



The Anatomy of an Award-Winning Entry

Wednesday, January 21, 2026

Denise McDevitt
Senior Vice President, Awards Program
ANA



ANA Awards Programs

Celebrating and Recognizing Great Marketing and Innovative Thinking

Through our best-in-class awards programs, the ANA honors and promotes groundbreaking marketing solutions, media strategies, and brand activations executed by the industry's true growth leaders





WHY ENTER AWARD PROGRAMS?

Why submit to award programs?

Build Credibility & Industry Reputation

- Awards serve as third-party validation of your work.

Strengthen Client/Agency Relationships

- Deepens trust and reinforces the partnership as one that drives meaningful impact.

Support New Business & Growth

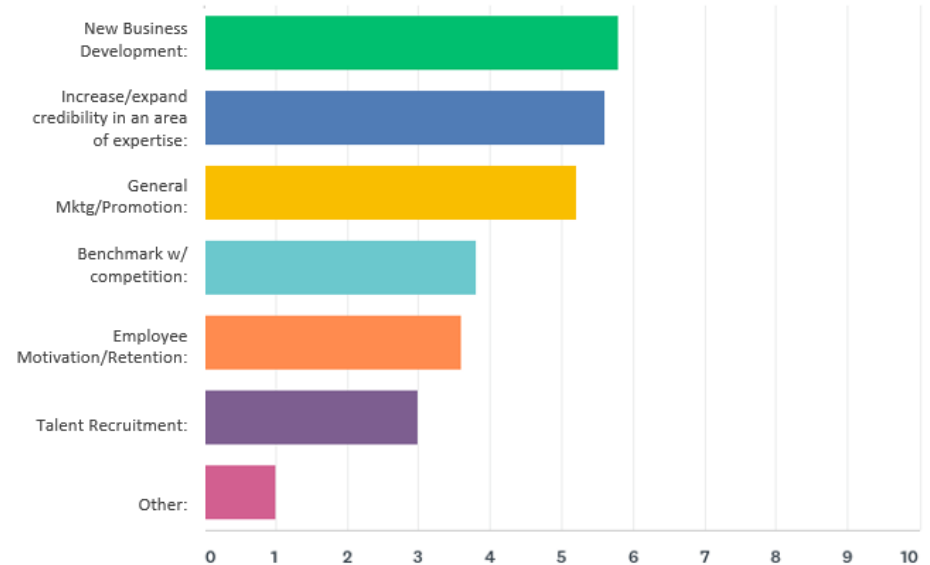
- Reinforce category leadership in specific capabilities
- Provide tangible proof that team delivers results, not promises

Attract and Retain Top Talent/Recognition

- Boost morale and pride internally
- Reinforces a culture where excellence is noticed and celebrated.
- Recognition fuels momentum and inspires the next wave of great work.

Content & Storytelling Assets

- Creation of polished case studies
- Thought leadership materials
- Sales and marketing assets



Bottom Line

- Build reputation
- Deepens client/agency team trust
- Drive growth
- Retain and attract talent

The discipline of crafting an awards case study submission sharpens how you articulate our value.



CRITERIA IN SELECTING AWARD PROGRAMS

Criteria in selecting award programs

Credibility & Industry Reputation

- Reputable, neutral organization implementing the program
- Respected brands participating
- senior, credible leaders on the juries
- Juries have balance of client-side and agency-side perspectives

Alignment With Your Positioning

- categories align with our core strengths
- program celebrates the type of work you want to attract more of

PR & Amplification Potential

- Strong PR visibility and media coverage
- Opportunities for case studies, thought leadership, or speaking
- Assets to activate across press, social, new business pitches, and recruiting

Rigor

- Strong judging process
- Clear criteria
- High quality entry process, entry questions, etc.



Bottom Line

- Reinforces our strengths/positioning
- Matters to C-Suite, clients and prospects
- Are judged by people we respect
- Celebrates work that moved the business forward



TOP TEN TIPS FOR DEVELOPING AN EFFECTIVE AWARD CASE STUDY

Review Recent Winners

- Study recent winning case studies, especially within your target categories
- Identify patterns in story structure, rigor, and results
- Note the types of brands, challenges, and outcomes that resonated with judges
- Use past winners as inspiration — not templates to copy



Strategic Category Selection

- Choose categories aligned with what you want to be known for
- Ensure the work clearly fits the intent and criteria of the category
- Enter the same work in multiple categories only when justified
- Customize each submission to address category-specific expectations





CONTEXT is Everything

- Clearly define the industry, category, and competitive environment
- State the business problem in plain, specific terms
- Explain why this challenge mattered to the brand or organization
- Clearly describe the audience, constraints, and market realities
- Acknowledge challenges, trade-offs, or risks upfront

What
makes an
entry
“Award
Worthy”

“Most entries claim extraordinary results, but the winners are the ones who can tell me why.

I look for industry context that makes the numbers meaningful. A 30% lift sounds great until you realize the category was already surging.

Tell me what you were up against in plain speak.

Give me the business challenges that put it all into context.”

Connect the Dots

- Clearly link the challenge → objectives → strategy → execution → results
- Ensure objectives directly address the stated business problem
- Explain why specific tactics and channels were chosen — not just what was used
- Ground your approach in audience insights (demographic, psychographic, geographic, behavioral)



Be Real and Authentic

- Set realistic, clearly defined objectives
- Quantify results honestly — avoid inflated or unverifiable claims
- Provide context and benchmarks (before/after, targets, category norms)
- Involve the person most passionate and closest to the work in shaping the story



What makes an entry “Award Worthy”

“As you prepare your submission, please stay anchored to the goals and measurement plan you’ve defined.

Provide well-documented KPIs and data points that clearly tie back to these success measures and meet the thresholds you’ve set.

Please also avoid vanity metrics; focus instead on meaningful indicators that genuinely reflect performance and impact.

When sharing results, include context for the numbers and explain how you interpret them, as we only have the information provided in the entry.

Help bring us into your thinking so we can fully understand how the idea performed and how the various elements connect to demonstrate success.”



Address the Scoring Criteria Directly

- Review the judging criteria before you start writing
- Map each section of your story clearly to specific scoring elements
- Make it easy for judges to find the answers they're scoring

What
makes an
entry
“Award
Worthy”

*“Credible results against the
business objective, reported
transparently with evidence
that the work influenced
outcomes.”*



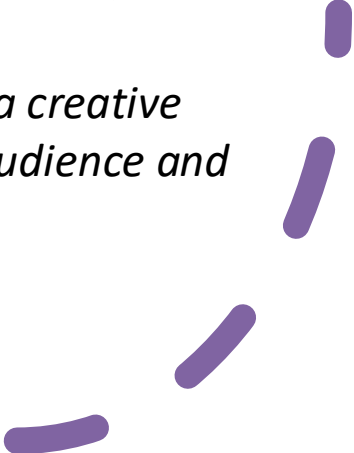
Tell a Compelling Story

- Ensure the narrative flows logically and engages the reader
- Balance clarity with inspiration — strong storytelling still matters
- Clearly articulate the business impact, not just marketing success
- Explain what made the work hard, ambitious, or complex
- Show why this work mattered beyond a single campaign moment



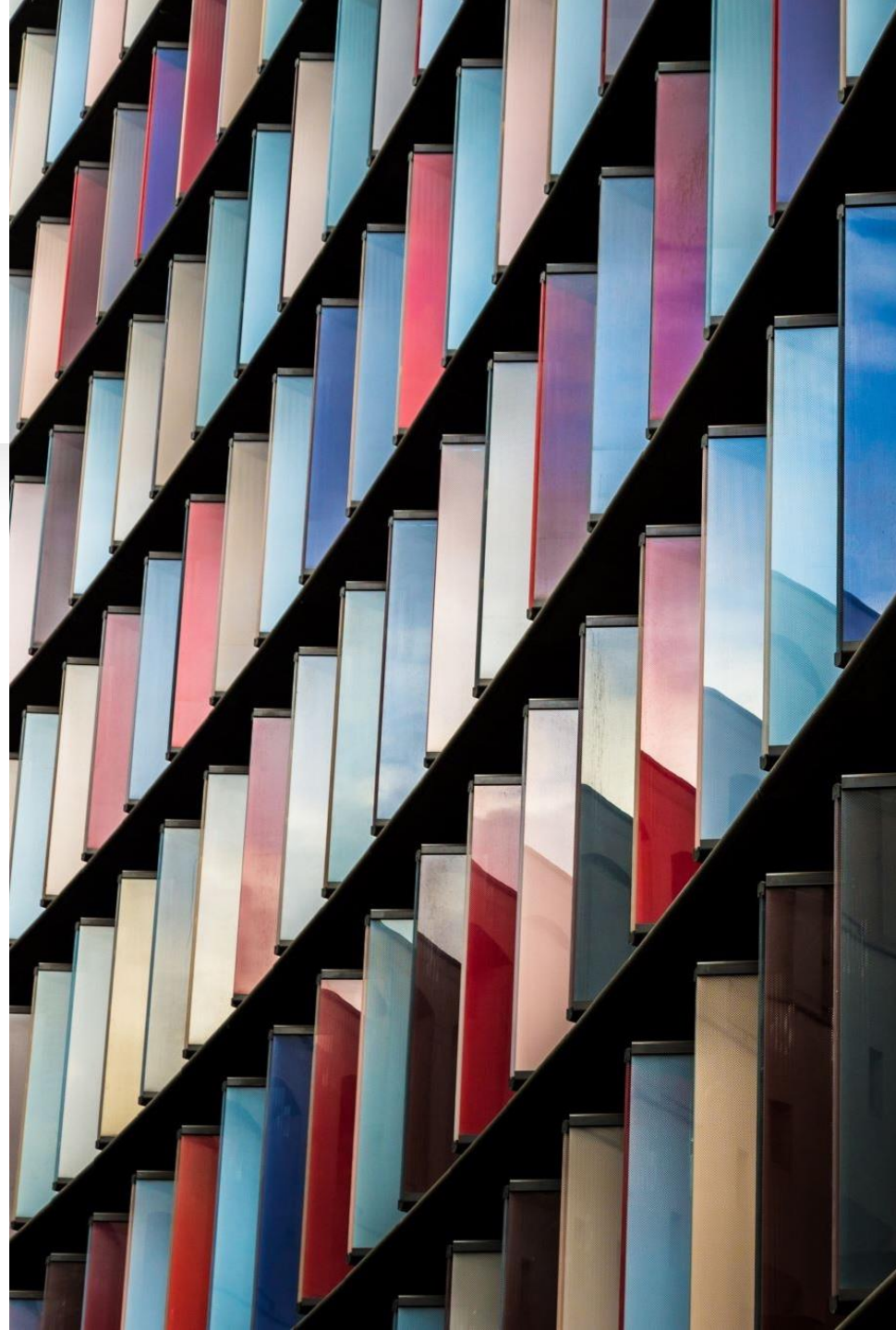
What makes an entry “Award Worthy”

As I'm reviewing Cases, there are several key items I'm looking for:

- 1) Is the situation and challenge clearly & simply articulated.*
 - 2) Is there a relevant, empathetic, universal human insight (hopefully catalyzed through research)?*
 - 3) Is there a strategy that helps solve a problem or create an opportunity that drives growth?*
 - 4) Is there a measurement framework in place and are the BUSINESS KPIs (no soft KPIs) clearly articulated?*
 - 5) Assuming 1-4 are amazing, is there a creative idea/experience that provokes the audience and pulls them in?*
- 

Showcase Creative Thoughtfully

- Include full-length creative assets, not overly edited versions
- Use assets that clearly support the strategy and results
- A case study video is optional — but can be a powerful storytelling tool
- Think beyond the award: assets should be reusable for PR and marketing





Get Fresh Eyes to Review

- Have colleagues who have judged awards review the submission
- Ask people outside your industry or brand to read it
- Test for clarity: does the story make sense without insider knowledge?
- Eliminate jargon and assumptions
- If they're impressed and understand it — you're on the right track

What
makes
an entry
“Award
Worthy”

“I’ll be looking for work that’s rooted in real insight and clearly tied to a business objective, not just a beautiful execution.

I’m drawn to ideas that show up authentically in culture, connect seamlessly across channels, and create meaningful impact for both the audience and the brand.

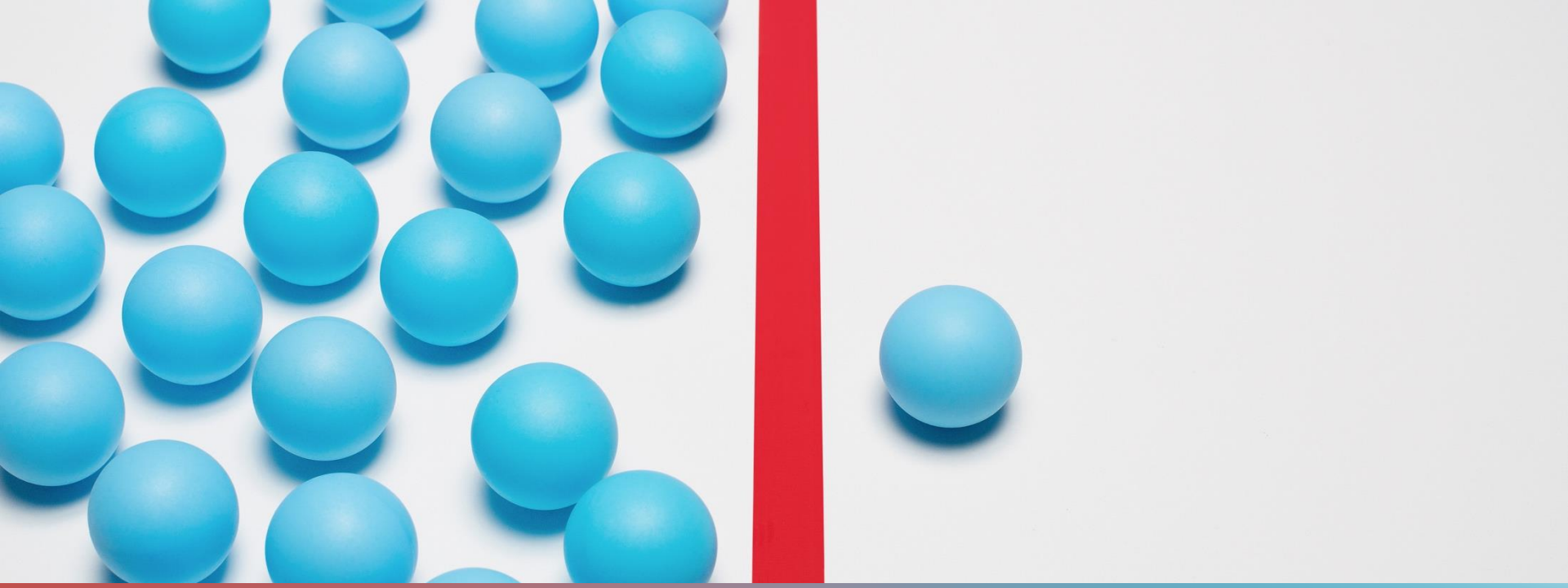
The strongest submissions don’t just capture attention—they move the business forward.”





Credit the Right People

- Accurately credit all key contributors and partners
- Include co-leads and cross-functional collaborators
- Ensure credits reflect how the work was truly developed
- Recognition matters — get it right



BOTTOM LINE

The submissions that stand out from the rest make it easy to understand and appreciate the work and its achievements.

- Clearly frame the challenge and why it mattered
- Explain the strategic insight behind the idea
- Connect creative decisions to strategy & audience
- Map your story directly to judging criteria
- Highlight what made the effort difficult or ambitious
- Provide results with context (benchmarks, targets, pre/post data)

2026 Awards Programs Deadlines



- Standard Deadline: January 30, 2026
- Final Deadline: February 27, 2026



- Standard Deadline: January 23, 2026
- Final Deadline: March 6, 2026



- Early-Bird Deadline: February 6, 2026
- Standard Deadline: February 20, 2026
- Final Deadline: March 20, 2026



- Early-Bird Deadline: April 24, 2026
- Standard Deadline: May 15, 2026
- Final Deadline: June 12, 2026



Open for Entries
Deadline Varies by Program



Open for Entries
Deadline July 3, 2026

2026 Awards Programs Upcoming



ANA
MULTICULTURAL AND
INCLUSIVE MARKETING
EXCELLENCE AWARDS

Entries Begin: April 2026



Entries Begin: Spring 2026



Entries Begin: Spring 2026

www.ana.net/awards



Q & A

Denise McDevitt, SVP Awards Program
DMcDevitt@ana.net

