THE ACTIVATION GAP
A newsletter from:
P1 ADVANTAGE



Before You Renew: Five Checks for Your 2027 Racing Sponsorship

Q4 is when the renewal gets signed. It's also your best chance to ask whether the program is paying you back.

Welcome to the first issue. I'm Steve Mears, and I run P1 Advantage out of Canton, Ohio. I sit between companies that sponsor IndyCar or IMSA and their race teams, and help the sponsor turn that spend into business results.

Here's the line I keep coming back to: your sponsorship is already costing you. The real question is whether it's paying you back.

It's Q4. Budgets for 2027 are being set right now, and plenty of renewals will go through on momentum. Before you sign, run these five checks.

1. Logos aren't activation

Look at what the program produced this year, not what it displayed. A logo on a car is visibility. Activation is what you did with it: the customer conversations it opened, the content your sales team used, the meetings it got you that you wouldn't have gotten otherwise.

Ask yourself: if we took the logo off the car, what would we lose besides the logo? If the honest answer is "not much," the problem usually isn't the series or the team. It's that nobody built the work around the placement.

2. Hospitality should run like a pipeline, not a party

Race weekend hospitality is one of the strongest assets a B2B sponsor has. Too many programs treat it as the finish line. It should be the starting line.

Look at who you hosted this year and what happened after. Was there a follow-up at 30 days? A next meeting at 60? A clear read at 90 days on where that relationship stands? If guests went home with a hat and a good memory and nothing else, you paid for a party.

For 2027, build the guest list around business priorities, give every guest an owner on your side, and put the 30/60/90 follow-up on the calendar before the weekend, not after.

3. Programs die when the champion leaves

A lot of sponsorships live in one person's head. The person who championed the deal knows why you signed it, what it was supposed to do, and who at the team to call. When that person changes roles or leaves, the program drifts, and the renewal becomes a question nobody can answer.

Check this: are the objectives written down? Does more than one person own them? Could someone new pick up the program next month and know what success looks like? If not, fix that before you commit to another year.

4. Give your people a Monday story

On the Monday after a race, your dealers, sales reps and leadership team should have something to say. Not a results recap. A story they can use with a customer: what the brand did, why it matters to the buyer, and what happens next.

If the only people talking about the sponsorship on Monday work in marketing, the program isn't reaching the people who sell. Before you renew, ask your sales team and dealers directly: what did you actually use from the program this year? Their answer is some of the most useful feedback you'll get.

5. Race-to-road proof only matters if buyers hear it

If your product runs on the car, the track is a proving ground. That's a strong message, but only if it reaches the engineers, purchasing managers and decision-makers who buy from you. A technical story that stays in a press release or on a social feed won't do much for your pipeline.

Ask: who needs to believe this product claim, and how did we get the proof in front of them this year? The proof has to travel to where the buying happens: sales decks, trade shows, customer visits.

What to do with the answers

None of this means don't renew. But renewal is leverage. It's when you can reshape the package, ask for the assets you'll actually use, and set objectives that will hold up in a budget review a year from now.

If you can answer all five checks with confidence, good. If a few made you pause, that's normal, and it's fixable before the contract is signed.

A simple place to start

I put together a short **Activation Scorecard** for exactly this moment. It's a quick form. You fill it out, and I send back a plain-English read on where your program is strong and where it's leaving value on the table. No cost, no pitch deck.

Take the Activation Scorecard

If you'd rather talk it through, I also do a 15-minute Health Check call. Email me at steve@p1advantage.com. If you know someone facing a racing renewal this quarter, pass this along.

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