

Sovereign Says Corporates Have Something To Give

The idea of using sponsorship more smartly, to the point of driving marketing programme, was reason enough for Liz Bridgeman, Sponsorship Manager at Sovereign, to jump at the chance to work with the Robin Hood Foundation.

"A year ago, we were doing lots of good things in the community but there was no cement to give us the stickability to maximize ROI (Return on Investment). In other words, nothing was strategic and our portfolio represented mainly piecemeal, goodwill gestures. Just as importantly, this approach was limiting our ability to support the social sector – we were acting as funders rather than partners."

"It's definitely an ongoing process we've committed to", says Liz. "We first started working with Jude Mannion, CEO, Robin Hood, nine months ago and she has been a total inspiration. Since then we've had to do a few of the hard yards, exiting from properties that no longer fitted with our strategic direction. Others have had to be repositioned. Each move needed a carefully planned strategy and there was certainly some emotional impact to consider, leaving properties we had been associated with over a number of years."

"The hard work has been hugely worthwhile because we're well on our way to building a portfolio of properties that resonate with our purpose and values. Because partnerships are now developed where they fit with Sovereign's values, they're beginning to ring true with stakeholders. It's also easier to engage staff because they consistently hear what we stand for and how we're helping in the community. What's more, we're valuable to our sponsorship partners now because we're aligned and take a longer term approach."

Liz says one of Sovereign's most exciting properties is the Millennium Insti-

tute of Sport & Health (MISH).

"We entered into the sponsorship two years ago and during our planning process with Robin Hood identified that the property needed to be repositioned strategically to enable both parties to enjoy reciprocal benefits. Jude came in and ran a couple of workshops with a team comprising staff from both MISH and Sovereign. We included people with a broad range of skills, not just marketers."

The great thing about working with Robin Hood, is that everything is outcome based, says Liz. "Action plans became a road map to drive the development of joint marketing plans."

Now MISH and Sovereign have a joint marketing plan for 2004/05. New ideas are added on and other sponsors and supporters are aware of where Sovereign is involved. "It's way more than naming rights that Sovereign has invested in the sponsorship", says Liz. "Providing marketing expertise is a big part of Sovereign's determined effort to add value. Already we've helped MISH by providing Public Relations expertise to develop Media Guidelines. And, most recently, we've commissioned a major research project for MISH. Next week, we'll work with Robin Hood to run a half-day workshop to help build the Millennium Institute brand."

So where to from here?

Liz says Sovereign is now at the integration stage. The next six months will be focused on driving sponsorship internally and we'll see the added value of a sponsorship driven marketing programme.

Liz Bridgeman was appointed Sponsorship Manager last year.

She previously was Marketing Manager at the former TMP Worldwide (now known as TMP/Hudson Global Resources).

Liz is responsible for Sovereign's extensive sponsorship portfolio, which

supports properties in the arts, education, health and sporting arenas.

"My immediate focus will be on the Sovereign Sports Super Centre which is currently the training ground for the All Blacks. This is one of the most sophisticated sports training facilities in New Zealand and nurtures so many individuals and teams through to the top of their game on the world stage. If we can help cultivate the skills required to bring home the Rugby World Cup, then that's a huge accomplishment for a sponsorship."

Liz has already got one launch under her belt since starting at Sovereign recently. "My first priority was to launch a national scholarship programme for students aged eight to 17, called 'Touch the Sky'. Its aim is to help children get passionate about their own goals and dreams and commit their plans to paper in a national essay competition. We've undertaken a three year commitment to this initiative because it takes that long to make a difference. Encouraging our young people to be passionate about themselves helps them go further and get more out of life. It's initiatives like this that attracted me to Sovereign's culture in the first place."

Liz's previous experience at TMP/Hudson has highlighted the importance of involving the entire staff in the opportunities sponsorship provides, so the 800 staff at Sovereign will be experts on the community initiatives they're involved with in no time.

Liz has an International Business Diploma from Massey University and prior to entering the corporate world, enjoyed eight years on the professional show jumping circuit in New Zealand, Canada and the USA.