



**GUIDE**

**How to write a  
winning award  
entry ...**

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# How to write a winning award entry ...

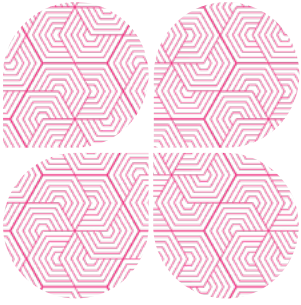
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## Introduction

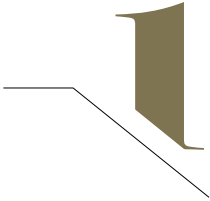
So, it's the deadline for the Big Awards next week. You mentioned it to your marketing director months ago, who passed it to the intern who sent a vague email to your PR company. With not much to go on they've pulled an entry together which has been stuck with the client for a month. On top of this, they've now taken out all the interesting bits and you've discovered there aren't any good photographs of the site. Still, the competition probably isn't that good, is it? You must stand a good chance.

Winning industry awards isn't a matter of luck. If you're going to spend time and money entering an award scheme, then it's worth planning it properly and producing the best entry you can. This short guide, written by former awards judge Cathy Hayward, takes you through the process.





# This short guide takes you through the process.



## Choose your award

There are dedicated award programmes for the facilities management sector and you should certainly consider these. But you should also think about the impact you're trying to make. Do you want to raise your profile in a particular sector? It might be worth looking at awards for service in that sector – for example, healthcare, retail, law, financial services, manufacturing, education, or the public sector.

Are you working outside of the UK? Consider entering a European or global award programme. Or maybe you want to demonstrate your work on CSR through winning an award from your local community or region. Think carefully and don't always go for the obvious awards programme (see FM and related award programmes on page four).



## Decide on the category

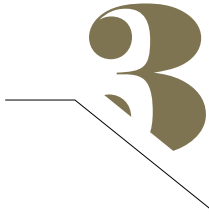
Once you've decided where your focus should be, choose the most suitable category for your project, team or individual. Consider choosing newly introduced categories which typically have fewer entries and steer away from popular categories (such as customer service and environment) unless you have an absolutely brilliant story to tell. They tend to be vastly over-subscribed. If in doubt, ask the awards organisers which categories typically have fewer entries.

When deciding what to put forward, choose a project, team, person or innovation which has genuinely broken new ground. If partnership is the theme can you demonstrate joint working? If site visits are part of the entry process will these be easy to arrange? If testimonials are required are you confident that your client thinks as highly of your performance as you do? A visible client always helps. It is also beneficial to check who is sponsoring that particular category. You don't want to find yourself accepting an award from a competitor through gritted teeth!



It's tempting to think that everything your organisation does is unique, but it's probably not. Consider getting an external viewpoint from someone who knows your company well, has a good perspective on the industry, and can be trusted to give you an honest appraisal. That way, you'll know whether what you think is award-winning stands a chance.

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## Read the entry form and conditions ... then re-read them!

It's surprising how many entries are received by awards organisers that don't meet the entry criteria. Sometimes you'll have the opportunity to revise or re-submit but lots of schemes will simply discard your entry.

Many awards have time criteria – for example, a project must have been started or completed within a certain timeframe, or an individual must have a certain amount of experience. Check your entry is eligible. Some awards will require counter-signing of entries by clients. Make sure you have complied.

Deadlines can be flexible but some organisers like to know if an entry is on its way. Don't run right up to the deadline and then plead for an extension! If there's a hiccup, make sure the organisers know you will be submitting an entry and that you're just waiting for more information.

Some awards organisers are sticklers for detail, so check maximum word counts and format stipulations. If they ask for entries in Word format, don't send a PDF. If they want a maximum of 10 pages, don't send 11. If additional material is prohibited, don't send it anyway and don't try to impress with folders and ring-binders if these are specifically excluded.

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## Engage your client

Not all award categories involve clients but where they do, you want them signed up to the idea. Ideally they should want to win the award as much as you. Explain to them how winning the award will enhance their profile, too. This will make it easier to get cooperation when it comes to putting the entry together and getting it signed off. It will also help should you win. It's important not just to engage your main client contact but also their leadership team and the comms function as they're likely to be the ones to give it the green light.

While it is often possible to submit an entry with an anonymous client, it is never as powerful as a partner who is prepared to stand alongside you and shout about your work.

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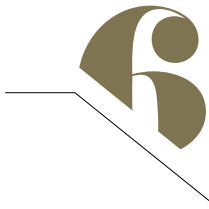


## Create a timeline

Put together a timeline to write the award entry ensuring that you've built in plenty of time for internal and client approval – that takes longer than you think. The timeline should also include the date of the presentation days (should you get through to the next stage) and even the awards dinner itself. If you do this early enough, you can get it in people's diaries. Spring it on senior people at the last minute and they're unlikely to be available.

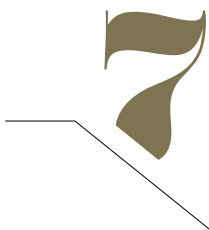
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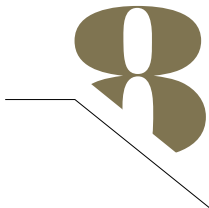
## Tell a story

Awards judges have to read a lot of submissions, so yours needs to stand out. Don't simply list facts, provide a compelling narrative. Explain how your work was part of a wider initiative to improve performance, reduce costs or rationalise locations. Provide some context – tie your project into your or your client's mission and objectives. Take the reader along the timeline – from conception to implementation, or from pilot to full roll out. Finally, make it personal – add quotes and feedback from staff, customers and visitors.



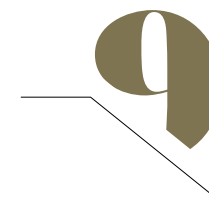
## Read judges' list of requirements

Judges will be looking for the entry to fulfil certain requirements. If the submission darts about from topic to topic, it's really hard to see that it's met the requirements. But if you set it out in the same format as the entry criteria, then it's much easier for the judges to score – and therefore much easier for the entrant to score well. You'll find it easier to write as well!



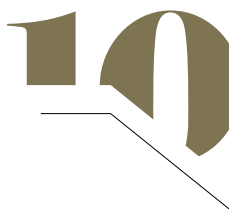
## Provide evidence

Many awards entries fail to score well because they don't back up their claims. Too many make assertions but don't produce the evidence. If your new helpdesk system resulted in a "major improvement in customer service" then provide the KPI or survey data that proves it. If you achieved "significant cost savings" then quantify them or at least give the percentage reduction in costs. Include simple graphics to make the point.



## Use photography and video

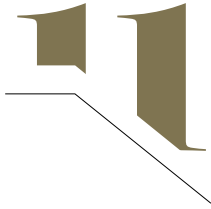
Even if the submission doesn't require images you'll almost certainly need them should you make the shortlist, so be prepared. Many submissions are let down by poor photography – there really is no excuse for this with the consumer equipment available today even if you don't want to employ a professional. Consider making a short (sub three minutes) video which you can also use on social media or in bids.



## Make it attractive

You don't need professional graphic designers but judges will be reading a lot of entries, so you should make yours to stand out. Break up text with photography, graphics and stats or facts to make it easier for the judges to read.





## Prepare for the presentation

Prepare for any presentation well in advance, don't let it be a last-minute thing. You should have decided who is going to present at the timeline stage and secured the dates in their diaries. The presentation is often worth a significant part of the overall score, so it's important that you make the most of it.

Unless there are any specific requirements set out by the awards organisers, use the presentation to summarise the submission and take the judges through the journey that you set out in the entry. But don't repeat information too much, just refresh their memories. The presentation provides you with the opportunity to go more in-depth and give a real view of what's been achieved. If there's confidential info that you or your client didn't want put in the written submission, then this is your chance to tell the judges.

Make sure everyone who presents to the judges is a good public speaker. If they're not, then you should consider informal coaching or even booking public speaking training.

Bring the presenters together and ensure they've run through the presentation a few times in advance so it comes across naturally, especially if you're focusing on a partnership element.

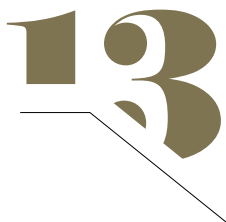
Video always works well at the presentation stage because it allows you to get lots of stakeholders' views across when you can't get them in the room. It's also a chance to showcase the project if you're not able to host the judges at your site.



## Book the awards dinner

Don't forget to book the awards dinner and think carefully about who you invite. It might be an opportunity to recognise members of the team who seldom get accolades as well as a chance to entertain clients and prospects. Check who's providing the entertainment just in case there are any sensitivities.

Most people know what to expect from an awards dinner, but some may be unfamiliar. Always put together a briefing note explaining the details such as location, timings, dress code, format of the evening, who else is on the table, what to do if you win (e.g., who will come on stage, do you need to prepare a speech). Even details like travel to and from the venue are useful. People are reassured and can relax when they know what to expect.

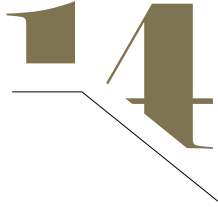


## Publicise your entry and your success

You can make the most of your entry from the moment you make the shortlist. Issue a press release, publicise it internally, on your website, through social media and in newsletters. Many award schemes will offer downloadable media kits, including finalists and winners logos that you can add to marketing material, stationery and email signatures.

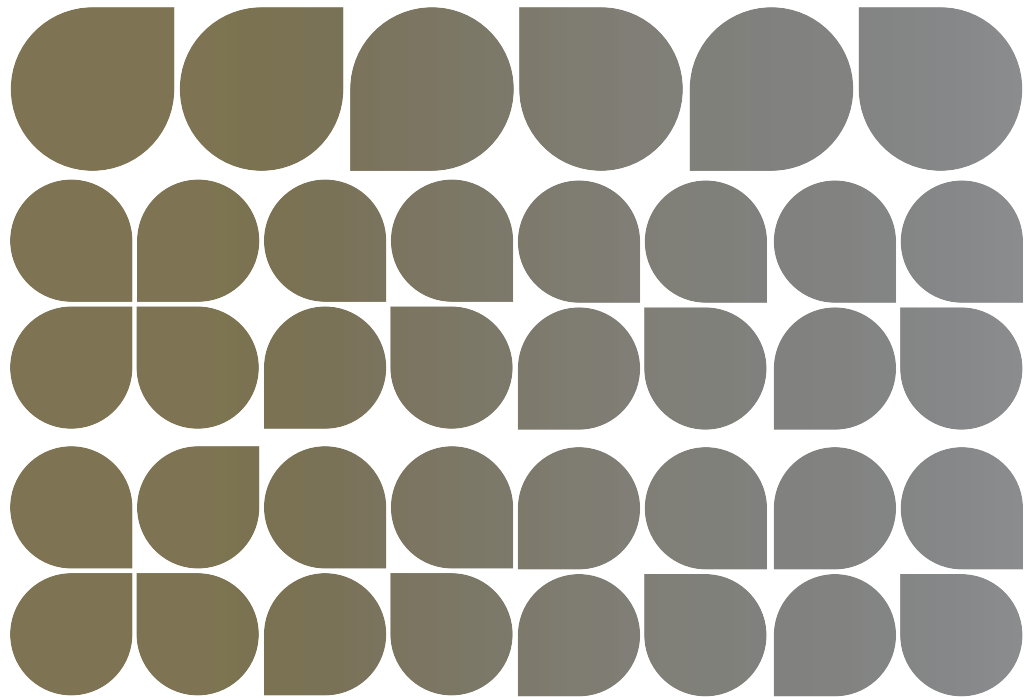
If you really want to get ahead of the game, write your winner's press release before the event. That way, all you'll have to do is drop in the judge's remarks and you can enjoy the celebrations safe in the knowledge that you won't be up at 6am trying to write sparkling copy with a hangover!





## Ask for feedback

Whether or not you win (but particularly if you didn't) always ask for feedback. Most awards organisers will provide this as a matter of course, but do ask even if they don't offer. It can be very useful to know where you went wrong. Think of it as free consultancy. You might even find out that you were a close second, which can help to shape future awards entries.





Office 3, Design Quarter  
129-130 Edward Street  
Brighton BN2 0JL

info@magentaassociates.co  
+44 (0)20 3773 3622

[magentaassociates.co](http://magentaassociates.co)