

Bidding to Win - Ten Hints for a Successful Campaign

Just like an athlete, when your city decides to enter in competition against other cities for the right to host an event, it is to win. And in order to win, you need to do the training and understand the competition landscape. TSE has therefore gathered ten hints for running a successful bid campaign.

10) Know the rules and requirements

Most international federations have strict requirements and rules in place for their bidding phases. Study them. Don't get yourself thrown out of the race on a technicality. Missing a deadline is like missing the election. When writing the bid book, always check that the questions in the bid questionnaire have actually been answered, it's easy to get excited by the application process and forget to provide the answers asked for. Bidding rules are there to protect the fairness of the competition among the candidate cities, it is a competition and the candidate city that knows how to operate best within the framework has a good chance of winning.

9) It's about bidding for the event, not organising it

Although the technical part of the campaign - the production of the bid book - is crucial, it is not sufficient to win. It is safe to assume that serious competitors will be able to meet all the technical requirements, such as hotel capacity and financial guarantees. Therefore, it is important not to lose focus and remember that during the campaign phase, the main activity is communication. All actions during the campaign have to be focused on influencing votes. Everything else can wait until after the event has been awarded.

8) If you can't take a hard look at yourself, get someone else to do it

An analysis of strengths and weaknesses is always a good way to start the campaign planning process. However, many candidates never get past the strengths leaving them unprepared for criticism which leads to the wrong strategy. Many bid campaigns hire external international consultants to assist in the campaign strategy preparation. An external view can help not only identify the main weaknesses, but also point out strengths that the candidate is not aware of or takes for granted.

7) If you don't know where you are going, don't go there

In political campaigns, it is said that about 50% of the money and resources spent are wasted on activities that don't get any votes. In bid campaigns - especially the big ones - it is probably more. The main reason for this often comes down to a lack of a clear strategy. Spend the necessary time researching, analysing and planning the strategy and make sure that the whole bid team is familiar with the strategy. One of the most damaging tendencies for a bid committee is listening to rumors and acting on emotions instead of facts. We have yet to experience a well analysed and researched campaign strategy needing to be changed dramatically during the course of a campaign.

6) It's not what is said, it's what the voter hears

The right words delivered the right way will inspire and engage the audience. Too often bid campaigns are filled with standard phrases and empty slogans. Most bid presentations are solid but not inspirational or memorable. Let there be no doubt: all things equal, bid campaigns are won by the candidate city with the best message and the best presenters. But it is not enough to be correct, reasonable or even brilliant. The key to successful communication is to understand what moves the voter. How the voter perceives what the candidate city says is more important than how the candidate city perceives itself. It's not what is said, it's what the voter hears.

5) Don't ask for attention, grab it!

Don't assume that voters will read or study any of the things sent to them. Decision makers in the international sports world travel often and are flooded with documents and promotional materials. Choosing

the right medium and presenting the message the right way can help get the candidate city get through the clutter. Creativity and innovation is rewarded.

4) People vote for people, not for places

While decision makers in international federations might choose a host city that is not entirely ready to host the event, they will never choose a host that they don't know or trust. The bid representatives are crucial for the success of the bid. They should be sales and PR people, not administrators or event organisers. People vote for people they like and who are like them. Athletes speak well with other athletes, politicians with other politicians. Choose the right people and the voters will be more likely to choose your city.

3) Focus on the most influential voters

There will always be a group of voters that is more influential. This often includes the president of the federation. Target the influential voters first and spend time on them. The voters in international federations discuss the elections with each other and the opinions of the strongest, most active members count. Their opinions and involvement in the campaign change the outcome of the vote.

2) Don't attack competitors, question their ideas

We are often asked if a bid should engage in negative communication about the competitors and we always answer 'no.' The international sports world does not like it when a member of their 'family' is attacked. Don't attack the competitors, but be very active in questioning their ideas and concepts. Everything is relative and all bid communication should aim to highlight the weaknesses of the competitors by highlighting the bid's own relative strengths. If a competitor focus their strategy on development and new markets for the sport, counteract the argument by saying that the sport definitely needs to look for new markets but that the safest way to do that is to go to a strong, established market. Go one step further and include developing countries in the organisation of the event to build up their skills. This acknowledges that the competitor's development plans for the sport are good, but indicates that they are too weak and inexperienced to actually organise the event. Control the communication and don't let the competitors set the agenda.

1) It ain't over till it's over

The last chance to present the candidate city is the final presentation just before the vote takes place. The favourite candidate at the time of the final presentation is typically the winner after the presentation. But a candidate city should never relax until it has crossed the finish line. Don't underestimate the competitors' will to win and their desire to make a good impression - all the way to the end. A strong final presentation by the favourite can secure the win, but a poor, unprepared presentation can leave the competition wide open.

If you want to know more about TSE's experience in assisting winning bids, please contact Heloise Lacroix, Project Manager at TSE Consulting, hlacroix@tseconsulting.com.