

How to win a CASSIES

April 2016

Overview

To win a CASSIES, you need four things:

1. Breakthrough thinking.
2. Original and creative advertising.
3. Impressive results.
4. A compelling business case.

1) The quality of the analysis of the client's issues/opportunities and the level of insightful thinking are what underpin a winning CASSIES case. It's not enough to have advertising that happened to break through or merely to be in the right place at the right time with regard to market trends.

Points to note:

- Judges will be looking for you to explain succinctly WHY the client's problem/opportunity has arisen and WHERE the solution may lie.
- Insight is a much misused term. Do not just present facts; show that the facts led you to see things in a new way. Your insight, if you have one, must be more than a blinding glimpse of the obvious—it must be something that has not been seen before or was hiding in plain sight. [Example: it's not an insight to say that working women are pulled in many directions. It would be an insight, however, to say that a sub-set of these women relish the pressure].
- Do not try to dress up everyday observations as killer insights as this will lose you some of the **15% of total marks** awarded in this area.

2) The CASSIES was set up in 1993 to showcase how Canadian-produced original and creative advertising can be instrumental in profitably advancing the business goals of advertisers in Canada and beyond across short, medium and long-term time horizons. We believe that great advertising and great results are not mutually exclusive, in fact they are symbiotic. Consequently, the originality and quality of the advertising as perceived by the judges forms a key part of the judging criteria: **30% of the overall scoring.**

Points to note:

- Judges review many cases in a short space of time so you are in a crowded field.
- It is up to you to highlight in the case the original aspects of the work and to showcase its creativity to best effect.
- Pay attention to the creative you attach. Judges do not react well to a disorganized jumble or to a multitude of almost identical executions. A good rule of thumb is to attach no more than six pieces of creative that are reflective of the campaign.
- It is helpful to include visuals of creative within the narrative to illustrate your thinking.

3) It is crucial in writing a CASSIES case that you are able to show the impact of the advertising on key business metrics. The strength of the results accounts for **25% of judges' scoring** while the scale of the task you faced accounts for a further **15%**.

Points to note:

- Make sure the results cover the whole Business Results Period. Do not cherry-pick with claims like "In the final month Blixen sales hit a record +40% versus year-ago." Judges will suspect that this was an abnormal result, perhaps caused by pricing or promotion.
- Excluding results that you feel do not support your case harms your chances of winning. Judges will be on the lookout for "missing results", i.e. measures they would have expected such a client to have and that would have been pertinent given the objectives. You will be much better off including all key data and rationalising any measures that you feel do not obviously support the case.
- Put results in context for the judges. 3% growth in a huge, flat market may be a significant achievement. Find a way to make this clear. If relevant, say what happened to the competition.
- Include sufficient data prior to the commencement of advertising to give judges a clear context of trends and normal competitive "churn" in the category.
- Show, don't tell. A well-constructed results chart or graph showing a results upturn at the time of the advertising is far more likely to gain judges' attention than paragraphs of assorted facts.

4) Probably the biggest single reason why submitted cases fail to win a CASSIES is the failure of the case-writer to demonstrate to well-informed, sceptical judges that the great results were brought about primarily by the advertising. **15% of the judges'**

score is on the strength of the proof that the advertising, and not other factors, drove the results.

Points to Note:

- Above all, judges are looking for evidence, not assertion.
- Information from creative testing and tracking studies showing the link between advertising and consumer behaviour/attitude change can be very helpful.
- Test and Control comparisons can be particularly persuasive to the judges, e.g.
 - Comparison to areas that did not get the effort, e.g. elsewhere in Canada and/or the US.
 - Exposed vs non-exposed consumers.
 - Advertised vs non-advertised products.
 - ACNielsen "non-promoted" sales data.
 - Comparison with similarly timed previous campaigns.
- Judges tune out reams of Social Media stats - focus and simplify, highlighting only the results that feed directly into the business results.

Writing the Case

Key to success in writing a CASSIES case are **simplicity, clarity, completeness and logical flow**.

Point to note:

- Gather the hard data early and prepare a first draft as early as you can. This will help you see any weaknesses in your argument.
- Use straightforward English and a readable layout.
 - Quote evidence over opinion.
 - Use credible and identified sources.
 - Be business-like in describing growth; judges are not impressed by exaggerations like "stupendous", "incredible", "eye-popping" and "staggering".
 - Avoid acronyms or "insider" terms that judges may not understand.
 - If you mention awards, include only prestigious events.
 - If the campaign has been exported, state this prominently.
- Use clear, simple charts and tables in the body of the document. Complicated information - if needed - can be attached as exhibits, but do not bury key information at the back. It substantially hurts your case if charts, tables and exhibits are inaccurate, confusing, hard-to-read, or incomplete.
 - Give all charts accurate titles, with sequential numbering.

- Clearly identify the geography (Canada, English Canada, Quebec etc.) the chart refers to.
- Clearly identify the sources for all quoted data, charts, graphs etc. (e.g. AC Nielsen Past 12 mo. through June 2016).
- Make sure the dates/timing are clear; judges want to relate results to when the effort ran.
- Consider using layout and colour to increase the impact and clarity of charts/graphs/tables.
- Ensure all data included in charts/graphs/tables are identical to those in the narrative; you lose credibility if there is one number in the text and a different one in the table.
- Find out if anyone in the company has written a winning case, and get them to review your early drafts.
- Leave good time for the sign-offs by Client/Agency Management.

What Do Losing Cases Have in Common?

1. **They weren't a case study.** A winning CASSIES case is not a press release, part of your credentials pack or how you would like the case summary to read in Strategy magazine. Short cuts in writing the case are usually short cuts to not winning an award.
2. **They weren't a CASSIES case.** Don't enter the case you wrote for the Effies, Bessies, Creative Effectiveness Lions or something else; they are different entities with different rules, judges' expectations and scoring criteria. While much of the material you use will be the same, read the CASSIES rules, ponder the category definitions, read some past winning CASSIES cases, follow the CASSIES template and apply the hints in this document.
3. **They didn't follow and leverage the case format.** The CASSIES entry form has a prescribed format to help you structure your case and focus on where points are gained/lost. The more you deviate from the format or skimp sections, the worse your case will score.
4. **They weren't persuasive.** The CASSIES attracts many entries each year, usually well over 100, of which the majority end up not winning despite all having positive business results. The field is crowded and the standards are extremely high, so, as with the advertising you carefully crafted to drive the sales, a winning CASSIES case must take into account WHO you are talking to (the make-up of

the judges), WHAT they are looking for (their remit), and their decision-making process. A CASSIES case study is a targeted document of persuasion and should be written as such (see next section).

Understanding the Judging Process

All CASSIES cases go through two rigorous stages of judging: Benchmarking and Final Judging.

The Benchmarking Panel.

The remit of Benchmarking is two-fold:

- Only send forward to Final Judging cases that have a reasonable chance of winning an award.
- Ensure there is no incremental degradation over time of winning standards.

Benchmarking is the biggest hurdle as it is at this stage that most of the cases which do not win an award fall out of the running.

Members of the Benchmarking panel are mostly past CASSIES Final judges, and many are long-term Benchmarkers who have a vast amount of experience in reading and evaluating business cases. Many are also regular judges at Effies and Cannes.

- They are a VERY senior group of industry professionals taken from Agency, Client, Research and Academia backgrounds. For example, the 2016 CASSIES Benchmarking panel included nine members who were either Agency Presidents/CEO's or Client Marketing VPs, i.e. a very senior, experienced, challenging, demanding and sceptical group.

Imagine the time, effort and care you would put into a live presentation to this audience – you need to do the same for your case.

Benchmarkers are split into several teams, each in isolation reading and scoring 40+ cases. This means your case has to stand up and stand out in a 15-20 minute read.

While Benchmarkers use exactly the same decision criteria as at Final Judging stage, they evaluate each case as either: A – “Should win”, B – “Might win”, C – “Shouldn't win”.

- All cases scoring mostly A's automatically go ahead into Final judging – a feat achieved on average by less than 25% of cases – to do so requires a case that is compelling.
- All cases scoring no A's are rejected at this stage.
- All other “split vote” cases are discussed in depth at Benchmarkers' team meetings where, on average, another 15% of cases pass through to Final Judging.

The Final Judging Panel.

The remit of Final Judging is to review all cases passed through Benchmarking and then decide the award level from:

- Gold
- Silver
- Bronze
- No Award

The panel then also awards the Grand Prix for the “best in show”.

Members of Final Judging (12-15 in number) are all current senior industry leaders, drawn 50% from the Agency world and 50% from Clients. They are drawn from across the country, across market sectors and across areas of functional expertise.

Judges are split into three teams, each of which deals with 20-30 cases in a three-stage evaluation process:

Stage 1: In-depth pre-read and scoring against the criteria detailed in the opening section of this article (Both Benchmarking and Final Judging use exactly the same criteria to judge cases).

Stage 2: First group discussion. Taking place over a full day, each case is debated in depth, meaning that every weakness will be ruthlessly exposed. At this stage, No Award, Bronze and Silver awards are allocated. Cases deemed possible Golds go onto the third stage.

Stage 3: Full Judging Panel Discussion. Cases reaching this stage are read and scored by the judges who did not review the case in Stage 2, followed by a debate per case by all 15 judges. Golds/Silvers/Bronzes are allocated as agreed by the full judging panel and all Golds enter Grand Prix voting process.

Write your CASSIES case at two levels:

- **Tell a compelling story at the strategic level for the Benchmarkers – they are CEO’s/CMO’s who do not like to be buried in irrelevant detail.**
- **Predict and head off every possible detailed objection from the Final Judges – they have the experience and know-how to pick apart inconsistencies.**

Award Criteria.

All advertising is supposed to achieve business results for the client. It is not the purpose of the CASSIES to celebrate “doing the day job”, so the standards set to win an award are

very high. This is why many of the cases entered each year either fail to get through Benchmarking or are allocated “No Award” at Final Judging. While, each year, the Final Judging panel will collectively decide on award levels, they work to the following guidelines:

Bronze: An impressive, all-round case showing good insight, original thinking, creative work and strong results against a challenging background. The industry aspires for this level of work to be the commonplace achievement for its clients.

Silver: As above, but the case will have at least one or, more likely, several spikes of true excellence.

Gold: The kind of case the judges wish was on their resumé as it displays true excellence throughout, making it a shining beacon of what advertising can achieve for clients.