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 Awards Preparation Module
Click on this link to register for a module to gather all the information you need to write a compelling awards submission

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 several years we have worked with multiple Microsoft partners and helped them win or become a finalist for a Microsoft award ***more than one hundred times – last year alone we helped twenty partners be recognized for their amazing solutions***. 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?
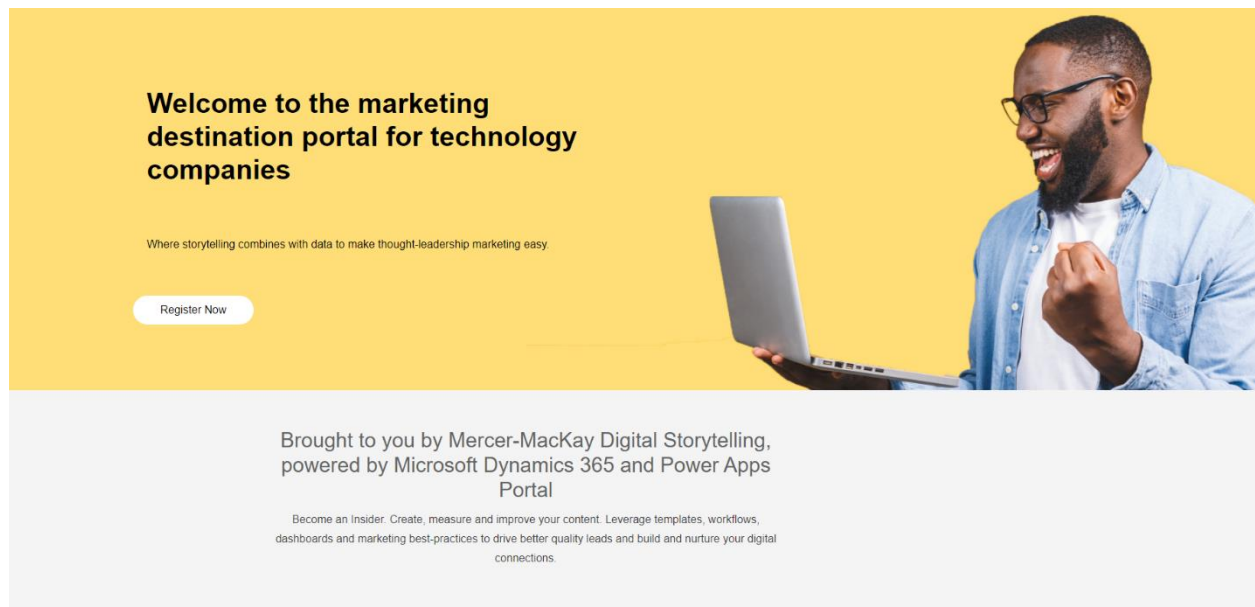
Start by reviewing the **Guidance from the Judges** document which includes terrific tips and advice. Know that the key is to tell your story. The best way you can.

Second. Register for the free planning tool brought to you by Mercer-MacKay Digital Storytelling (available in the Go-To-Market with Microsoft Catalogue – we've got a short-cut to it here). We've learned that most partners don't gather all the information they need to write a great award submission. And because they leave it too late to get started, their submission is not as strong as it needs to be to win.

Last year we built a (free) software application where you can collaborate with your team members (inside and outside of your organization) all year long to collect ALL the information you will need to write a great award submission. Your customers can even collaborate with you

and answer some of the questions. By answering all the questions in this preparation tool, you will have everything you need to get started writing once the awards open.

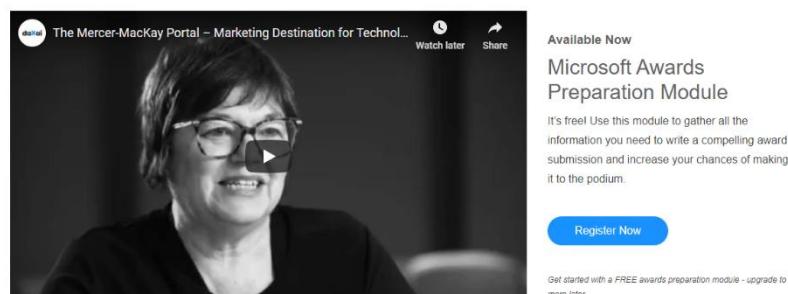Register for free at www.daxai.com

Telling a great story - 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 mentor or guide who is wise, innovative and experienced (like Gandalf in the Lord of the Rings)
- A villain who needs to be vanquished (like Darth Vadar, the Joker, the Wicked Witch of the West or even the Prince in Shrek)

- A protagonist or hero who needs the help of a mentor to vanquish the villain (like Luke Skywalker, or Bilbo Baggins).

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. Try to capture all of the highlights of your entry in the opening:

> ***Weak opening***
> *We are a Microsoft Gold partner and we worked really hard this year and we think that this is a great entry because our team 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 WVD with O365 coupled with the Microsoft APS platform which was able to deliver reports at sub-millisecond speed in any location, stopping a Google Analytics project 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 mentor or guide
Every good hero's journey story needs a mentor. Someone who is humble, modest, and has what it takes to ride in and work with the hero to save the day. In your story, that mentor is you. You and your company are Gandalf. You are the one with the answers, the resources, the skills, and the innovation to slay the villain and save the day in collaboration with your customer.

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 (or use the online tool). Your list will help you build the foundation of what you want to say.

The hero
In your story, the hero is your customer. They know that they need to change something (think Luke Skywalker or Frodo and Bilbo Baggins) but they are facing the unknown. They aren't sure

which direction to go. They are ready to take a risk but not on their own – they want the right mentor to guide the way.

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 or AWS).
- **Budget** – we have limited financial resources but our company has got to take better advantage of technology.
- **Inertia** – the customer has a legacy environment and there is push-back at moving to the cloud.
- **Corporate culture** – not-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.

Paint a picture of what it will mean to solve the hero's problem:
Because the hero is your customer, let's humanize them. How can you tell a story that the reader can identify with:

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

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

Content marketing and 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.

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

Other Awards
- 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)
- Local Chamber of Commerce awards

Other Assets
- Blog
- Win Wire
- Case Study
- Infographic
- Press Release
- Webinar

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 and an innovator. It tells people that doing business with you is a smart choice.

Tell your story. Tell it well. Good luck!