

Ever considered entering for a business award? Here, Jacqui Smith looks at the why's and how's, and talks to some past winners.

There are many types of business awards around: local, national, free-to-enter, expensive-to-enter, prestigious and... not so prestigious. Some take a lot of time and effort, some less. So are business awards worth entering? What benefit do they have for a physiotherapy practice? And what do practice owners need to consider when entering?

In the last few years, more and more physiotherapy practices and their owners have entered business awards, some making it to the finals and several taking out the top prizes. Interestingly, some of the winners didn't nominate themselves, only applying after being nominated by joint owners, employees, and in some cases, independent businesses.

There are many benefits to entering business awards, and you don't even need to win to receive them. Speaker and MC Nerida Gill from neridagill.com, creator of Admin Bandit accounting software for volunteer treasurers, has won many prestigious awards, including the Prime Minister's award for Excellence in Community Business Partnerships and an ACS Canberra ICT Award. She believes there are three main benefits: exposure, credibility and morale.

Exposure

Says Gill: '[A business award] provides you with exposure... you receive an award and you promote it on your website, in your newsletters, and if you're lucky enough you might even get an article in the newspaper.'

Roger McIntosh was one of the lucky ones. His practice, North West Physiotherapy in Brisbane, has won four Quest Business Achiever Awards (also awarded the Bronze Hall of Fame in 2009) and was a finalist in

the Telstra Business Awards (Queensland) last year. He says his business received plenty of exposure in print media from the awards.

'That's one of the main reasons we enter [the Quest Business Achiever Awards], because being run by a local newspaper, we receive a lot of local publicity through that paper,' says McIntosh.

'But from [the Telstra Business Awards] we got a lot of publicity in the state-wide newspaper, *The Courier Mail*, got a half-page story in that as well as a few mentions in other editions,' he says. 'We saw a massive spike in hits on our website. Lots of interest generated around the local area in local newspapers... and it has also led to some other media opportunities.'

Similarly, Kellie Wilkie, co-owner of Bodysystem in Hobart, found that her business benefitted from the publicity generated after she won the Marie Claire Business Women's Award (Tasmania) in 2009, also one of the Telstra Business Awards. She says she gained more clients after the awards. 'The media exposure in... Hobart, really had quite a big effect. As soon as the awards were announced, it definitely had a flow-on effect very quickly in terms of people understanding what our business was about and therefore making contact with us to be able to become clients.'

Credibility

Gill retold a friend's story around credibility and business awards: 'If you go into the wine shop and you don't know much about wine, and there are two wines that are both merlot and you don't know which one's going to be better... if one's got awards on it and the other one doesn't, then you will probably pick the award one.'

Credibility gives a practice the potential for new clientele and new business opportunities, such as attracting investors into the company. This is increased when combined with exposure.

Marnie Douglas, owner of Ergoworks Physiotherapy and Consulting, and creator of the online workstation assessment tool ErgoAssess, won the 2010 Nokia Business Innovation Award (Telstra Business Women's Awards, New South Wales), to go with her 2009 Small Business Champion Award. 'It certainly added to the credibility of the business and specifically the ergonomic software that I won the innovation award for,' she says of her Nokia award. 'I guess rather than me knocking on big companies' doors, trying to promote the business, we're probably getting more people coming to us directly.'

Douglas went on to say that although the other smaller awards she won in the past didn't have quite the same effect, she believes having a few awards over the years increases credibility and helps a practice become more recognised in the marketplace.

Practice morale

Practice morale might be one aspect that doesn't always have a visible financial impact, but nonetheless is one from which staff and clients will definitely profit.

'It's an opportunity to think about and enjoy that process, and reap the rewards for your organisation in terms of morale, because it's good for morale for organisations to feel like "Gee, we've just won a national award, how good are we?" It's good for the team,' says Gill.

There's nothing like being recognised as a great team with great leadership to strengthen the



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passion, confidence and work ethic in a physiotherapy practice.

Other benefits

There were two other beneficial aspects that all three physiotherapy practice owners mentioned. The first was reflection, looking at the whole business in minute detail, thinking about the beginnings of the business, and how far it's come. This is especially true for large awards, where the application process can be very in-depth and often gruelling. Kellie Wilkie said she took upwards of 20 hours to complete her application.

McIntosh, Wilkie and Douglas spoke about how rewarding it was to analyse their businesses, realising how much they'd achieved, laughing at some of the past decisions, and thinking about the future. The process clarified the way they thought about their businesses, and this is something any physiotherapy practice owner entering an award can benefit from, even if they don't make it on to the list of finalists.

The other area that all three agreed helped their businesses was networking, specifically at the award ceremonies with other award winners and with guests. Networking allows businesses owners to meet other people from different companies so they can work with or learn from them, and keep in touch long after the award ceremony is over. Wilkie found this beneficial.

'I've actually gained a huge amount of colleagues through networking from entering the awards process, so that would probably be the biggest gain that I've made,' she says. 'I'd encourage people to enter these sorts of awards because of that.'

Douglas agreed. 'Probably the greatest benefit is really the exposure to the network of women in the awards, previous award

winners and all types of inspirational women,' she says, regarding the business women's award that she won.

Hints and tips

So what are some tips for entering business awards? With the larger awards being such an intensive process, Roger McIntosh recommends getting professional help from a copywriter company. 'I gave [the copywriter] the structure and he actually wrote the application for me, using all my information, but he worded [it] in such a way that it would be more conducive to the judges [understanding],' he says. 'I was so impressed with his writing that I got him to rewrite my whole website. How it's written means everything.'

McIntosh also suggested avoiding awards with a fee attached, saying it was possible the awards were not credible. 'Basically, you're just paying to have this award more or less given to you, because there are so many different categories.'

After hearing about a business award, it is worth taking some time to do some research on the award to assess its credibility and worth to the business. There is potentially very little advantage in applying for (and winning) an award that is not respected in the business world.

Nerida Gill insists that businesses should look at the categories in business awards, and make sure they can meet the criteria of one of those categories. That is, match where the business is at and what the businesses has achieved to a fitting award category.

As with any application, a nominee should always follow the guidelines and instructions carefully. It's important that the information about your business is presented in a professional way. Stick to word limits, address the key criteria, make sure the details are informative, but

keep it relevant and concise. The judges should be able to read the information easily, so ensure spelling, grammar and language are correct, and fonts and formatting are orderly and consistent. Don't automatically assume the judges have an in-depth knowledge of physiotherapy and the profession, and make sure the whole application is as polished as possible. The written entry is the first impression the judges have of your business.

A good tip is to keep a copy of the application as a reference for nominating for other business awards in the future. This will save a lot of time, effort and thinking.

Is it better to enter local or national awards? Gill doesn't think

one should be preferred over the other. 'Certainly if it's a national award, then you may well get more exposure and more credibility from it,' she says, 'but I think for a physio practice... a local award would be just as significant, because people are looking for a physio practice to go to.'

Your practice may get more exposure and credibility from a national award, but practice morale and networking will be gained from both local and national awards. Reflection is probably more likely for large and national awards, but with many smaller awards using mystery shoppers and client voting to assess a practice, there is definitely room for reflection on

how the business is working and whether it is impressing people.

So what marketing advice does Gill have for physiotherapy owners?

'Don't be humble... Because there's no point winning an award and then not spruiking about it,' she says. 'You must take every opportunity to promote it. So when you refer to your business, say it's an award-winning business and put it on your website, in your newsletters, social media, Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, wherever you can talk about it.'

Gill maintains that entering awards is a deliberate part of her PR strategy, to win them and then spruik about them. Even if she doesn't win, but is a finalist or

is commended, she still spruiks about them.

Marnie Douglas says she uses her award status everywhere: 'You get to use the Telstra logo, New South Wales Award Winner 2010, so I have basically a shrine in the physio clinic where all the awards are put up. It's on my email signature, I put it in any proposal that I write to corporates,' she says. 'It's pretty much everywhere.'

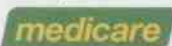
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