

# UTILIZING AWARDS AS A MARKETING STRATEGY

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*This article was written in 2013 by Tracy Gray, who was the owner of Discover Wines in Kelowna at the time and had several award wins under her belt. Over the course of applying for many awards, she learned what worked for her and generously summarized her tips in this resource.*

*Tracy Gray has since transitioned from being a business owner and leaned into her role as a leader in her community. In 2019, she was elected as the MLA in Kelowna-Lake Country.*

“Utilizing Innovative Marketing Techniques” was in our mission statement prior to our opening day; however we had not clearly defined what they were to be. We did know that media editorials would be imperative but we did not realize the impact that awards could bring.

## Five factors that can make a difference in your application

- **Be a salesperson** – you are selling the idea to pick you as the winner. State who you are, what you do, and what makes you different from other similar businesses. Judges will not know anything about you and your business. It is important to give them the information they need in a clear and concise manner.
- **Tell your story** – the harder it was or the greater the obstacles the better. However, do not be a martyr or bring negativity.
- **Brag** – now is not the time for humbleness or modesty, unless you don't like winning!
- **Be a good corporate citizen** – all packages will have some element of this. What do you give back to the community?
- **Have your finances in order** – you may be asked for year-end and recent financial statements, which should show growth.

## What worked for us

- Always type out the package, it is much neater than handwriting in provided spaces. Ask if a copy can be emailed so you are working off a word or pdf document.
- Print off several copies and include them with your package, as there may be several judges. This way, you know the quality of print and copying will be up to your standards.
- Take the time to do it right. Just dig in—we all have no time. Working full-time at a new business with a big loan to pay off and having a young family left no time for me work on a nomination....so I scheduled 10pm-12am to work on it every second night until it was done. The great thing is once you have done one package you can do a lot of cutting and pasting on the next!

- Proof, and proof again—spelling and grammar must be perfect—enlist the help of someone you know who is good at this (luckily my mother used to be an English teacher and she proofed all my work).

## Telling your story

### How our opening began:

“We opened on July 22, 2003. We had a slower start than we planned, with many unforeseen challenges. With lots of hard work, a good training program and our new team pulling together, we increased sales quickly. A good marketing plan that we were able to implement within six months of opening, despite our challenges, allowed us to become the number one B.C. VQA Wine Store in British Columbia and have been since.”

### How our opening ALSO began:

“On August 22, 2003, exactly one month from our opening day, the Okanagan Mountain Park fire came raging into Kelowna, dramatically changing the business climate in the community. One third of the city was evacuated from their homes, business halted and all tourists left the area. The evacuation order line ended on the street adjacent to Discover Wines. It was surreal to think of potentially losing the store. I, myself, was evacuated for over a week from my home. In retrospect, this whole experience strengthened us further as a team. Though business in Kelowna was practically non-existent for weeks following, the effects could be felt well into October as water bombers flew over the city. All of our initial marketing plans had to be put on hold. Despite this, within 6 months of opening we were the number one BC VQA Wine Store in British Columbia and have been since.”

Which view of our situation and history were you able to visualize and feel an emotional connection to? The second explanation of our opening is the exact insert I wrote and utilized in all our nomination packages, and I heard comments from several different judges at different competitions that our package was one of the best applications they have ever read...obviously parts touched their hearts.

## You've been nominated and maybe won...now what??

Tell everyone, because no one else is going to!

Use three strategies listed above: Be a salesperson, tell your story and brag. Get your one- to two-sentence elevator speech down. I would also recommend taking a media seminar or, at the minimum, do some research online for how to answer questions to the media and practice out loud by yourself while looking in a mirror. It doesn't matter what they ask you, it's more about getting out the message that you want, so write it down and memorize it so that it flows easily from your lips.

You can leverage being nominated just as much as winning.

Some larger competitions will do their own media campaign, which may include businesses that are nominated, but you cannot assume or count on this. You need to plan your own campaign.

We found that media in general were not interested in hearing from us unless we had won. On the other hand, our contact base of friends, customers and suppliers were interested and cheered for us when we were nominated. List any nominations or awards immediately on your email signature, website and on any other marketing materials.

If customers or suppliers are deciding who to do business with, and similar businesses are offering similar products or services at similar prices, why would they pick your business over the next? We found being nominated or winning an award brought credibility to our business in the eyes of potential customers, suppliers and industry colleagues.

### **Discover Wines Awards and Recognition**

- 2009 Okanagan Life Magazine (Public voted for Best Local Wine Store)
- 2008 featured in the Women's Enterprise Centre *New Pioneers* book profiling 100 BC women entrepreneurs
- 2007 Finalist for Ernst & Young Entrepreneur of the Year in the Emerging Business category – Vancouver
- 2006 RBC Canadian Women Entrepreneur of the Year Award in the Deloitte Start Up 3-5 years Category – Toronto
- 2005 Business Excellence Rising Star Award – Kelowna Chamber of Commerce

### **Further acknowledgements of Discover Wines include:**

- 2005 BC Entrepreneur of the Year for Exceptional Product and Service Knowledge
- Runner-up, 2004 Western Diversification Award for New Emerging Business
- Featured in “100 Reasons to do Business in the Okanagan” by the Central Okanagan Economic Development Commission
- Rated as one of the top wine retailers in British Columbia by *EAT* magazine
- Rated as one of the top wine retailers in Canada by the national magazine *Wine Access*