



# From Little Acorns . . .

## **ALEX GIBSON on the cathartic awards process**

This year sees the running of the 10th HSMIA Sales and Marketing Awards. The first award ceremony which took place in the Chapter One restaurant in Dublin was attended by a modest, but enthusiastic, group of entrants. Today, the awards ceremony has long since outgrown the capacity of any restaurant to host it, such has been the explosion of interest in marketing as a driver of business and the need for the industry to celebrate excellence in marketing endeavour.

Indeed, the Awards themselves provide us with a type of bellwether insight into how the marketing sector has changed. Early award ceremonies tended to focus on brochures and print advertisements as the key factors to be focussed on and for which effort needed to be rewarded.

Today however, there are a veritable plethora of categories covering the internet and the web, and international marketing strategy among others. Fittingly, there is a greater emphasis on recognising the role that team effort plays in delivering sales and marketing success. This emphasis on team-work has proved revelatory to me. While the categories for individual professionalism sometimes demand a gentle push or cajoling to get people to let themselves be nominated, there is wild enthusiasm on the part of sales teams to step up to the mark and put their best foot forward (forgive the clichés – it's the warm weather). The team category typically fosters in entrants a competitive spirit that would leave professional sports people in their wake.

Intense, but equally good-natured, rivalries have emerged between the teams of the top hotel companies of late to win a coveted HSMIA Best Sales Team award, and often reveal themselves in an unbridled sense of triumphalism among the successful team. As the general managers get swept along with the mood and order a break out of the champagne, the team typically experiences a sense of collective euphoria and togetherness that lasts well beyond the night itself. I do feel that the process of preparing an entry is, in itself, a benefit to organisations.

We have seen a very welcome number of initiatives such as Optimus which have served to build systems to ensure excellence in management processes. I see award ceremonies as being a very important adjunct to such programmes. While strategic planning

should be a normal part of all business management, sometimes it takes the challenge of entering an Awards to force companies to galvanise their thoughts on why they do what they do. This is especially so when the uniqueness of a company's people or activities has to be crystallised and distilled to just a few pages. It has been said to me on more than one occasion that the process of entering was even therapeutic, though admittedly not by entrants who left it until the last minute. As well as technology impacting on the types of award categories on offer, it has also impacted on the way judging is conducted. The advent of online judging for most categories has meant that a broader, more diverse range of judges can be accessed to assess the entries.

For the professional endeavour awards, either team or individual, there still remains the daunting process of an interview – not a grilling per se, more an opportunity to shine (now where did I hear that before?). But as with all ordeals the reward of putting your case before a jury of your peers should not be underestimated. I have yet to meet a sales team who emerged from a session with the judges who did not feel that the process itself, whatever about the final outcome, was a valuable exercise in critical self-evaluation. It is also a process that has a degree of self-confirmation attached to it too. After all, reaching a short-list is testimony itself to a degree of excellence in the sales and marketing process.

And after the graft comes the fun part – the awards ceremony: part glitz, part fun, part networking, the awards night is one of the few chances the sales and marketing community have to swap tales of business and social happenings in a relaxed environment. The awards night offers the ultimate showcase for talent, where the frontline troops in the battle to attract customers to hotels and Ireland Inc. can receive their due recognition. Many a hotel corridor sports the parchment to celebrate success at awards ceremonies. While some may take a jaundiced view on the benefits of entering and winning such awards, I for one am delighted that today there is a positive sense of possibility abroad. Long may there be those who raise themselves above the parapet.

You can join Ireland's sales and marketing elite storm troopers by entering the 10th HSMIA Awards 2006 at [www.hsmaiawards.com](http://www.hsmaiawards.com) ♦

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