

Microsoft Australia  
Partner Awards 2014

# Writing a Winning Microsoft Australia Partner Award Entry

By Lisa Lintern from Lintern Communications

**MAPA  
2014**

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Australian partners are responsible for some of the world's most exciting and innovative technology.

If you believe you have a great story that puts you in the running for an award, it's time to **START YOUR SUBMISSION NOW**. Don't leave it to the last minute.

While the deadline for **submissions** is Thursday, 5 June at 11.59, Australian Eastern Standard Time, we recommend you set yourself an earlier deadline to avoid any last minute hitches. (And trust us, they do happen!).



READIFY – Winner: Application Development Partner of the Year 2013

The first thing you should do is read the award guidelines. It's important that you are clear on the eligibility requirements and the questions for your chosen award. Then, once you are certain you are eligible, copy and paste the questions into Word where we recommend you write your entire submission in draft form. Only once you're happy your submission is ready to go should you copy and paste it into the submission tool.

When writing your submission, think about who your audience is. In this case, it's the judges: possibly up to eight, depending on your category. Like everyone, judges are busy people. So you need to make your submission interesting and easy to read.

Judges have told us they love submissions that:

- Tell a story and entertain them
- Have been freshly written for that submission and not simply copied and paste from a website
- Articulate a credible understanding of the technology of the category they are entered under
- Have been written by a person passionate about the technology or solution
- Contain real customer stories
- Use a mix of story telling techniques, like videos and photos

Judges have also told us they struggle with submissions that:

- Are sloppy, full of mistakes and look like a last-minute rush job
- Stretch the truth
- Use too many words to tell a simple story

## HOW TO TELL A GOOD STORY

Sometimes those first words – the ones that start your submission – can be the hardest to find. So we also recommend you think about this tried and trusted formula for telling a good story.

### THE HERO

At the heart of good stories are strong, well-described characters. In your submission you are the hero: the one with all the answers to save the day. Think James Bond or Lara Croft, ready to swoop in on your helicopter.

So spend a bit of time understanding what it is that makes you, as the main character, special. Perhaps you only started up the business two years ago and have already doubled your customer numbers. Perhaps you have launched the first product of its kind – your secret weapon. Or perhaps you have highly talented people working for you. Take the time to really describe who you are and paint that picture with real evidence. Things like where you operate: the number of employees you have: the number of customers on your books: the fact that you operate entirely online or that you service customers who are members of the FTSE 500. Whatever it is, find something that makes you special.

### THE VICTIM

Who are you saving? In most of our cases it's a customer facing some kind of problem. Perhaps it's a customer struggling to get information quickly and safely to a workforce located in remote regions. Perhaps it's a company being held back by a slow and unresponsive IT service provider. Or perhaps the victim is a market place suffering from a lack of competitive offerings. Or could it be bunch of students missing out on amazing learning experiences because they don't have access to the right technology?

Again, paint the picture of your characters with evidence. The amount of money the customer is spending on outsourcing their IT needs. Numbers or statistics that show how inefficient their industry is. Numbers or statistics that show the opportunity for that industry if only they could work more efficiently. Or academic evidence pointing to a change in the way students should be learning.

## THE VILLAIN

Just to make things even more interesting, make space for the villain: the person, or thing, that could stop the hero in its tracks. This could be: other competitors circling like sharks; tough regulatory red tape that could tie the hero's hands behind their back; a possible lack of funding; a challenging office environment; high security risks; or a last minute technical hitch. What is it that you, as the hero, must overcome in the inevitable struggle?

Like all good stories, the hero always wins. Somehow through either brawn or brain, the hero always overcomes the villain to save the day. It might be through sheer passion and determination. It might be through creative thinking. It might be through changing a work process to make you more efficient. It might be bringing a customer closer to you so you can make changes to your product to really meet their needs – a co-designed approach. It could be innovative and robust compliance techniques to overcome regulatory burdens. Or it could be a great idea that came from one of your employees that you empowered to really make a difference.

## HAPPILY EVER AFTER...

And finally, there's the happily ever after. The hero has saved the day! How? Well this is where you need to be very clear. How many new customers did you win as a result? How many new customers did your client win as a result? What was the tangible increase in a customer's productivity as a result of your solution? How much money is your customer now saving every year? What other customers did you win as a result of this win? How many students are now benefiting from your solutions?

This tangible, 'real information' is very important. They are the proof points as to why your story is such a success story. Make sure you back up your story with as many of these proof points, these stats and these figures as possible. This is the stuff that really makes a difference to your story.

## NOW TURN YOUR STORY UPSIDE DOWN

Once you have your story, there is one, final and very important thing you need to do. You need to turn it on its head, so that the happily-ever-after-bit becomes your introduction. That summary pitch makes it an irresistible story for the judges. It becomes the hook that reels them in and encourages them to make the time to read the rest of your submission.

Turning a story on its head like this is based on the inverted pyramid method of journalism. It's important for a number of reasons. Firstly, it helps the judge to understand quickly why

they should read your submission and give you the time of day. And secondly, if, for some reason, the judge gets distracted during your submission and has to stop reading it, they will still come away with that most important information you want them to know, because they read it first in the introduction.

## A FEW PRACTICAL WRITING TIPS

- Write your words as though you are saying them. Writing as you would speak enables your writing to have a conversational, 'authentic' feel – a style that is much easier to read and absorb.
- Use an active voice, not a passive voice. This is another big rule for writers. Active writing is easier to read as it puts the subject at the front of the sentence. For example, "Fred loves Angela" is active. "Angela is loved by Fred" is passive (and takes the mind a bit longer to work out!).
- Assume the judge knows nothing. So this means avoiding acronyms and jargon like the plague! What if your judge has only been three weeks in their role? What if your judge really dislikes acronyms?
- Say it once and say it well. Don't use slightly different sentences to make the same point over and over again.
- Edit, edit, then edit again! Don't be afraid to get professional help.

## AND THE CHERRY ON THE TOP...

- Use real customer quotes and testimonials. Just make sure you get their permission first.
- Point out if you used the tools and benefits within the Microsoft Partner Network and who (or what) helped you. For example the Partner Learning Centre or Pinpoint. Or if you partnered with another partner, make sure you highlight that too. Collaboration is highly valued.

Good luck with your submissions. Do us proud! And don't forget there is a wealth of information about the awards at [Australian Partner Conference](#).