

VIEW FROM THE CHEAP SEATS



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This Column is Gold, Baby

Your guide to entering awards shows

Grab the spray mount! Fire up the interns! It's awards show entry time again. You've got forms to fill out and ads to trim.

What's that you say? You didn't produce any worthy ads last year? Don't fret. I'm here to help.

There's always a decent percentage of authentic, truly good work that wins. But here are some tips for the rest of us who don't work on stuff like that:

Get your Creative Director to be a judge in the show. Your agency will be guaranteed to win a few awards just as a quid pro quo. If your CD can't be a judge, then volunteer to do the inside-ad-joke "call for entries" piece. That always gets at least a merit award.

If you went to a portfolio school, chances are you did a whacked out, visual solution, two-page spread for a product that doesn't need to advertise—like say, the "Connect Four" board game or marshmallows. You can enter ads like that in the real world. Just credit your agency as being located in Singapore, Malaysia, or South Africa. Don't enter any ads with store locations, phone numbers or contact info to get more information. That's all extraneous and never gets read. Besides, consumers don't need that stuff--the logo is all they need to go find the brand and buy the product.

No body copy should be longer than two sentence, unless it's a 400 word treatise on the centuries' old tradition of hand-crafted Norwegian truffles.

Stencil something on the sidewalk outside your agency and take a picture of it. That's your "Guerrilla Marketing" entry.

Don't submit ads for cigar bars, hot sauce, or sex toy shops. They're too easy. But organic dog food stores, discount coffin warehouses, and lesbian bed-and-breakfasts are all fair game.

In every awards show, there's always one good carnivore-oriented steakhouse or BBQ restaurant campaign. Give it a whirl.

All newspaper ads must be four-color, full-page, and have minimal copy. Just like all newspaper ads are, right?

Judges respond to brand names. Wanna do a Nike ad? Wanna do a Miller Lite ad? No problem—instead of putting the brand logo in the corner, just stick in the name and phone number of a local store where they sell those products—that’s your real client.

It doesn’t matter what your ad’s target audience really is—ads that speak to older or less affluent or small-town audiences never win awards. At awards show time, your audience is a group of 38 year-old white guys (and a token woman) wearing lots of black and acting hipper-than-thou. Concept your ads accordingly. (There is a caveat, however: Be leery of anyone in your agency who walks down the hall with a tissue comp saying, “This ad is a gold winner” or anyone who evaluates ad concepts based on “What would show judges think of this?” That’s a sure sign of a loser—in more ways than one.)

So there you have it. Good luck, and have a good time.

By the way, if you take me up on the discount coffin warehouse idea, be sure to ask ‘em if they sell coffins big enough to fit you and all your awards. Remember, the only true measure of a person in the ad business is how many awards they’ve won, and only gold pencil winners go to heaven.