

The delights of winning an award

There is something special about receiving an award that is bestowed by one's industry peers.

While this is not in the same category of achievement as reaching greatness in terms of raised company profits or larger share of the market, all the same it is special.

To be called up to the stage as the representative of one's company, at a gathering of one's competitors and colleagues, and to hear the applause as the compere reads out the judges' comments brings a bloom of pride to the most stoic of faces.

And there are plenty of awards in the cards and payments industry that a company can enter.

Some have been around for years and years, such as the Cartes Sesames Awards in Paris, France and now Hong Kong, the ICMA card manufacturers association Elan awards and the Smart Card Alliance OSCA awards in the US.

Others are more recent, such as the Card & Payments Awards in the UK, and various prepaid and mobile awards.

Awards as art

One awards ceremony that held its first event this year, but that has already managed to make a mark on the business is that of the European Card Acquiring Forum held in Berlin.

The first differentiator was that this involved awards to that often unsung bunch, the back office processors and card acquirers, who rarely make the news unless there is a data hack.

The second differentiator is that these awards involved art.

The chairman of the judges, Leon Dhaene of consultants n2euro was a chief instigator of the idea that the conference should give the award winners a small sculpture by a young and promising artist, the Belgian Sofie Muller.

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Sofie Muller has been working as a professional artist for over 10 years now, and has collected several awards herself including the prestigious "A home for a sculpture" from the Belgian Province of Eastern Flanders in January this year. She has exhibited in several European cities, China and in New York.

Muller explained her work to the enthralled audience before the award ceremony began, which added an interesting dimension to the proceedings. Now everyone wanted to win.

Explaining why he had elected to introduce a cultural element to the awards, Dhaene said: "In order to put their sec-



tor relevance into evidence, the European Card Acquiring Forum wanted to bring a tribute to those acquirers who were instrumental in pushing the card payment system beyond the next level and to those innovations which were relevant to the success of card payments today and in the near future."

And the winners were:

- Barclaycard for the data security award and the channel award
- Deutsche Card Services for international services

- Ompipay for innovative processing
- Garanti Payments for the information award, and the loyalty award
- HSBC for the performance award and the merchant award
- Atos Worldline for the usage award
- Heartland Payment Systems for the integrity award.

Commenting on why they had decided to hold an awards ceremony, Andy Ivanis, head of organization for the conference organizers Empiria said:

"The role of acquirers has been vastly underestimated in the entire value chain of a card payment. Hardly ever do acquirers receive the visibility they deserve when it comes down to improving the end-to-end quali-

ty of a transaction, to implementing change, or ensuring the success of innovation, or stopping the bleeding edge of technology."

The next European Card Acquiring Forum will be held in February 2011 and there will again be an awards ceremony.

The judging rules will be the same as before, in that companies must express an interest in being considered for an award.

It is thought likely that Sofie Muller will be asked to provide the work of art for the winners in 2011, with other young artists being involved in future years.

Ivanis said: "The judging criteria may differ a little from the previous year in order to fine-tune some details. Also, the judging panel will be created from scratch to avoid any notion of biased consideration. The exact criteria will be placed on our event website www.europeancardacquiring.com in August."

How to win card awards

Card World editor Annich McIntosh is a judge for a number of international card awards schemes and she says the most important point for entrants to consider is their written application.

She explained: "It is often the case that entrants assume knowledge of a product on behalf of judges, and the result is that it is not at all clear either what a product does or even what it is. It is so important that a summary of the product or service is presented on the first page of the entry, before going into further detail."

She also suggests that companies should consider carefully which category to enter as this is crucial. "It is very sad when a company fails to win a prize for what is, for example, very clever

technology, because the entry has been put in a totally inappropriate section, where it is impossible for the judges to consider it as a prizewinner."

She also suggests rewriting an entry if it is put into multiple categories. "Judges are only human, and if they have read something before, they are unlikely to give it much attention the second or third time.

"So if in the first instance, the judges have been looking at the entry in terms of customer service, they may then overlook its really strong innovation, or marketing performance in subsequent entries. It is important that these elements are highlighted and brought to the start of subsequent entries to make these differentiators really clear."

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