

# Judgement day, or you ought to be congratulated

I missed the deadline for this column because, rather ironically given the topic of the issue, I was knee-deep in trying to get award entries out.



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**WHEN I WORKED** for big agencies, things like award entries were just taken care of. I had no idea how, but they just happened. All we creatives were left to do was bitch – something that, as creatives, we were very good at. We bitched, firstly, about what great work of ours hadn't been selected to enter. Then, when the list of finalists would be posted in the creative department, we would bitch about how the jury was so obviously biased.

Finally, when our work did actually get something, we would bitch that it wasn't enough – if it had been given a bronze, it should have been at least silver – and we would delight in pointing out the obvious discrepancies and inconsistencies in the judging like the most insane of 9-11 conspiracy nuts.

We had some vague idea that awards cost money to enter, but it was an abstract thought – kind of like it was when you were a kid and you knew that cars cost money but you still couldn't

understand why your dad didn't own a Corvette. After all, he had a Datsun Sunny, so why couldn't we just have that Corvette instead?

When you run your own small business, things are a lot different. If you think the judging of awards is random and frustrating, try figuring out how to enter the bloody things.

This year I decided to enter one particular campaign in three different international awards. Each had completely different, very specific,

instructions on how they wanted the print entries prepared; from unmounted concertina-folded entries, to mounting on black board with a three-inch boarder; some want foam-core, others view foam-core as Satan's mounting material and will send the good ship Steve Irwin over to your place if they hear that you have even looked at a piece in the last decade. Some required copies of you mother's birth certificate taped to the back of each entry, each of which was to be delivered, by Nepalese monks, during a full moon, in a month beginning with G, to an obscure address in Norway from where it would be flown to a secret location in London to be spat on by a bunch of creative directors who know more about everything than you do because they are English and they are creative directors... The instructions went on and on.

And, for this privilege we are charged about \$500 a pop.

Add to this the cost in my time and that of our staff trying to make sure that everything was mounted (and re-mounted after the work experience kid had the first go at it) on the correct stuff and double-checking that the A2 boards didn't end up in the three-inch-border envelope. (And who knew that black mounting board is \$17 a sheet? Certainly not the work experience kid who went through it like toilet paper in an all-girls' boarding school). And throughout this whole process you can't help thinking that you are just pissing money up against this giant awards wall – but you press on like a slightly senile pensioner spending their rent on scratchies.

For God's sake. How long have these award shows been going? Surely, if they can standardise time around the world, they can figure out a standard system for entering bloody award shows. I suggest that if Kevin Rudd really wanted to make a difference to the country's productivity (or at least that of our industry) he should convene a Copenhagen-style summit at some ski resort in Europe, send in Penny Wong and Wilson Tuckey and get this shit sorted out.

So, why do we do it year-in, year-out? This is one of our industry's eternal questions, a question that ignites a level of passion amongst the industry's talking heads the likes of which is rarely seen in this country outside of the stands at a Serb vs Croat match-up on Rod Laver Arena.

Award shows cater to the two underling forces that drive the advertising industry: ego and the need to bitch endlessly. For this reason they will never die. The winners have their egos polished, while the losers

are provided with the most wonderful opportunity to bitch. Award shows are a product that this perfectly formed for their audience.

My first experience of 'big time' award shows was when I was 22 and won a trip to Cannes for the ad festival. Being pretty much an outsider, I was vaguely embarrassed by the whole thing while, simultaneously, being in awe of it. But it was walking into the Palais des Festivals et des Congrès de Cannes (the same venue that hosts the film awards) for the award ceremony that really defined my experience and has coloured my personal view of awards since.

We were required to enter the Palais via the same entrance, and over the same red carpet, they used for the film festival. It was a beautiful summer's evening and the edge of the red carpet was lined with a few groups of tourists, perhaps 50 or so, cameras at the ready. They had been attracted like seagulls to the lights and the red carpet. "Surely", they must have been thinking while they surveyed the Hollywood-style set-up, "we are going to see some celebs – if they are making such a big fuss there must be someone famous arriving".

These poor tourists were disappointed in the extreme. The pathetic nature of the situation as we walked up red carpet still makes me cringe when I think about it.

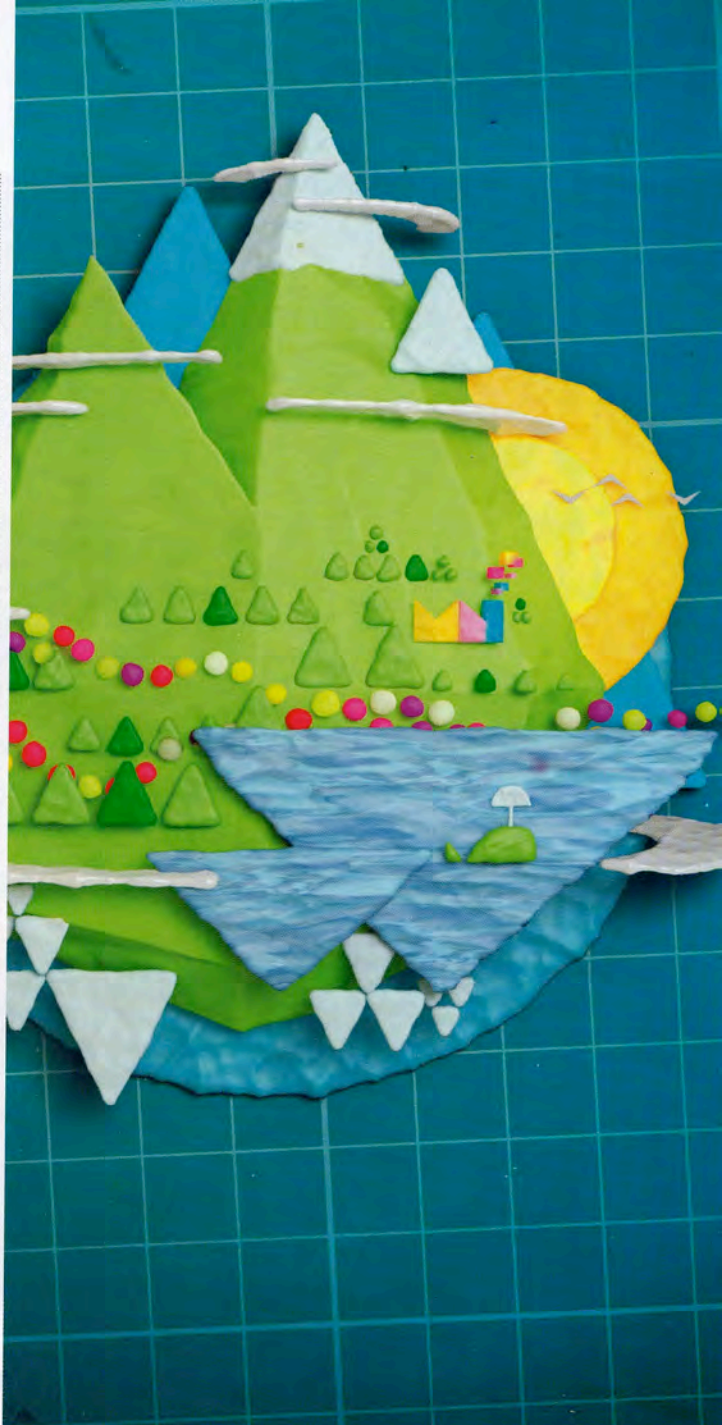
Somehow, though, it is wonderfully poetic that those tourists, the unsuspecting public, had been so disappointed by a bunch of ad people. The same bunch of ad people that disappointed them on a daily basis as their nightly viewing of *Baywatch* was so rudely interrupted by messages from those trying to hawk their dishwashing liquid and breakfast cereals.

And, I can't help but feel that this is why, ultimately, award shows will prevail, because those for whom we spend our working lives crafting messages will never see what we do as much more than an interruption. Those things that we spend most of our waking hours slaving over, stressing about, arguing with colleagues and clients alike about, will never have any more meaning than a call during dinner from an Indian call centre to the general public.

If getting a little kudos from our peers for this pain is all we get, then we'll take what we can.

So, here's to another award season. I hope you get something, and if not, I'll see you on the blogs. ©

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brief  
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