

Everyone's a winner

Entering the CCF European Call Centre Awards is about much more than winning, argues Chris Robinson. After all, it's the taking part that counts

Now all the hangovers have subsided and Birmingham Metropole staff have finished tidying up a mess that makes warzones look tidy, we can all take stock and think about the overall significance of the European Call Centre Awards. Was it just a jolly to wash away the credit crunch blues? Although it was definitely fun, I believe it means a lot more than that.

Writing award submissions is my bread and butter and I often hear the line: "I only want to enter if I'm going to win." It's a frustrating sentiment for me, because it is based on one flawed assumption: that the only people who benefit are the winners.

Doubtless, those who win awards will see the benefit from (according to recent research) the 89 per cent of business buyers and 84 per cent of consumers who are influenced by awards when choosing products and services. However, which do you think comes first: the hunger to be the best or actually being the best? Let's face it, you can only achieve excellence if you work hard and truly aspire to greatness.

So, here is the strategy when it

comes to winning awards: ensure you do yourself justice in the award entry process. If you don't win, then learn from the process, improve your operation and try again next year. This is what dozens of businesses do every year and, although they might not pick up awards every time, the simple act of aspiring to be the best and acting accordingly invariably results in continuous improvement for your company.

Jay Wright, managing director of Virgin Wines supports this notion: "Entering the European Call Centre Awards has been an extremely valuable experience for Virgin Wines. Preparing the application and being scrutinised by the judges really made us step away from our day to day activities to review our working processes."

Obviously, I'm not expecting you to propose to your stakeholders: "I will up the game of this call centre because I want it to win an award," but how about: "I will make this the best call centre among the best in Europe, and prove it by being shortlisted for a 2009 European Call Centre Award"? Is that such a crazy notion?

So, the only people who are losing out are those who don't

enter the awards and settle for the 'same old, same old'. They will drop further and further behind the leaders, and the worst part is, they won't even realise it.

The benefits of winning

It might seem daft to try and explain the benefits of winning. Obviously, everyone who wins is thrilled. Actually, the true benefits are not that obvious. Partying, parading the award around your call centre and posting a press release does not maximise the benefits of winning an award. The benefits derived from the awards are two-fold: the first are reputation benefits and subsequently, the commercial benefits that ensue.

Firstly, the reputation benefits, and I am not just referring to good PR. Awards are not simply about public relations – they prove a point to stakeholders other than the public: Peer businesses, employees, potential employees, senior management, investors and customers are all inspired by a win and often just the nomination.

Sally Wrigglesworth, head of customer services at Coventry Building Society believes its Best





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Improvement Strategy award improved the team's reputation both internally and externally: "Internally amongst my executive peers and across the Society itself, it has re-inforced the success we already show through quality, efficiency and performance measures. On a wider perspective, it adds great value to our brand, image and reputation because the call centre is a prime channel for many of our members. We are all proud of our success and are all keen to celebrate it."

Nicholas Nesbitt, chief executive officer of KenCall in Kenya comments: "It was an absolutely incredible feeling getting off the plane from London in Nairobi knowing that we were bringing home to Kenya our team's award for the best non-European call centre – we had demonstrated to the industry that we could run with the best of the best, despite how hard it had been to get started and operate in Kenya."

For Lloyds TSB Insurance, the award helped the team prove to all concerned what they passionately believed themselves. As customer service director David Stoddard explains: "I'm in no doubt that

our customer service and claims team is among the best in Europe. It is thanks to all our hard work and dedication that we have been uniquely recognised for the outstanding way in which we help our customers get their lives back on track in their time of need. To have our achievements publicly recognised really is the icing on the cake."

For beCogent, the stakeholders they were hoping to impress were potential employees: "beCogent has greatly benefited from the communities around which our four sites are based, so we feel it is essential to give a little back to show our gratitude to the people living in the local areas. It really is a win-win situation for us as we predict that many of these people will see that we have won this award and be encouraged to apply for positions within the company," says Edna McElroy, CSR co-ordinator at beCogent.

After the reputation benefits come the commercial benefits. Many sceptics out there believe that an award is just for display – I say that a win, or even a nomination, is a commercial coup that can act as a catalyst for sales. Nicholas Nesbitt testifies

to this: "We have now had a few offers from larger call centres trying to buy us and we've suddenly been able to open doors to meet with the ceo's of Britain's largest companies. Winning the award has completely boosted our self-confidence, given us that extra bounce in our step, and raised the roof on just how high we believe we can soar. It's simply great. We are ready to go!"

Research (commissioned by Boost Marketing, and conducted by Shape the Future) proved that 84 per cent of business buying decisions and 89 per cent of consumer buying decisions are influenced by awards.

The simple truth is that 73 per cent of buying decisions in relation to call centre services are influenced by awards. That should be reason enough for you and your customers to enter. While it is just one factor to consider and there are many other reasons for your company to enter the awards, you should certainly ignore this one at your peril.

*Chris Robinson is managing director of Boost Marketing
www.boost-marketing.co.uk
0870 0421926*

