



Awards 101

Everything you need to know to run a successful awards ceremony

Awards are very easy to do badly, leaving sponsors disappointed and attendees exhausted. Done well, they inspire a whole industry and produce margin boosting profits. It is all about careful planning and disciplined execution.

1. Anatomy of an awards ceremony

- **Awards categories** – minimum of 12 to make money, maximum of 21 to avoid people poking their own eyes out with dessert forks (if you have really done an incredible job selling categories and go over 21, present an opening 3 – 6 awards with the starter, then have dinner and do the rest with dessert and coffee; or, for the truly award-tastic typically magazine-legacy businesses who sell 50+ make it a winners only event)
- **Judges** – the great and good of the industry with whom sponsors will want to network, from whom nominees will want jobs, to whom the industry listens, follows and retweets
- **Ceremony** – somewhere cool or fabulous, in the heart of the market or a destination; pre-dinner drinks (sponsored), VIP drinks (sponsored), entertainment (Britain’s Got Talent style); MC (comedian, personality or industry veteran who gives a short set / speech and then either reads the nominations or welcomes the presenter to the stage); three course dinner; after awards band / casino / secret after party location (sponsored)
- **Photography and videos** – photographer takes step and repeat photos of guests arriving, winner pictures, videographer records short interviews with every winner and sponsor
- **Sponsors** – headline sponsor, one sponsor per award category, reception and entertainment sponsors. If you sell naming rights make it a minimum of a three-year deal

Categories

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2. The economics

- Your entry fees should be used as a means to drive early entries by judicious use of early bird and discount offers
- Table sales should cover the cost of the event
- Your SpEx sales are your profits. Expect to be able to sell 75% of your awards categories. Use judges and media partners to present unsold categories.

3. Who does what?

- The **show director** sets the prices
- The **producer**:
 - > chooses and runs the judging panel(s)
 - > writes the description and criteria for each award for the website and brochure
 - > proposes the shortlist to the team
 - > manages the judging process of the shortlist
 - > writes the awards script for the night (including phonetic pronunciation as needed)
 - > writes the copy for the awards guide and winners magazine
 - > briefs the MC on the industry, attendees and winners
- **Sales and product** agree the awards categories [criteria: commercially viable AND editorially sound] and judging criteria
- **Technology** shortlists the awards entry and voting system e.g. Cvent, Capterra, Awardsforce, for executive sign-off; is there on the night with laptop and printers for last minute support
- **Marketing**:
 - > develops the brand including the trophy design and web cards for announcements and congratulations
 - > builds the website (entries, judging and results)
 - > drives awards entries including producing the awards brochure, with the complete categories guide, entry process and judges
 - > produces the sponsorship prospectus
 - > liaises with sponsors to amplify awards and presence
 - > manages judges involvement marketing program
 - > writes and sends out the short list press release
 - > creates social media buzz (pre, at and post awards)

- > sends out the shortlist and attendee emails (being sure to include an add to calendar button)
 - > manages table sales
 - > manages the app downloads and usage (need 75% downloaded before evening for full engagement on the night)
 - > briefs the design company to create the step and repeat board, the on-site signage, stage set and award PPT template
 - > works with the AV company to produce the opening sting and all “on to the stage” music
 - > produces “finalist” and “winner” print assets and media badges
 - > manages the photographers, interviewers and videographers on the night
 - > writes and distributes the winners press release and review of the night
 - > edits and posts the ceremony gallery
 - > edits and posts the winners videos
- Delegate **Sales** sell tables to short listed companies, whole tables and half tables only, no single seats
 - **Sponsorship Sales** sell all non-table sales inventory ie headline sponsorship, awards categories, reception and entertainment, app inventory, awards catalogue/guide ads and winners magazine; and manages sponsors



■ Ops:

- > Books the venue, the F&B, the entertainment and the MC
- > produces the trophies
- > builds the app
- > collect judges' photos and bios, and sponsor logos and descriptions
- > hosts judges judging day(s) / virtual if necessary
- > creates and manages the onsite running order
- > ensures that AV company has the position of all winners tables marked in the running order so can turn camera and spotlight on them
- > develops and distributes the table plans
- > prints and sets-up signage, step and repeat board, triangles with app and wifi details, table plans, menus, awards catalogue and winners magazine and any paid for inventory such as logos on napkins and business cards in glasses
- > manages the budget, F&B, venue, the entertainment, the ticketing and the AV
- > works with marketing on the table design and decor
- > produces the nominee and winner slides to the template
- > ensures that everything runs smoothly on the night
- > sends post show thank you notes to sponsors with print ready picture of presenting the award and video link; sends winners their photos, videos and print ready / digital "winner of" assets

4. The timings

- - 11 months book venue
- - 8 months strategy and planning meeting
- - 7 months start recruiting judging panel
- - 7 months save the date as soon as have half a dozen impressive judges
- - 7 months start selling sponsorship
- - 6 months announce awards and open nominations
- - 4 months agree shortlist of nominations for lifetime achievement award
- - 3 months announce categories shortlist and start selling tables
- - 6 weeks meet with judges live / virtually
- - 6 weeks invite family of lifetime achievement award winner as surprise guests
- - 1 week finalise stage set
- - 2 weeks send app download instructions
- - 1 week finalise sting
- - 1 week brief MC
- Live tweeting
- Midnight winners live on website
- +12 hours social media winner posts and responses (being sure to tag individuals)
- +24 hours headline and reception sponsor re-books
- +1 week winner / sponsor thank you's, photos and videos
- +1 week attendee emails and photo gallery link
- +1 month follow up interview with lifetime achievement winner

5. The venue

- Entrance branding
- Reception / drinks room
- VIP drinks room
- Large **seating plans** on either side of *each* door way into main room as well as by the cloakroom and the entrance to the drinks room (alphabetise)
- **Stage set** (steps on either side for the presenter to come on one way and off the other; steps in the middle for winners to run up; two podiums, one for the host and one for the presenter; three strong branded photograph points: behind the MC, behind the presenter and centre stage for winners)
- **Venue décor** (check carpets, wall paper and height of ceiling)
- **AV** – opening sting, PPTs nominees and winners, VoG (for shortlist OR welcome to the stage name of presenter whichever has more room for name errors OR for additional details about why the winner won as they walk to the stage if a large venue), camera feed/relays, roaming camera to follow winners from floor to stage
- **Tables** – check before booking whether they have tablecloths to match brand colours, venue centrepieces so you can skip the floral budget and use their candelabras, check chairs and see whether you will need to cover them or you can save money by avoiding covers and ties. If you have flowers on the table make sure they are high enough or low enough for people to be able to converse across the table

6. Judging

- It is vital to be transparent about the judging criteria
- Ensure that the judges feel absolutely bought into and responsible for the results; they should be accountable to the industry
- The Lifetime Achievement Award tends to excite the most criticism. Be sure that you have the buy-in of the industry influencers. Look at your selections over the years and be conscious of the optics

7. Staff on the night (your own)

- Front of house greeters (who can then double up in roles below)
- Person to check off VIPs have been photographed in front of step and repeat board (who can then double up as trophy presenter)
- Person to collect the presenters (two awards before the one they are presenting, be sure they have a table plan with presenters highlighted)
- Person to greet presenter, hand them the envelope, check that they know how to pronounce the winner's name, remind them to walk off the stage using the steps on the other side, go with winner to press room
- Person to hand out trophy on stage to the presenter once they have read the name of the winner
- Person to collect winner and presenter off the stage and take them to the press room
- Person to manage videographer
- Person to live tweet (have winner cards pre-prepared and ready to post)
- Two table hosts per judges table
- Sales staff to manage sponsors
- Admin staff to manage F&B, AV and logistics
- CEO / Board of your own business to add star dust

8. Staff on the night (vendors/partners)

- AV staff
- VoG (normally from AV company but check quality)
- MC
- Photographer
- Videographer
- Interviewer (of winners being videoed)
- Entertainment

9. To ensure a seamless night – top tips

- Staff run through the day before with all timings and reminder of appropriate attire
- Send attendees a calendar invite with the location
- Update the invite with a link to the table seating plan an hour before the event
- Add the table seating plan to the event app
- Make it easy to tweet from the app
- Have the event hashtag clearly marked on the stage set
- Brief the MC fully on the make-up of the audience. Send the table plan ahead so that s/he can research individual companies. Insist on a bespoke / tailored turn, not a standard routine
- Have walkie talkies / ensure all staff are on a what's app group
- Check sting and slides on-site at least 3 hours before ceremony begins
- Have MC there an hour before the event to do an AV run through
- Offer sponsors an AV run through
- Use an autocue or if budget is really tight have multiple copies of double spaced, colour coded, large font scripts
- Include phonetic spelling of any difficult company names; in particular check with sales team that you have the correct pronunciation of any sponsor
- Have FoH staff alert sales when sponsor(s) arrives
- Have FoH staff alert producer when judge(s) arrives
- Have FoH staff alert CEO / board member when industry VIP(s) / outstanding achievement winner arrives
- Start moving guests from drinks reception to dinner 20 minutes BEFORE you need everyone seated
- Plate starter and have it waiting on tables
- Encourage awards sponsors to pre-purchase a bottle of Champagne for the winning table and have it delivered as they return to their table
- VoG while dessert is being served, 10 minutes BEFORE main award ceremony will start
- Ensure wait staff know when they need to have served ALL desserts for the awards to start
- Have response plan for any complaints
- Have after dinner party sponsor thank host and invite everyone to the next stage of the evening

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