

Sponsorship and brand ambassador contracts

With the rise of social media activity within the equestrian sphere, and the prevalence of online activity in driving peoples' purchasing activity, there has been a consequent explosion in riders working with brands to promote them, in return for free or discounted products, services, or other ancillary benefits.

The endorsement of products by a rider, and of the rider by a product, can be a mutually beneficial relationship – however it is at its

heart a commercial arrangement, and both parties need to derive value from it. Ensuring that the deal is correctly documented at the outset, both protecting commercial value and incorporating key clauses to enable the sponsor or rider to step away if circumstances change, is a crucial part of a sponsorship arrangement.

Setting Out Clear Expectations

A sponsorship contract should clearly set out what the sponsor will provide to the rider, and what the rider will provide in return.



Sponsorship offers can range from discounted products, to a percentage of free products, free or discounted services, the provision of rider or horse clothing, and anything in between. It does not necessarily need to have a monetary value attached; however it is important to be clear about what that support includes. If it is free treatments from a physio: how many, how regularly. If it is discounted saddlery: how much discount, and is there a limit.

If there is a benefit to a rider from introducing others to the products (for example, by using an exclusive discount code) this should be stated, and the potential benefit to the rider set out clearly.

From a sponsor's perspective, it is crucial to outline exactly what is expected from the rider within the relationship. This may vary depending on the nature of the product and the marketing requirements, from specifying a minimum number and type of

social media posts, to ensuring horses and riders are dressed in the products at shows, to requesting attendance at tradestands and wearing specific items in any press conferences. With the rise of influencers, sponsors can afford to specify how they want their products marketed on the various channels, and further request that an influencer retains a material market share upon each platform to maintain the agreement.

Exclusivity

A key element of a commercial relationship is exclusivity: for a sponsor, it is crucial to ensure that a rider is not promoting products or services which are duplicative. There is value and kudos to a relationship where a rider becomes part of a team of well-known sponsored riders, which can strengthen a sponsors' bargaining position in offering sponsored roles.



Specific Deliverables

Where a rider has a particularly high profile, or a sponsor has a specific commercial result in mind, it may be possible to link rider benefits to achieving specific targets. This approach allows the sponsor to direct their marketing budget in a more streamlined way, and for a rider who has regular success, allows them to capitalise on their competitive achievements commercially.

Material Changes

It is prudent to discuss at the outset of a relationship how the sponsor and rider would choose to deal with a sporting disappointment, such as a significant injury to horse or rider, or the sale of a top horse, during the term of the sponsorship contract. Resolutions might vary from a change in focus of the relationship, to a decrease in the volume of sponsorship, to termination if the rider is out of action for a long period of time and unable to support the sponsor's profile.

When to Walk Away

While both sponsors and riders engage in a relationship hoping for a productive, mutually beneficial outcome, this is not assured. A sponsor may have specific areas of commercial sensitivity where they may need to terminate a relationship with a rider promptly; for instance, if a rider is accused of horse abuse or similar impropriety. From a rider perspective, if the sponsor does not deliver in line with their obligations, or experiences significant financial issues, the rider may wish to seek support elsewhere promptly without the restriction of exclusivity.

One Size Does Not Fit All!

While it is tempting to see a bespoke sponsorship contract as an unnecessary additional expense, it is important to ensure that your contract fits your relationship – as a sponsor or a rider – and that both parties have clear “rules of the game” at the outset. This allows clear open communication in the event of any unforeseen event or disappointment, since both parties have considered a route forwards. The benefits of long relationships between sponsors and riders are evident; and showing that a rider can deliver a sponsor long term value can make a rider a more attractive prospect for other brands to work with.

Similarly, the endorsement from a top-class brand for an up-and-coming rider can hold significant non-financial value; equally, the support from an established rider for a new brand can be highly influential. Such relationships should not be left to chance!

