



## WHAT MAKES A DRINKS COMPETITION GOOD AND WORTHWHILE ENTERING?

I'm very lucky as I've been part of the jury at many drinks competitions and awards, from small to global, on several continents and in many different countries, as a judge. Perhaps I am one of the busiest drinks judges globally, given that I can do all sorts of spirits and also wine. It is a bit like an all rounder at cricket situation, but it is not about my specialisms but rather what I've seen and learnt from being able to work behind the scenes.

There are so many drinks awards and competitions out there that it is really hard to navigate these treacherous waters. Some are there to truly help, some are brilliant for making that next local or regional step-up with marketing and sales, others are greatly helpful and can make a brand very successful in an instant, but sadly there are many just jumping on the bandwagon and milking the industry with bad systems or under-qualified judges. Some might look shiny from the

outside but are actually rotten inside whereas others might be less active on social media but are actually more valuable and thorough. Some used to be great and majestic but over time they might have changed in the wrong way. These are difficult to tell apart from the outside if not impossible. How would a marketing manager of a small drinks brand know what's good and what to leave? Some are amazing investments, others are just a straight waste of your marketing budget. If one has a healthy budget to carpet bomb and enter almost every one of them, that's great but trial and error can be expensive and the results altogether misleading. So where to start on this minefield of a topic?

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It is a decent idea to ask others, even if one thinks one has been there and knows it all. **On the basis of that sentiment we conducted a recent poll asking our professional contacts about the most important aspect of drinks competitions and awards and 3/4 picked the “quality of judges”.** It was a particularly difficult choice as all 4 answer options were valid to different levels. The quality of the judges was the clear answer and the most important of all.

Without good judges with a great understanding of not just the product and the market, but how to be a team player, it is just impossible to call yourself a respectable and valid drinks competition. I love the idea of consumer choice awards, but that’s just retrofitted sales figures engineered in a time traveller’s dream.

The consumer will decide what sells, and is the ultimate decision maker, but the consumer’s level of understanding of the product can be very variable here.

### What makes a drinks competition / drinks awards more relevant?

|                             |     |
|-----------------------------|-----|
| Their social media presence | 8%  |
| The quality of judges       | 73% |
| Number of entries           | 6%  |
| Number of years running     | 13% |

THE POLL  
THE POLL  
THE POLL

So back to the poll:

The question was “What makes a drinks competition/awards more relevant?”

1. Big social media presence
2. Number of years running
3. Number of entries
4. Quality of judges

And I can say straight away that they are all important but on very different levels.

The least important is the ‘social media presence’ as it is used mainly to sell the competition itself to the entrants, not to sell the winning products.

The use of the awards/medals and turning them into sales is the entrant’s responsibility. It is a marketing tool. Similar to a big Olympic win - it is the start of your brand’s next level journey and a big opportunity, not the solution itself.

A big win might be a distiller’s end goal, but it is where the marketing team’s work really ramps up. Maximising the return on investment from the otherwise great news of winning a medal or an award can be daunting, and many marketing teams or brand owners get startled by a big win.

How to maximise ROI? What to do? It's very important to make a plan, and take it as an active project and a challenge, instead of taking the winning of a big awards medal as just being the job completed. It is a step in a series of actions that ideally had to start before the big win and will continue long after. I have worked in several different positions as 'brand ambassador' of an awards or advisor of a drinks competition and during these years I have slowly built a document, a 'cheat sheet' that can help a brand owner to build a strategy to use the good result of an awards entry.

One thing is clear: it starts with a strategy and steps way before the actual announcement and celebrations. This document and a training session is available - please just get in touch.

The number of years running is a good indicator of something that is working fine, but is it necessarily a mark of the most relevant and best, or could it just be that it is a good business with a nice cash flow? I will just leave this in here for you to decide. Some stay relevant, some improve, and others just sadly can't keep up with changes or deliver the quality that they used to.

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The amount of entries is also a very good indicator but it is a popularity thing. Your family SUV or big brand chocolate bar will be a dimensionally bigger seller than your favourite Belgian or Swiss treat enjoyed in the back of a long wheelbase Range Rover. Numbers are a great indicator but it does not make a competition better or easier to win actually. Sometimes quite the opposite. Plus as someone from behind the curtains, I can say some are very secretive with their numbers, others are more creative...

And furthermore, entering a competition to get feedback is an expensive and very inefficient way to learn about your own product. There are only a handful of drinks awards with good enough feedback and it is not really a marketing tool's job to help with R&D or product improvement plus it is back to the quality of judges again: would you like a bartender to fix your broken still or would you like the engineers coming to fix the poor still to come up with your next signature serve cocktail?



## ADVICE:

Know your product and what exact category to enter. Some are obvious but we see hundreds of entries annually in the wrong category and without experienced judges these would mostly fail in the wrong category. Now that is a problem and if you are running a marketing agency you are losing a client on this out of lack of knowledge and understanding of the product and the system.

Make sure the awards/competition fits your plan. Imagine buying a tool, what is it for? Local or regional, maybe global? Big news or long term integrated brand strategy? Entering a new market or building brand awareness? Sometimes an easier more local victory can be as useful as a bigger National one but easier to achieve given the smaller number of competitors.

Make a strategy and have a plan how to build up to it and use the great news if/when you win. It is not easy or obvious.



The good news is that we have a service covering all of the above: we help with evaluating a product, giving it a score as a prediction of a competition result, confidentially commenting on areas of improvements if they are needed and giving an in-depth feedback, helping with determining the true category and the best class to enter it into a competition, and recommending the awards we think it would benefit from and finally helping the marketing team with how to get ready for potential winnings and how to maximise the impact and turn it to sales. If you have all of that covered, we'll see you at the big event of the actual judging but if you have questions, we are here to discuss all of the above and our services.



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BY TOBIAS GORN

