

Secrets of Successful Awards Programs

The Executive's Guide



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 OpenWater

INTRODUCTION

Here's a fact: not all awards programs are the same.

Sure there are many industries and focuses, but what I'm talking about is more basic than that: there are successful programs and not so successful ones. Though it's such a basic concept, success is not always an easy thing for an awards program to achieve. Some programs seem to have found the secret formula that makes everything run smoothly and gets them a high number of quality submissions.

How do they do it?

Well, luckily there's no holy grail of awards that these organizations have found and others have just missed out on. Instead, they've realized that there are several factors that go into running a successful program. The best part of this news is that anyone can adopt these best practices and see the benefits to their program.

Here are a few of the things organizations do to make sure their awards program is always on top.

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Making sure they've got a good awards website is the first step an organization takes in order to prepare for the launch of its awards program. It's such a crucial part of your program, because not only is it the source of information concerning your program and the point from which people can apply, it's also your program's first impression.

Successful programs make sure their awards website is full of important information for entrants like judging criteria, call for entry information, and the history of the program. They recognize that potential entrants are going to have questions, not just about entering, but about the program in general. By creating an informative and easily navigable site, they're not only guaranteeing that many of these questions will be answered, but that visitors can become familiar with the program's legacy and credibility within the industry.

On top of including relevant information they also ensure the layout and design of the website itself is interesting and memorable enough to get visitors to stay and check it out. After all, first impressions are incredibly important.

A successful awards program will...

...CREATE
A GREAT
AWARDS
WEBSITE





Timing is critical for all awards programs. If your call for entry is too short, you may lose out on potential applicants, if you plan your gala near a holiday, no one will show up. Many programs make the mistake of approximating timelines for their awards instead of taking the time to plan things out carefully. What results is a lot of pushing back deadlines, rearranging tasks, and general problems and craziness.

However, a successful awards program, recognizes the need for planning and will follow these basic steps:

1. Determine the number of steps your awards program needs.
2. Determine the time each step will take.

Tip: Many call for entries are open for 3 months. Also, leave plenty of time for judging, about 1 month.

3. Work backwards.

Tip: Set the date of your awards gala first. Then calculate the other dates based on the length of time they'll take.

4. Keep a buffer

Tip: Don't forget to give your program's dates some wiggle room. Situations always arise that may end up pushing dates and deadlines back. We recommend allowing 2 weeks between each step.

A successful awards program will...

...TAKE TIME TO PLAN AN ACCURATE & APPROPRIATE PROGRAM CALENDAR



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One of the biggest mistakes organizations make when planning their awards program is not setting a realistic and adequate budget. This is unfortunate, because, even though it's not easy, it's one of the most important things you can do. A budget depends on many factors and without planning, your lack of awards program budgeting can really end up costing you.

It's important to sit down with your team and list out all of the costs that you will encounter during each stage of your awards program: Pre-CFE (call for entry), CFE, Judging, Post Judging, and Awards Gala. When organizing costs this way you'd be amazed at which items are crucial, but may have been forgotten. Some examples are: Press Release syndication, credit card processing fees, compensation/transportation of judges, cost of returning items to entrants, and cost of food at your awards gala.

The best awards programs have a dedicated staff that takes the time to review all of these costs year over year to set up a budget to help them organize their awards season and keep them on track during planning.

A successful awards program will...

...SET A FIRM, BUT REALISTIC BUDGET





A successful awards program will...

When it comes to your awards program, marketing is absolutely crucial. After all, if you don't get the word out, who's going to apply? Many organizations make the mistake of thinking their marketing will happen organically and as a result, they get fewer submissions than they hoped.

So be sure to invest some time and part of your budget to marketing. However, even if your marketing experience is minimal, keep this in mind: you already know the necessary information to market your awards program: how it performed in the past, who's applying, who you want to apply, what exactly your program is about, and what makes it unique and interesting for those in your industry.

It's important to also utilize all your marketing resources, so that a combination of these platforms are always working for you to get more and higher quality submissions. You can use: email marketing, social media, advertising, press releases, and your awards website.

**...INVEST IN
MARKETING**





Two reasons organizations run awards programs are:

1. To represent the professional purpose of the organization
2. To further the goals and values of the organization

Whether you're just getting started with your awards program, or are a seasoned veteran, take a step back and ask yourself: is your program aligning with these two reasons? A successful awards program will be focused on what the organization is all about and create an opportunity for others in the industry to showcase their similar interests.

If this isn't happening it can be confusing to people, because they're not sure why exactly your organization is running the awards program it is. This will decrease your credibility and lower the number of entrants you'll receive.

A successful awards program will...

...LINK THEIR AWARDS PROGRAM TO THE CORE VALUES & GOALS OF THE ORGANIZATION





One of the factors of an awards program is to serve as a promotional vehicle for your association. Therefore, it is a significant part of your organization's brand and messaging. Consistent messaging, design and branding are essential to getting the most potential benefit from your awards program.

“Consistent messaging” means carrying over your association's goals and mission into not only the awards, but also into advertising and marketing. This reinforces your organization's purpose and gives credibility to your awards program. In doing so, you're creating trust with people who are already familiar with your organization, by highlighting that your awards program is an extension of that.

One example would be when designing your program's logo, keep some elements of its parent organization in it, like the color scheme. This allows your program to distinguish itself with a unique design, but still hark back to your organization.

A successful awards program will...

**...DEVELOP A
DISTINCTIVE
AWARDS BRAND
THAT IS STILL
ASSOCIATED
WITH THE
ORGANIZATION**





Getting your awards program ready for the opening of your call for entry requires an enormous amount of work. In order to get everything done in time and get it done properly, every awards program needs to have a dedicated, hard-working staff. The best awards programs will have a group of people working on specific goals for the program with specific deadlines, instead of letting a couple people attack the to-do list willy-nilly. This ensures that everything gets done well and in time for your launch, and prevents your team members from getting burned out or going insane.

A successful awards program will...

**...FOCUS
THEIR STAFF
ON THE
APPROPRIATE
TASKS**





A successful awards program will...

Finding the perfect judges for your awards program is essential, as they can be a huge source of publicity for your awards program.

Think about it, having a judge who is well known for being an expert in her industry's field, will greatly add to the value and prestige of your awards program. And on top of the prestige, it also lends legitimacy to your program. It shows that in your industry, your awards are at the top of the game, because not only do you recognize the best of the best, but these entries are being scored by someone in the top of the field.

Look at it this way: If you're running a restaurant in your city and just entered a restaurant competition, would you rather have Jamie Oliver evaluating your entry or someone you've never heard of?

Winning an award because Jamie Oliver thinks your entry was awesome proves to you and your industry that you've got what it takes to succeed. After all, he's at the top of his field, so he should know, right? If someone like Jamie Oliver is selecting winners for this award, it obviously means something.

...FIND
WELL
RESPECTED
JUDGES



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After all the time, effort, and work that's gone in to your awards program you're as ready to celebrate at the awards gala as the winners are. And you should! You and your team definitely deserve a chance to enjoy the fruits of your labor.

But, the work doesn't end there. Truly successful awards programs, don't just sit back and take a break from things until the next awards season rolls around. They analyze their awards program's data in order to understand what worked and what didn't and how they can use that information to make next years' awards even better.

After all, there's always room for improvement, especially if you want to stay ahead of the game in your industry!

A successful awards program will...

**...ANALYZE
THEIR
PROGRAM
EACH YEAR**





When organizations are getting ready for their awards program, one of the struggles they face is organization. Different parts of the program are dealt with on a variety of systems, like emailing submissions, loading supplementary files onto Dropbox, mailing submission packets to judges, and tracking it all in Excel. This can quickly become a tangled mess and more often than not, your awards staff gets overwhelmed and frustrated.

More and more organizations are taking steps to remove these hassles and frustrations from their awards program and they're doing this with awards management software. It provides one online system that tracks, stores, and manages all stages of submission and judging. That means no more spreadsheets, binders, or form-builders. The entire awards process is streamlined and hassle free for entrants, administrators, and judges. By taking out the struggles of the awards process, awards management software can help to increase submissions and give your team more time to focus on other vital tasks.

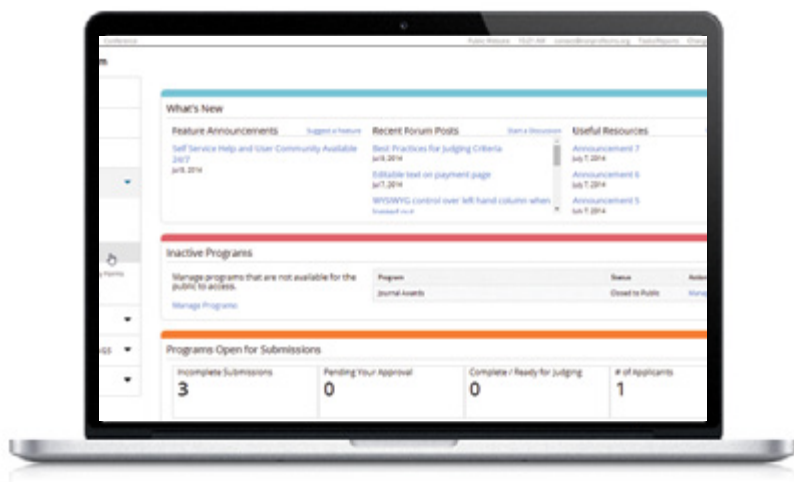
A successful awards program will...

...TIE IT ALL
TOGETHER
WITH
AWARDS
SOFTWARE



CONCLUSION

All of these ten elements help differentiate good awards programs from great ones. Through years of experience the best organizations have learned these secrets (and their benefits) and applied them to their awards programs, making them more successful than ever before. Are you ready to do the same?



REQUEST A DEMO WITH OPENWATER TODAY!

How OpenWater Awards works:

Entries and Judging In One System: Keep it all in one place. OpenWater Awards gives you quick access to both online entries and online judging. No juggling act required.

Branded Site: With OpenWater Awards the awards website looks like your site...no templates, no confusion.

Keep Informed: Confused about confirmation emails, reminder emails and winner emails? We have you covered. OpenWater Awards was designed to keep everyone informed.

Just click the button below and fill out the proceeding form to request a demo.

REQUEST A DEMO TODAY!