

Reducing Award Costs Through Sponsorships and Style

by Fran Adams

Many exhibitors at the local and national levels show to win awards. Not necessarily all exhibitors, but awards are seldom refused. After garnering a few basic medals, there's typically a wish to win more prestigious ones; wanting to compete and succeed is simply human nature.

Awards are part of any show's budget and depend on the show's philosophy and frame fees. They represent a significant dollar total and if things can be done more economically, many shows take the less expensive route. This results in awards of all sizes and shapes, ranging from crystal bowls and paintings, to certificates. This article focuses on cost reduction as well as how awards might be added to attract more exhibitors (luring the ants with sugar).

Reviewing lessons learned at local shows helps as they generally have the least to work with. One example which comes to mind was Powexp of years gone by, a local club show in North San Diego County with good exhibit support. Powexp minimized cost and increased the number of awards (a main reason exhibitors showed there). With creativity, these two goals proved not to be mutually exclusive.

Standard awards were plaques but the real treasures were the 'special' awards. They first created categories similar to those at national shows, i.e. traditional and thematic with a special award for the best exhibit in each class, similar to AmeriStamp Expo. From there, awards were added for the show themes and other criteria deemed suitable (novice, etc.). If national societies had awards, they searched out those that were free. In the end, we had a serious list of award categories, the grand award (provided by the club) and a few national society awards.

The next step was to approach other clubs and organizations in the metropolitan area and most were receptive to sponsoring various of the remaining awards with prizes of their choice (gift certificates, blacklights, etc.). One year, the San Diego Museum of Natural History even sponsored the grand award as the show's theme revolved around the museum. Organizations are often overlooked as potential cosponsors. Many bring small exhibits of their subjects since not every spouse is interested in stamps and these collateral displays increase foot traffic for both sides. They can also share floor space

costs, but that's a story for another day.

The basic classes however remained reserved for dealers who specialized in particular broad areas (allowing them to sponsor a specific class award, i.e. postal history). These dealers gave the idea a bit of thought and freely threw in their \$20-\$25. For that sum, they received advertising — their name listed in the prospectus (next to their award) and a card displayed prominently with the respective award at the show entrance. Awards were purchased mainly from a literature dealer (his contribution being a small discount) — in the form of publications. Award winners became more knowledgeable through their awards and award costs were funneled back into the local trade.

On a slightly different note, some shows seem to have trouble keeping awards equitable between classes. In single frames competition — one national show awards only a certificate despite charging \$10 per frame. The cost might be justified with a small token of remembrance costing the organizer perhaps a dollar or two, but a single sheet of card stock is really frugal. They have a 'baby' grand which costs a few dollars, but probably not more than \$20 of the total derived from single frame fees. The ratio of frame fee to award cost seems extreme in this case. I don't know the answer, but care should be given to ensure at least a perceived parity.

A major concern is the award presentation method as this costs absolutely nothing and often leaves something to be desired. Calling exhibitors forward in alphabetical order and piling on their awards has absolutely no style. Little better is proceeding by medal level and throwing everything at them on the first trip to the podium. How exciting!! If you want sponsors for your award system, develop style and invest effort for zero dollar cost.

After all, why do we dress nicer and go to a so-called 'banquet' that never offers a choice of Italian cuisine? If it were simply to eat, everyone could have been handed their tin, a palmares and a map to the nearest restaurant. Shows have award dinners to provide a bit of theatrical suspense during the ceremonies which allows anticipation to build. Perhaps even a local recognition award before the meal might provide a dinner conversation theme — some of those dishes really demand one.

Standard awards should be presented

from the bronze level up through gold (or platinum), each building on the status of the last. That might seem to be a 'no brainer,' but some shows don't do it. In Europe, the practice years ago was not to post awards until the day after the banquet. You chatted through dinner and afterwards, the longer the wait, the better the award. I'd forgotten how much your nerves jingled, hoping not to hear your name called quite yet.

And, don't simply throw special awards at exhibitors during this period. If special awards are presented near the end, they are accorded greater status and with good reason. Those awards carry the word 'special' because they are intended as an honor, a measure of accomplishment and recognition of a job done over and above the requirements. If sponsors are attending the banquet, acknowledge them to the attendees — they are patrons.

Secondly, why should we minimize the importance of some special awards to get to the last two (grand and reserve grand) quicker? All winners deserve some time in the spotlight, let them walk once more to the podium to receive that recognition from their peers. At the same time, acknowledge the dealer or organization paying for the award, providing them with a further feeling of appreciation. That's satisfaction and advertising that no other money can buy.

There will be many winners on such nights and the last three are the most honored when their big moment comes. Don't blow a great highlight by giving a single frame grand to an exhibitor during standard or even the special awards presentations. Accord it super status at the end of the ceremony with perhaps an order similar to: single frame grand, multi-frame reserve and then BOOM — the Grand.

Do you want award sponsors? Do the math. Exhibitors get great awards, the literature dealer gets more business, sponsors get super advertising (and perhaps a tax deduction) and the show reduces costs and increases prestige with a classy ceremony.

Lastly, the single frame and multi-frame reserve/grand winners become kings (or queens) of the current assembly. But remember, lords and ladies not receiving special awards today could be king tomorrow, so treat all your exhibitors as royalty.