Awards, Rankings & Best-Of Lists

Tools For Operators · https://jeffreysummers.com/docs/awards-rankings-best-of-lists/

Best new restaurant. Top twenty-five in the city. A reader's choice plaque. A badge for the window and a logo for the website. Sometimes there is an entry fee, sometimes there is an ad buy in the issue that announces it, and sometimes it arrives free because a publication needed a list that week.

The operator puts it in the window, and something has just been decided about his operation that he did not decide.

What An Award Actually Is

An award is somebody else's criteria, applied to your operation, and then adopted by you as a measure of it.

The criteria came from a publication, an association, a platform, or a vote. Every one of those was built for a purpose, and the purpose was never your operation's health. A publication needs traffic and advertisers. A platform needs engagement. A vote needs participation, which means it measures who mobilized their list, not who produced the better operation.

The inference: **good operations win awards; therefore winning awards means a good operation.**

Same reversal as everything else in this category. And here it has a second stage that costs more: once the award exists, the criteria start running the operation.

The Criteria Become Your Standard

This is the mechanism, and it is quiet.

An operation wins for something. Now there is a reason to keep winning. The next cycle's decisions start getting made with the criteria in the room -- the dish that photographs, the concept the writer will find interesting, the thing that reads well in a category, the timing that lands inside a voting window.

None of those decisions came from a read of the building. They came from a read of what gets recognized, which is a different business entirely, and the operator has quietly switched which one he is in.

An operation that chases recognition ends up designed for the people who hand it out. Guests are a downstream consequence at that point.

Six Ways The Badge Costs You

It aims you at the middle of a category. Lists are organized by category, and a category is a description of a group. The operation that wins is usually the best example of the type, not an operation nobody can compare to. Winning requires being legible, and being legible requires being comparable.

It arrives with a spike your operation cannot hold. Recognition brings volume you did not design for. The operation runs above its capacity, the standard slips for the exact cohort of first-time Guests the award sent, and the badge in the window produces the worst version of your operation. That spike also reads as a visible queue, and an operator who reads a temporary line as demand makes capital decisions off it.

It measures a visit, or a ballot, or an editorial need. A judge came once. Or nobody came and a writer needed copy. Or your mailing list voted harder than the other place's.

It is frequently paid. Entry fees, ad buys, membership requirements, sponsorship tiers. Not all of them, but enough that the whole category carries the smell, and your Guests increasingly know it.

It teaches your cast the wrong scoreboard. A cast oriented toward recognition is a cast performing for people who are not in the room most nights.

It expires and leaves a hole. Position built on recognition has to be re-won on somebody else's cycle. Position built on what Guests cannot get down the street does not, and nobody else controls whether you keep it.

The Legitimate Use

Recognition is a marketing asset and it is worth something. Use it as one.

Put it in the window, put it in the copy, let it do its work bringing people through the door. What it cannot do is tell you anything about whether your operation is healthy, and it cannot get a vote in

a single operating decision. The moment a menu, a hire, a standard, or a capital decision gets made with a ranking in mind, the instrument has stopped being marketing and started being the architecture.

Enter them, win them, hang them, and keep them entirely out of the design.

What Replaces It

Guests returning at their own interval. The only recognition that pays. Nobody hands it out and nobody can take it away.

Guests sending people. A referral costs the Guest standing, which is why it is the most honest signal your operation can produce.

Guests asking for a cast member by name. Reads the relationship and the cast at once, and no publication can see it.

Cast tenure. The people who could work anywhere choosing to stay. That is a verdict on the operation from the people with the most information about it.

What you are chosen for, stated and held. Name the thing a Guest cannot get in the same form down the street, and read whether it held this period. That is the scoreboard, and it is yours.

Your own operation last period. The only valid comparison, because it is the only one where the population is actually yours.

What Changes Tomorrow

Write down every decision in the last year that was influenced by recognition -- a dish, a concept move, a timing choice, a spend, a hire, a room change, anything made partly because of how it would read.

Then ask a harder question about each one: would you have made that decision from a read of your own building. Some you would have, and those are fine. The ones you would not have are the ones where somebody else's criteria were running your operation, and that is the finding.

Then do the replacement read for one period. Guests returning inside their normal interval. New Guests arriving because a named Guest sent them. Guests asking for somebody by name. Cast still here.

Those four numbers describe your operation. Every plaque in the window describes a publication's need in a particular month, and knowing the difference is what keeps the badge useful instead of expensive.

Digging Deeper

Every term in my framework lives in the Knowledge Base: kb.jeffreysummers.com

Terms used here: [Visibility Trap], [Visible Queue], [Operator's Visibility Problem], [Measurement Lock-In], [Positioning Capital], [Meaningfully Differentiated Value], [Ordinary By Design], [Editorial Capture], [Novelty Arbitrage], [Designed Architecture], [Default Architecture], [Guest], [Contract Constraint], [Perspective Constraint], [Constraint Architecture]

More of my work on this, all of it in the Knowledge Base:

- Demand You Create Is The Only Demand You Own -- the position underneath this entry
- 2235 The Guest Investment -- the recognition that pays
- The Advantage You Already Have And Aren't Using -- what the badge distracts from
- 5.TA.0 Transactional Arbitrage -- the category the award industry sits in
- 3070 A Level Talent -- cast tenure as the honest verdict

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