

Award Winning Advice !

June and July are the heart of the **award season** and if you are considering entering a submission at the moment and are wondering if it is worth the time and effort, then perhaps the following 10 tips and hints* might help you!

(*based on observation as a judge of learning innovation submissions over the past 7 years!)

Is it worth the effort?

For organisations implementing learning innovation internally Towards Maturity's latest research has shown that external success in awards shows a direct correlation to internal take-up of e-learning. Many organisations are struggling to engage learners and managers but we found that those organisations in the highest quartile take up are three and a half times more likely to report external successes in awards back to the business than those in the lowest quartile.

For providers – award successes win customers. A survey, commissioned by award entry consultants Boost Marketing and undertaken by market researchers Shape-the-Future, found that of the 400 business people who took part, 81% admitted to being influenced by awards when buying training/HR services for their business. The research also demonstrated an increasing appetite for entering awards despite the economic climate. This fact was reinforced by 76% of respondents agreeing with the statement “awards are important for generating business or improving the value of a brand”.

10 Top tips for creating award winning submissions:

1. **Don't be put off at the first hurdle** – I speak to many people who have done some really innovative work for their sector or size of business but continually compare themselves with others with different

circumstances and feel that they just don't stand a chance. Most judges are looking for submissions that will help move the industry on and inspire change in others, this is not just a role for the big guns!

2. **Do your research** - select the right award category for you. Read the judging criteria carefully and consider how your story stacks up. Award winners will have made every attempt to provide solid evidence that they have met each of the judging criteria set down for the category. The criteria are not chosen lightly and will reflect areas critical for sustainable e-learning success in any organisation. The award winner's story will be more than a one hit wonder and will contain lessons that others can learn from and rely on. Tangible evidence and proof in each area is a critical foundation for an award winner – more on that later!
3. **Don't waste words** -follow the free advice! – most awards organisers provide clear instructions on how to submit entries with suggestions on word count, structure and the type of evidence that they are looking for in a successful submission. Word count is important as it is often the first point of selection, particularly if an award is heavily subscribed. Judges might not even get to see an entry that exceeds word count let alone read it.
4. **Stick to the story** – when an award has clear judging criteria, make sure that your submission clearly addresses each of the areas that the judges are considering, preferably in the order suggested! This really helps the judges when they are comparing several entrants at the same time and will increase your likelihood of being shortlisted.
5. **Demonstrate business impact.** Historically, an award winning programme might have been able to rely on its technology innovation, its reach and its take-up to take away the top prize. Now, winners are showing more evidence on the outputs of learning initiatives rather than the inputs. As a result, judges will now look for award winners who are driven, first and foremost, by the need to support their business's goals and are to explore the impact of their learning on those goals. This approach raises the credibility of the sector and the

award process helps us transition from technical training geeks to valid business partners (see example below).

<p>Using surveys to boost your evidence base.</p> <p>– an example using Health and Safety</p> <p>Click here for more ideas from Chris on measuring value and evaluating impact.</p>	<p><i>Chris Robinson at Boost Marketing observes that most award categories want to know the business need behind the learning solution, the intervention and the success. When it comes to evidence of success, awards tend to want to see evidence that follow the Kirkpatrick models. So for example for an award submission for a health and safety course might include feedback on learners reaction (level 1), improvements in first time pass rates and scores (Level 2).</i></p> <p><i>Good submissions would also include feedback on the core business drivers behind the programme e.g. reportable incidents have dropped by 5% since the programme was introduced (level 4 measures that are already in place via normal management systems).</i></p> <p><i>However most organisations have not gathered information on cause and effect up front – the extent to which behaviour has changed as a result of the learning (level 3) - which is particularly powerful in award submissions. Chris advocates the appropriate use of surveys in gathering quickly gathering data in this area – a simple question like ‘can you recall an incident where this course has helped you avert an accident can provide a powerful case for cause and effect.</i></p>
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6. **Consider carefully how you position cost efficiency savings**
 – this is particularly important in submissions that illustrate innovative use of learning technology. As judges, particularly in this day and age, clear evidence of improved efficiency (& I would include time and cost here) for your solution is always welcome so that we can compare it with previous approaches you have used. BUT it is not the whole story. We would also be on the lookout for the ‘so what’ factor - how the new

efficient approach delivered the same or more business impact in your organisation? This type of information will separate the winners from the also rans!

7. **Bullet the killer facts.** Time is short for both you and also for judges and as a result several short bullets outlining facts and figures from your organisation will pack a stronger punch than a long anecdote. Equally minimise supporting documentation and evidence and only include that which is absolutely necessary to illustrate your main points. If you include web addresses or CDs to review – highlight the key features that you want judges to consider in the main text (& don't forget clear instructions on how to log on – including a short/clear URL and relevant passwords).
8. **Make the most of face to face time** – if the award includes a face to face presentation with judges then make sure that it packs the punch that you need. Again take note of any feedback you have received - & be prepared to dig in deeper. If you are a provider, where possible bring your client along with you to talk about the solution and, more importantly, the business impact of your solution. Keep to time and leave plenty of room for questions (it's fascinating for judges to meet with participants in such a focused way and we always want to find out more!). If it is not possible to bring your client in person, then they can still contribute by embedded video or audio in helping you deliver your story
9. **Be inspired by others.** At Towards Maturity, we regularly publish the stories of award winners and those shortlisted for specific awards to inspire others and you can check out <http://www.towardsmaturity.org/tag/award-winning/> for examples from successful candidates over the past 4 years and we can also help you think about how you present your own story. If you need specific help in choosing an award, feedback on your likelihood of success and putting your award together then specialist help is also at hand from award entry specialists at Boost Marketing.

10. **Inspire others.** By this stage you will have created a succinct and useful story around your successes, backed by compelling evidence – it shouldn't be for the judge's eyes only. Again our research has shown that organisations that are the most successful in implementing learning technologies with their staff are much more likely to regularly communicate those successes to staff line managers and supervisors. (Communicating success to senior managers is important too but does not have the same impact on success as engaging line managers).

Share your story

A good award submission will also really inspire other organisations who are just setting out on a similar journey in their own business and at Towards Maturity our interest in awards is to find motivational examples, backed by strong evidence that will help others on their journey. Whether you are shortlisted or not, we would always love to hear from you and welcome the opportunity to share your story.