GALA DINNER AND AWARDS CEREMONY
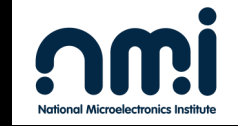
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Manchester

WHAT JUDGES WANT

How to create a winning TechWorks Award entry

Competition is always tight at the TechWorks awards, with 12 winners announced on the night and 9 categories open to entries*, judges have a lot to weigh up and many high-quality entrants to choose from.

The awards are judged by a panel of industry experts, with each giving their time voluntarily to consider entries for one or more categories.

So, what makes a winning entry? We sit down with two former judges - Pete Davy, an independent business development consultant to the semiconductor & electronics sector, and Jon Older, a director of business development at ITDev - to discuss this and help you get the recognition you deserve.

Since 2011 the Company of the Year award has been awarded 7 times, no-one has won it twice.

Can it happen this year?

What is your process?

Pete Davy: You've got a limited amount of time to go through it and you make a decision based on what you see in front of you, not on anything else, so entries have got to make it easy for judges.

I look at the criteria which TechWorks have said are important for the category, and I use this to grade each award.

Jon Older: I tend to turn the criteria into an Excel spreadsheet and assess each entrant against each with a score of 0 to 10.

I've judged several different awards, and the number of times I don't get answers to the set criteria; or haven't been given enough data to quantify or justify why their company, product, innovation, etc, is just frustrating.

My process is that I'll go through them all, then read them all to make sure that I have a good feel for every single entry. Then I'll go back through each one in detail and score against how they've answered the criteria.

And then I also take a level of comparison with the other entrants.

PD: The first year I did it, when the judges got together to discuss the entries, it really surprised me how in common our choices were for each category.

How close are the entries?

PD: There tends to be three classes, a handful (possibly a third) of entries will have been rushed and submitted with little thought, a third are good, and a third are exceptional and hard to separate from one another.

And these will often shine. It's a bit like if you're hiring someone for a new job, the great CVs can leap out and make you want to have a look at them in more detail. And the same is true for the awards.

JO: As Pete says, you might get twelve submissions and two thirds of these are good enough to merit going through in detail, with a handful of exceptional ones

Just one company has won the Disruptive Innovation category more than once since 2011
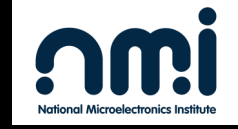
What do you look for, and what are the common mistakes?

JO: It's about respecting the value of the award. The common mistake is when someone just fires off something to either tick a box or maybe win if they're incredibly lucky. If you're respecting the value of the awards, you're going to put time and effort into a submission. And yet in the past I've seen company presentations, product presentations and product shots. In one case a simple product flyer.

PD: It's prestigious to win any award, but amongst your peers at TechWorks I think it should be more prestigious, and the CEO should be passionate about it. I like seeing something where you read it and you can tell there is real passion. It's pretty obvious when some things are rehashed press releases, or slides from a corporate presentation with one or two added."

JO: I think Pete summed it up nicely. It is a level of passion for the product or innovation or whatever it was. That typically isn't conveyed with purely factual information like a data sheet.

An entry needs to understand the basics of a story. For example, if someone's bringing a new product to market you want to hear a bit of background: about the market landscape; the perceived gap in the landscape; which companies are already there; what made you think there was an opportunity. And then you might want to hear a bit more about the challenges about how the opportunity went ahead. And then you want to hear about the idea, backed up with factual information as to why it will be successful and why Product X by Company Y or Z will not succeed Of course, it can't just be a pure story. There must be some factual, quantifiable basis for this. Use the award entry to build credibility and establish facts.

PD: I do remember last year one really shone out with how they'd written it and structured it, which made it easy for me as a judge to consume it and make my assessment. as you want.

How long should an entry be?

JO: It should be long enough to create a story with paragraphs or chapters to address each of the criteria. Doing this shows it has been considered… three pages would be the level of expectation for me.

PD: If you get something which is many slides, with a whole load of attachments you just look at it and think 'I ain't got the time, I'll lose the will to live.' Conversely, you'd have to be amazing to write an entry that's less than one side and demonstrate what makes your product or company special quantifiably, with the passion shining out.

Four sides should be the maximum, including graphics to help me understand. If you've got a short video it can help, and a rough smartphone-shot one that illustrates the point can often be more powerful in showing the nub of the issue than a slickly-produced corporate one, which will have been created for a different audience.

How do you deal with sensitive information?

PD: I've seen companies hold back sensitive information.

It's difficult to get the balance between the ones who say 'we've got to protect our IP' versus the ones who just say 'trust me I'm a doctor'. For the award, very simply I do need to see some evidence.

Everything supplied to TechWorks is confidential and judges are asked to delete the material after making their judgement.

We have some entries that highlight what is confidential, and others that say we can't divulge information due to NDAs. The more they can share with us the better because it makes it real, it avoids it looking snake oil. If, on the other hand, every bullet they say 'we can't share this because it's confidential', they won't have established their credentials well enough.

So companies need to work out that balance.

JO: A great example of this came a couple of years back, with one company supplying a whole lot of information in confidence purely for the application and we deleted it afterwards. The information was evidential and gave reasoning's why they should be award winners. It wasn't a standard print of datasheet they get on the internet.

5 companies have been ranked Best Supplier in a survey of peers—Compugraphics, KMG Ultra and Multi –Lab have won it twice

Do SME's or blue chips have an advantage?

PD: It's a level playing field when judging this and just because a company is a corporate, with a lot of resources, doesn't mean they'll have a better chance of winning versus the SME or start-up who's just getting going. It's about sharing all the credentials to demonstrate that you're a worthy winner.

That said, if you're entering too early into a category such as emerging technology you still need to be able to demonstrate growth in terms of revenue and team size.

What would be the key advice you would give an entrant?

JO: Answer the questions. Back up your statements with data. Take effort to write a bespoke application.

PD: Make it easy for the judge. As a judge you make a decision based on what you see in front of you. Make it easy for us to mark vs the category's criteria.

The Techworks Awards are open now, with applications closing on the Friday 16th September - to enter visit https://techworksawards.com/apply-for-an-award-2022

Or for further tips visit: https://techworksawards.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Annual-Dinner-Awards-Entry-Kit.pdf

* Three categories are not open to entry: TechWorks Company of the Year and TechWorks Contribution to Industry Awards are decided internally; the NMI Manufacturing Supplier of the Year Award is decided by member survey.

TechWorks