

Business Awards aren't just about Winning!

WHY ENTER?

- To improve brand awareness and positioning in the market
- To take an opportunity to review your business while completing the application form
- To have your business peer reviewed
- To promote your success to a wider audience
- To involve your team in understanding and celebrating what makes your business truly special.
- To share your success with colleagues in the industry and your customers.
- To promote client testimonials

Completing the applications.

The application process forces you to review, and look in on all aspects of your business. For a period of a few days to a week – you're outside of your business looking in. This allows you to reflect on how far you've come, appreciate whether you've met the goals you set for yourself, and where you need to go.

The applications themselves are also great at highlighting areas of weakness in your business. You are often asked if you have a documented plan in place (in areas such as business strategy, marketing strategy, sales, workplace safety & health, social impact, business continuity) and whether you plan on executing that plan into the future. Understanding areas of weakness presents a great opportunity to improve.

The trick to making the most of that, of course, is whether you implement change within your business to address those weaknesses. There's no point understanding what you need to improve if you don't go out and do it.

1. Apply for awards that are relevant to your business
2. Use them as a way to build your brand, and position yourself above your competitors
3. Use the application process as a way of reviewing your business, your progress and your goals
4. Apply the changes to improve your business
5. And have fun

TIPS

1. **Tell a great story**

Writing about your business gives you the opportunity to bare your soul. Show your personality, and what makes you unique. Embrace the opportunity to be quirky, funny, serious, and write in a way that takes the reader on a journey that allows them to truly understand where you have come from, and what you have achieved. Sure you can state facts, but tell them in an engaging way.

2. **Answer the question**

It sounds obvious right? But often the questions are asking for specific topics to be addressed. A question may have multiple parts –

“Demonstrate a structured approach to start-up, with clear objectives and associated results. In addition, highlight how you have engaged best practice and innovation to achieve start-up success.”

or provide hints as to what you should consider when answering the question –

“Detail any community involvement, whether for the good of one or more people or the entire community. (Involvement can be past or present. Examples may include active service or memberships in community organisations, honours and awards received for community involvements or any other action to which the community is the beneficiary.)”

Make sure you answer the questions being asked – this is the criteria that you are being judged on. Remember how you used to write essays at school? It’s the same thing.

3. **Answer every question**

I was chatting recently with a respected business leader who is often asked to judge award submissions. He noted with some sadness that he often sees people write fantastic answers for almost every question – then mysteriously forget to answer one or two. It leaves him with no choice but to award zero points for the blank answers. In his words – *“the difference between getting in and missing out at the top is a matter of points”* so when you forget to complete a question, you’re guaranteeing that you will not only fail to win, but fail to be considered as a finalist. Answer. Every. Question.

4. **Use the word limit**

Each question typically has a word limit. You can write a short answer, but are you doing your business justice? Remember that each question can be judged independently from others. If all that a judge has to go on, to understand and associate with your journey is what is contained on that page – then it is critical for you to make the most of the word limits to communicate as clearly and effectively as possible.

5. **Focus your message**

Once you’ve written your initial answers – go back and focus the main message. Are there unnecessary words in there? Can you simplify the language to be easier to read? Have you written filler that you could replace with statistics, testimonials or proof backing up your answer. Is the overall theme of your answer consistent with what is being asked? Make sure you hone your message.

6. Make several applications

If the Awards have many categories, then enter several at the same time. You have already done much of the hard work on the first application which can be amended or added to, to enter another award. Awards can include, SME of the Year, Customer Delight, Innovation, Employee engagement etc.

If you are shortlisted

- Use social media repeatedly to promote you are a finalist. Your own FB, Linked In and Twitter obviously but also your local town/ village websites
- Add a finalist banner to the bottom of your e mails and to your website (even if you do not win keep the finalist logo on your website, it shows you are a winner anyway)
- If you are a retail outlet use the shop window and inside to promote that you are a finalist.
- Contact local free magazines for advertorial promoting that you are a finalist.
- Do a press release to say you are a finalist

If you Win!

- Do all of the shortlisted above!
- Celebrate with staff. It is their Award!
- You now have a winning application so look for other awards to enter using what you have learned. Especially National Awards like the Federation of Small Businesses, the IOD and many banks. These often have regional finals as well as the national finals.
- Remember that most businesses are too lazy to enter awards. Just a few hours spent on an application can be rewarded with many thousands of pounds of free advertising.