Inside the judging chamber: 17 tips for crafting impressive awards submissions

Since inception in 2015, the Search Engine Land Awards have maintained some of the highest submission requirements and strictest standards among digital marketing awards programs.

The application process requires submitting details around campaign budget, metrics, strategy and tactics, tools and resources used by entrants, in addition to laying out a compelling case study within the submission limitations.

As a result, assembling all of the required materials and supporting data is a team effort and time investment, though one past winners and finalists have concurred is well worth the effort.

About our panel of expert judges

While it’s common across many marketing awards programs to have a judging panel of peers (often, competing agency

employees or consultants) for campaign focused categories, we have taken a different approach given the sensitive nature of the data required in our program.

Our panel of judges are comprised primarily of the Search Engine Land editorial staff (employees and contractors of our parent company), who are responsible for the primary task of reviewing and scoring all of the campaign focused categories, in conjunction with representatives from Google and Bing.

All judges are required to adhere to strict confidentiality standards in order to maintain privacy of sensitive data, recuse themselves from judging any submissions with a conflict of interest or bias.

17 tips to create an award-worthy submission

What impresses the judges most:

1. What impresses me is when people have clearly aligned the tools and features they're using to the goals they want to achieve. It sounds simple, but the entries that are goal-oriented rather than focused on tactics are always strongest. – *Ginny Marvin*
2. When entries have a new take on a situation or feature and talk about into how their strategy is different from the norm, and demonstrate why is their strategy or tactics are award-worthy. – *Brad Geddes*
3. When submissions are succinct but concrete in their campaign summaries, show examples (i.e., ad creative where relevant) and use straight-forward English rather than marketing speak. – *Greg Sterling*
4. When applicants are able to go beyond percentages of increases and show tangible results of how the campaign directly impacted the bottom line of the business. Also, it helps to put results into perspective – so instead of

simply saying: “Before the campaign, the client was only bringing in this # of leads, clicks, etc – but the campaign raised that number to XXX” offer an example of how the campaign impacted the business overall and not just the analytics. – *Amy Gesenhues*

5. When entrants share a lot of technical data around their case studies. – *Barry Schwartz*
6. When entries prove their point with stats, graphs, and especially screenshots of GA/PPC Engine/ other paid search tech providers. Too many just say, “we increased business [some huge number]” with no way to back it up. – *Brad Geddes*
7. It really impresses me when entrants show how they retooled, revitalized [a campaign] or did something extraordinary to achieve extraordinary results. Or, how they outfoxed a competitor in a clever way – anything that shows how extraordinary results came from really extraordinary work. – *Matt Van Wagner*

What judges want to see more of:

1. I love to see orchestration – when teams use tools, tactics and features in interesting ways to solve problems and execute on a strategy. – *Ginny Marvin*
2. Images from the campaign and data illustrating concrete outcomes. Calling out what was innovative or especially significant or effective about the campaign. – *Greg Sterling*
3. Stories around how the campaign was unique from other campaigns the agency and/or client had implemented in the past and the tools used to implement the campaign. Also, did you learn anything from the campaign that you’ve been able to introduce to other campaigns/clients. Were there any unexpected benefits that played out during the course of the campaign? – *Amy Gesenhues*
4. I’d love to see more data from our entrants that

pinpoint successes or failures in their case studies. – *Barry Schwartz*

5. Entries that show the challenges they had to overcome that are outside of the norm (the scrappy startup against goliath, goliath showing it can innovate still against the scrappy startups stealing market share, etc), which might be market conditions, a business change, etc. – *Brad Geddes*

What entrants need to stop doing:

1. It's great to test new betas, but having access to betas doesn't make you a great marketer. Be sure your entry doesn't lean on implementing the newest beta features as evidence of running a successful campaign. That's not enough. – *Ginny Marvin*
2. Padding their discussions, using marketing jargon or bloated writing. I'd also like to see less self-congratulation. – *Greg Sterling*
3. Using language like world-class, best-in-class, etc. to define your campaign. Talk specific numbers and results. Using flowery language to build-up the campaign takes away from actual/quantifiable results. (In other words, let the numbers speak for themselves.) – *Amy Gesenhues*
4. Not differentiating on strategy or tactics. While it's important that we see 'best or standard practices' are in place in an account, we are also looking for a detailed explanation of strategy that truly differentiates the work from others… For example, an account testing new ad extensions / formats or a landing page that breaks convention but delivers impressive conversion data. – *Brad Geddes*
5. Claiming increases of 200% when you really mean 100%. A 100% increase means you doubled your number. Going from $100 to $137 is not a 137% increase. It is a 37% increase. I'd like it that when you say ROAS, you show the formula you used to calculate it. A 1000% increase

> is almost always ignored as a metric. It is the opposite of impressive – it is suspicious. It is most likely you were doing very little before and now you are doing a little more than nothing. – *Matt Van Wagner*

How Search Engine Land Awards applications are scored

In order to provide complete transparency into our judging process, we wanted to share greater detail around how our awards categories are judged and scored.

All submissions are individually reviewed and scored within our secure online platform by the judges, with the first round of scoring producing a shortlist of the top-rated submissions.

Each required element of the application is rated on a 1 to 10 scale, 10 being exceptional, with incremental points (.25, .50, .75) allowed. Our scoring process is weighted objectively to avoid bias and places an emphasis on verifiable results, innovation and best practices.

Most of the campaign and in-house team focused categories in our awards program are weighed heavily on **measurable results, innovation and creativity** and expertly implementing a smart strategy utilizing b**est practices**. Other factors that account for a small portion of the final score include points and deductions for degrees of technical difficulty, expertise demonstrated, and effective use of budget and resources.

The individual awards categories place an emphasis on thought leadership and overall industry contributions as part of the innovation and creativity score.

Once all entries have been submitted and judged, the top five highest-scoring applications will be “shortlisted”, and all applicants will be notified. A second round of review takes place for the top five scores in each category, and additional

review is required for final scores within .5 points of other submissions within the category. Ties, albeit incredibly rare, are subject to an additional round of scoring on results and innovation.

The Early Bird entry deadline for the 2020 Search Engine Land Awards is July 24, 2020 at 11:59 pm PST. The ***FINAL entry deadline to submit is July 31, 2020, at 11:59 pm PST****. Review the categories for 2020 and begin your application here.*

Opinions expressed in this article are those of the guest author and not necessarily Search Engine Land. Staff authors are listed here.

About The Author

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