



how to win awards

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Startups struggle to establish recognition and credibility. Winning awards can help small businesses achieve both and lead to long-term growth. An award can validate your company's success and bring well-deserved prestige to your small business or startup. From the benefits of applying for awards, award application tips, to promoting awards you've won, here are some helpful tips for savvy entrepreneurs....

The Benefits of Awards

Never underestimate the power of winning of awards. Awards can:

1. *Attract Venture Capital* – Investors and the banking community review awards lists and rankings to identify high growth businesses.
2. *Woo New Customers/Clients* – People want to buy products/services from companies with proven track records. Awards give you a leg up over the competition.
3. *Enhance Employee Recruitment/Retention* – Everyone wants to work for an award-winning organization.
4. *Open Doors* – Journalists, influential business people, investors, and/or government officials serve as award judges. Your award application increases their awareness about your company, your leadership strengths, and your products/services. Business award ceremonies afford you rare opportunities to rub elbows with prominent industry leaders. And winning an award can ensure immediate recognition in local media.

awards validate success

BENEFITS				
APPLICATION				
PROMOTION				

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Award Application Tips

Identifying the right award programs and acing award applications is an art form. If you don't apply, you can't win. A good place to start looking for contests is AwardSync.com, a site that helps groups publicize their awards. Other tips?

1. *Start Local* – Apply to awards from local organizations or local chapters of national organizations. You'll have a greater chance of winning and victories under your belt for bigger and better award competitions.
2. *Target Industry Awards* – Identify awards sponsored by industry associations that highlight your expertise. Apply for awards that leverage your company's strengths.

3. *Do Some Detective Work* – Choose awards competitions carefully, applying to awards that optimize ROI (return on your investment). Approach award submissions as you would any other important company project. Scour award websites for more information and ideas about what to highlight in your award application. Determine the specific criteria, submission word count, and submission deadline. Research the awards program judging panel. Look at past award winners and their submissions.
4. *Ace the Award Application* - Judges determine winners by the information submitted and the wording of the award submissions so make your application as compelling and detailed as possible. Use strong words and adjectives. Back up claims with facts and supporting material. Share measurable, quantitative achievements such as percent growth, number of employees, new-client wins, new-product launches, growth in the customer base. Mention endorsements that you've received from customers, media, and bloggers. And be sure to proofread your application.

Promoting Your Awards

Once you've won an award, don't forget to promote the win to increase the return on your investment.

1. *Issue A Press Release* – Share the news about your victory. A search-engine optimized (SEO) press release with keyword rich copy will improve your ranking on Google, Yahoo and Bing.
2. *Announce Victory Via Social Media* – Announce your win and post links to the award website and/or your award press release on Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn.
3. *Use Award Logos* – Display the award logo prominently on your website and in your marketing materials. Add the phrase “award-winning” to your website and marketing copy.
4. *Showcase Your Awards* – Ensure that employees and customers see the award. Frame it, display it or feature it in your office or at events.

As any entrepreneur will tell you, in the end it's about the work, not the awards you get for doing the work. But winning awards brings big benefits and can help you build and sustain your business. Compared to the cost and benefits of advertising, awards are one of the most efficient and effective means of marketing.

About the Author:

Kirsten Osolind is CEO of RE:INVENTION, a nationally-noted marketing consulting firm that helps companies sell more of their products and services. A Duke MBA and a former Entrepreneur Magazine monthly columnist, Osolind's board leadership experience includes: the International Stevie Awards for Women in Business, the National Leadership Council for the National Association of Women Business Owners (NAWBO), Springboard Enterprises Venture Forum Midwest, and various planning committees as an elected member of the Economic Club of Chicago.