc).

Early in my career I felt there was little I could do influence the quality of these meetings / visits to see my charity's work, but in fact I was usually wrong about this. An immensely powerful question to ask yourself and your colleagues is: What could we possibly do to increase the reliability (in terms of inspiration) of these project visits? How could we design the experience the potential partner receives more carefully? Of course things will always go a little different from the plan, but how can you maximise the chances that they'll leave inspired?

D) Set up an informal zoom meeting with someone at the company using your phone.

You may [want to listen to this Podcast](#) – where Rob and I talk about being brave and picking up the phone at the moment, to connect with your donors.

Though you may have found this difficult in the past, try it with either:

- i) **Ideally using a well respected 'ambassador's' name as reference to needing to understand their world now more than ever – remember the Lidl example.** ie *"Mark Wood a supporter of ours recommended I talk to you, as someone who could help us understand XXYY sector's response to coronavirus – especially as we know our organisation could form partnerships in this space... Do you have a good time for a zoom chat?.."*
- ii) **The logic of the second half of the Dream 10 strategy,** (the potential for a company with their strengths to make a disproportionate difference especially for you to continue during coronavirus). ie 'Your chief executive has asked you to get advice from companies that are excellent in (eg reaching children who buy phones / safe travel in rural Africa / are experts at legal cover...etc), and would they meet you for 30 minutes to offer you some advice on how to solve it?'

Good Luck.