

Marks of a Winner

**What to look for when judging
an IABC Award Entry**

The Work Plan

1. Need/opportunity. How clearly is the need/opportunity and its effect on the organization identified?

A SATISFACTORY entry should:

- Clearly define and show understanding of the problem or opportunity
- Show how the problem or opportunity was identified and why it matters
- Explain how the project addresses the need or issues that were identified
- Provide sufficient context about the organization and its priorities so that you can see how this project could contribute to the broader organization's success, including impact on performance, reputation, image, profits, participation etc.

MARK UP for:

- Solid formal or informal research used to identify the opportunity
- Superior explanation of how the research was used to define the opportunity
- Clear explanation of specific changes or challenges that led to the opportunity
- Superior explanation of why it matters for the organization

Mark DOWN if the entry:

- Does not explain how the opportunity was identified
- Fails to demonstrate how the project would help the organization
- "Assumes" the need, or takes it as given
- Doesn't provide context for the organization within its sector, geographic location or market

2. Intended audiences. How clearly are the critical characteristics of the intended audience(s) identified?

A SATISFACTORY entry should:

- Describe audience key characteristics (needs, preferences, demographics) and needs in sufficient detail so as to show how that understanding led to choices of strategy, tactics & media
- There may be secondary audiences, but it should be clear who the primary audience was

Mark UP for:

- Research to determine audience characteristics and/or needs; thorough formal research is best; informal analysis can be credited
- A focused description that demonstrates the thought process linking audience to strategy and tactics
- Addressing a variety of relevant factors, e.g. prior knowledge, education level, geography, psychographics, motivations, opinions, issues

Mark DOWN if the entry:

- Does not define the primary audience or claims a "general public" audience without defining the needs or characteristics of that public
- Has a long list of audiences but no descriptions or analysis that would show whether the solution chosen was appropriate
- Makes vague, unsupported assumptions about audience needs
- Has demographic detail on the audience, but it does not seem relevant to choices made in the project.

3. Goals and objectives. How well do the goals and objectives address the stated need? To what extent are the objectives measurable in addressing the stated need?

A SATISFACTORY entry should:

- State an overall “big picture” goal oriented to the organization’s future needs: what were they trying to achieve with this project? There should be only one or two goals; they need not be measurable.
- State specific, results-based objectives that set targets and are measurable or have clear criteria for success

Mark UP for:

- Clearly stated goal, clearly linked to the organization’s objectives and the need/opportunity that was identified
- Objectives that are results-based, stated in terms of impact on the target audience or financial
- Objectives that are results-based in terms of impact on the target audience
- Objectives that, taken as a whole, appropriately measure success for the project
- Objectives clearly measure significant results in a quantified way or with clear criteria for success
- Identifying appropriate measures for projects where it is difficult to do so

Mark DOWN if the entry:

- Has no objectives
- Has immeasurable objectives
- Has vague objectives with no specific measures, e.g. “to improve morale”
- States objectives based on process not results. “To produce a newsletter” or “to meet our self-imposed deadline” are not objectives.
- Has too many objectives (unfocused) or “slam-dunk” objectives that are too “soft” to achieve the goal (“increase readership by 1%”)

4. Solution overview. How effective is the overall solution in employing messages, tactics and media? To what extent does the overall solution demonstrate a strategic or creative approach to business communication?

A SATISFACTORY entry should:

- Describe the plan the entrant developed and why they did what they did, including key messages and how stakeholders were involved in developing the solution
- Explain the rationale, demonstrating that the plan is an appropriate approach to the need or opportunity

Mark UP for:

- A well-explained rationale clearly linking audience characteristics and objectives to tactics chosen
- A plan that is clearly appropriate for the task at hand
- Sound reasoning supporting choices, possibly including evaluating other options
- Creativity and innovation in devising a solution

Mark DOWN if the entry:

- Does not explain what was done or why
- Offers a plan that does not seem likely to achieve the goal and objectives
- Offers a tired response to a standard communications problem

5. Implementation and challenges. How effectively was the project implemented in terms of budget, time, and other resources?

A SATISFACTORY entry should:

- Explain how entrant sold the plan to management, client, etc. and/or negotiated solutions
- Describe the resources needed and available (budget, staff/consultants, equipment)
- Note challenges encountered in implementation and how they were overcome (reward for smart solutions to challenges, but avoid penalizing if everything went according to plan)
- Include a budget – no matter the size

Mark UP for:

- Clever approach to selling the project
- Efficient use of budget; reward effective use of constrained budget or appropriate spending if not constrained
- Effective and appropriate use of internal and external resources

Mark DOWN if the entry:

- Does not provide budget information (a common failure)
- Shows wasteful or inappropriate use of budget
- Does not clearly explain how the project was implemented and how various roles and resources were coordinated by the entrant

Watch for:

- Apologies or regrets for too low budget (many Not-for-Profits produce exceptional materials on a shoe-string budget), slow progress, inappropriate choice of media, etc.
- Excuses based on limited resources ("If we had more staff, we could have. . .").
- Media/vehicles that don't suit the audience (a brochure for semi-literate adults).
- Excessive use of resources without proper justification.

6 & 7. Measurement/evaluation. How thoroughly were the results measured against the objectives? How well are the projects goals and objectives met?

A SATISFACTORY entry should:

- Prove that the objectives were met through formal evaluation
- Have evaluation measures directly related to the objectives that were set
- Have methods of measurement appropriate to the project

Mark UP for:

- Thorough, valuable and convincing results
- Every result linked to one or more objectives
- Appropriateness of measures in relation to objectives
- Effective measurement of things that are difficult to measure
- Thoroughness of evaluation

Mark DOWN if the entry:

- Measures outputs rather than outcomes (brochure was distributed versus brochure increased audience acceptance of company's plans)
- Does not have a measure to match each objective
- Has only anecdotal evaluation ("We heard that people were happy")
- Does not relate evaluation to audience or objectives ("My manager liked it")
- Uses data or measures inappropriately (i.e. does not support conclusions)

Watch for:

- Objectives that are never mentioned in the results section or vice versa.
- Results that were obtained through unknown or questionable means.
- Quantitative results that are statistically invalid (e.g., sample size too small).
- Illogical pairing of objectives and qualitative/quantitative results.

The Work Sample

1. How well do the elements of the project reflect an understanding of the needs and characteristics of the target audience?

A SATISFACTORY entry should:

- Embody choices appropriate to the audiences

MARK UP for:

- Particularly good choices matching audience characteristics
- Packaging of messages that would clearly impact the specific audience

MARK DOWN for:

- Level of language, graphics or design that is too complex or too patronizing for the defined audience

2. How well does the work sample reflect the objectives in the work plan?

A SATISFACTORY entry should:

- Reflect the objectives set out in the work plan
- Be immediately clear why certain design, style, tone and packaging were chosen.
- Clearly integrate all elements of the sample in support of the objectives.

MARK UP if the entry:

- Is clearly designed and produced in such a way as to be likely to achieve the objectives that were defined
- Reflects choices of design, etc. that are clearly appropriate given the objectives
- Has clear, consistent messages, reflecting the objectives
- Is impactful in communicating the messages

MARK DOWN if:

- Some objectives are not addressed in the work sample
- Messaging is not consistent
- Excess elements in the sample distract from the objectives
- The sample offered does not show you what was done: incomplete, confusing or poorly presented/explained

3. How clearly does the work sample meet or exceed the accepted technical and professional communication standards for the medium/media selected?

A **SATISFACTORY** entry will have good production values appropriate to the media selected and the available budget, while reflecting professional standards of ethics, good taste, etc.

MARK UP for:

- Effective use of limited budget
- Efficient use of budget to create the most effective media vehicles possible
- Quality of writing, graphics, messaging, etc.

MARK DOWN for:

- Amateurish work
- Out-of-date approaches
- Poor technical production
- Apparent excess spending not likely to achieve results
- Evident disrespect for the audience (e.g. poor taste)

4. To what extent does the work sample show imagination, innovation, uniqueness and/or creativity?

A **SATISFACTORY** entry will take a fairly standard approach to the solution, but will do it competently.

MARK UP if the entry:

- Stands out from the others
- Shows a clearly original or creative approach
- Leaves a lasting impression
- Makes you wish you'd thought of it

MARK DOWN for:

- A clichéd approach
- A product likely to bore the audience or be buried by the competition
- A creative approach that clearly would not work

5 To what extent does the work sample live up to the description and expectations described in the work plan?

A **SATISFACTORY** entry should reflect the plan.

MARK UP if the entry:

- Seems to embody most or all of the considerations explained in the plan
- Is clearly a good overall product, suited to the objectives

MARK DOWN for:

- A sample that does not match the plan - was the plan written later, for the awards competition?
- A weak sample that does not address the considerations outlined in the plan
- A poor piece of work

Comments/feedback

The comments are very important for entrants - and for the credibility of the competition. Entrants look to the comments to explain why they scored how they did and how they can do better next time. This section can make or break whether an entrant enters an IABC awards program again.

Try to be constructive. The objective is to encourage the entrant to put together a better entry next time. Balance positive and constructive comments. Think how you would feel receiving the comments you've made.

Give specific, practical; advice on how to improve the entry. For example, instead of saying "there were no measurable objectives," say "Make objectives more measurable, for example, re-write objective #1 to read:....." (then rewrite the objective in a measurable way so they can learn from your knowledge).

Be encouraging. Some entries may be first efforts by relatively junior communicators. It should be a learning experience. We don't want people to be so discouraged that they never try again.

For example, don't hesitate to include comments such as: "Making the changes noted above will make this entry a winner. Enter it in the upcoming XXX awards." Or "Great work!" or "Try again!" or "A bit more attention to details noted above will make all the difference next time."