

How to Craft a Slam-dunk Legal Award Submission

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Jaffe Staff

As we find ourselves in the throes of March Madness, the focus on winning is more intense than ever. In the spirit of bringing home the W for your firm and attorneys, let's consider some techniques proven to give your award-submission game just the boost it needs. I can assure you that these tips are much easier to execute than sinking a half-court, game-winning buzzer-beater.

Don't Submit Just to Submit

These days, most publications and organizations offer numerous award opportunities. As my colleague noted in [her recent piece](#), the number of legal ranking and award opportunities is growing rapidly. Award opportunities – such as the various *Business Journal* "40 Under 40" awards, local and national bar association awards, and *Law360* and ALM profile awards, among others – are generally advantageous for all parties involved. In addition to the obvious benefits for award winners, submission opportunities provide publications and organizations with the chance to drive profit by increasing readership, engagement and membership.

That said, it's important to examine requirements carefully and weigh the benefits of each submission before deciding whether to pursue. Legal award submissions are often very time-consuming and labor-intensive. Ask yourself: Is this worth the time investment it will require to complete? Do I have a candidate who truly has the credentials to outshine competitors?

When making this decision, it's helpful to review winners from years past to determine if the candidate you have in mind measures up. Sometimes it's more sensible to pass than to pursue. Other times, your candidate is deserving and qualified in every way, so it's a matter of accurately and effectively conveying that in your submission.

Tell a Good Story

Imagine that you are a judge reviewing award submission number 489. You will probably begin to drift off ... What is the best way to keep a judge engaged and present when reading your submission? Tell a story that will distinguish your candidate from the rest!

When drafting your submission, make a point of sharing a story that truly presents a

memorable, striking snapshot of who your attorney is and why he or she should be selected. Many candidates will be presented as “client-centric,” “innovative,” “detail-oriented” and “prolific,” but can you go the extra mile with a story that affirms those claims?

For example, perhaps you are trying to convey the point that your law firm demonstrates extraordinary client service. Why not tell a story of the time your lawyer dropped everything to fly across the country on a moment’s notice at 8 a.m. on a Saturday to counsel a client whose business was in critical need? Perhaps you wish to demonstrate the impact your candidate has had on the local community. Can you share the tale of a recycling program the candidate implemented at their child’s elementary school that required them to dress up as the program mascot?

Anecdotes such as these can speak volumes and paint a vivid picture of who your candidate is both personally and professionally.

Highlight the Tangible

Work with your candidate to pinpoint his or her recent accomplishments, quantifying them when possible. Have they brought five new clients to the firm in the past five years? Did they identify a need or opportunity and take the initiative to establish a new practice group as a result? Did they save a client \$2 million in legal fees by offering an alternative to litigation? Numbers can pack a substantial punch.

Format and Organize Effectively

Complete sentences are not always required. Bullets and numbers can be extremely effective in an award submission, particularly to break up longer paragraphs or sections.

Include Third-party Perspectives

Sometimes a third party just says it best. If it’s possible to garner support from a third-party source – such as a candidate’s client, colleague or team leader – we strongly encourage including their commentary. Reference letters are nice, but a few sentences describing exactly what sets your candidate apart can be equally powerful.

Go Beyond the Surface

These considerations just barely skim the surface of the legal award-submission game. As with basketball, a plethora of techniques and strategies can help you craft a slam-dunk submission. If you would like to discuss specific opportunities, ideas or the awards process in general, contact Vivian Hood at vhood@jaffepr.com.