



The Sponsor Game

Rules, Strategy & Cheat Codes

So you want to race... Welcome to the club. Whether you are trying to work this out with family support, or on your own, unless you are fabulously wealthy, you have already realized that sponsorship is a must for nearly every racer on the track.

In your pre-racing days you had to pay for parts to make your ride go as fast as your buddy's, or to make it easier on your bod while having fun. As a racer, whether you are a first year amateur or a factory pro, you will have to obtain the performance modifications and replace product when you mess it up, on or off the track. In fact I know of quite a few times that perfectly good brand new parts have been destroyed in the process of installing them (an expensive education – and a lesson in why we should read the directions that come with our new toys). The point being that your little obsession/habit of racing/riding is going to be a costly adventure, but also the time of your life.

Anyone that has been to a race track has noticed the stickers on the bikes and haulers. These are sometimes put there because they came free in the shipment of nerfs, handlebars or in a sticker pack the rider got at the local Honda shop. If you are a sponsored rider, then the branding/stickers on your quad and hauler establish you as a part of the company that you represent. Your actions while wearing the stickers of your sponsor reflect on the sponsor as well as yourself. Sponsors consider that when choosing riders.

Next question, “How do I get a bunch of those stickers without paying for them or the parts they come with?”

Answer: “You do your darndest to earn sponsorship.”

Simple. Right? Not really. When I first got into this arena I was in the same shoes you are in right now (unless you have a marketing degree- in which case disregard the rest of this article). My background had nothing to do with how to write a resume for a racer. Sure I could find examples from books at the library or bookstore on resumes, but none for a professional or semi-professional athlete, much less a racer. So I had to determine what to do to mix the style of resume that I would submit if was looking for a position with a secretarial pool or a teaching position and that of a professional athlete forming a ‘Racer’s Resume’.

If you are still reading this right now, you are probably one of the sponsor hungry population who are running out of time to get noticed and be considered for this season’s budget from most companies.

The Rules.

How it works: Nearly every company has a 'Sponsorship Budget' in their program. Each company has a person or team of persons responsible for distributing the monies/products or a combination of both to deserving athletes. This person or team of persons is called 'Rider Support'. Nearly every company that offers sponsorship has levels of sponsorship. Common levels are A, B & C level support, Pro and Factory. Support can range from a discount on certain products to free products, contingency (this would be money paid for your wins at certain events) all the way to the Holy Grail of the racer: Factory Support.

Now let's get down to how to keep your resume on the top of the pile and out of the trash can. Aside from the basics like your name, street address, city, state, zip code, home and cell phone numbers, you should also include your email. A common mistake, believe it or not, is to leave out contact information. Jack Bednar, from Lonestar Racing, has had to dig through the trash pile before to find the right envelope that a resume came in to find out how to get in touch with the rider.

Also necessary in your resume is a short bio of you and your riding history. Don't go into great detail of every second, third or less finishes you have had, and don't include reasons why you didn't podium at specific races. Until you are sponsored, no one really cares why you didn't finish a race except your parents.

Photos are a must. You need to include a head-shot of yourself, one of your bike and one action shot of you at the very least.

References must be listed on your resume. Make sure to include contact information on your references as well.

Submit your resume to the right people, during the right time frame. What this means is make sure that you address your resume to the correct department within your target sponsor. Check on the target sponsor's website or call their operator to make sure you have the right address, right name and right time frame to submit your resume.

OK, these are the rules. Sounds pretty easy so far. If this was all there is to it, you would not have read this far.

Strategy & Cheat Codes

This section is more the strategy than cheat codes. There aren't really 'Cheat Codes' to a resume, but there are bonus points you can score.

Let's review what we have done so far. We have a basic 4 page resume. You have included all the 'regular' stuff and are following all the rules. Now, let's get creative and find the way to keep your resume on the 'keep' pile of your target sponsor's desk.

First of all do not even consider handwriting your resume. Make sure you use a good word-processor and spell check it. Kevin Mummuaah, from Lost Creek Cycle, says, "Don't expect someone to do more for you, than the effort you put into your resume. I can tell how much work they put into it when I open them. The ones that haven't spent the time are obvious."

Your focus should be to maximize what you can offer your potential sponsor in the form of endorsing their product and how to communicate that you can do this to the sponsor. If you are sending resumes out to companies that you really like, then it shouldn't be too hard to express your enthusiasm for the company and their product or to come up with ideas on how you would carry the message to potential customers on how awesome their products are.

Is your brain full yet? Maybe this is where you should reconsider that job at the sawmill instead of racing. I know I have suggested something like this a couple of times to my racer....

Beginning with your contact information review what you have there. Format your information with your name in bold print. This is important. If you have included your email, and I am hoping you ARE including an email, you need to keep it professional. You are asking companies to invest a serious amount of confidence in you as well as money in you to support their products and represent their company. If you have an email of toker420@hotmail.com or radicalrider69@yahoo.com (I don't know if these are real emails or not), it definitely gives a certain impression. Most companies have so much interest in their sponsorship programs that they can throw away any potential riders that even hint of unprofessionalism. Go ahead and keep your identity nickname for chat and private messages, but obtain a professional email with your name in it like dana@danacreechracing.com or john_smith@hotmail.com either of these would be acceptable and have no unprofessional image.

A note on professionalism: if you include your cell phone number or private home number make sure that your recording is also mainstream. No radical music interludes, raps, or weird recordings. Keep it short and sweet. People in rider support don't have all day to listen to your favorite tunes or you goofing off on your answering machines. Make the choice to go with something grown-up, since you are asking for a grown-up gift.

Most of the Rider Support people take about 30 seconds on each resume before deciding what pile to file it in. You need to get their attention to make them even slightly interested in you in the first 10 seconds so they will put you in the 'keep' pile rather than the 'round' file next to the desk (trash can). Start your resume with an eye catcher. What catches your eye? An action photo would be a good idea. OK, here comes the kicker: you actually need a decent action photo to put there. If you don't have some that have been professionally done, get some. Next make sure that the reader can tell it's you. Below are two examples. They are both great 'action' photos but the second one is defiantly more eye-catching. Also use good sizes but not to overwhelming and use good quality prints. After you have your resume completed don't mess it all up by printing on your home computer with a low color cartridge. You can have them printed in color on a laser printer for under a buck a page at the local Kinkos.



Make sure that you are the focus and that action is clear. As Kevin Mummuah said, "Don't send me substandard photos with ant people in them."

Next you need to describe what your abilities and qualifications are. Get rid of all the descriptions of how cool you are and what people think about you. Do include action words describing what you can do. Be willing to back it up. And keep it short.

Make sure to include a short history of your wins. Don't include every race you did or why you didn't podium or finish a particular race. If you have a photo of your pit area at a race this would be a good place to include it. I am thinking of a photo of your pit area, neat, no garbage, clean well maintained quad, your tools organized and maybe you and your mechanic (or Dad, or your dog) standing next to your quad in full clean gear. Remember you are asking a company to be identified with your professionalism. Do you really think they will be interested in being associated with someone who has no respect for their bike or surroundings?

Include where you plan to race for the upcoming season. Just list the series that you plan to do in full. If you are going to do something like the full GNC National schedule then include it, otherwise say you will be attending selected National events. Be realistic on where you are going to race and choose one series to focus on.

Spell check. Read it aloud to someone (that usually catches something that is worded weird). Check your formatting. Make sure you don't have lines that look like
this
in your resume.

Do your homework. Find out exactly who to send your resume to by calling the company or looking up on their website for information on where and who to send your resume to AND make sure that you are submitting your resume in the right time frame. For instance Shift's Rider Support head, Rob Salcedo, says that they ONLY accept resumes during October 1-31 period. Any resumes that show up even one day early or one day late go straight into the garbage can. Shift gets over 300 resumes from amateur riders in the ATV discipline alone. Clancy Schmitt, from Hiper-Technology, says they get over 500 per year. The competition is stiff for those sponsorships. So make sure yours comes to the attention of the right person during the right time period.

Spell out how you plan on earning your sponsorship. Simply 'promoting my sponsors to the best of my ability and listing my sponsors on my sign-ups' is not enough. This is EXPECTED not a perk from you. Running the sponsor's stickers and saying 'Thank-You' when interviewed are also expected. Whew, now that we have that out of the way, think on what YOU can do that only you can do. Be original. Be clear on what your plans are.

Spell out exactly what you would like your sponsor to do for you. Do not expect free stuff. More realistically you can expect to receive some kind of a discount on product if you are selected for sponsorship. Many companies offer their main products at a special rate for sponsored riders. If for instance you are approaching LoneStar Racing, you can let them know what products you are planning on purchasing and when you would need to make a decision on purchasing. Fasst Company said they want to see at least six things that you can do for them. Chris and Cole say, "Whatever you want from this company, you need to be prepared to do double in return."

References are important. Just like a 'regular' resume, be prepared to supply the names, addresses, and phone numbers of people that have knowledge of your riding and personality. Your school counselor could write a quick letter of support (on school letterhead) as well as be a reference, a

family member, the owner of the local bike shop and other sponsors are great references. Other riders are not good references. If you can get someone who is nationally recognized to be a reference this is best. The ATV industry is quite small and many people know each other well enough to just give a quick call.

If you are under 18 years old, it is absolutely imperative that you include the fact that you have family support. Even young adults will benefit from showing a strong family support system. Be prepared to show who you are, not just what you do. This is hard to accomplish in a 4 page resume but can be done.

Presentation. Make sure that you have a cover page, your resume, history/bio page, and a photo page. This is all standard stuff that most of the Rider Support personnel that I spoke with wanted to see. They also have some pet peeves of what is not cool to them.

Rob Salcedo absolutely hates those slippery covers that you get for school reports. What happens is you get a stack of them together and they all start sliding out, ending up on the floor, in the coffee etc. So binders are a big no-no. A simple staple or cover that is not slippery is good. Have I mentioned spell checking yet? Take pride in yourself and your request. Let your potential sponsor see who you are.

Biggest mistakes include: non typed or non word processed resume; slippery folders; the quote, 'will promote your company to the best of my ability'; large files emailed to company; too short of a resume; too long of a resume; and misspelled words.

Every company that I spoke with accepted resumes in mail form. A few accepted emails, and fewer still accepted FAXed resumes. Nearly every company accepted resumes in October and November. A few accepted them in September and a few accepted them in December. After January 1 no one that I spoke with would look at a resume.

Each company that I spoke with had different levels of support. Scot Denton, from Denton Racing, said they have four levels of support. Kevin Mummuaah from Lost Creek Racing works with a lot of riders at different levels of support. Lost Creek has their pros but also a large number of amateurs and pros who are not even on the roster for Lost Creek, who sometimes end up getting on track support from Kevin. Hiper Technology has three levels of support. Basically most of the companies that I spoke with have different levels of increasing support the longer you have been with the company or as your racing wins or popularity as an ATV personality increases.

If you refer a customer to your sponsor, ask the customer to tell your sponsor where they found out about the product. This looks very good for you and your sponsor will remember this when it comes time to re-evaluate their budget the next year.

Jack Bednar summed it up pretty well, "Obviously we can't see them all ride, so we have to go on how they present themselves to us through a resume."

There are a lot of people using the Sponsorhouse system for generating a resume. This is a great resource, and OK to use, for a starting point. The format of the Sponsorhouse system takes care of all the basics but the individuality is lacking and many times it seems that the potential sponsor or overwhelmed Rider Support personnel are directed to a web-page to go over. Keeping in mind that

the Rider Support people see so many resumes each year, do you really think they are going to be interested in sitting in front of a computer surfing your webpage? Sponsorhouse is a great addition to a traditional resume that is sent out as a hard-copy to your target companies and can really help as the year goes on by keeping your hard-won sponsors up to date on what is happening with you. I would not rely on Sponsorhouse to do it all for you though.

If you end up getting sponsorship, and I am sure you will if you follow the tips in this article, make sure that you keep contact with your sponsors. Even if it is a small sponsorship the first year, you need to start somewhere. Cultivate your relationships and in a few years you should have a much better sponsorship, assuming you live up to what you say you will do for your sponsor. Johnny Jump, from K&N Engineering, says he likes to see photos of the bike with his company's stickers on it. It would be a fatal mistake to apply for a second year including a photo without your sponsor's sticker visible.

Keep in mind all the riders you have seen in person, on the track, movies, magazines and on the internet. They are all potentially competing with you for the sponsor budget.

You have to sell yourself. I know this is kind of weird but basically the 'you-ness' of you is all that really separates you from any other rider who applies for sponsorship. I know it feels odd but you need to bite the bullet and go for it.

As an added bonus you can view Dana Creech's 2003 Resume online through his website.

Have fun, ride safe and don't forget to call your Mom.

Mom

**This article has been written entirely by and is the property of Teresa Creech to benefit the ATV Community. No affiliation is suggested between the writer and any of the people interviewed for this article nor any website that this article may eventually be found on other than Dana Creech Racing. The original copy of this article is posted in the forum at www.danacreechracing.com

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