



Writing a Winning Partner of the Year Award Entry

by Gail Mercer-MacKay

Gail's 15-minute Video ["How to Win a Microsoft Partner of the Year Award"](#)

Microsoft Inspire is around the corner and the Microsoft Partner Network Partner of the Year Awards is always one of the highlights. Are you interested in winning an award this year? Think it's impossible to win? That only the "big guys" have a real shot at it? Every partner has an opportunity to win, raise their profile, and be recognized for their innovation and their hard work.

Over the past five years I have worked with multiple Microsoft partners and helped them win or become a finalist for a Microsoft award **more than one hundred times**. Some of these partners have been very small – with less than 10 people in their organization. Others have been larger partners. The judging process at Microsoft is very fair. Lobbying judges is not tolerated (it is also almost impossible to figure out who the judges are) and Microsoft really wants the best submissions to be selected. So how do you become a winner or a finalist?

Start by reviewing the [Guidance from the Judges for Partners](#) document which includes terrific tips and advice. Know that the key is to tell your story. The best way you can.

What All Writers Know

Capture the attention of your reader and keep them engaged. Tell a story using the four elements that make for great story-telling. These elements are:

- A great opening hook
- A gallant hero
- A villain who needs to be vanquished
- A "damsel-in-distress"

When you pull these elements together you have a story. Tell a story that will capture the attention of the judges, and keep them reading through to the end.

A Great Opening Hook

With thousands of entries and only a handful of categories, some judges will be reading hundreds of submissions. This means that during the first read through, *the judges are looking for a reason to throw out your entry*. That's right. The first pass is about eliminating the ones that are weak or are not up to par. Grab those judges with a strong opening sentence.

Weak Opening

We are a Microsoft partner and we worked really hard this year and we think that this is a great entry because our guys skipped vacations to get this solution delivered on time.

Strong Opening

When ABC Company needed a better business intelligence engine to improve decision-making for remote location managers, we spear-headed an initiative that saw the implementation of SQL 2012 and PowerPivot for Excel, stopping Google Analytics in its tracks.

In the first example, nothing was said except that you forced your employees to skip their vacation. You sound like a whiner and a bad boss. In the second example you showed leadership (implementing the latest technology), courage (fearless in a competitive situation) and the power to vanquish the evil empire (Google) from gaining traction at an important Microsoft client.

A Gallant Hero

Every good story needs a hero. Someone who is humble, modest, and has what it takes to ride in and save the day. In your story, that gallant hero is you. Your company is the hero. You are the one with the answers, the resources, the skills, and the innovation to slay the villain and save the day.

Before you begin your story, list all of the qualities and capabilities that you bring to your clients. You may not use all of them in your entry, but get them down on paper. Your list will help you build the foundation of what you want to say.

A Villain

Who is the villain in your story? You cannot have a story without a villain. In your case, the villain is anything that is standing in the way of the hero reaching his goals. Examples of a villain could be:

- The customer's pain point (I have terabytes of data but can't turn it into business intelligence);
- The competition (there is nothing better than vanquishing Google, Oracle or IBM);
- Budget – we have limited resources but our company has got to take better advantage of technology;
- Corporate culture – aligning user buy-in to ensure the adoption of technology was threatening to derail the entire project.

Only you know the insurmountable odds you faced to deliver the results your client needed.

A "Damsel-in-Distress"

This is your client. Everybody likes a victim that they can identify with. Who is your client?

- A school board with students who need better access to technology to prepare them for life and 21st century learning;
- A multi-national who is losing market-share because they have lost control of their data;
- A charitable organization who is trying to increase donations but have not capitalized on the opportunities that social media can introduce;
- A small company trying to keep pace without realizing that the cloud is their answer.

Understand and portray your client so that the judges can sympathize, relate to them and understand their situation.

Re-Submit to Other Award Programs

You have terrific stories. If you didn't, you wouldn't be in business. The only difference between you and the partners who win awards is how you tell your story.

However, no matter how well you tell it, there is no guarantee of a win. That is why you should re-purpose your MPN Partner of the Year Award content and enter into other award programs or use this information to create useful digital assets. Consider the following:

- International Business Awards (Stevies)
- Local/Regional Microsoft Awards Programs
- Vertical Industry Awards Programs
- Local Newspapers or Online Publications (often looking for great stories from local companies)

Get your story out there and get recognition. It is a great way to boost your brand. It tells potential clients that you are a leader, a hero, and an innovator. It tells people that doing business with you is a smart choice.

Tell your story. Tell it well. Good luck!