

And the Award Goes To...



Your Business Awards Entry Resource:

47 Reasons, Tips and Techniques

By Laurie Garrison

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Introduction

Throughout the year, employees at companies across the country work hard at their jobs. Whether they're tasked with creating products, marketing, sales, accounting, communications or human resources, it takes a team effort for a company to excel in its industry.

Far too often, the hard work and sacrifice of these employees goes unnoticed. But that does not have to be the case.

Regardless of the industry – sports, marketing, healthcare, financial, retail, etc. – there are multiple awards programs available. Many professional and trade associations, as well as business publications throughout the country, run awards programs.

This ebook will explain why companies should submit entries for business awards and how to go about it.

Chapter 1



6 Reasons You Should Enter Your Company for a Business Award

The only way to get the national or local recognition that winning or being named a finalist will bring is to submit an entry.

Here are six reasons you should enter the fray and submit an entry for your company.

1. **Evaluate Your Business Direction** – Even if your company is not chosen as a finalist, the entire process of submitting an entry allows you to evaluate your business direction and practices. You're able to spot weaknesses and identify areas that may need

improvement and areas where you may be excelling more than you anticipated. Submitting awards entries is the perfect year-end evaluation tool.

2. **Boost Staff Morale and Attract New Talent** – Many people prefer to work for a company that's recognized as one of the top in their industry. This recognition acknowledges your employees' hard work and contribution to the company. An award can be a prime recruiting tool to entice the most talented people to choose your company.
3. **Increase Your Company's Visibility** – It can be weeks or months between the time finalists are announced and the winners are crowned. During that time, not only can you promote your status as a finalist, the organization presenting the awards will be doing the same. This is an invaluable amount of free publicity and can be a constant source of inbound traffic to your website and social media pages. If you're not chosen as a finalist, submitting an entry can bring awareness of your company to the people, often journalists or high-level executives, serving on the judging committee. This could lead to the possibility of business referrals or, if the awards program is organized by a publication, your company may now be on the reporters' radar and receive additional coverage.
4. **Increase Your Company's Credibility** – Being chosen as a winner or finalist for a business award becomes a third-party endorsement about the excellence your company is achieving. You can include judges' comments about your entry in your marketing materials. Being named a winner or finalist positions your company as an industry expert or leader. This recognition can inspire confidence in your board; your current customers, who may be more likely to refer you; and your prospects.
5. **Differentiate Your Company from Your Competitors** – National or local recognition can set you apart from your competitors. When prospects are choosing between two companies, that award recognition can be the differentiating factor that tilts the scales in your direction.
6. **Gain a Sales Advantage and Improve Financial Performance** – By aggressively marketing your awards recognition, your company has the potential to achieve more sales, which can result in an improved financial performance. Being chosen as a winner or finalist for a business award is an attractive feature for your sales reps to present to your prospects.

With the thousands of awards programs available, there's bound to be several that align with your company's business and direction.

Chapter 2



5 Tips to Preparing To Submit an Entry for a Business Award

Once you've decided to submit an entry for your company for a business award, the question becomes – where do you start?

Submitting an awards entry can be a lengthy, complicated process, so it's best to set a strategic plan and get an early start.

Here are five tips to help you prepare to submit your entry.

1. **Choose the Best Awards Program for Your Strategic Goals** – Between programs offered by professional and trade associations, cities, states and business publications, there are thousands of award programs available in the U.S. alone. It can be a daunting task determining which program is best to enter. Start by deciding if you want to enter a national or local program. Then find programs that best match your strategic goals. For example, are you trying to attract top talent? Then you may want to enter a program recognizing the best or most friendly places to work. Look at your competitors' websites and see what awards they may have won. Those may be programs you want to consider. Find several programs to enter over the course of the year to give your company the best opportunity for recognition as a winner or finalist.
2. **Review the Entry Requirements** – Once you've selected the programs and categories you want to enter, carefully review each program's entry requirements. In addition to publishing the criteria for each category, many programs publish entry guides to assist you in preparing your entry. You want to ensure your work matches the entry's requirements, particularly the dates of eligibility – not all programs operate on a calendar year.
3. **Review Past Winners** – Every program publishes a list of past winners. But some programs go one step further and publish either winners' entire entries or synopses of their entries. By reviewing this information, you'll have a better understanding of what the judges rewarded, including the structure, style and tone the winners used.
4. **Get an Early Start on Your Entry** – Most awards programs have a long period of time between the call for entries and the initial deadline. The best time to start working on your entry is when the call for entries is announced and all of the requirements and criteria are published.
5. **Put Together the Team That Will Be Working on the Entry** – Your team may consist of the:
 - Awards coordinator or project manager – the person on staff who will be managing the entire entry process
 - Writer – whether you have someone on staff write the entry or you hire an outside awards-entry-writer specialist, that person is central to the process and should meet with the team early
 - Graphics designer – if your program calls for presentation decks, charts or graphs, the designer will need to set aside time to create these visuals

- Videographer – if your program calls for a video, your videographer may need to create something new or edit a pre-existing video to fit into the program's requirements
- Account manager – the person most closely aligned with the campaign or brand that's being submitted

Bring these people together in a meeting or conference call to discuss strategy, writing and creative elements, timeline and specific responsibilities. The process will go more smoothly when everyone on the team knows what they're doing and when they need to have their part of the project completed.

It can take a great deal of time to create an award-winning entry, so you don't want to wait to the last minute and quickly compile something. You want to give your company the best possible chance by being prepared and getting an early start.

Chapter 3



11 Tips to Writing Your Business Awards Entry

As with many writing projects, there is a specific way to write business awards entries that will greatly improve your chance of being selected as a winner or finalist.

Here are 11 tips that will make it easier to write your awards entry.

1. **Follow the Instructions** – As surprising as it may sound, many people fail to follow the instructions laid out in the entry process. It's imperative to provide exactly what is requested. Failure to do so may result in your entry being disqualified before it even makes it to the Judging Committee. Be mindful of limits on word counts, photos, charts, graphs and external links. If you're unsure about an instruction or an element of the entry, call the awards organizers. They're generally more than willing to help people through the entry process.

2. **Know Your Audience** – You’re not writing for your board of directors, the executive management in the C-suite, your customers or even your prospects. You’re writing for the members of the judging committee. These people, often volunteers, may be reviewing 50, 75 or more entries. It’s important to write in a persuasive, conversational manner that will grab and keep their attention. Avoid corporate-speak and industry jargon.
3. **Provide Context** – To encourage entrants to include strategic, statistical and financial information, awards programs often choose judges who are not part of your industry. While you won’t be providing your information to the competition, the result is the judges may not be aware of the nuances of your industry. This makes it important to provide context about the marketplace, the competitive environment, the challenges you faced, etc., so the judges have a better understanding of your results.
4. **Focus on One or Two Big Ideas** – You may have had a fantastic year, but if you try to include all of your successes, you may end up with a superficial entry – providing small tidbits of information on many achievements. Instead, pick the top one or two achievements that are most applicable to the category and discuss them in depth. This will give the judges a better understanding of the full scope of your success. You may still want to list the other achievements, but don’t try to give a full explanation of them.
5. **Focus on What’s Important for the Program You’re Entering** – Are they looking for innovation? Creativity? Leadership? Diversity? A specific campaign? Sales results? This will usually be explained in the criteria. Once you know this, you can tailor your entry to highlight that information.
6. **Show What Business Obstacles You Overcame** – Every company has obstacles in their path. Pointing out what obstacles you faced and the strategies you put in place to overcome them on your way to the successes you’re basing your entry on will resonate with the judges. Conversely, you won’t score any points with the judges by glossing over the obstacles or pretending there weren’t any.
7. **Provide Evidence to Support Your Claims** – In order for any claim to be believable, it must be substantiated. If you’re going to tell the judges you had the best sales year ever, you must include your sales figures from the current and previous years.
8. **Include Statistical and Financial Data** – Judges typically sign a confidentiality agreement, so you don’t have to worry about your finances and results being revealed. If you use percentages instead of hard data, you’re not providing context (tip #3). For example, if you increased the number of clients by 50%, did you go from 100 to 150

clients? Or from 2 to 3 clients? If you don't provide any data, you won't be able to support your claims (tip #7).

9. **Tie Your Results to Your Initial Objectives** – While it's imperative to provide results on your campaign, program or year, you need to give that information context (tip #3) by tying it back to your original objectives. For example, you and a competitor may both have achieved a 75% increase in sales. But if your competitor's initial goal was 75% and your initial goal was 50%, then you vastly out performed your competitor. This will help you stand out from other entrants.
10. **Write Your Draft in a Word Document** – Many awards programs have an online entry portal. For some programs, once you enter your information in the portal, you cannot go back and make edits. Additionally, if there are any technical problems with your computer, your Internet connection or the program's host website, your work may be lost. The best process is to write your entry in a Word document that can be reviewed and edited by your team. Once you have a finished entry, you can copy and paste the information into the entry portal.
11. **Write Multiple Drafts** – When you've completed your entry, you'll want to revise, edit and polish it before you submit it. You'll want other people to review it to find out if you're telling your story in the most persuasive and compelling way possible. This may take several rounds of revisions. Be sure to allow time for multiple drafts so you can still meet the entry deadline.

Don't be overwhelmed by the entry process. If you look at each step as a rung in a ladder, you'll work your way to the top and will soon have a completed entry ready to be submitted.

Chapter 4



7 Writing Techniques for Your Awards Entry

Continuing on our theme from Chapter 3, not only is there is a specific way to write business awards entries, the writing style that is used could make or break an entry.

Here are seven techniques that will help present your case in a persuasive and compelling story.

1. **Write in the First Person** – When you’re referring to your company, say “We” and when you’re talking about yourself, say “I”. This may be a challenge as, in business communications, many people use the third person. The company becomes “it”. This one step will help personalize your message. As we discussed in Chapter 3, you need to

Know Your Audience. You are writing to a group of judges and you want them to connect with you. It's much harder to connect when you write in third person.

2. **Write in a Conversational Manner** – The tone of this book is conversational. This is how you should write your entry. Write as if you're sitting down with the judges telling them your story. This will help draw the judges in and keep them engaged. You don't want to use corporate- or boardroom-speak.
3. **Tell a Story** – Don't just answer the questions on the entry form. Weave your answers together so you're creating a complete story over the course of several questions. When the judges have finished reading your entry, they should be able to see the:
 - Beginning – what was the problem or challenge you had to overcome
 - Journey – what was your process in solving this problem/challenge
 - Ending – what was the resolution

As with technique #2, this will help keep the judges engaged.

4. **Write Clearly and Be Honest** – You have a limited amount of space available to make your case, so choose your words wisely. Answer the questions and tell your story completely, but succinctly. Judges can tell if you're padding your answers. You also want to be completely honest. If you ran into problems with a campaign, be upfront about it. The judges will want to know how you overcame the challenge. Exaggerating the truth, conjuring up facts or misleading the judges are great ways to be kept off the list of finalists.
5. **Use Testimonials/Social Proof to Back Up Your Claims** – How did your program resonate with your audience? In addition to presenting facts and statistics, judges like to hear from your audience. This can be in the form of testimonials, Facebook and Instagram posts, tweets or emails. Social proof aids in telling your story (technique #3) and writing in a conversational manner (technique #2).
6. **Do**
 - Use contractions
 - Use short sentences
 - Use bullet points
 - Use specifics
 - Personalize your copy by referring to people as “who” instead of “that”
 - Focus on benefits, not just features
 - Use subheads in longer copy to make it easier for your judges to read

7. Don't

- Make claims you can't prove
- Use jargon
- Use the words “unfortunately” or “however”
- Use a complex word when a simpler one will get the point across
- Use the same entry from a previous year with updated information
- Use the same entry you wrote for a different awards program or different category within the same awards program
- Wait until the last minute to write your entry

The key takeaway is to tell your story in a persuasive, compelling way that will keep the judges engaged throughout the entire entry.

Now that you've written your entry, have your team review it. As we discussed in Chapter 3, it can take multiple drafts before your entry is ready to be submitted. Once you're satisfied with your entry, submit it and wait for word that you've been shortlisted!

Chapter 5



8 Reasons to Hire an External Business Awards Entry Writer

While our previous chapters will help companies that want to go it alone, sometimes the best course of action is to hire an external awards entry writer. In going this route, you'll want to look for a specialist who has achieved a high level of success with clients being named as winners or finalists.

Here are eight reasons to hire an awards entry writer.

1. **Insights** – An awards entry-writing specialist has insights into the awards process that most people don't have. This includes what the judges are looking for from award-worthy entries.

2. **Perspective** – When you're writing about your own company, it can be difficult to gain the right perspective. You're so close to your company and the project, you may not realize the best approach to take.
3. **Strategy** – Combined with reason #2, having the right perspective, an awards entry-writing specialist will take a strategic approach to your entry. Knowing which achievements to feature and what to leave out are key to the entry-writing process.
4. **Time** – It takes a great deal of time to write a competitive entry. Having someone on your staff write the entry takes them away from their core responsibilities. That person may be more inclined to rush through the process to get back to their main role. So while you'll get an entry to submit, it may not be able to compete with the other entries.
5. **The Chore Factor** – Many people tasked with writing their companies' awards entries dread the process. As mentioned in reason #7, it's a time-consuming project that becomes an add-on to their regular responsibilities. The result may be an entry that doesn't get shortlisted even though you've had an outstanding year.
6. **Discretion** – Awards entry-writing specialists work behind the scenes. Unless you choose to inform them, the judges won't even know you didn't write your own entry. Additionally, the information you provide your writer is held confidentially.
7. **Writing Style** – As we discussed in Chapter 3, writing a business awards entry for judges requires a different writing style than you may use for your Board of Directors, executive management, staff, clients or prospects. It can be difficult for in-house writers to adapt to the persuasive writing style that resonates with the judges.
8. **Specialization** – Just as your clients hire you because you're a specialist in your field, so too should you hire someone who specializes in writing awards entries. While you may have many good writers on staff, they may not be skilled at writing awards entries.

Due to the confidential nature of awards entries, an external writer won't be able to provide you with awards entry samples. But you can review samples from other projects to see if you like their writing style. You should also schedule a phone call to discuss their awards entry-writing approach.

Chapter 6



10 Tips on Working with Your Business Awards Entry Writer

Now that you've made the decision to bring in an external awards entry-writer specialist, you want to set up a method of working with your writer to give your company the best opportunity to win.

Below are 10 tips on working with your awards entry writer.

1. **Bring your writer on board as early as possible.** As we discussed previously, most awards programs have a long period of time between the call for entries and the initial deadline. The best time to get started on your entry is when the awards program announces its call for entries. When you bring your writer into the process at that time, you'll be able to plan and implement a strategic approach to putting together your entry. This will give you plenty of time – for your writer to write the entry, for your staff to review it and for your writer to make revisions. Remember, depending on the complexity of the entry, it can take the writer anywhere from 10 to 40 or more hours, spread out over multiple days or weeks, for research, writing and revisions.

2. **Identify one point of contact.** You may have several people involved in your entry process, but select one person who will be the conduit between your company and the writer. This will make the flow of information easier and quicker.
3. **Provide your writer with all of the background information available.** This is the foundation from which your writer will be working. Since your writer should have no problem signing a confidentiality agreement, don't hold back select information – including financials. Even if the information is not used directly in the entry, it may give your writer a valuable point of reference.
4. **Plan to have an extended phone call with your writer after the background information has been reviewed.** After reviewing your background information, your writer may have questions or points that need to be clarified. This is where she'll dive in and go beyond the information provided. She'll want to resolve any questions before moving on to the writing process.
5. **Give your writer access to company personnel.** In addition to talking to the primary point of contact, depending on the award and category, your writer may want to interview other people from the company. This could be the account manager on the campaign, the marketing director, etc. This will allow the writer to go deeper than what may be provided in the background material and what your point of contact may know.
6. **Respond quickly to any questions your writer may have.** Additional questions may come up during the writing process. In order to keep the process moving along, you'll want to get the requested information and respond quickly.
7. **Acknowledge receipt of the draft.** Although it may take your team a day or two to review the draft, keep the writer apprised of its status. Let her know you've received the draft and when you expect to have revisions ready.
8. **Coordinate your review process.** Have each person that needs to review the draft do so and return one marked-up version to your writer. This should be coordinated by your point of contact (tip #2). You don't want to give your writer multiple copies of the revised draft and have her decide, if there are conflicting changes, which ones to make.
9. **Reach a final version of your entry before deadline day.** Remember, your external writer is not an employee. If the deadline to submit an entry is midnight, don't expect your writer to be available at 11:00 p.m. for last minute changes. It's best to have your final version completed at least by the day before the deadline. Additionally, if there are

any technical issues with the entry portal, this will give you time to get them resolved with the awards program coordinator.

10. **Schedule a follow-up call.** Once you've submitted the entry, talk with your writer about the process and discuss other awards programs you may want to enter so you can make sure you can get on your writer's schedule.

Even though you're outsourcing the writing of your business awards entry, it will still take some involvement from company personnel. Using these steps will help the process go smoothly.

Chapter 7



Business Awards Entry Checklist

✓ **Determine your company's goals**

- Are you looking for local or national recognition?
- Are you looking for publicity or the best opportunity to win?
- Do you want to highlight a specific aspect of the company? Or a specific achievement?

Answers to these questions will help you determine which programs to enter.

✓ **Put together your awards plan**

Based on your answers to item #1, put together a list of awards programs, and categories within those programs, you want to enter. This will make the process smoother for your team.

- ✓ **Review the entry requirements for each program**
Before starting the entry process, make sure you're eligible for the program and category you want to enter.
- ✓ **Get an early start on your entry**
The best time to start working on your entry is when the call for entries has been announced and the category and criteria have been published.
- ✓ **Put together your entry team**
Possible team members include:
 - Awards coordinator or project manager
 - Writer
 - Graphics designer
 - Videographer
 - Account manager
- ✓ **Gather together all the information needed to write the entry**
This includes sales material, video, financials, etc.
- ✓ **Have select members of your staff on standby**
This could be for interviews with your writer or to review the first and second drafts.
- ✓ **Review the draft**
Review and revise the draft with your writer until you have a finished version.
- ✓ **Gather additional materials for the entry**
This could include photos, charts, graphs, video, external links, etc.
- ✓ **Submit the final entry**
This includes the written entry and all other elements identified in the program and category criteria.

About the Author

Laurie Garrison specializes in writing awards entries for businesses in all industries.

She has more than 30 years experience as a writer in the sports industry. Laurie had previously spent 10 years running a business awards program, 12 years running a national postgraduate scholarship program and 12 years running an individual awards program with regional winners. She has also served as a judge for a national marketing awards program.



Laurie has sat in hundreds of awards committee meetings and reviewed thousands of entries. She knows what works, what doesn't and what judges want.

Her clients have been chosen as winners and finalists in multiple awards programs.

Contact her at Laurie@LaurieGarrison.com for help in writing your awards entry.