

HOW TO WIN AN AWARD

Awards provide instant credibility and deliver great PR value. For these reasons, I'm often asked by our clients how companies win awards. Companies can have outstanding products and great case studies but fail to win - or even get shortlisted - losing out to suppliers with products that are not of the same standard. The complexity of B2B technology often means that awards fail to give recognition to what is objectively the "best" product or service. The truth is that winning awards is often as much to do with the quality of the entry as the quality of the product that is entered.

There is some cynicism about awards. Let's face it, the awards business is a business, and sometimes sponsors and advertisers seem to be a little luckier than those who don't spend money. Most awards organisers try to be impartial to maintain their credibility, so don't jump to the conclusion that the awards are rigged simply because you are not winning.

Having written many awards entries, and served on judging panels, I've seen many of the tactics that can help boost your chances of winning, as well as most of the pitfalls that surround awards entries.

UNDERSTAND THE JUDGES' SITUATION

Most judges want to do a good job, but they are almost certainly volunteering their time, and will often have limited knowledge of your products, markets and technologies. Judges won't have a lot of time to allocate to the process, so be clear and concise when explaining why your entry should win.

IT'S THE ENTRY THAT IS JUDGED

The judges will rely on the entry to determine the shortlist and (assuming that the awards aren't decided by a public vote) the winner. Don't assume that the judges will have expertise to grasp why your product will change the world. There's no time for background research, so make sure that you explain the need for the product and why it is so much better than alternative solutions in your entry.

BE DIRECT

Judges will see many entries. They don't want to have to read between the lines of the corporate messaging to work out exactly why the product deserves to win an award: clear, direct language makes it easy for a judge to understand the impact your product

or service has made on the market. Judging panels often interpret vague claims as an indication that the product wasn't really that good, so back up your statements with evidence and statistics.

WORRY ABOUT THE ENTRY, NOT THE SUPPORTING MATERIAL

Most awards require you to submit an entry that has a maximum word count, but will also allow you to supply supplementary materials to support the entry. Judges don't spend a long time looking at the supplementary material - it's as much as they can do to read all the entries - so if you submit anything else, make it visual and don't use the supporting materials alone to communicate information vital to the entry.

FOLLOW A SIMPLE STRUCTURE

Most entries follow a simple structure of a one-paragraph overview, an explanation of the need for the product or service and the reasons why your new widget is the best solution to this requirement. Your entry should not only explain why your product is great, but also establish the desperate need for the product.

Regardless of your brand style, award entries are not the time to be modest and understated - you have to sing your own praises if you expect the judges to appreciate what you do. Entries should also highlight any major barriers that had to be overcome in the development of the product or solution. Judges enjoy a story about the underdog that overcame adversity to best the industry giant as much as the rest of us!

STAND OUT FROM THE CROWD

Standing out is important. This doesn't mean sending an entry in red type (I've seen it, and believe me it didn't work), but it means highlighting something that other entries won't have. The truth is that most judges find it hard to rank entries, so you need to highlight the reason to put you on the shortlist. Get to the heart of what makes your product or service unique, and sell it the same way you sell to customers. Demonstrate how you stand out from the market, and your entry will stand out from the others in the eyes of the judges.

BE PROFESSIONAL

Judges are giving their time and credibility to the awards, so be professional. If you have to present to a judging panel, respect the time they have given to the process and be prepared to answer any questions. Also, bear in mind that it can be just as important to avoid being overly friendly with judges who you know: if they are going to maintain credibility, they won't be able to argue for an entry from a team who are obviously their friends.

PAY ATTENTION TO DETAIL

There are lots of silly ways that you can blow your chances of winning, particularly if you ignore the rules. Get your entry in before the closing date, and please don't imagine that nobody will worry that you went a couple of words over the prescribed limit. There is always one judge who spots it and demands you are disqualified for a breach of the rules.

VOTES ARE WON BY THE ENTRY WITH THE MOST VOTES

It's pretty common for a judging panel to decide a shortlist, and the winner to be selected by a public online vote. Unless the person voting is a colleague, channel partner or customer, they aren't going to spend much time reviewing the entries. In fact most of the voters are only concerned that one or two of the entrants win, and are almost random in their other selections. So the key to winning these public votes is to get as many of your potential supporters as possible to vote for you. Tell your employees.

Beg your distributors. Do everything you can to encourage people to vote for you - from putting a link on your email footer and spreading the word via social media to asking everyone you know to help you out. The icky feeling you get when begging for votes will disappear if you win!

ASK FOR THE AWARD

Don't be shy about explicitly stating that your entry should win: some of the best entries start and finish with something like, "This widget is the best techno-widget this year because....."

So that's it: a simple approach for entering and winning. It's not a guarantee of success, but it allows you to present your company in the best possible light - and delivers the best chance at lifting a trophy.

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