

Winning the Loerie for PR may be losing the PR for PR

By Roger Hislop

6 May 2011

April is a trying month of two-day weeks and skiving off work. Or bashing your heads trying to get a campaign out the door. So excuse me for not noticing the details until now of The Loerie Awards' [new gong for great PR](#).



Have you seen the [new categories](#)? At first sight, I was not sure if the Loeries organisers just made them up quickly before popping down to the pub, or if they were surreptitiously taking the piss out of the industry they secretly scorn? Hard to tell.

The award for the best PR Communication (is one half of that not redundant?) will see the hand-engraved acrylic statuettes dispensed for "the strategic and innovative use of PR to drive coverage of a brand", which is fair enough. Picky PR people might already start objecting, since "coverage of a brand" is a tactic; it is neither an objective nor a strategy.

And then we look at the categories. You can win for getting a piece of coverage in print. Or you can win for getting something on the radio. Or TV. Or the Internet. Or, a combination.

What do the PR people think?

The Loeries committee will be going, "Yep. That pretty much covers it, right? Off to the wine bar." But what about the PR people? What do they think?

As it turns out, the Loeries people and the PRISA people put their heads together and thought long and hard about the new award - these categories do not come through ignorance of 'what PR is'. It was a conscious choice to focus on tactic.

The Loeries do not, and have never, recognised strategic communications in advertising. It is an award that applauds creative brilliance and excellence of execution of a single, tactical piece of work. The Loeries is fundamentally an awards exercise for the creative people, not the long-term strategy or roll-out behind the scenes.

And this is why some in our industry are looking at this 'PR Communications' award extremely askance.

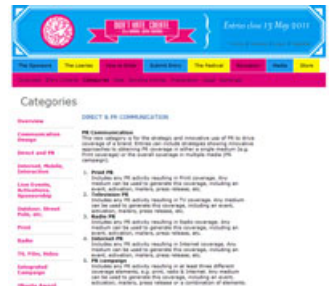
Educate the market

For the last decade, the PR industry has been breaking its back to educate the market about what it does for clients: why, and how. Central to this attempt at education is that securing a piece of coverage is nice enough, but PR is so much more than that: most of it lies in subtle influence and the redirection of conversations. Not in a single kick-ass half page story with pics on page 23 of *The Star*.

Now, in a stroke, we put PR back into the box marked "Get our press release on the front page or you're fired".

The rewarding of a single, high-visibility piece of coverage is also only really suited to consumer PR - business-to-business (B2B) PR is out in the cold. Not for the first time, incidentally, even within PRISA, B2B PR is the unloved uncle, coming right at the tail end in the PRISA awards categories (after even the NGO and PR on a shoestring categories...) and with close to zero B2B experts amongst the judges.

So with all the above historical and class baggage in mind, this is what I would say to the awards organisers:



The PR Communication categories as per the Loeries website.

[click to enlarge](#)

“ Dear Loeries Giving an award for PR that got a nice piece of coverage in a newspaper is like awarding an Olympic Gold for Best Baton Pass in the Men's 200m Relay. Or a Victoria Cross for jumping out the trench and screaming "Gaaaaaaah!" really well. The PR industry has struggled to define concretely how it delivers value for decades - and most of this struggle has been in getting paid for a direct effect on the business, rather than getting lots of press releases out the door and into print. A single (albeit satisfying) tactical win does not a PR campaign make. To reward a single piece of coverage outside of a campaign's success metrics harms the PR industry. It confuses our clients even more about what they should expect and need. It trivialises the difficult, subtle and devastatingly effective work PR does to shift perceptions, grow understanding, educate audiences and great brand preference - often WITHOUT A SINGLE NEWSPAPER CLIPPING. The advertising industry, and the Loeries in particular, reward a single, brilliant, creative piece of tactical execution that you can project on the screen and hear people's gasps. This is not what you find in PR. It is not bite-size chunks, nor blinding flashes. Like it or not, the Loeries carry a huge amount of weight and light up the marketing sky when it comes to town. The [PRISM Awards](#) are barely visible in its shadow. According to PRISA, the PRISM Awards reward strategic value and great campaign execution. The Loeries will reward a drop-dead gorgeous tactic. And people will only see the Loeries. ”

The Loerie Awards will be holding a complimentary workshop in Johannesburg on Tuesday, 10 May 2011, to provide insight into judging criteria, allow questions about entering work, receive tips on what the judges look for during the scoring process and find out who the 2011 international chairman is. The workshop will be hosted by Loeries CEO, Andrew Human and PRISA. Time: 4pm-5pm. Venue: Vega the Brand Communication School, Auditorium, at 444 Jan Smuts Avenue, Bordeaux, Johannesburg. RSVP to michelle@thelorieawards.co.za or tel +27 (0)11 326 0304.

For more:

- Bizcommunity: [Loerie Awards adds PR category for 2011](#)
- Loeries: [Categories: Direct & PR communication](#)
- Cannes Lions: [PR Lions categories](#)
- Twitter Search: [PR loeries](#)

See also:

- Bizcommunity special section: [The Loerie Awards](#)
- Bizcommunity search: [Loerie](#)
- Bizcommunity: [Twitterfall](#)
- Loeries Twitter: [@loeries](#)
- Loeries Twitter Search: [Loerie OR Loeries OR Loeries2011](#)
- Google News Search: [Loerie](#)
- Facebook: [The Loerie Awards page](#)

Workshop notification added at 5.23pm on 9 May 2011.

ABOUT ROGER HISLOP

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