



## Centralizing Awards Management With mBLAST Awards

Awards contests, by their nature, are often very distributed endeavors. Typically, an editor or publisher decides that their single publication wants to honor products, services, companies, and/or people in their editorial scope, and creates an award. It is not unusual for an IT group to throw together an online form for submission and to track the results with Excel spreadsheets. Judging is done via email, sneakernet, or other basic forms of communication. That all works, for a while.

When we encounter these types of awards processes we find that the process is often categorized as “a pain.” We also find that the editorial staff is not enthusiastically encouraging too many entries, because those entries increase the pain. Many of these programs are not revenue-producing because the publications lack e-commerce capabilities, and they require that their customer service deal with credits and other issues that invariably arise.

In short, the awards programs are underperforming simply because they were not set up for ramped success from the beginning. That’s where mBLAST can help.

### ***Breaking Apart the Awards Process***

The generic awards process involves a number of players:

**Nominees:** These are the people submitting to the award. These parties are most often PR firm personnel masquerading as the company submitting for the award.

**Judges:** These are generally internal editorial staff, but they can be external as well.

**Admin:** These are the editorial staff members who manage the ‘process’ of getting the submissions in from nominees and coordinating the judges’ analyses. They also deal with any inbound materials required for judging such as multimedia submissions, product samples, etc. They also summarize the results and participation stats.

**IT:** The information technology folks, who are always just sitting around waiting for something to do (sarcastic), get involved by programming the website and coordinating any special uploads (like short videos, pictures, etc.) associated with entries.

There can be other players too – administrative assistants, product managers, sales people, and so on – that get involved for key customers. You may also find that vendors want to nominate their customers, or that distributors want to nominate their manufacturer represented clients.

All of these people collectively represent what we call the awards “ecosystem,” those players that make it work as an end-to-end process. mBLAST has designed its system to let distributors be distributors, PR

firm representatives be PR firm representatives, and others be themselves as well. We track each participant through the process in a relationship management fashion.

mBLAST's tracking is key. When our clients look back on the information they used to get from their processes that were handled in a very distributed and one-off fashion, they find that they were leaving many of the important relationships out of their process. Their forms only had one field for a contact, even though multiple players might be involved in filling out the form. Some things observed during such a process include:

- Which PR firms were sending them the most nominations?
- Which PR firms who regularly called on their editorial staff were not submitting any nominations?
- Which players taking part in other processes, directories, buyer's guides, etc., were not taking part in awards?
- Which customers were submitting multiple awards and which ones were not?
- What were the year-to-year trends in individual corporate participation across their different awards categories?

Indeed, since most awards programs were one-off processes, critical business information was lost year-to-year when stored in Excel spreadsheets or random databases.

Ongoing experience is lost also when there is employee turnover. More than once we have heard statements like, "Well Susie knew how to do all of this, and then she went out on maternity leave...so I'm stuck with it now and I have no clue what to do." Award processes can be dissected into elements like outbound promotion for awards, searching for judges, collecting inbound materials, processing credit card transactions, and the like. What's disappointing in many of these situations is that you find editorial or analyst personnel doing clerical work, which is clearly not appreciated by them nor is good for the ultimate bottom line.

mBLAST approaches awards by breaking them down into their components and applying as much automation to the process as possible. Core philosophies include:

- Re-using as much information as possible. If the same person came in last year comes back this year, pre-populate the forms with their prior contact information because it is most often unchanged.

- Enabling multiple people to collaborate and capturing all of these relationships so we know who to ask when we have specific questions. This makes follow-up with contacts a lot easier.
- Knowing what needs to be done next. If a judge is coming in for a second stage of judging, we take them right to that stage automatically. We try to predict what a user wants to do and then help them get through it as fast as possible.
- Letting the system answer user's questions. We use extensive UI techniques to guide people through the process no matter their role, normalize data, make sure files are in the correct formats, validate email addresses, etc. Thus, we are more confident that each entry in the system is what it's supposed to be, cutting down on later problems.
- Providing support where users absolutely need it. Whether it be an online chat, email access, or telephone support, we are pretty accessible for help when needed.

mBLAST does much more than is detailed in this list. In the end, we are told that we are reducing 95%+ of the time involved in awards processes, and letting people get on with their jobs. Let the editors be editors, not programmers.

### ***The Case for Centralizing your Awards***

While mBLAST can be, and often is, used at these more discrete publications, events, and other distributed levels, there is a certain amount of overhead in running an awards process. While it is not hard to learn, someone needs to learn how to operate the mBLAST software.

Much of the work from one awards program to another is the same and can therefore be easily centralized. Questions about the content of awards and actual judging/declaration of winners can be done by each individual publication. However, the process of creating awards – tracking participation, mining data, feeding customer information databases, creating plug-in web modules, managing credit cards, analyzing participation, etc. – can be centrally managed. There is no reason why an editor or editorial assistant in a publication needs to know how to process a credit card refund.

The benefits of centralization extend beyond mere process issues. By centralizing the awards, you can compare participation to formats. You can experiment with new pricing techniques. You can target specific entities that used to submit awards but have now fallen off. You can mine the data and link it to other important business processes like lead generating and sales systems.

The great thing about centralizing your awards is that mBLAST fully supports this concept. You can have views within different publications' processes while maintaining an overall view as well. You can centrally view charges and track revenue growth month-over-month and year-over-year. You can view in real time the progress of each process and flag issues for the editorial, analyst, or other staff for review.

In short, you can be in control and manage this as the revenue center it was meant to be.

Note that not all awards processes must have revenues associated with them. For various reasons many awards processes are free; this does not diminish the need nor the attractiveness of offloading all the administration tasks onto a central person.

### ***Driving mBLAST into your Organization***

mBLAST's Awards module is simple to implement – a new award can be launched in minutes. It is comprehensive and end-to-end. It is scalable, reliable, and secure. When combined with mBLAST's customer service and professional services groups, it is a one-stop resource for building a whole new fast-growth revenue center for your organization.

All of the reasons why you may be centralizing other efforts within your group apply here. Economy. Efficiency. Focus. With mBLAST Awards you can quickly convert existing programs and launch new ones, monetizing your brands along the way.

mBLAST Awards is the only package on the market today with such sophisticated capabilities, and it is priced for entry into any organization. Contact mBLAST Sales at [sales@mblast.com](mailto:sales@mblast.com) to get started today.