Submitting Entries for Awards: Tips for Success

An international award is an exceptionally effective way to showcase innovation, best practice and first class service delivery. The data centre sector is particularly good at recognising and rewarding excellence through high profile global awards that are free to enter and include a wide enough range of categories to ensure broad inclusion irrespective of company size or busines model.

At techUK we always encourage members to enter awards and have been delighted to see how many of our operators and service providers have been shortlisted or emerged as category winners.

Here are some personal observations on the most common factors that separate the shortlisted entries from the rest of the pack, and perhaps more importantly, what prevents an entry from getting onto a shortlist.

Don't enter categories you are ineligible for. It's astonishing how many organisations submitted entries for classes for which they didn't qualify.   For instance, global players with operations in multiple regions are not eligible for regional data centre or cloud awards, because these categories are restricted to players that have not yet expanded out of a region.

Don't scattergun identical entries across multiple categories. This annoys the judges and it is obvious that the entries are not bespoke. There is no harm in entering multiple categories if you are eligible and there are technologies and services that are valid in more than one category, but don't just cut and paste.
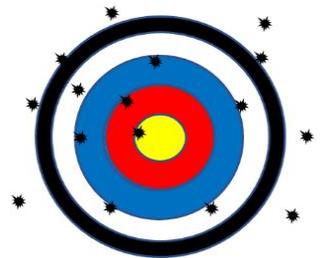
Don't stray off the point - be relevant and remain relevant. Lots of entries lost marks because they were unbalanced: they got sidetracked on a particular offering, got too detailed about a specification or feature. Occassionally they misunderstood the questions, which didn't help either.

Don't get too technical: yes, there will always be judges who know what you are talking about but judging panels are diverse to draw in a wide range of expertise. Speak in a language that everyone can understand.
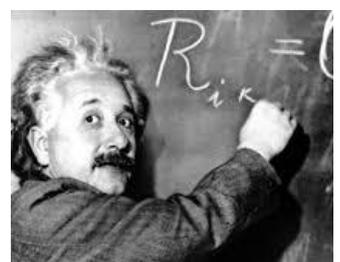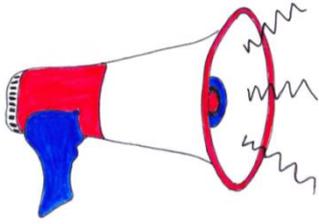
Don't give a sales pitch. This happens far too often. Yes, you need to explain what your solution does, but you must be clear on why is it better and, most important, what your solution has actually delivered in the real world - NOT just what the technology or service is capable of in an ideal situation.

Don't make assumptions. Although the judges do have background knowledge, they are obliged to base their decisions on the quality of the entry, not on what they've read in the press. So don't be complacent. Don't neglect relevant details because you've assumed that everyone already knows about them. It's surprisingly common to read entries from companies that had a great product and a great story to tell but failed to explain the product or provide a coherent narrative because they didn't think they needed to.
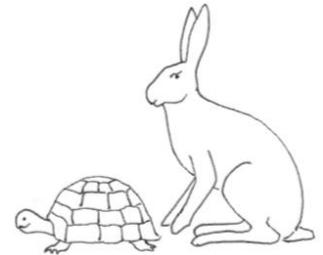
| Q1 | Velocity of an unladen swallow | 11 m/s | ✔ |
Q2	Cube root of 343	☺	✘
Q3	Meaning of life?	42	✔
Q4	2019 Datacloud Awards date	4th June	✔
Q5	The date of Brexit		✘

Answer the question – ALL the questions. Failing to answer the question is the most common reason for being relegated to the also-rans. The questions are there for a reason and irrespective of the category they broadly ask the same thing: What (is it / did you do)? How (does it work/ did you do it)? And Why (is it better than others)? Your answer to each one is marked individually so don't write "see above" if you think you have already covered it: the judges are within their rights to give that part of your entry a zero.

Provide evidence to back up your claims: so many submissions fall at this hurdle because they don't provide hard evidence. Judges are very good at differentiating assertion from evidence and want to see outcomes and deliverables – whether they are measured energy savings or happy customers. Always include data if you have it.

Always provide testimonials if you have them. Third party corroboration is invaluable. Even a sceptical judge will take note. Not only does it demonstrate the quality of your service but also says good things about your ongoing customer relationships.

Re-read your entry to ensure it makes sense before you submit, or get someone else to look over it. While we always make allowances for those not writing in their first language, it does need to be coherent. Occasionally entries appear to be a jumbled set of random statements, are clearly unfinished, or make so little sense that they may as well be written in Klingon. A few minutes for a final check is usually time well spent.
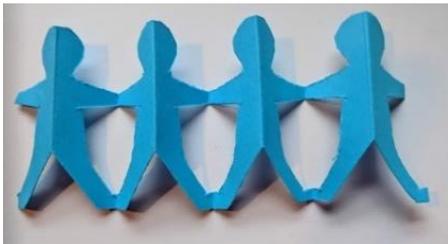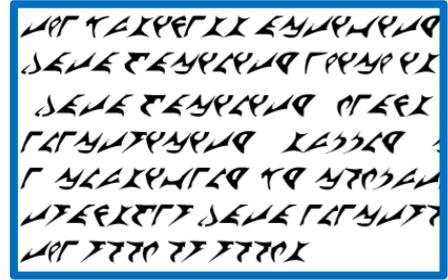
Do not put multiple identical entries into one category under the misapprehension that the result is somehow vote-led like Strictly Come Dancing. It is not.

Is what you have done material? Finally, and most importantly: materiality. Is it truly substantive? Have you delivered concrete outcomes? The judges are adept at distinguishing style from substance and so, no matter how beautifully crafted your entry is, if it lacks substance it cannot win. Be devil's advocate to yourself and keep saying "so what?".

techUK contacts

Emma Fryer
Associate Director, techUK
Tel: 01609 772 137
Mob: 07595 410 653
emma.fryer@techuk.org

Lucas Banach
Programme Assistant
Tel: 020 7331 2006
Lucas.banach@techuk.org

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