

Awards Programs: Handling The Losers

By Richard Lowe

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Sometimes it's an easy decision, sometimes it's more difficult. Occasionally you find a site which on the surface looks very good and you spend hours looking it over, comparing it to each part of your criteria. Believe me, it's those last one's that hurt the most - the site is gorgeous and wonderful, but ... it just does not meet your criteria.

So what should you do? Should I send a note to the webmaster to fill him in on what I found that was not correct? Wouldn't he or she want to know? These questions go through my mind every time I look at a site which applies for one of my awards. Should I tell them what's wrong?

NEVER. Let me be fully and completely clear about this - **NEVER UNDER ANY CONDITIONS, WHETHER REQUESTED OR NOT, SEND BACK CRITICAL COMMENTS TO ANYONE WHO HAS APPLIED FOR YOUR AWARDS PROGRAM. NEVER.** After all, if you apply your criteria to the letter it should be obvious why the site didn't win the award - it didn't meet the criteria.

There are lots of reasons not to tell webmasters why they didn't get your award.

There is nothing more devastating to a webmaster than getting back critical comments, especially when those comments are not anticipated. It's one thing to be in a classroom environment and receive feedback, it's entirely a different matter to have a professional webmaster tell you your site is horrible or even that the "navigation needs work".

Let's say you do send a quick note which explains, "your navigation was difficult to comprehend." Well, now the webmaster has to send you an email back asking "what do you mean?" After this, you

might spend the next week trying to explain what on earth you meant. Wouldn't it be better to be working on your web site, doing your job or taking your kids to the circus? The odds of you winning this discussion are very low.

More often, you'll send the note and get back an incredibly hostile response. You have not made a friend.

And even more often, the webmaster will not send a note back to you at all. You will never hear from this person again. But the unkind words will stick in his mind. He or she will be hurt or unhappy.

Once in a while, your words may discourage what could have been a good webmaster. You may return to the site a few weeks later and find it gone ... and you will never know whether it was your comments that did it.

Once I received a comment from an awardmaster who told me, in a very long email, that my site was great but since I do not accept psychiatric sites into my own awards program he could not award me an award. Keep in mind his own criteria did not mention such a restriction. I was so furious. How dare this pinhead make that kind of comment?

I remember another woman who had a beautiful site with some non-traditional navigation (it was some floating squares and was absolutely gorgeous). She didn't get an award and received a response from the awardmaster which said her navigation was terrible. She was upset and posted a note to a newsgroup asking for a site review. Before long, she got back a dozen responses, some negative some positive. She was so confused, discouraged and unhappy. Nothing good came from the comments.

I've known many beginning webmasters who are just starting out. Of course their GeoCities and Tripod sites are lacking ... but heck, these people are beginners. What do you expect? Telling them they didn't get the award because, well, their site failed all 26 criteria points just will not make any friends and, believe me, will not help anyone.

Okay, what about honorable mention awards? Lord, I hate these ... this is a wonderful way of saying, "your site was only a little bit sucky". Come on, either give out the award or don't, but please don't hand out honorable mentions.

My opinion: honorable mention awards are the product of amateur awardmasters. Don't include them in your program.

So what should you do about those who do not win? It's simple ... don't do anything. No matter how much time you spent judging the site, just put it aside and resist any temptation to "help" or "give some advice". Move on to the next web site without looking back.

If the webmaster sends a note asking (and this has only happened to me once), well, then you can either (a) ignore the request or (b) just send a quick note saying it didn't meet the criteria. You can suggest he read the criteria again and in, say, a few months he can resubmit his site. Don't get into any details, even if he asks and says that he wants to know. Believe me, he really doesn't.

The bottom line? Keep you negative comments to yourself.

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Richard Lowe Jr. is the webmaster of Internet Tips And Secrets. This website includes over 1,000 free articles to improve your internet profits, enjoyment and knowledge.

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