



Position Paper The Role and Importance of Packaging Competitions and Awards



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Introduction

Many WPO member organisations run packaging competitions or awards in their own countries and the WPO itself also organises schemes. These are mainly focused on industry, although an increasing number are organising student awards and there are a few schemes for younger school children. In addition to nationally based competitions, there are also some regional ones and through WorldStar and WorldStar Student, the WPO organises global competitions for both industry and students which accept entries from those who have achieved awards in qualifying national or regional competitions. The WPO has been organising the WorldStar Awards for many years enabling companies to match their own innovative packs against others from elsewhere and through this the quality of packaging across the globe is enhanced. Although the WorldStar Student awards are much newer, they are equally important to the industry and consumers as they help to attract new and exciting talent to packaging.

There are several issues that this position paper seeks to explore. First, what is the purpose of such schemes, secondly, what is the difference between an *awards scheme* and a *competition*, and finally the need for integrity, openness and transparency in the organisation of competitions and awards.

The Purpose of Packaging Awards and Competitions

As indicated above, competitions and award schemes target different groups and this discussion will therefore be divided into two sections. The first looks at the general importance of these schemes and secondly at the importance for different groups.

Although little research has been carried out into what competitions and awards schemes achieve for individuals and organisations, most people are likely to agree that they primarily stimulate and recognise achievement. For a company or other organisation it can improve their position in the market place resulting in increased sales, or enhancing the ability to attract good recruits. Achievement can increase morale amongst those successful participants and to a lesser extent, the organisation as a whole.

However, it must also be acknowledged that participation is not without its downside and risks. Focus on preparing for entry is likely to be time consuming with the possibility that it can detract from other, perhaps more important, activities. For this reason, careful consideration needs to be given by an organisation before it commits the time and other resources needed to participate with a reasonable prospect of success. The risk of lack of success or underachievement also needs to be recognised as this can impact not only on those directly involved but also on customers and potential customers. Demotivation and disillusionment are very real possibilities for those who do not succeed, especially if close competitors are more successful

For these reasons, before entering an awards scheme organisations ideally need to be clear that:

- Participation fits in with overall organisation strategy or priorities
- The necessary resources are identified and committed
- A PR strategy is clearly defined and resourced
- Clear support from senior management is established e.g. ' with a senior manager acting as a internal sponsor for the team involved
- Management of success and/or failure is recognised and planned for

The importance for different groups.

For companies, participation can help to:

- Drive innovation through enhanced focus and effort on packaging development
- Provide a measure for benchmarking company talent against national and international competitors
- Build or further develop teams in the company through working on the entries
- Enhance the internal profile of packaging vis-a-vis other parts and functions of a company
- Provide a focus for promotion and marketing to customers and others
- Reward staff for their achievement e.g. through a bonus or attendance at an awards ceremony.

For students participation can

- Turns young people on to the industry by bringing them into close contact with an area they may not previously have considered
- Can give students industry contacts or even direct employment opportunities by bringing them into contact with sponsors, the packaging press and others
- Identify a pool of young talent for companies and a way of recognising creativity
- Help provide parity with other competing career possibilities that may be perceived as more desirable
- Provide opportunities for a realistic curriculum experience

For schools again participation can offer advantages. It can provide:

1. General awareness of the role of packaging in society and appreciation of its complex relations with the environment
2. Opportunities for teachers to use something that all their pupils will have direct experience of as a vehicle for learning
3. Opportunities to work with different materials that are at the junction of pupil's lives and the packaging industry
4. Pupils with ideas for possible future career interest
5. Opportunities to build school/industry links through interaction with sponsors and others

Competitions or awards?

What are the differences between a competition and an awards scheme?

Competitions have a “first past the post” format with additional recognition to those in second and third and perhaps other positions. The advantage of this approach is that it is simple, easy to understand and there is a single clear “winner”. The disadvantage is that winning is not recognition of objective quality, but rather quality only relative to the others that have taken part in the specific competition. So the “best” entrant one year may not even be in the top group on another occasion. This means that there is always a winner irrespective of the quality of the entrants.

Awards on the other hand are usually given against criteria that should be established prior to judging taking place. The advantage of this approach is that there is recognition that success is more likely to be an indication of quality against a pre-established benchmark and that, if the criteria for success remain the same, quality should be more consistent over time. The disadvantage is that establishing the criteria can be a long and detailed process with the possibility of disagreement within those setting the standards, those entering and also between the two groups. Judging criteria often comprise different elements and not only is there the problem of defining and agreeing what these should be but also determining the comparative weighting between the elements. With awards, it is possible to have a large number of winners or indeed none at all.

Competitions and integrity and transparent procedures

Regardless of the type of scheme, procedures for entry, judging and the awarding of prizes etc to those who are successful are imperative. These procedures also need to make clear the use that can be made by the competition/award organisers of entry images and other details.

Information about the judges the scheme also needs to be made public and they have to be clearly qualified and provided with clear guidelines or even training in the process. It is also advisable that brief but essential details of the reasons why they arrive at their conclusions are kept. It is increasingly the case that unsuccessful entrants ask for feedback especially if they have committed extensive resources into submitting an entry and if there is a substantial entry fee. Again entry procedures need to specify whether or not reasons for lack of success will be given and the extent of any dialogue that the awarding organisation is willing to enter into.

It is also of vital importance that there must be no chance of a conflict of interest between the scheme and the organisation running it. If there is a suspicion that the results can be directly or indirectly influenced in the interests of the organising body, the value and integrity of the scheme and the awards are likely to be questioned. Allegations of a conflict of interest are also possible if financial sponsorship to support the competition/awards scheme is given. Sponsorship is an essential element in the financing of many competitions and care needs to be taken when raising sponsorship to make clear that

this does not entitle the sponsor to any say in decisions about winners, or where it does that this is made public and transparent.

Lastly, the procedures also need to it make clear that the decision of judges is final (even if they are wrong!)