

THE MIDAS TOUCH

HOW TO PREPARE A GOLD QUILL AWARDS
ENTRY FOR THE COMMUNICATION
MANAGEMENT DIVISION



IABC INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION
OF BUSINESS COMMUNICATORS

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INTRODUCTION

IABC's Gold Quill Awards program is an international symbol of excellence in strategic communication that recognizes smart thinking, flawless execution and proven results. Whether policy-based or marketing-driven, award winners deliver meaningful work that contributes to business results and builds the reputation of the communication profession. Reaching across the globe, IABC seeks the best of the best.

This guide shares what we look for in an award-winning entry. With *The Midas Touch*, you'll be able to match your work against the criteria used by our trained evaluators. We invite you to use this guide to help you prepare an award-winning entry that turns your work into gold.

THE BASICS

- You can enter your work in four divisions and 47 categories. Gold Quill Award divisions include:
 - Communication Research Management
 - Communication Management
 - Communication Education and Training
 - Communication Skills
- You may enter work in multiple divisions and categories, however each work plan must be customized to the category description. Please read these descriptions carefully to determine which categories best fit your entries.
- The work plan reviews six sections of IABC's strategic communication planning model against IABC'S Global Seven-point Scale of Excellence.
 - Business need/opportunity
 - Stakeholder analysis
 - Goals and objectives
 - Solution overview
 - Implementation and challenges
 - Measurement and evaluation
- Each entry consists of two components: The work plan and the work sample. A work plan is like an executive summary of your communication strategy. A work sample is a representative copy of all the material that supports your project. The work plan must be presented using the major headings found in the score sheet.
- You are allowed up to four (4) pages for the work plans. Margins must be at least half an inch (1.27 cm) on all sides, and fonts may be no smaller than 10 points. Work plans exceeding the maximum length will be disqualified. For all divisions, the entry must include a work sample. If the work sample is missing, the entry will be disqualified.
- Make sure to follow the directions, and answer all questions clearly and concisely.

ELIGIBILITY

Any work done for IABC is not eligible. All entries must align with IABC's [Code of Ethics](#), and you must have direct involvement in the work that you're submitting.

HOW TO WRITE A WORK PLAN

Meet the seven-point scale

Gold Quill Award entries are scored using a seven-point global scale of excellence as a guide. All entries start with a base score of 4, which represents a fully competent approach to communication planning and execution. Work is scored up or down, depending on the content. Scores of 7 or 1 are very rare. To earn an award, entrants must achieve a score of 5.25 or higher.

| | |
|---|---|
| 7 | Outstanding: An extraordinary or insightful approach or result |
| 6 | Significantly better than average: Demonstrates an innovative, strategic approach, takes all elements into account and delivers significant results. |
| 5 | Better than average: Demonstrates a strategic approach and aligns the communication solution with the business need to deliver meaningful results. |
| 4 | Average: Competent approach or results, professionally sound and appropriate. |
| 3 | Somewhat less than satisfactory: Several key elements that are critical to the strategy or execution are missing, incorrect or underrepresented. |
| 2 | An inadequate approach or result: A significant number of critical elements are missing. |
| 1 | Poor: Work that is wrong or inappropriate. |

The Gold Quill Awards score sheet provides information about how scores are weighted for each section. Go to gq.iabc.com to check it out.

DON'T FORGET!

Start with the background information

Complete the required information including your name and organization, the division and category that you're entering, and the title and time period of the entry. A short description of the project must also appear. These elements are not scored, but evaluators keep them in mind when considering the context of the project. Check out the work plan template on gq.iabc.com to see formatting preferences.

SECTION 1: THE BUSINESS NEED OR OPPORTUNITY

Why it's important

Evaluators need context to assess whether the communication solution supports the business goals. Without the relevant background information, it's difficult to determine whether the strategy addresses the right issues and audiences. A good description of the business need linked to the communication opportunity sets the stage for the rest of the work plan.

Evaluator Questions

How well does the entrant explain the context for the entry by clearly establishing the business need and the related communication opportunity?

To what extent does the entrant:

- Explain the business and communication environment including specific challenges that have occurred?
- Align the communication opportunity and the business need by explaining how the project helped the organization?
- Use research to substantiate the need and inform the direction of the communication strategy?

How this section is scored

- It must be evident that the communication solution is aligned with the business needs and organizational mandate.
- It should be clear why the project was carried out.
- It should solve a problem, fill a need, or help to leverage an opportunity.
- Ideally, the need was identified by formal or informal research, and communication work positively influences business performance, now or in the future.

Avoid:

- Inclusion of generalizations and vague needs such as, "Management thought it would be a good idea."
- Assumed needs such as producing a newsletter because the audience needs information.
- Providing needs that don't support the business of the organization.

A satisfactory entry earns a score of 4. It should:

- Clearly define and demonstrate an understanding of the business need.
- Speak to how the opportunity was identified and why it matters to the business.
- Explain how the communication project addresses the need.
- Provide enough context about the organization and its environment so that it's clear how the program contributed to business success.

Entries are scored up for:

- Formal or informal research that demonstrates the need.
- A clear explanation of specific changes or challenges that may have occurred.
- A superior explanation of why it matters to the business or how it will make a difference.

Entries are scored down if:

- There isn't an explanation of how the project will help the organization.
- The need is assumed.
- There isn't enough information about the organization and its business goals to allow evaluators to fairly evaluate the solution.

SECTION 2: STAKEHOLDER ANALYSIS

Why it's important

Effective communication doesn't occur until the audience receives and understands the message. The work plan must demonstrate an understanding of the audiences. If the entrant doesn't explore the audience preferences, attitudes, demographics, psychographics or other characteristics, it's difficult to determine whether objectives, messages, approach, media or channels are on target.

Evaluator Questions

How well does the entrant define, segment, and analyze the critical characteristics of the audience in relationship to the business need?

To what extent does the entrant:

- Share relevant audience characteristics such as prior knowledge, education, geography, demographics, psychographics, preferences, attitudes, opinions, motivations or issues?
- Include research that identifies the characteristics, mindset, preferences and needs of the audience?
- Use this research to provide insight to the strategy?
- Discuss how relevant factors will influence the communication strategy and tactics?

How this section is scored

Audience analysis should be based on formal or informal research. Look for information about demographics, psychographics, mindset, what the audience thinks and why. Entrants must show that they've taken the audience's needs, wants, preferences, opinions and behaviors into account, and that they've used the information to design their program. The better the entrant describes the audience, the higher their score will be.

Avoid:

- Making vague assumptions such as "We thought they might like . . ."
- Stating an audience collectively with no identifying characteristics such as the general public.
- Stating characteristics or behaviors that seem irrelevant to the project or audience.

A satisfactory entry earns a score of 4. It should:

- List audiences (primary, secondary and tertiary if appropriate), and describe their characteristics, preferences, and needs in enough detail to show how your understanding led to choices of strategy, tactics, media and channels.

Entries are scored up for:

- Research that defines the audience characteristics and needs (formal is best, but informal analysis can be cited).
- A discussion that shows how the audience is linked to strategy and tactics.
- Comments about relevant factors, such as prior knowledge, education, geography, psychographics, motivations, opinions, understanding, and other issues.

Entries are scored down if:

- The audience isn't defined.
- Broad audiences such as employees or the general public are listed without defining needs or characteristics.
- Audiences are listed but no analysis is provided.
- An opportunity to segment and target specific audience groups is missed.
- An obvious audience in relation to the defined need is missed.
- The wrong audience is identified based on the defined need.
- There are vague, unsupported assumptions about audience needs.

SECTION 3: GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Why it's important

The ability to set meaningful, measurable objectives that are relevant to the business need is critical to measure the success of the program. Effective work that delivers results helps to create value and build credibility for the value of communication as a primary business driver. The answer to this question is critical, because poor objectives will lower the score in other parts of the evaluation.

Evaluator Questions

How well does the entrant set measurable objectives that are relevant to the business need and will measure the effect of strategic communication on the business?

To what extent does the entrant:

- Distinguish between objectives, tactics, and an approach to the issue?
- Align the communication goal and objectives with the business need?
- Establish measurable, relevant objectives that are stated as communication outcomes?
- Align objectives with the stakeholder analysis and the business need?
- Ensure that objectives will produce an effect on the stated business needs?

How this section is scored

Goals and objectives must be aligned with the business needs identified, and stated in measurable terms as outputs and outcomes. If you only state objectives that are output-based the highest score you will earn is 3.5, providing that the objectives set are in direct relationship to the business need.

Goals generally describe what you want to accomplish in a broad sense. Objectives are measurable and set targets. Progress must be reported in the Measurement section. Objectives clearly define the desired outcome, or what success will look like. They are:

- Measurable in quantity, time, cost, percentages, quality or some other criteria.
- Realistic, meaningful and believable.
- Aligned with the needs of the business.
- Stated from a communication perspective.
- Can be a combination of output-based statements (volume, increases), and outcome-based measures (attitudes, opinions, behaviors and business results).

Output and outcome objectives

- Output-based objectives measure volume or increases against media vehicles and communication channels like website visits, articles distributed, ads produced, meetings held, content analysis, blog posts, tweets, downloads of publications and so forth.

Examples:

- News media will carry 100 stories.
 - The publication will be downloaded 10,000 times per year.
 - The number of visits to the website will increase by 15,000.
- Outcome-based objectives measure what the audience will gain by way of awareness, understanding, recall, different perceptions, and quantifiable change in attitudes, opinions and behaviors. Was the message heard? Is the audience engaged? Did they read the information? How many phone calls or requests for information were received? Did the communication strategy influence the audience to buy something—either a product or an idea? Outcome-based objectives have a greater impact on the business need.

Examples:

- Audience awareness of the product will increase from 10 percent to 50 percent.
- Employee understanding of the business goals will increase from 25 percent to 65 percent.
- Positive perception of the organization will improve from 30 percent to 50 percent.
- Sixty-five percent of employees will actively practice the customer experience standards daily.
- Product sales will increase by 10 percent and market share by 2 percent.

Tactics, approaches, and supporting strategies are often confused with objectives. These elements describe the vehicles, channels and activities used to achieve results, and are reported in the Solution Overview or Implementation and Challenges sections.

Examples:

- Redesign the employee newsletter.
- Stage a town hall meeting.
- Create a new social media campaign.
- Stage a special event.
- Distribute the brochure to 15,000 customers.

The **SMART** formula is one way to determine whether the objectives are sound, and while this process is not the only way to evaluate the strength of objectives, it is a good guideline.

| | |
|----------------------|---|
| S pecific: | Describes a desired outcome |
| M easurable: | Quantified as an output, outtake or outcome |
| A chievable: | Challenging but within the range of influence |
| R elevant: | Contributes to business goals in a meaningful way |
| T ime-framed: | Includes a completion date, if appropriate |

Avoid stating objectives that:

- Don't seem to flow naturally or logically from the goal or need.
- Seem to be a long shot.
- Seem worthy and measurable, but don't address the need.
- Are vague, irrelevant or not measurable such as, "Our objective was to win the hearts . . ."
- Are task-based or process-based (stage a special event) rather than results-based.
- Are too numerous.
- Aren't aligned with audience or business needs.
- Are numerical but not substantiated with research.

A satisfactory entry earns a score of 4. It should:

- State an overall big picture goal (one or two) that doesn't need to be stated in measurable terms.
- State specific measurable, meaningful objectives demonstrating the effect of communication on the business.

Entries are scored up for:

- Clearly stated goals linked to the business objectives and the identified need.
- Objectives that are stated in terms of impact on the business and the target audiences.
- Objectives that are outcome-based and likely to deliver meaningful results to the business.

Entries are scored down if:

- Objectives are production or deadline-focused, or based on process (tactics) such as “produce a newsletter”.
- Objectives are not related to the problem identified.
- There are no measurable objectives.
- There are too many (unfocused) or soft objectives that are not supported by research. Example: Increase readership by 1 percent.

SECTION 4: THE SOLUTION OVERVIEW

Why it's important

The solution overview offers insight into how you approached the project. Looking at the communication environment, business and audience needs, and relevant research, the evaluator should be able to easily determine whether and how the information informed the strategy.

Evaluator Questions

Given the business need and audience analysis, how effective is the communication approach?

To what extent did the entrant:

- Demonstrate strategic thinking?
- Clearly explain how the business needs, audiences and objectives are aligned with the strategic and/or creative approach, tactics, vehicles, media and communication channels?
- Demonstrate that the audience analysis was taken into account when developing key messages for each group identified?
- Provide an executive summary of the tactical execution plan listing the audience, tactics and time line?
- Demonstrate that the communication solution is aligned with the business needs?

How this section is scored

Evaluators look for a summary of the solution, the logic that supports it, and details about how the plan was implemented to assess how well you demonstrated strategic thinking and problem-solving skills.

Ask yourself:

- Did I discuss the approach and the process, and is it well thought out and implemented?
- Are key messages defined? Are they appropriate?
- Did I define what is relevant to the audience and likely to trigger a response?
- Did I discuss why I chose particular tactics, media and distribution channels?
- Is the strategy aligned with the business needs?

A satisfactory entry earns a score of 4. It should:

- Describe how the plan was developed and implemented.
- Explain the entrant's rationale and strategic thinking.
- Include key messages and a high-level tactical implementation plan.
- Be aligned with the business need.

Entries are scored up for:

- Well-explained rationale linking audiences and objectives to tactics and vehicles.
- Sound reasoning supporting choices, which may include evaluating other options.
- Discussion of the links to business needs.
- Inclusion of stakeholder input.
- A plan that is clearly appropriate.
- Creative or innovative approaches.
- A summary of the tactical implementation plan listing the audience, key messages, tactics or communication vehicle and timeline.

Entries are scored down if:

- The plan fails to explain what was done or why.
- The plan doesn't seem likely to achieve the objectives.
- Presents a dated approach to a standard communication problem.
- Key messages are missing.
- The plan doesn't address the business need.
- The tactical implementation plan is sparse or missing.

SECTION 5: IMPLEMENTATION AND CHALLENGES

Why it's important

Communication professionals often navigate through a variety of challenges such as tight deadlines, changes in direction, small budgets, stubborn decision makers and staff turnover. Challenges add complexity to project management. Efforts to successfully manage these issues are taken into account when scoring the entry. How well challenges are met speaks to the project management skill.

Evaluator Questions

How well did the entrant manage issues related to budget and other resources, timing, direction, selling the solution to decision makers or other challenging issues?

To what extent does the entrant:

- Provide a budget that seems reasonable given the organization and the scope of communication activities?
- Demonstrate that time and other resources were effectively used?
- Outline any challenges faced, and demonstrate that they were effectively managed?
- Demonstrate consultation with stakeholders including presentation of the plan to management?
- Provide evidence of direct involvement in the project?

How this section is scored

Your discussion of the program implementation and any challenges that you faced must be documented. Evaluators look for how budget, time and other resources were used. While the budget doesn't have to be detailed, a range must be included. Provide evidence that resources were used wisely, regardless of how limited or generous. Review limitations or challenges you managed including selling or implementing the idea. Demonstrate collaboration with stakeholders. Resources should seem appropriate for the scope of the project and the size of the organization. If you don't budget, the most your entry can score is 3 points, providing that you have addressed the use of other resources.

Avoid:

- Apologies for insufficient budget or excuses about limited resources.
- Use of media, vehicles or channels that don't suit the audience.
- Excessive use of resources without proper justification.

A satisfactory entry earns a score of 4. It should:

- Discuss how the project was managed, including stakeholder collaboration and involvement if appropriate.
- Provide a reasonable explanation of the resources available and used. Discuss budget, time, staff, consultants and other resources that may have been used.
- Note challenges encountered and how they were overcome.
- Explain how the plan was sold to management, the client or other stakeholders.
- Include a description of your role in the project.

Entries are scored up for:

- A clever approach to selling the project.
- Good use of budget including effective use of a limited budget.
- Effective and appropriate use of internal and external resources.
- Smart solutions to challenges.
- Work achieved under impossible deadlines or within tight budgets.

Entries are scored down if:

- Budget or resource information is not provided.
- Use of resources seems wasteful or inappropriate.
- There's no explanation about how the project was implemented.
- Deadlines are missed or the budget is exceeded, unless there is a reasonable explanation.
- Work clearly wasn't worth the time, effort and money.

SECTION 6: MEASUREMENT AND EVALUATION

Why it's important

This is where the rubber meets the road! We want your work to demonstrate that strategic communication planning and execution is a vital business process. That's why it's critical to set measurable objectives that are aligned with business needs, and then measure progress against them. When communicators can show management the value of their work in measurable terms, senior executives sit up and take notice, and the reputation of communication as an important business process increases.

Evaluator Questions

How well were the communication objectives met?

To what extent does the entrant:

- Align measurement with valid objectives?
- Demonstrate output-based results that measure increased volumes as an indicator of progress and/or outcome-based results that influence awareness, understanding, opinion, attitude, behaviors or business results?
- Provide a thorough evaluation that supports the results?

How this section is scored

Did you track progress against the objectives set? Experienced entrants often report results against objectives in a table format by listing the original objectives, the targets, and the outcome or output as results.

Evaluators look for measurement of outputs (usually volume-based), and outcomes (measurements that influence audience awareness, opinions, behaviors or business goals). Measurements should be objective, clearly explained and appropriate for the project. The results should show the relationship between the objectives that were set and the results that were achieved. They should be thorough and convincing.

The program must deliver meaningful, measurable results. If you have set strong objectives and measured against them, scoring will be easy. If the original objectives were weak, your scores will not be high.

Your work plan will score lower if:

- There were no objectives or no meaningful objectives.
- You show clear evidence of success without an extensive evaluation process.
- The results were carefully measured but were below expectations. Be sure to provide rationale for objectives that were not met.

Avoid:

- Subjective results based on hearsay without documented evidence.
- Results that don't address the business need.
- Overly positive results that don't seem possible given the project description.
- Narrow, skimpy or vague results, or generalizations.
- Highlights that don't seem to paint the entire picture.
- Results reported only as outputs.

A satisfactory entry earns a score of 4. It should:

- Demonstrate alignment between the objectives and the measurement.
- Demonstrate appropriate measurement methodology, formal or informal – formal is best.
- Reference sample sizes if appropriate.
- Measure against the original benchmarks used to set objectives.
- Show credible results that support the business needs.
- Prove that the objectives were met through evaluation.
- Provide results that demonstrate that the strategy has influenced progress toward business goals.
- At minimum, state output-based results.

Entries are scored up for:

- Thorough evaluation and documentation of measures.
- Use of multiple measurement methods that clearly define results.
- Credible measurement of intangibles such as a media relations or reputation index, or brand or loyalty measurement.
- An executive summary included in the work sample if a formal evaluation was done.
- Results that exceed targets.
- Results that demonstrate a positive impact on the business.
- Outcome-based results that positively influence awareness, understanding, opinion, attitude, behaviors or business results.

Entries are scored down if:

- The plan fails to report against the stated objectives.
- Results aren't statistically valid.
- The plan includes subjective measurement, or measurement without a source.
- There is a mismatch between objectives and qualitative or quantitative results.
- There is a misinterpretation of survey data.
- Results measure only whether a tactic has been completed.
- There is lack of measurement for each objective.
- The plan provides only anecdotal evaluation such as, "We heard that people were happy."
- Results don't relate to the audience or objectives such as, "My manager liked it."
- Results aren't meaningful to the business.

You will get some credit if evaluation plans are thoroughly outlined but haven't been carried out for a valid reason. You will score zero if objectives are not measured and the missing information is not explained.

HOW TO PREPARE A WORK SAMPLE

What to include in the work sample

Preparing a work sample is like preparing a portfolio. Work sample elements demonstrate skill in strategic planning and execution. Material should be organized and presented in the same order as the questions answered for the work plan.

A work sample counts for 50 percent of the score in Communication Research Management, Communication Management, and Communication Education and Training divisions.

The work sample scoring is split into four sections:

- Stakeholder alignment and impact
- Alignment with objectives and strategy
- Professional execution
- Overall quality

The sample is scored separately from the work plan, but it's hard for a sample to get a high score if the plan didn't score well. Make sure that the material in your work sample matches the material described in your work plan.

In Management and Education categories the work sample should include a representative sample of all project elements so that evaluators can review the material and determine how well it's aligned with the work plan. This might include a summary of the research, the strategic plan, tactical implementation plan, budget, measurements or evaluation, and sample material such as brochures, print or electronic ads or media clips, screen captures of websites, or a link to the website, Power Point presentations, scripts, publications or specific material referenced in your work plan.

In Skills categories, samples should include a copy of the product entered in the program, and any supporting information such as research, media plans, DVDs, scripts, creative rationale, focus tests, and post-campaign tracking information or other elements.

Even though the Gold Quill Awards program process has moved online for both entrants and evaluators, please be mindful of your file sizes. You will be able to upload a maximum of five (5) work sample files. Your work sample files must be in PDF, PNG, JPG, GIF, MP4, WMV, M4V formats. If you have more than five (5) files, please combine them into fewer PDF files. Each file is limited to 2 GB (2,000 MB) in size.

When evaluators review the work sample material they will look at it as objectively as possible through the eyes of your intended audience, and take the overall strategy into account.

For information about which file formats are accepted and how to convert large files please reference the IABC Gold Quill Awards website at gq.iabc.com.

SECTION 7: STAKEHOLDER ALIGNMENT AND INFLUENCE

Why it's important

Connecting with the audience in a meaningful and memorable way is an important competency in communication work. Strategic planning is only part of the equation. Messages, vehicles and channels must be aligned with audience needs and preferences because if the audience doesn't get the message in a clear, consistent and creative way, everything else is academic.

Evaluator Questions

How well does the work sample reflect the audience characteristics, needs and preferences?

To what extent does the entrant:

- Demonstrate good choices of messages, media and communication channels that align with the audience analysis?
- Include messages that engage the intellect and/or emotions of the audience, and influence thoughts or behaviors?
- Integrate key messages, communication vehicles and channels to achieve consistency?

How this section is scored

Evaluators look for a match between the way the audience was described and the way that the program was executed based on the following guidelines:

- Is the language level appropriate for the audience?
- For an older audience, are the font sizes adequate?
- For an audience that has little time, is the copy concise?
- Does the choice of vehicle match the audience's needs?
- What about the communication channels used to deliver the message?
- Are the messages clear, concise, credible, consistent and creative?
- Is the information relevant and meaningful to the business need?

If the needs of the audience were poorly identified, it will be tough to score well in this section. If you're entering a media relations strategy, communication training program, an audit or another program that doesn't lend itself to outstanding visuals or audio, it is not likely to have the same creative appeal as a marketing or community relations campaign. However, creativity can be found in unusual approaches or innovative thinking, and if this is the case, it still counts toward creativity points. The following basic benchmarks apply.

A satisfactory entry earns a score of 4. It should:

- Demonstrate choices appropriate to the audience.
- Use clear and consistent language.
- Be well written and well produced.
- Reflect a clear understanding of audience characteristics and needs.
- Communicate the key messages in a way that is likely to resonate with the audience.

Entries are scored up for:

- Particularly good choices matching audience characteristics.
- Smart thinking that shows the audience's perspective.
- Messages that clearly impact the audience.
- Strong writing and execution that is likely to connect emotionally with the audience.
- Integrated vehicles and channels.

Entries are scored down if:

- Language, graphics or design is too complex or inappropriate.
- Messages patronize or insult the audience.
- Messages are not clear, or the material is overwritten or too bureaucratic.
- Key messages aren't evident.
- Work sample elements are bland and may get lost in clutter.

SECTION 8: ALIGNMENT WITH OBJECTIVES AND STRATEGY

Why it's important

The work sample must support the objectives stated in the work plan. Strategic execution is not strategic unless it supports the needs of the business, connects with the audience, and makes an impact. This should be clear in everything presented from research to language choices, media, messages, images, vehicles and communication channels.

Evaluator Questions

How well is the work sample aligned with the objectives stated in the work plan?

To what extent does the entrant:

- Provide evidence that program design is on strategy, and is consistent with business needs?
- Demonstrate that work sample elements are clear, consistent, and communicated in a powerful, emotional way?
- Demonstrate that work sample elements reflect the objectives, strategic thinking, key messages and audience analysis as presented in the work plan?
- Provide clear evidence that the work sample has the desired effect on the audience and the business needs?

How this section is scored

It should be clear why certain design, style or visual elements were used. The communication material should be clear, consistent and address the communication need. For example, if an objective was to increase employee awareness of company benefits, the writing and design of each campaign element should be aligned with the need.

Evaluators will look for:

- Choices that support the objectives.
- Clear, consistent messages related to objectives.
- Effective communication.
- Use of key messages.

A satisfactory entry earns a score of 4. It should:

- Reflect the objectives set out in the work plan.
- Contain clear key messages.
- Demonstrate choices that support the needs of the business.
- Be deliberately targeted to close any gaps defined by the research.
- Align with the business needs to support the achievement of goals and object.

Entries are scored up if:

- The work sample is designed and produced to achieve the project's objectives.
- Support material and design elements are appropriate for the audience, and aligned with the business need and brand identity.
- The work is clear, consistent and clever, and communicates the key messages in a powerful, emotional way.
- The sample fully reflects the objectives and strategic thinking presented in the plan.

Entries are scored down if:

- Key messages don't appear in the work sample.
- The work is out-of-sync with the organization's brand, unless there's an explanation.
- Messaging isn't consistent.
- Extra elements in the sample distract from the objectives.
- The sample doesn't show what was done.
- The sample is incomplete, confusing or poorly presented or explained.
- There is an obvious mismatch, such as an emphasis on the wrong audience or too much focus on executive egos and not enough on audience needs.

SECTION 9: PROFESSIONAL EXECUTION

Why it's important

Well-designed and implemented communication work helps to build professional reputation and credibility. Without carefully crafted vehicles, even the best strategy may fail to deliver messages that connect with the audience. Paying attention to industry standards and keeping up with leading edge thinking, processes and production demonstrates commitment to effective communication.

On average, people are tapped by more than 500 information sources a day, and they will shut down if a message doesn't grab their attention. Good creative work answers the questions "What's in it for me?" and "Why should I care?" in a way that connects emotionally with the audience. Whether the project is a multimedia advertising campaign or a government relations strategy, creative thinking, imagination and innovative approaches will cut through today's information overload and command audience attention.

Evaluator Questions

Given the budget and resources, how well does the work sample measure up to professional standards?

To what extent does the entrant:

- Provide well-designed work sample elements that are likely to build reputation while delivering meaningful results?
- Offer evidence of alignment with business and audience needs?
- Demonstrate high-quality writing and production within budget and resource considerations?
- Demonstrate consistency between what was presented in the work plan and what was delivered?

How this section is scored

Work must demonstrate alignment with business needs and audience preferences. Evaluators will take note of new or different approaches. Aside from a great print ad or television commercial, there are other ways to express creativity and imagination. It could be that you have presented a new way to use research findings, or demonstrate innovative thinking through audience segmentation or choice of communication channels.

Would this entry survive the competition given the kind of communication normally directed to the audiences described?

The work sample should showcase quality material. If the budget was skimpy, present the best job possible within the constraints. If the budget was generous, the production quality should reflect an investment in higher quality products.

Evaluators watch for clear, consistent, error-free writing; high-quality photography; adherence to design principles; and well-produced video. If the entry is an audit or a proposal, evaluators will look for clear writing, an easy to follow structure, charts, graphs, illustrations and appropriate research methodology.

IABC allows for cultural differences when evaluating work from different parts of the world.

A satisfactory entry earns a score of 4. It should:

- Contain quality production values appropriate to the media and the budget.
- Reflect professional standards of ethics and good taste.
- Align with audience needs and preferences, as well as the business needs.
- Include methods, messages, visuals and channels that are aligned with audience characteristics and preferences.
- Include work samples that match the description in the work plan.
- Demonstrate clear, consistent use of language, visuals and other elements that support the brand, communicate the business need, and support the achievement of communication objectives.
- Demonstrate a fairly standard approach that is well executed.

Entries are scored up for:

- High-quality writing and superior production values.
- Strong images that convey key messages.
- Work that inspires an emotional connection.
- Thorough documentation that supports the description of the project in the work plan.
- Clever, strategic work that's appropriate for the audience and likely to leave a lasting impression.
- Work that's state-of-the-art for the medium and channels selected, based on available budget.

Entries are scored down for:

- Amateur work or dated approaches unless supported by strategy.
- Inconsistent use of images and language.
- Poor technical production.
- Excess spending not likely to achieve results.
- Images, writing tone or style that doesn't match business or audience needs.
- An overused approach or one that's likely to bore the audience.
- An approach that clearly would not work.
- Work that insults the audience or is inappropriate.

SECTION 10: OVERALL QUALITY

Why it's important

The work plan and the work sample must be aligned. You must demonstrate that you applied the research and analytical thinking to the execution of your strategy. If the work plan describes the context, challenges and solution for the communication opportunity, the work sample should demonstrate that the strategy was carried out. Strategic execution is essential to great communication work.

Evaluator Questions

Given the interdependence among all sections, to what degree is the entry a strong blueprint for strategic planning and execution?

To what extent does the entrant:

- Provide a well-written and produced entry that's easy to understand?
- Offer a representative sample of all the elements and support material described in the plan?
- Demonstrate strategic and creative thinking as well as approaches that take the audience and business needs into account?
- Demonstrate the ability of communication to influence valid business results?

How this section is scored

There must be a strong connection between the work plan and the work sample. The work sample must not only look organized, but it must be strategic. If the work sample is weak although the work plan is good, the entry's score will reflect that weakness.

Consider the following:

- Does the work sample contain all or most of the elements referred to in the work plan?
- Is it easy to assess that the work sample is a logical, detailed presentation of the work plan?

A satisfactory entry earns a score of 4. It should:

- Provide an overall quality product aligned with the objectives.
- Demonstrate a comprehensive but not overbearing presentation of the elements described in the work plan.
- Provide evidence that as much care and attention was devoted to delivering the tactical elements of the plan as went into developing the plan itself.
- Include a work sample that reinforces the work plan and contributes to the overall quality of the entry.
- Demonstrate consistency between the work plan (what you said you would deliver) and the work sample (what you actually delivered).

Entries are scored up for:

- A comprehensive sample.
- Representing most or all of the elements referenced in the work plan.
- Creative execution, processes, and approaches that take the audience and business needs into account.
- Demonstration of excellence in strategic planning and execution throughout the entry.

Entries are scored down if:

- A sample doesn't match the plan or reflect the business or audience needs.
- Inconsistency or lack of clarity occurs between the work plan and the execution.
- Within cultural considerations, spelling, grammatical or structural errors occur.
- There is a demonstration of poor work, including lack of proofreading, poor photography and poor technical production.

REACH FOR THE STARS

Creating a Gold Quill Awards entry imposes the disciplines of strategic planning, audience analysis, strategic alignment, and measurement on the work of communicators, keeping us from a narrow focus on tactics. But most importantly, the program leads communication professionals through the process of explaining how our work helps business meet its goals, solve its problems and advance its culture. It forces us to provide evidence of the value of communication as a business driver.

The Gold Quill Awards are the world's premier awards program for communicators. Simply entering gives you value, as you'll receive quality feedback from trained international evaluators, all of whom are working professionals in the communication field. And, should you win, you'll become part of the Gold Quill galaxy—a stellar lineup of communication all-stars who've used strategy, creativity, measurement and innovation to take the communication profession out of this world.

Take your place in the glittering galaxy of communication stars.

Good luck in this year's program. We hope you win, and if you do, we'll see you at the Excellence Gala in San Francisco!

You'll find the 2015 Gold Quill Awards score sheet posted on the Gold Quill Awards website at gq.iabc.com, along with frequently asked questions and other tools that will help you shape an award-winning entry.

Questions? Please email recognition@iabc.com for answers.

2015 IABC WORLD CONFERENCE

This year's World Conference will be held at the Marriott Marquis Hotel in San Francisco, 14-17 June. The IABC Excellence Gala will be held on Monday 15 June. For more information, visit iabc.com.

