

2021 Microsoft Partner Network Partner of the Year Awards

Guidance from Judges

Have your hard work considered as the best in the industry by nominating your organization for the 2021 Microsoft Partner of the Year Awards celebrated at Microsoft Inspire.

Sometimes, the difference between a winner and just another award entry isn't the quality of the project, but the quality of the entry itself. The entry you submit is all the judges will have to work with to learn about your success. We've prepared this guide to help you create your very best entry—one that shows off your solution and the results you've achieved.

No matter which category (or categories) you nominate in, make it count. **We wish you the best of luck!**

GETTING STARTED

Start early.

Don't wait until the last minute. All resources that you will need are available now on the [Microsoft Inspire website](#) before the awards submission tool opens, so you can give yourself a big head start and increase your chances of success. Plan to spend 10 to 15 hours on your submission. You can reuse the content to enter other awards and/or for your own case study.

Draft your entry offline.

Uploading your entry to the Award Submission Tool is the LAST step in the process. You will want everything polished in Microsoft Word before you start inputting your answers into the tool on the website. Remember there is an 8,000-character limit for your executive summary.

Brainstorm with others.

Get in a room with the go-to people on the project(s) in your organization. Two heads are better than one, and six heads... well, you get the idea. You will learn unique angles and creative stories that can make a memorable difference in your entry.

Gather your facts.

In the words of one judge, "The best entries are those that include the most detail." Metrics, numbers, and statistics are all vital. You need all the facts, so you can describe the challenge specifically, and tout your solution strongly. How many people did your solution serve? What was the bottom-line impact? Did productivity increase? By how much? Did the solution save the

customer money? How much? Use solid stats to show what you achieved. All of this information is crucial.

Talk to your customer(s).

Some of the strongest evidence of your success is the satisfaction of your customer. Talk to them. Gather testimonials. Draw on case studies if you have them. Ask their permission to be quoted. Let them help you tell the story and quantify your success.

Choose your award category (or categories).

You probably already have an award category in mind, but after you've done the groundwork, read and choose your categories carefully. By selecting the most appropriate category, you can ensure your entry is as relevant as possible.

ALWAYS consider more than one category. Yes, writing more than one entry will take more time, but it will also give you a better chance of being a winner or finalist. Don't go overboard though. Spend your time submitting your best one or two stories, rather than trying multiple categories with less compelling entries.

WRITE YOUR ENTRY

1. Address every question asked in the guidelines in your Executive Summary. Each submission is carefully reviewed by several judges, and they will be looking for all the points the guidelines have asked you to address. Be sure to completely answer each one.

2. Put your best points up front. Start with a compelling opening statement that is relevant to the award category. Draw the reader in with the "who, what, why," and most importantly the "why care" of your story. You want to make sure the judge wants to read further. If you save the best for last, he or she might never get there.

3. Create a compelling story with a beginning, middle, and end. Define the challenge vividly using specific details. Make your story human. Your technology solution is ultimately for people.

4. Showcase your solution. Position your solution value in terms of business innovation, technology innovation, and customer ROI. And remember, your solution must have been deployed.

A few other pointers:

- Highlight your solution's creativity.
- Show the depth of the Microsoft stack used.
- Describe how it helped you win against the competition from a technical and a business perspective.
- Include information about how you went above and beyond in answering your customers' needs.

- When possible, show how your solution was tailored to target an untapped market.
- Include how your solution is different and better than your competition.
- If your solution can be replicated, say so, and mention any other customer deployments.
- Highlight any Microsoft Partner Network resources that helped, including other partners.

5. Prove your success. Here's where all those numbers come in. Include your metrics. Have a measured return on investment. Show exactly what you achieved, with the stats to back it up.

6. Include customer evidence. The best way of ensuring your entry gets noticed is to include direct evidence of your customers' satisfaction and success with your solution. Include customer testimonials in your answers. And include links to supporting materials such as case studies, white papers, other awards, videos, or anything else that helps document you and your customers' success. Don't forget to ask your customers' approval to use any of their content, although entries will not be disclosed without your consent

7. End where you began. Remember that compelling opening statement? You want that same message to resonate throughout. So be sure to tie your ending back to the beginning.

EDITING AND FINAL REVIEW

1. Don't upload until it's final! This bears repeating. Wait until your entry is 100% complete and final before uploading it to the [award submission application tool](#). The tool will help you catch minor misspellings but does not review grammar or mis-entered words. Please review your content thoroughly before submitting it.

2. Get professional help. Enlist the help of a writing professional with technical and marketing experience. If you don't have access to one, get a marketing writer and work with them to make sure the technical details are correct. A communications professional can help you polish your entry, ensuring that it tells your story well and is a good read.

Questions? Please send an email to the [Microsoft Partner of the Year Awards team](#) and allow 48 hours for a response.

Good Luck!