

TEN TIPS FOR WRITING A WINNING APEX ENTRY

Your communications campaign may have been spectacularly effective, but if your entry isn't as good as your campaign, it will not win an APEX award. The following are ten tried and tested guidelines on how to make your entry stand out.

TIP 1: FAMILIARISE YOURSELF WITH PREVIOUS WINNERS

It will be of great benefit to you to look at previously published papers. It is always good to learn how others have been successful – or learn from their mistakes. The APEX Case Study books contain the case studies of all previous APEX winners – these can be ordered from the ACA via: email to apex@aaaltd.co.za.

TIP 2: START EARLY

Writing an APEX case study is, as much as anything, a question of planning. Approach it as a project with clear timing deadlines and goals.

TIP 3: CONSIDER ALL EFFECTS

One evolutionary step which has been adopted from the IPA Effectiveness Awards is to invite cases that investigate the various ways in which communications campaigns can contribute to profitability and add value beyond sales. These campaigns have the power across multiple and sometimes indirect target audiences; i.e. it can inspire marketers (clients) and improve employee morale at times of change, it can build trust and respect among trade partners and suppliers, it can create goodwill amongst governments and legislators, it can have an impact on stock performance.

When compiling your submission, try to solidify the case you make for your campaign's effects by thinking in terms of the bigger picture. It is the cases that look at sales and explore the widest range of ways in which value was added, that really generate the biggest return on investment.

TIP 4: DATA FIRST

The basis of any good paper is data. Good data, good paper. Bad, inconclusive or missing data, bad paper. Understanding your data and having good links with those that produce it and good manipulation of it, is core to best practice in the study of effectiveness. In the development of a well-written case, it is crucial. Success, however, relies more on intelligent and even ingenious use of data to build a coherent argument, than the data itself. Data can be disguised (e.g. by indexing), as long as the argument is still made. It is however appreciated that companies may not wish to divulge information on profits or margins, except in the most general terms.

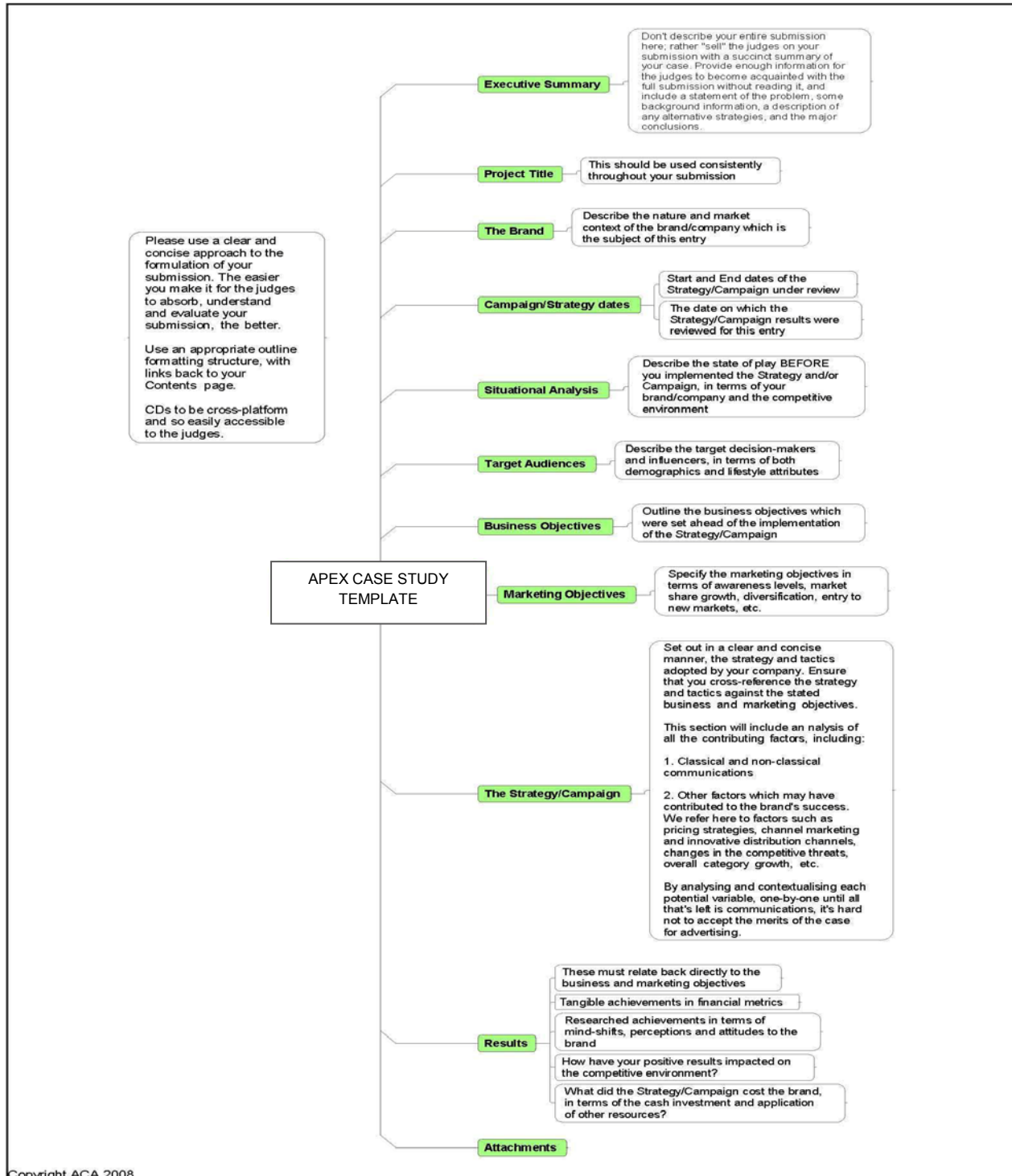
For more information on the importance of research and statistical data, refer to Tip 8.

TIP 5: CLARITY AND STYLE

Judges appreciate well-written papers. Good papers have a clear structure and signposts. Stick to the facts, keep your case focused and interesting and integrate the diagrams, tables and examples of creative work into the text to allow the argument to flow without interruption. A snappy title that encapsulates the case can be very effective. The Executive Summary is your opportunity to hook the reader by exciting them with the implications of your case for the market or the economy at large. Summarize the success of your campaign up-front with a simple statement of the Return on Investment (ROI) that it has achieved.

Hint: A short (and genuine!) testimonial from the most senior marketer (client) responsible for marketing can also be a good opening gambit.

The following structure for the **case study** is recommended:



TIP 6: ISOLATE THE EFFECTS OF YOUR MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS

Although significant improvement was shown in recent years, the most consistent criticism voiced by APEX judges over the years is that entries, on the whole, do not make enough effort to eliminate the effects of factors other than marketing communications.

Entries are often good two thirds of the way; some even outstanding in terms of strategy. However, when it gets to the most important part – convincing judges that it was the marketing communications that caused the results – the entry fails.

An important way of isolating the effect of marketing communications is to systematically eliminate other factors by putting yourself in the shoes of critical judges and asking yourself questions like these, where applicable:

- What was the impact of pricing policy or pack size on the perceived value of my brand? Did it, for instance, remain consistent (i.e. is this a marketing or marketing communications impact?)
- If the marketing communication budget increase was significant, wouldn't this automatically increase volume of sales?
- Was the impact on sales the result of the marketing communication or merely the impact of novelty on trial, or a lot of editorial coverage?
- What was the impact of line extensions on volume/sales?
- How do my results compare with those of my competitors in the marketplace?
- What was the impact of socio-economic or other 'contextual' factors on brand consumption/sales compared to competitors, i.e. significant passenger airline increase due to campaign or to general tourism increase?
- How did the distribution strategy impact on sales?

TIP 7: PROVIDE “RATIOS OF EFFICIENCY”

Effectiveness should not only measure result irrespective of input, be that input media weight or copy effectiveness in the minds of audiences. It should also include efficiency which, according to the Oxford Wordfinder, means to be “productive with minimum waste of effort”.

Efficiency is therefore really a ratio of worth. Entrants should look at all facets of advertising, including budget, measured against results, in order to provide ratios of efficiency. Do not simply think in terms of quantum of effectiveness by supplying a variety of hard and soft data to prove that “communications campaigns work”.

Separate generalised effects (we did that and achieved this) from specific effects relative to your strategy (we spent the same, changed the copy, or changed our media development etc. and achieved this). Focusing on efficiency provides more insight into the body knowledge of communications campaigns’ worth, commercially.

TIP 8: STRIVE TO PROVIDE MORE RESEARCH OR STATISTICAL EVIDENCE TO SUPPORT EFFECTIVENESS

In the past, judges criticized the lack of research to support claims of effectiveness in general. This does not mean that we all need to be scientists, but a little more vigorous and objective substantiation of results can be tremendously convincing.

For example, look for tests of significance before claims of “significant differences” in results are made. Even though you may be able to prove a definite “connection” between your campaign and results, it does not necessarily mean the difference in results were significant. Entrants may benefit from the option to get an independent expert to evaluate all statistical data.

Think in terms of models or quasi-experimental designs in which you keep certain variables stable or eliminate contaminating variables (i.e. those that can interfere with the effects of the marketing communication). If possible, look at some kind of test versus control structure, planned or fortuitous. We realise that tests or models are never perfect, but as long as you show an awareness of possible contaminating factors, you convince judges of your credibility, as opposed to what is sometimes perceived as “subjective waffle”.

Econometric analysis can be used with great success. It is a tool for exploring the relationship of different variables, i.e. the impact of ad spend on market share and it being increasingly used by marketers, audit and research companies. If used well, it is a very convincing tool for proving effectiveness and simultaneously removing contaminating variables. The guidance of econometric experts is advised. All the same, maintain the balance. Econometrics, models and statistics are not substitutes for presenting the data clearly and discussing it in a way in which non-statisticians can follow.

**TIP 9: MARKETER (CLIENT) AND AGENCY SHOULD WORK AS PARTNERS WHEN
 COMPILING AN APEX SUBMISSION**

Marketers (Clients) and Agencies should work hand in hand compiling an APEX submission from the start. This will ensure access to data and support with time and resources. Past winners have all seen that a clear agreement and understanding of how teamwork improved their client/agency relationships when compiling their APEX submissions, not simply with the marketing contacts, but through clients’ organizations in general.

TIP 10: READ

Read and re-read all the APEX related documents published on the ACA website including this entire document because it clearly outlines what is expected from a winning entry and follow all the submission guidelines to avoid disqualification.