

## ***Top 10 Tips for Compiling a Successful Totem Award Entry***

### **1. Do your homework! Find out as much as you can about the awards program.**

- ? Get lists of past winners. Many competitions have lists of winners online now.
- ? Look at previous entries; try to get copies of the entry summaries. Some of these are online too.
- ? Talk to colleagues who have entered.
- ? Find out as much as you can about the judging criteria. Try to get a copy of the judging scoresheet if you can. (Many competitions are reluctant to release this, but they should not be. You have the right to know on what criteria you will be judged.)
- ? Decide if this is the right competition for you based on the criteria. For example, if results count for 35 percent of the score, and you don't have results yet, wait till next year.
- ? Read articles about how to win awards. PRSA, IABC and *PR Week* all have articles available online.
- ? **Go to the awards ceremony** and spend time looking at the entries. DON'T blow it off just because you didn't win.
- ? **Serve as a judge.** This is the BEST way to get a handle on what makes a winning entry.

2. Choose the right category and the right competition. For example, if your only results are media coverage, Totems are not the right one for you.

3. Make sure the person preparing your entry has a clear understanding of public relations and of your program.

- ? Understand the elements of public relations planning -- ESPECIALLY objectives: **measurable behavioral change** among your target audience.
- ? Understand your program's value and be able to explain it. Answer the question "So what?"

4. Gather materials as the year progresses. For example, don't try to compile a clip report an hour before the deadline; be sure to get a screen shot of your Web site BEFORE the company gets bought out and the site no longer exists; and so on.

5. Plan ahead. Allot at least 3-10 hours for each entry, depending on the complexity (some can take up to 40 or more). Think about the details BEFORE the last minute. Gather the entry binder supplies early; start filling out the entry form as you begin writing the entry.

6. Take a step back and look at your entry as an outsider:

- the project - your company - our area - the industry

Get outside feedback. Ask someone not involved with the project to review the entry.

7. READ THE DIRECTIONS CAREFULLY AND FOLLOW THEM!

- ? Restrict your summary length to the page limit, or all that work is wasted when you're DQ'd.
  - ? Note when you must submit multiple copies of the summary, entry form or even – gasp – the binder.
- Note: Totems have required three copies of the entry form and no artwork on the cover of the binder; check these details!

8. Make it as easy as possible on the judges. Remember, **the judges are your audience now.**

- ? Start your entry summary with a one-sentence or one-paragraph description of the program purpose and results.
- ? Study what criteria the judges will use to judge your entry. Set up your entry summary to follow these criteria, and name your sub-heads to follow.
- ? Point out what's significant and different. Did you exceed expectations? SAY SO!
- ? Provide more than what they ask for -- details, documentation – but keep it clear and simple.
- ? Always provide the big picture; explain the context and relevance.
- ? Explain your challenges. If you succeeded against strong odds, your chances of winning are better.
- ? Organize your binder in an orderly, logical manner. Label EVERYTHING -- collateral doesn't talk.

9. Make sure your entry looks like you put time and care into it. It should be flawless. Proof it.

10. If you don't win this year, learn from your mistakes and try again next year.