

The second important point referenced above (that was also mentioned in Section 5 – “How to Negotiate a Sponsorship”) is that **companies should develop their activation plan PRIOR to negotiating the sponsorship**. By developing your plan in advance, you can negotiate all the necessary assets in the deal. If you don’t develop your plan until after the deal is signed, there’s a very good chance you won’t have the right assets to implement your ideas. As you can imagine, it’s difficult to know what assets to negotiate for if you have no idea what your plans are for the sponsorship. It’s not necessary to have all the tactical details of the plan finalized, but it is extremely helpful to know any big promotional or advertising ideas.

Section 8 – How to Break Through the Clutter

The chart below shows the number of sponsors for some of the top national properties:

Property	# of Sponsors
NFL	22
MLB	18
NHL	22 (10 – Canada only)
NBA	21
WNBA	17
NCAA	8
NASCAR	46
MLS	21
PGA TOUR	55
LPGA TOUR	24
US Olympic Team	10 (plus 12 worldwide TOP partners)

As illustrated above, a sponsor is often just one of a larger group of at least 20 companies that have secured similar sponsorship rights and benefits from the property. **You could reason, then, that sponsors are competing against each other for attention from the property’s target audience.** Let’s examine this for a minute using the NFL as an example.

At the time this manual was written, the NFL had 22 sponsors. As part of its sponsorship, each of these companies would presumably receive a number of highly-coveted NFL Super Bowl tickets. As you learned in the activation section, sponsors utilize the assets received in a sponsorship deal to drive business. Well, if all 22 NFL sponsors conduct consumer promotions to give away Super Bowl tickets, there is no sense of uniqueness for any of the sponsors. Sponsors have tried over the years to make the ticket giveaways unique by adding a different spin to it:

- *Giving away a large number of tickets so the winner can take his friends/family (“Win 10 tickets”)*
- *Giving away tickets for a period of years (“Win Final Four Tickets for Life”)*
- *Having the winner attend the game with a celebrity or former player (e.g., Attend the Super Bowl with Joe Montana, Attend the NHL Stanley Cup Finals with Bobby Orr, Attend the World Cup with Pele, etc.)*
- *Giving away tickets to multiple games (e.g., Attend each of the four Bowl Championship Series games via travel on a private plane, attend the NCAA Men’s and Women’s Final Four in the same weekend, etc.)*

This is exactly why sponsors are searching for unique programs that belong exclusively to them and, most importantly, can’t be emulated by either business competitors or other league sponsors. **In other words, differentiation is the key.**

Because of all the previously mentioned clutter within sponsorships, sponsors are searching for ways to make their sponsorship “stand out” or differentiate themselves from the rest of a particular property’s sponsors. As discussed in the last section, the creation of an activation plan is how the sponsorship comes to life in a relevant way for the target audience. In developing the plan, you can create promotions, events and other ideas that are unique to the property’s sponsor family.

As part of creating the sponsorship activation plan, another way of creating differentiation is to develop what is called an “ownership position” or “signature property.” Creating this signature property is usually most effective if it’s done in conjunction with the property that the company is sponsoring. As with most ideas in sponsorships, the idea can come from the sponsor, the property or a joint effort between the two organizations. The property adds credibility or legitimacy to your program as you’re trying to impact fans of the sport with whom the property has already established credibility. When creating the program, keep in mind that it should be **relevant** to and **meaningful** for each of the following groups:

- *Sponsor*
- *Property*
- *Target audience (fans of the property)*

SPONSOR

What does it mean to be relevant to or meaningful for a sponsor’s brand? Most importantly, the signature property should meet one or more of the corporate or sponsorship objectives and/or communicate information about the company or brand to the consumer (e.g., product features, corporate tagline, etc.). The reference can either be very obvious or a subtle reminder.

PROPERTY

The next step is to ensure that the program is relevant to and meaningful for the property. As you learned in the “Negotiating” section, properties have a handful of priorities they’re working to achieve. From a property’s standpoint, anytime a sponsor helps it achieve, or take steps to achieve one of its priority areas, it is a big win for the property. Of course, all properties have the opportunity to approve sponsors’ use of its marks. If the property doesn’t like the program, the sponsor won’t be able to implement it.

TARGET AUDIENCE

The final step, and arguably the most important one, is ensuring that the program is relevant to and meaningful for the target audience, or fans of the sport. Many sponsors typically conduct consumer research to obtain feedback on their concepts prior to the launch of a new program. The purpose of this research, obviously, is to eliminate any concepts that don’t resonate with the consumers. The advance research won’t guarantee that the program will be a success, but it’s always helpful to have feedback prior to launching anything new to help ensure a higher rate of success.

Section 9 – Importance of Research & Testing

SELECTION PHASE - PROPERTY RESEARCH

The most important consideration when selecting a property for a company to sponsor is that the fans of the property (e.g., attendees, viewers, listeners) must be the same as the company’s target audience. If the fans aren’t the company’s customers, it doesn’t matter how good the activation plans are because they’ll be targeted