Buffalo Niagara Chapter PRSA

Paterson's Seven Steps to Excalibur Gold

By Jeff Paterson | 70-time Excalibur Award Winner

1. ***Let the work be your guide, young Jedi.*** First decide what to enter. Rather than thinking what fits into the award categories (campaigns or tactics) start by thinking about the best work you did last year. You can always find a way to fit it into a category.

2. ***And your point is?*** As you identify which tactic or campaign you'll enter, focus on the ones that really accomplished something. It can be tempting to think of projects where you used a fun or creative communication tool, but you won't have a shot if your creativity didn't lead to measurable results.

3. ***We may be living in a material world, but most judges ain't material girls … or boys.*** The judges are in a hurry, so they will concentrate on your two-page summary and only browse through your supporting materials. The summary is what will decide your fate. If something is important, make sure you deal with it there. Then attach enough supporting materials to make your entry look thorough and detailed. Think of it this way: the judges will form a judgment based on your case study. Then they'll look to your supporting materials to confirm their initial judgment. If they've decided they love your entry, don't give them a reason to change their minds by not including sufficient supporting materials.

4. ***Outlines. They're not just for chalk anymore.*** It's not easy to remember all the details of something you worked on a year ago. If you just start writing, you'll find yourself omitting important chunks of information. Your best approach is to use the judging criteria to outline—and draft—your entry. It will give focus and clarity to your work, and the judge will be able to verify you have addressed the criteria of the entry.

5. ***Tell us a story, O wise one.*** Take it from someone who has been a judge: for pure entertainment value, some award entries rival a root canal. So set your entry apart by telling a story. Engage the reader in a narrative where you're the protagonist solving some challenge or working some miracle. Put the judges on your side!

6. ***Sweat the small stuff.*** As communicators, we should be held to a high standard of visual and textual integrity. And be assured that misspellings, poor grammar and sloppy writing will be held against you, even if they're (their? there?) not part of the official scoring.

7. ***Find a reviewer who knows nothing.*** The judges won't be familiar with all the ins and outs of your project. So, you'll want to guard against information gaps as well as jargon. To help you avoid making assumptions about how much the judges know, give your draft to someone for review – and make sure it's someone who doesn't know a lot of details about the project.

And remember … you have to be in it to win it!