



Keeping an eye on the marketing ball . . . m.a.s accountants' John Corias.

Photo: NIC WALKER

## Kicking marketing goals

**Jessica Gardner**

In uncertain times, small businesses are looking for marketing strategies that have minimal effect on their cash flow but still generate business leads and maximise brand exposure.

One accounting firm has found a value-in-kind sponsorship arrangement with a local soccer club fits that brief.

Sydney-based m.a.s accountants, which provides services to small businesses from its office in Surry Hills, looks after accounting for the Waverley Old Boys Football Club. In return, the business gets naming rights on jerseys of the top two teams and is a regular sight at matches, with its branded marquee.

Senior partner John Corias estimates the firm donates about \$8000 worth of services to the club, including monthly account reconciliation, lodgement of quarterly business activity statements and provision of reports for committee meetings.

"It is much easier to get a sponsorship-in-kind arrangement across the line [with other partners] than it is to part with \$8000 in cash," Mr Corias said.

At a time when accountants are forecasting record levels of insolvencies this year, cost-effective marketing is imperative.

"Small businesses, by their nature, they must watch every dollar they spend," Mr Corias

says. "Where they can get [marketing exposure] without expense, it's far more cost effective."

Mr Corias agrees that the time his staff takes to do the work for the football club does represent a cost, but contends that his employees will always have some down time so the opportunity cost of not completing billable work in some hours is minimal.

"There is no trouble involved in what we're doing," he says. "My staff are there regardless. If

**It's much easier to set up a sponsorship-in-kind arrangement than to part with \$8000 in cash.**

you can't find an hour or two in a week to pick up a little bit of extra work that is without cost attached to it, then we're kidding ourselves."

He reckons such arrangements are becoming more prevalent for his small-business clients.

The director of consultancy Marketing Is Us, Anne Sorensen, says an arrangement such as this makes sense.

"They've obviously identified who their target audience is and being a small business it's in the local community," she says.

"Although there's still an investment or cost of time, it is less impactful on the cash flow

[of the business]." To ensure that the expectations of both sides are met, Ms Sorensen says, the firm should confirm in advance how much work it will provide over the year, as part of the sponsorship.

She also says to have a strong marketing strategy, small businesses should never rely on one activity.

Using the sponsorship to gain publicity in local newspapers and advertising it on the firm's website are examples of how to have an integrated strategy.

Ms Sorensen said that to maximise the potential benefit, the firm should ensure that it does not provide a one-off or token effort.

As such, the partners should to go to games and get involved, because this is a chance to build relationships with potential clients within the club.

The best leads that have come from m.a.s's sponsorship arrangement were generated after attending quarterly social occasions and awards nights and placing advertising in the club's newsletter, Mr Corias said.

"By attending awards nights and doing presentations [we have made people feel comfortable] approaching us to start taking on their accounting," he said.

"You must work the arrangement. Don't just provide the services and then let it sleep."