

Recognising and rewarding B2B

By Danette Breitenbach

The opening of the entries to the PICA Awards this month will usher in a new chapter in the history of these Awards with new categories and a new judging process being implemented. For the Business-to-Business (B2B) sector, in particular, this signals a revival in the Awards, which has seen B2B entries diminishing over the years

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uch of why B2B publishers lost their enthusiasm for the Awards was due to the categories and judging process. Jonathan Harris, chairperson of the 2010 PICA Awards Committee, and CEO and co-founder of Thought24, is confident that B2B publishers will welcome the new categories and the new streamlined judging process.

He says the Awards morphed into something else organically which led to a range of opinions on whether the Awards were working or not.

“The PICA Awards were started by the B2B sector, but over the years the Awards have been perceived as a more consumer/customer title-centric award. It should never be perceived in this way as it is a publishing excellence award that spans the magazine industry.”

The problem started with and has always been how publishing excellence is defined. “It is not a constant and there are different pillars for consumer, customer and B2B. Within that, the B2B sector is a very complex business with different commercial imperatives to consumer and customer publishing.”

To kick off, the committee consulted three well-known and experienced B2B publishers on what they felt was wrong with the PICA Awards and what could be done to better service this sector.





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- Jonathan Harris

“The categories are a minefield for B2B, with vastly different opinions about how B2B should be segmented, and so we looked at overcoming this first. The goal was to bring the Award categories in line with international standards and meet the needs of local publishers and so we had a look at the TABBI Awards categories.”

These are much more content-centric which is appropriate not only for B2B, but for a publishing excellence award. It was agreed to propose the TABBI Awards as the benchmark for categories.

“The B2B sector was consulted as a whole on this thinking before the decision was made. We feel that we did our due diligence in this regard. It is never possible to get consensus but we listened and went with the balance of opinion and what we felt was best for the industry as a whole.”

The TABBI Awards approach is not only suitable for B2B but also aligns the PICAs with international standards.

The second critical point that needed to be addressed was the judging process. Two opinions came through here. Firstly, that judging should be done by consumers of B2B titles and secondly that judging should be done by experienced marketers, publishers and other media specialists.

Guts and courage

B2B media - or trade and technical - is characterised by its strong affinity to the industries and sectors it represents. Has B2B been true to these industries through the years and is this the key to their survival? AdVantage interviewed Rory Macnamara of Interact Media Defined who has been part of B2B media literally (he says) since its inception.

Q: What are customer expectations today in terms of B2B media and how has this changed - if it has - over the past few years?

A: Customers' expectations have not changed in the sense that they still demand B2B to give them access to decision makers, i.e. their readers. What has changed is that there is no longer one decision maker in a company but a decision making unit. The trick is to reach the unit as a whole. Other than that, I don't see B2B publications having changed too much. They are more niche than ever today and with the number of regulations and laws that have come about over the past few years, the issue of compliance has come to the fore.

Q: What has been the impact of the global financial crisis been on the B2B media industry in general? How has it affected the way you do business, if at all?

A: There was an impact, but not as great as in the rest of the world. It has led to B2B publications becoming more niche - as mentioned above - and has, in some cases, increased the standard of publications. It showed many publishers that they should stick to what they are doing rather than moving away from their subject matter.

Q: How has technology (digital and mobile) impacted on the traditional B2B media model?

A: The B2B model in itself has not really changed. It is offering more opportunities for readers and while

print will never die (that is wishful thinking by some), by embracing the opportunities offered by technology it has also opened more avenues for the publication to talk to its readers. It also means we can talk to a younger generation and through the electronic media direct them to the print version. The print version will always be more detailed than the digital media one in terms of the B2B model. Print will sustain itself in this country as more people learn to read. They will read print first, before they read on the internet.

Q: What are the biggest needs or challenges the industries face? What must the B2B media industry do to overcome these challenges?

A: It is the same for any publishers whether online or print - to be relevant. Publishers also have to pay more attention to the law in terms of compliance. In the past 16 years we have seen compliance go out of the window in many if not *most* of our industries. B2B has a huge responsibility to fulfil here - one which takes guts and courage. If you are not compliant, a publication should not be interested in your business. This is not an easy thing for a B2B publication to do as it is dependent on advertising, but it is in their interests and the industry they represent to do so. With the Consumer Protection Act the onus is on the manufacturer and supplier in that industry - in other words our readers. B2B publications must serve these industries and they will be

rewarded. Publish garbage and you will not be. It is your commitment to your industry that will set you apart.

Bearing in mind what I said above, I believe that a B2B publication must be part of the industry it serves, rather than an appendix. Talk to them, don't just sell space. We need to break out of the mould that we are images on paper. We must be involved and committed to our industry. Be involved in the official bodies. Work for it and grow for it.

Advertising agencies and marketers need to understand this and wake up. In this regard, the ABC in B2B is more and more necessary. Many B2B publications are, but there is still a whole batch out there that is not audited. Marketers need to learn to work with publications that are audited.

Another issue is the training of people. The organisations and associations in the print and magazine industry are not doing a very good job and failing horribly in this sense. They should be pulling this together.

My last thoughts are around the PICA Awards and while I welcome the PICA Awards revamp, I think this should be viewed as the beginning of a process and not the end result. The PICA Awards were based on what you were contributing to your industry and it was the users who determined the winners. Over the years the publishers got involved and the categories went downhill. The Tabbies are a good start and gives a nice international feel to the Awards, but it is only the first step. It is not the answer.

“The first option limits the judge in terms of his or her field and also their experience in publishing and was therefore found to be unsuitable. However, this approach clearly signalled a need for judges from the business sector to be included and not just media. The second option, together with a very clear brief and mission statement about the sector and what the title is trying to achieve was therefore selected.”

Harris is aware of how important this panel of judges has to be. “The panel must know what B2B is. We have selected judges who understand the B2B sector and may come from either a publishing, design or branding background or be marketers from business sectors such as telecoms, retail and the like. We will also issue clear guidelines on judging as we want the standard to be consistent and high.”

This year’s entries, judging and voting will be done electronically. “The first round will be done remotely using online. The panel will then come together to discuss the top publications and make a final decision.”

This method of judging holds many benefits. “It will mean that judges have time to deliberate during their initial judging phase, instead of being forced to make decisions driven by a one or two day deadlines. Once judges come together for the second round they should be fully prepared to debate publishing excellence and they will have to

WHAT ARE THE TABBIES?

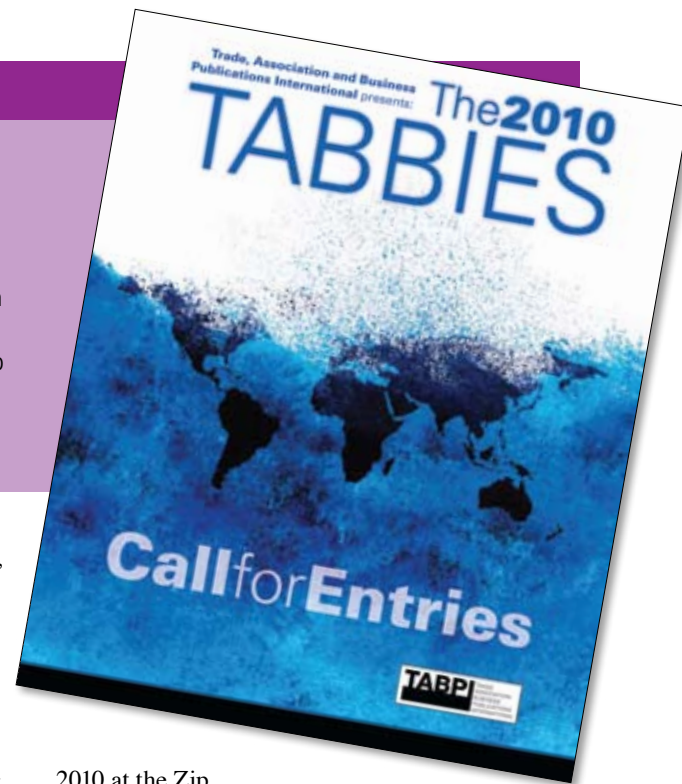
THE TABBIES are the editorial and design awards programme of the Trade, Association and Business Publications International (TABPI), which is partnered by a number of publishing associations around the world, including the Magazine Publisher’s Association of South Africa (MPASA). The TABBIES international B2B magazine competition has 20 categories, open to English language publications. This year already the entry mark has surpassed the 400 mark.

be ready to motivate their winner on the day.”

“Apart from this, the process will be auditable, and publications will receive feedback on their entries. I also believe that this process will place the panel above reproach.”

He is also confident that the PICA Awards will meet the needs of the publishers and establish a reputable benchmark that will be recognised locally and internationally. “We want to celebrate and reward this talented, unique and innovative industry so I hope with this focus we are raising the value of a PICA Award. Rewarding clearly-defined publishing excellence will also allow us to continue to push boundaries and remain at the forefront of publishing.”

The PICA Awards take place 11 November



2010 at the Zip

Zap Circus in Cape Town.

Riaad Moosa will be the evening’s MC, with entertainment provided by one of South Africa’s top hip-hop stars HHP, the African Drums and performances from the Zip Zap crew. The evening will then wrap up with an after-party at the venue hosted by a top radio DJ. ◀

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