Marketing awards: Why they matter

To enhance my own thinking, I have interviewed a number of experts, including PR executives, judges of the awards and previous winners. This has yielded a number of thoughts which may be helpful to marketing people.

Why enter awards competitions?

Foremost is the opportunity to benchmark what you are doing with some of the best marketing around and to determine if others see value in what you have accomplished.

Creating the entry itself forces the team to clearly articulate the idea or innovation, generating a common understanding of what it is and how the company did it, together with the results.

Of course, a main reason for entering is for the chance to win. How many times have you heard someone say, "We should have won that award." Typically, a major reason for not winning was that they did not enter the competition.

In discussing reasons for entering awards competition, both Rob Baskin, president of Weber Shandwick PR, and Glen Jackson, co-founder of Jackson Spalding, stressed the importance of being strategic in choosing which competitions to enter. They suggest that it is important to enter competitions that are the right fit for the company, given the product or innovation.

Smaller companies in particular don’t have enough resources to enter many competitions so they should select those where there is credibility through the caliber of the judges and the prestige of the award itself.

There are both internal and external benefits to winning marketing awards. Everyone I talked with who won cited the benefit of how winning boosts the morale of the marketing team. It energizes those who worked on the program, serving as a well-deserved recognition.

Employees feel proud when their company is talked about in the media in a good way. It can help attract high caliber new employees or stress to current employees why your company is a winning company. It sends a clear message that you are the best in your field.

Winning can energize people. Winning can inspire them to take new risks and have the internal credibility to get approval for what they are recommending.

In today’s world, where recruiters use social media to find good candidates, personal recognition coming from awards becomes part of your personal brand and makes award winners attractive to future employers.

Increasing visibility

I talked with several past MAX Award winners who identified a number of external benefits to winning awards. Debbie Smith, principal of Idioms LLC, pointed out that winning elevated the company in the eyes of the community, overnight giving the startup company a great deal of credibility.

Lara Hodgson, founder and CEO of Nourish Inc., said, “others saw us through the awards and contacted us instead of us having to contact them, which had been difficult.” Winning gave them visibility in ways more effective than traditional media.

Jeff Cohen, vice president and general manager of Media Consumer Healthcare Inc., pointed out that winning the award energized its brokerage partners, who now felt part of a winning team. This helped Media when it launched other products, giving the distributors the confidence that Media could do it again.

Perhaps the most important benefit from winning was given by Sheila Weidman, senior vice president of communications, government and public affairs for Georgia Pacific LLC. She pointed out that the immediate credibility can increase brand recognition, position your company as a leader and sell more of your product.

Some dos and don’ts

- Do enter but do so selectively, picking those competitions with the best fit for you.
- Do ensure that your entry responds to all of the criteria.
- Do tell your story clearly and concisely.
- Do communicate how your entry is innovative, departs from the industry norm, employs great marketing, and is successful (or at least has shown strong signs that it will be).
- Do allow enough time for others to edit your entry carefully.
- Don’t assume that small, new companies can’t win. Most judges will adjust for the level of the company’s resources in evaluating an entry.
- Don’t ignore the risks in the success.
- Don’t use a lot of industry jargon.
- Don’t wait until the last minute.

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