

The Rewards of Awards

BY SUZANNA CARDASH, CREATIVE DIRECTOR OF THE ADVERTISING SHOP, WHICH WAS PRESENTED WITH AN AWARD FOR BEST MICRO-BUSINESS 2008 BY THE FEDERATION OF SMALL BUSINESSES IN PARTNERSHIP WITH BUSINESS LINK.

When I was younger and greener I was regularly awestruck by those who had won prestigious business awards. I assumed the companies proudly displaying them must have been nominated by a string of admiring clients.

Not so. Actually, however delighted they are with your services, one's clients are always far too busy running their own businesses and seeking their own accolades to worry about yours. So realistically, and however much you've pleased them, the most you're likely to get is a glowing testimonial to use on your literature and website. And don't get me wrong – that's good too.

But if you want to adorn your workplace mantelpiece/gently rusting filing cabinet (delete as applicable) with some fancy etched crystal or a shiny trophy on an engraved plinth, there's really only person who should do it for you: check out your mirror.

Deciding whether or not to enter is a daunting task in itself, particularly when you're laden with British reserve. Self-effacement must fly out of the window if you're to convince the judges that your company is worthy of distinction. And unless the award you crave will be won on public votes and you're confident that you can coerce family, friends and clients to play the game, there are plenty of hoops to jump through and stringent criteria to meet. Word on the street also says that companies that sponsor certain awards mysteriously win them year after year, votes or not, so you might want to factor those odds into your decision to make your bid for stardom.

But let's assume you opt to go for it. What next? Faced with a blank screen or list of business-related questions from a faceless, nameless jury, how do you strike the right balance? Blow your own trumpet too loudly and you risk sounding conceited or, worse still, downright arrogant; hide your light under a bushel and you'll never get the award in your hands because the judges won't know what you've done to deserve it. Then, of course, there's the question of style. You don't want your responses to be so long that those reading your entry feel their eyelids drooping; neither must responses be so brief that weighty stones are left unturned. And the biggest challenge? You don't know who's competing against you and how many weapons they're using. It's astonishing that anyone runs the race and indeed, many apparently give up at the first hurdle and don't submit their entries.

Although I have plenty of awards to my name for creative work, the prize we've just won is The Advertising Shop's first for the company itself, so I make no claims to be an expert in this field (although I intend to work on this). But if you're in business and think you deserve some tangible evidence of your brilliance and passion for customer service, here's the trick as far as I see it: read the questions carefully.

That's it. Because the clues within them tell you exactly what the judges want to know – no more and no less. Then answer each one honestly, fully but without repetition or embellishments, making sure you address all key issues carefully. And perhaps add a bit of gentle humour if you think it's appropriate. Sounds simple, doesn't it? But actually it's all too easy to get carried away and write reams in the vain hope that something – anything – will impress.

At any rate, that's what I did. My first stab at the entry form took a novel approach. Literally. The sheer length of my answers made it more of a book than a nomination. Fascinating for me and my mum. Not quite so hot for the judges or, for that matter, the trees. Making each answer informative but succinct takes time, and the delete key on my Mac was showing signs of duress after several hours of writing and re-writing.

So was it worth it? Well let's just say that the moment when we were announced as the winner of the FSB/Business Link B@NES award for Best. Micro-Business 2008 was one of the highlights of The Advertising Shop's first four years.

We've always known we offer clients an unpretentious environment and friendly advice coupled with years of big-agency experience, targeted creative ideas and outstanding copywriting and design. And now, hey, third party recognition!

Surely a beautiful piece of glass can't make up for the long, challenging and often thankless hours of hard work that many of us face when we're running our small businesses? Well weirdly, it sort of does. To walk on to the stage at the Guildhall amid cheers and applause from other members of the local community was amazing. And every day since, being able to display the award reminds me that our belief in ourselves – even when things have been tough - has been vindicated by a team of respected business people after we took a risk and pitted ourselves against many other worthy and extremely talented competitors.

In response to the obvious question, no cheque was attached. Just a bouquet of flowers, a bottle of champagne and the award itself.

But that, as the ads say, is priceless.

To celebrate their award The Advertising Shop is offering ten Bath-based businesses a free one-hour consultation or critique of their marketing materials. To find out more or book an appointment, please call 01225 447474 or visit www.theadvertisingshop.com

Suzanna Cardash with FSB award



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