

Awards – Sweet Recognition or Half-Baked?



Filomena Fanelli, CEO/founder, Impact PR & Communications, Ltd.

We recently received a letter in the office saying Impact PR & Communications had been named the best public relations firm in Poughkeepsie, New York. After some initial excitement at the possibility of being recognized for all of our hard work, critical thinking kicked in and we started to ask questions. “How many PR firms are even in Poughkeepsie? Is this for real?”

In 2017 and beyond, personal and professional branding is important and even necessary to help show the world that you and your business/organization are leaders in your community and industry. Awards are a great way to build those brands, and there are many out there. Here are two areas to consider if an award is truly sweet recognition for your leadership – or simply half-baked.

Reputation of the Awarding Organization

It’s no coincidence that the top sought-after awards are those given out by the most prestigious organizations for a particular industry. Think of the Oscars, the Emmy Awards, GRAMMY Awards, etc. Each of these awards carry a particular weight because they are bestowed by an organization with a strong reputation as the leader in its industry.

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s are the equivalent for your industry or community? Do those organizations have any awards programs you can participate in? I am particularly proud of having been named a “Forty Under 40” by the Dutchess County Regional Chamber of Commerce, a competitive distinction in my community. Similarly, there is a “40 Under 40” program run by The American City Business Journals, located in major markets across the U.S. *Business Journal* staff from various markets have noted that “40 Under 40” or its equivalent is one of the most popular award programs they have, and it lends instant credibility to honorees, in large part due to the strong reputation of Business Journals across the nation.

How Winners are Determined

Another important way to know if an award is legitimate is to consider the process by which honorees are selected. In the case of the Chamber’s “Forty Under 40,” a selection committee comprised of former honorees makes the call, ensuring fairness. The Business Journals’ “40 Under 40” awards receive hundreds of nominations in some markets, and the editors and publishers know their publication’s reputation is on the line based on the individuals they select for these awards.

Does the nomination or application package for the award you are seeking explain how winners are chosen? Is the selection process conducted by an impartial panel of judges, or is it selected by someone who may have ulterior motives? For example, does ability to sponsor the awards event or purchase

advertising space in an event program play in to the selection of winners, i.e. is it simply “pay for play?” Are pricey statues and plaques the first thing that’s offered up along with the good news? The more commercialized the honor, the less legitimate they feel and look to you and the outside world. Of course, there are expenses associated with awards such as purchasing a table or tickets to the award ceremony, but none of those expenses should be considered mandatory for your company or you to receive the award. There should be a strong element of merit.

One last thought in closing – it’s totally okay to seek and even self-nominate for awards. Your personal reputation and that of your company or organization can be greatly enhanced by receiving an award, so don’t be shy about applying. If you do feel awkward about self-nominating, you may want to consider hiring a public relations firm or independent consultant to fill out your award application for you. Just be sure to provide all of the necessary details for a strong application and, then, let the celebrating begin.

About the Author: Filomena Fanelli is the CEO and founder of Impact PR & Communications, Ltd. (www.prwithimpact.com), a certified Women Business Enterprise (WBE) and award-winning public relations firm based in New York’s Hudson Valley. Fanelli can be reached at 845.462.4979 or filomena@prwithimpact.com.