IEG, a sponsorship research organization, reported that North American companies planned to spend $16.97 billion on sponsorships in 2009, an increase of 2.2% in an economy where budgets are being cut to the bone (Klayman, 2009). Even so, in the current competitive marketplace, the number of sponsorship opportunities are significantly greater than the resources of interested sponsors (O’Reilly & Madill, 2007). This leaves sponsors and properties searching for ways to maximize their associations, both seeking to get the most of what the other has to offer.

Sponsorship has offered small and/or local business an opportunity to gain identity through partnering with local events (Mack, 1999). Much literature has focused on national or international corporations participating in national or international sponsorships; however, local and regional businesses gain many of the same benefits by participating in sports sponsorships on a scale that is in line with their less-impressive budgets. Mahoney and Howard (2001) believed a benefit of owning a small business associated with a local event was the ability to reach a distinct target market. Furthermore, a series of committed small businesses may actually bring more benefits to a property than a larger national sponsor.

Traditionally, sponsorship objectives have been enhancing image and creating awareness (Walliser, 2003). Copeland et al. (1996) noted that social and environmental sponsors sought to demonstrate social responsibility; Drees (1991) claimed that arts sponsors were motivated by hospitality opportunities. Sponsors located within close proximity to the property being sponsored were most likely seeking enhanced public relations opportunities (Chadwick & Thwaites, 2005).

Gilbert (1988) felt that sponsored events could achieve promotional goals, and Cornwell (1995) claimed some companies used sponsorship for product distribution. Manufacturing organizations sought media coverage and publicity opportunities though their less impressive budgets; service sponsors were hoping to improve employee morale. Owners of fast food franchises used sport sponsorships to draw attention to their businesses in local market areas (Cousens & Slack, 1996). Komoroski and Biemond (1996) added that sports sponsorships were established to gain an advantage over competitors, identify with a particular market segment, achieve sales objectives, and alter or reinforce public perceptions of the company.

Quester and Thompson (2001) discovered that motivation factors behind sponsorship investment included: enhanced image, increased awareness in target markets, presentation of a strong corporate presence, creating a public perception of “giving something back,” presentation of an image as a strong competitor, enhancement of trust, promotion of a product's practical aspects, positioning or repositioning in relation to corporate competitors, and product promotion that differs from conventional setting. Marshall and Cook (1992) included requests from organizations or individuals, benevolence, and the ability to cross the spectrum of media activities as reasons for entering into sponsorships.

Most published research does not explore sponsorship at a local or regional level; national and international sponsorship events and associations attract the attention (Mack, 1999). Alvarado (2007) showed that consumers viewed businesses with a close proximity to the sponsored property in a positive manner, and Martin (n.d.) determined that the length of a commitment that a sponsorship agreement required could be a deciding factor in businesses’ decisions to participate in sponsorship activities. The question then becomes how do sponsors themselves view sponsorship when taking into consideration the market area in which they operate and the average length of commitment that they make to sponsorships.

The athletic marketing department at an NCAA Division I university in the southwestern United States provided contact information for 204 sponsoring organizations. All prospects were contacted at least four times by e-mail, postal mail or telephone with an invitation to participate in a web-based survey. A total of 111 responses were received. Fully completed questionnaires (n = 67) accounted for 60.4% of the responses; a completion rate of 32.8%. The overall response rate, 111 out of 204 sponsors, was 54.4%. All responses were included in analyses.
When considering market area, analyses of statements expressing reasons for entering into sponsorship revealed that having the opportunity to allow people to sample products was the only item that was influenced by market area, $F(2, 81) = 34.36, p < .05$. A review of the associated means revealed that local businesses were most likely to want to provide samples.

Analyses revealed that being the only business in a category was influenced by length of commitment, $F(2, 82) = 43.58, p < .05$. Bonferroni post hoc tests confirmed that businesses with longer commitments believed that it was more important to be the only sponsor in a particular category than did sponsors with commitments of one year or less than one year.

Status associated with an event was influenced by the length of commitment, $F(2, 80) = 44.76, p < .05$. Post hoc tests indicated that the difference fell between sponsors who made a sponsorship commitment of one year at a time and sponsors who committed to sponsorship for more than one year at a time, with the latter respondent more likely to find event status important. Additionally, belief that sponsorship increased employee productivity was found to be directly related to the length of sponsorship commitment, $F(2, 67) = 32.35, p < .05$. Bonferroni post hoc tests revealed differences when comparing sponsors who committed to sponsorship for less than one year or more than one year, with shorter-term sponsors more likely to believe that the sponsorship would lead to increased employee productivity.

Also significant for this variable was the importance of the sponsorship to the company’s owners, $F(2, 67) = 28.35, p < .05$. Post hoc evaluations showed that sponsors who made commitments of one year at a time perceived the sponsorship to be more valuable to their owners than did respondents who reported longer or shorter sponsorship commitments.

One of the most relevant findings in this study was that there were few differences between businesses that sponsored this collegiate athletic program. Local and regional businesses are just as likely to be interested in sponsorship, and may even offer more income in the long run – there are far more local and regional business to tap than there are national/international corporations. The most important areas of sponsorship for a business was to generate awareness for their brand, something that a sport property can accomplish relatively inexpensively with signage and audio announcements. Additionally, the property and sponsor can work together to customize packages that allow both to benefit from the association.

In general, sponsors at all levels do the same things for the same reasons. Great differences were not readily apparent between sponsors at national or international levels and those that operated on a more local basis. Collegiate sponsorships, at least in this instance, appeared to follow the reasoning presented by researchers in previous studies that used national or international sponsorship occurrences. These similarities existed, not only with businesses or companies with national or international presences, but also among those operating on a local or regional basis, giving credence to Mack’s belief that local businesses can play a vital role in sponsorship partnerships.