

# HOW TO WIN AWARDS WITHOUT DOING GOOD WORK.

If you secretly despise people who win ungodly amounts of advertising awards, you are not alone.

Because for every Tracy Wong or Neil French in the world, there are hundreds of grumbling malcontents who would like nothing more than to see these talented lads, as well as the entire creative department from Goodby, get hit by a bullet train.

But what if we offered you something to help tip the cruel hands of fate in your favor? That's right. A way to give your work, as wretched as it may be, an edge on the judging table.

Well, that's exactly what we're proposing. For as you will soon learn, this 2,840-word circular is literally teeming with tips that you can start using right away. But first, a few words about this sickness we call awards shows.

## **1. THIS SICKNESS WE CALL AWARDS SHOWS.**

As we're all painfully aware, ad people don't get to sign their ads.

For creative people, this is intolerable. So intolerable, in fact, that in the old days, a bunch of these people banded together to form the first advertising award show. God bless them.

But, without knowing it, what started out as a nice little forum for ego-gratification has snowballed into a full-blown addiction for thousands. Perhaps you are one of them.

Who can blame you? Simply put, win a major award and people will start recognizing your work. Which will bring calls from headhunters. Who in turn can get you more money. Better assignments. Leading to more awards. Still even more money. A better office. A bigger house... (It's enough to make you want to join a 12-Step Program, isn't it?)

## **2. THE EFFIES, THE ADDYS, THE NUBBIES & THE WUBBIES.**

Given the fact that award shows are an addiction, it should come as no surprise that there are countless unscrupulous piranhas out there willing to feed your habit (and take your money) by offering meaningless shows.

You can avoid all this nonsense by taking heed our handy little show guide:

CA – No medals. No statuettes. No splashy dinner ceremony. And yet CA is probably the most prestigious show in the country. Why? Well, as Tom Monohan so deftly put it, "It's the thinnest show book around."

The One Show – This is a big one. "Pencils" are awarded to gold, silver and bronze winners. This is the show that made Fallen McElligott famous. Perhaps, it will do the same for you.

The New York Art Directors Annual – A prestigious show, but for some reason, not as prestigious as the other two shows. Writers typically have a gripe with this show. If you'll

notice in the credits, they're always listed fifth; after art director, creative director, designer and photographer. Hmmm.

The Clios – Hah!

The Cannes Film Festival – Typically, funky TV spots from Sao Paulo, Brazil and Milan, Italy do well in this show. Occasionally, though, a few Yanks manage to sneak in.

Tellys, Addys, Effies... – What is it about shows ending with the suffix “ies”? With exception to Portland’s “Rosies”, these shows carry about as much weight as Twiggy. In other words, save your money.

### **3. WHAT? HAVEN'T DONE SQUAT ALL YEAR?**

Let's say a call for entries shows up, and you haven't got anything decent to enter. Obviously, time is short. Here are a few hasty field-expedient strategies that might help.

First off, you have to find a client

Birth announcements always make for good ads. Heck, you don't even need to have the brat yourself. (Note: Due to the high success rate among cut-rate hacks in this category, many shows have banned these types of entries, so check the fine print.)

In the '80's condom ads were a hit. Nowadays, offbeat clients are still a safe bet. Good ones include tattoo parlors, casket manufacturers, gynecologists and dog psychiatrists.

But if you can't find any clients, we heartily recommend you just start concepting some ads in one of these funky categories, then look for clients to fit your concepts. This is called Minneapolisizing.

### **4. HOW TO CATCH A JUDGE'S EYE.**

Judges are a tough lot to peg. What works for a particular group of Cannes judges might not necessarily cut it for One Show judges. It's a bit of a subjective crap shoot.

But not to worry. After sifting through dozens of award show annuals, we have compiled an air-tight list of tricks and hints that have worked in the past. Good luck.

Nudity is hot right now. Especially for the Europeans. Full-frontal shots of male and female genitalia are quite the rage at the moment. As are ads including naked, wrinkled-up, saggy old women. (See Archive magazine, Vol. 1, 1993, pg. 23.)

Whenever possible, work dog poop into your concept. In a pinch, cat poop will serve as an acceptable substitute, but the canine variety is usually preferable. (See the '88 CA, pg. 20. Or the '91 One Show, #44.)

Cutting down Jerry Della Femina has proven quite successful. He's bald, fat, funny looking and surprisingly available for photo shoots. (See the '86 One Show, #358. Or the '92 CA, pg. 116.)

Here's an oldie-but-goodie. Account executives and clients are the ideal targets. You can capitalize on this by creating house ads or promo pieces that poke fun at them. If you can work both into the same piece, all the better.

Or how about this? Try to get project work (e.g. matchbooks, napkins, flyers) for neat accounts like Nike, Porsche or maybe Harley Davidson. Judges will invariably assume that the work came from equally neat agencies.

## **5. TIPS FOR WRITERS.**

Long copy ads have proven to be a gold mine for writers over the past few years.

Will this continue? We can't be sure, but if you hurry, you might just be able to ride on the coattails of this trend.

And while you're writing long copy, make sure to throw in a healthy number of parenthetical asides. (If you don't know what that is, you're reading one right now.) The judges will automatically think the ad was written by David Fowler or John Robertson. Not a bad thing.

With regards to radio. Whenever possible, try hiring a British voice-over talent. Coupled with a dry-witted English-style script, you might just sucker the judges into thinking the spot actually came from Britain.

Have you ever considered teaming up with an art director who's into all visual solutions? If he or she is any good, you could win scads of awards without even breaking a sweat.

And finally, for print, if you're really desperate, try reusing old award-winning headlines. Two years ago, we wouldn't have endorsed this, but during the past 12 months a surprising number of old headlines have resurfaced. It might be worth a shot.

## **6. TIPS FOR ART DIRECTORS.**

We're sorry to report that the trend of setting type from bigger to smaller has run its course. However, hand-written type is staging a strong comeback. (The harder you make it to read, the better.)

If you're fresh out of ideas, try a process called "blending." It works something like this. Look through a few award show annuals and pick the three or four looks you like best. Then simply mix and match the varying styles to suit your needs.

Here's a curious observation. Have you noticed that some of the best art directors around have weird names? It's true. Guy named Houman, Jelly and Cabell have all been wildly successful in the shows. Coincidence? Perhaps. But if you're stuck with a boring name like Bob or Ned, try changing it to something strange. Names like Brule, Niamh or Sakol should do nicely.

## **7. GETTING YOUR ADS TO RUN.**

Once you've amassed a slew of concepts, you'll need a quick way to run your ads. A cheap way to do this is to convince your clients to start their own magazine. If they won't go for it, start your own.

If you've got outdoor, try this tip: Build a scale model of a billboard with your ad on it, and shoot a photograph from ground level alongside a real freeway. After a while the judges may figure it out, but by then you'll probably already be in the show book.

If worse comes to worse, and you can't find a way to run your ads, at least make it look like they ran. This can be accomplished by doctoring up phony insertion orders on your Mac. (Hey, we're not endorsing this practice, just stating something that desperate people actually do.)

## **8. ENTRY DEADLINES. HOW TO DELAY THE INEVITABLE.**

Are entry deadlines a reality, or simply a myth created by the various award shows to stir up panic at agencies across the nation?

We lean toward the latter. For the most part, it seems, the deadlines aren't really deadlines at all.

To see if a show's deadline is for real or not, try this test: A few days before the "deadline", give the show office a ring. Usually you'll find that the deadline has been pushed back anywhere from two to seven days. There is usually no fee for this type of extension, which can occur two or three times before the people in charge of the show feel they've gotten enough entries to balance their budget. Then, and only then, the actual deadline is set in stone.

The bottom line? Don't sweat it, you have plenty of time.

## **9. FUNDING YOUR AWARD SHOW HABIT.**

There's an art to prying more money from your agency's purse strings for award shows. It all starts with the check request. (Note: Before submitting the check request, make sure it's padded with an extra few thousand dollars in entry fees. More on this later.)

Soon after your agency's president gets the check request, you will undoubtedly hear various muffled obscenities shouted from behind his door. "What?!! This is eight times that of last year. How did this happen?" Here's where you've got to schmooze him.

First try this line, "Hey, your partner approved this months ago." If that doesn't work try this, "Under your leadership, our work has gotten eight times better than last year."

If he's still got smoke creeping up his shorts, it's time to bring out the big guns, "If we enter any less than this, our competitors will sweep the award shows, word will get out, they'll get more clients, our clients will leave and in six months we'll be out of business."

It'll take a day or so, but he'll come around. Then all you need to do is come up with some sort of compromise. Which brings us back to the padded check request. Just delete the

entries you really didn't want to enter in the first place. (Note: If you are a creative director, do not make the deletions a democratic process within your creative department.) See how nicely all this is coming together?

#### **10. PRESENTATION. YOUR SECRET WEAPON.**

Superior looking reprints can often help a bad concept on the judging table. Or at least that's what many creative people think.

Example. We know of one famous creative director who sears by spot-varnished with a minimum 2" border. He's so anal about this, that he was rumored to have taken a swing at a production manager because she forgot this mandate.

Over at the Ball Partnership (a place that actually does good work), they make it a point to make their reprints as large as possible. "Table presence," they're fond of calling it.

Another good thing to remember is that a quality 3 ml. non-gloss laminate will take away from the fact that you're merely entering high resolution color outputs that you printed in the back office.

#### **11. JUDGING. THE ULTIMATE CRAPSHOOT.**

What happens when you lock a smattering of people into a hotel meeting room with 12,000 or so ads to judge?

A lot of people are still trying to figure this one out. Because, what happens behind those closed, hallowed doors is always a mysterious and fascinating process.

Some people, and rightly so, take the whole thing very seriously.

CA for instance. Judges are forbidden from even speaking to each other when they're reviewing work. This is a good thing in our opinion. It is better to have silence than allowing a few loud mouths to spoil the judging.

In England, they take the process even more seriously. If you doubt this fact, look through the photos of judges in any British D&AD Annual. You'll notice that a high percentage of them are dressed as if they were going to have an audience with the Queen. Maybe that's why they think their advertising is so much more culturally superior and enriching than ours.

#### **12. THE NIGHT OF THE SHOW.**

This is it. The night you've waiting for all year. The night you'll get to parade up on stage and thumb your nose at all those who work elsewhere. The night you'll see your salary increase 150%. The night you'll become immortal in the world of advertising.

But more likely, the night you'll walk home empty-handed bitching about how stupid award shows are. If that's the case, don't feel glum. Hundreds of creatives go through this year after year and survive quite well, usually at the big mega-agencies in Detroit.

But if, by chance, you do capture a prize, here are a few tips to help you milk the most out of your winnings:

When consoling friends who didn't do so well, say something like, "Hey, your ads should've won!" (Even though they know inside you're secretly saying "Ha, ha. I won! I won! Neener, neener, neener.")

If given the opportunity to make a speech, say something trivial or thank the client for being a genius.

And always carry your award in your left hand. That way your right will be free to shake your future boss' hand after you accept that new job you're bound to be offered within minutes.

### **13. HOW TO DISPLAY YOUR AWARDS.**

If you work in an agency, you should by all means display them in your office. It's best to be nonchalant about it, though. (One Show Pencils make excellent doorstops and Belding Bowls are great spittoons.)

The only time to be overt in displaying awards is salary review time. Just make sure the actual review process takes place in your office.

Now, if your name is on the door, it's best to display your biggest, most magnificent looking awards in a prominent place. Like the lobby. Clients will be impressed. Even if they have no idea what the hell you won them for.

Which brings up an age-old question. Do clients even care about awards? Is the Pope Mormon? Clients live in their own world of frustration, resentment and bureaucracy. Just be happy you live in your world and not theirs.

### **14. LAST RESORTS.**

What, still no awards? Take heart.

In reality, awards don't really matter. All awards do is allow creatives to bask in a bombastic, self-congratulatory glow. (And if you actually believe that, why are you still reading this?)

But if you're still looking to soothe that bruised ego of yours, there are a number of things you can do.

Maybe it's time for a career change? Truck driving and bartending schools abound. Check your yellow pages.

Win your agency bowling party trophy. Take home your softball team trophy. Or go down to your neighborhood trophy shop and buy a few of your own.

There must be something you're good at, isn't there?

## **15. CONCLUSION.**

Sorry, but in this business, nothing is ever concluded. Like we said, award shows are addicting. It's all a downward spiral. But we hope this will help turn the tide for you.'

If you've had a run of bad luck, keep trying and happy hunting.

And if you're already winning heaps of awards, then damn you.