



Competition Commando!

By Shaw Finn

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About The Author

Shaw Finn is a Competition Commando – enthusiastic, dedicated and a bit secretive.

“I don't need to put my picture or details about my business activities in this book about how I enter competitions, because they're worlds apart.”

“I have the same attitude in both areas; prepare carefully, attack strongly and never give up.”

“The prizes and also the mental exercise I get just from entering a variety of competitions makes the time and effort very worthwhile. And it's a nice change from working at my business. I tried to share some of that enthusiasm with my readers.”

“I have been along the track, know the bumps and pot-holes, so I believe that every reader, whatever their level of knowledge will find some things here to help them avoid the traps, waste less time and energy and win more sooner.”

“The thought of lots more Competition Commandos reading this book and then making their own attacks on the prizes which I want to win is not a worry. The more entrants and quality entries which they get, the better the chance that Sponsors and Promoters will offer more competitions and better prizes. Anyway, there's plenty to go around.”

“But the biggest factor is that I know many people who could write and submit much better entries than me but they don't stick to it – maybe try once and then go back to buying a heap of lottery tickets every payday!”

“I've tried to give some motivation along with the information to help readers get over that procrastination hump on their road to success.”

I hope that it won't be long before I'll start seeing your name on the Winners' lists!

Introduction

We all dream of having more money, a nicer car, maybe a nice cruise – all expenses paid - and an improved lifestyle without too much extra effort.

Some people say that's just being greedy but Competition Commandos don't say, "Greed is Good!" They don't say much at all – just take action and use the contests to improve their mental and other skills and have some fun. The prizes are a bonus!

This book can be your guide to getting part or all of that.

It doesn't cover every type of competition – I've concentrated on the main types which you'll find in stores, magazines and newspapers because they're the ones which almost everybody can enter and have great success – yes, almost everybody!

If you have any particular skills or enthusiastically pursue a hobby, you'll probably find that magazines, shops and groups which are related to your hobby have competitions too. Of course, most of those will probably have an emphasis on demonstrating your expertise and knowledge in that area, whether it's beer-making, doll-making or landscape painting.

But, the tips in this book will also help you with preparing, presenting and keeping track of your entries for those competitions too.

Why NOT You?

I don't know you, probably never met you - but I can tell you're a **Winner** ... even if you don't believe it yourself right now!

The egg which you came from won the Great Sperm Challenge against very high odds and I'm sure that you have had many victories. You probably, like most of us - including me - have had more small ones than large ones in the years since.

No-one wins every time and, even if it seems that you could be destined to be the exception that loses every time, we'll prove that really is not so. Next time you find yourself walking past a stack of brightly colored entry forms offering a chance for you to win something, big or small, give yourself a chance!

I've put enough tips in this little book to get you closer to the Winner's stand. It's all based on my experience, combined with the advice of many other winners.

We are basically no different or luckier than you. But:

- ✓ We enter more competitions than you
- ✓ We do it much more often.

Also,

- ✓ We're probably a lot more methodical in how we do it.
- ✓ We're selective about which competitions we put our efforts into and
- ✓ We put more effort into every competition which we enter.

Why They Don't Win and YOU Can!

The main reasons that people don't join the Winners' lists are that they don't enter enough competitions or they don't take any care with their entries.

Ask your friends about their experiences with competitions and you'll probably hear the same unhappy responses that I have:

A] "I entered a competition but never heard anything."

That's like asking someone out and then never asking anyone out again if that first person said, "No." You've got to keep trying, whether you're after some romance or a new car, because you must keep in the chase or you will never win!

B] "No-one ever wins – it's mostly a trick!"

The sponsors and promoters invest substantial money and effort in competitions to promote their products and services. That's their prime goal, but they also do everything they can to give their customers a great experience so that, whether or not you win this time, you will be left with an improved impression of the sponsor's product and their way of doing business. They love winners because the publicity they get in giving out the prizes will often appear in the editorial sections of the media for free as well as in their paid advertising. This helps to boost the public image of the company and their products.

Also, the State and Federal regulators take a keen interest in ensuring that consumers are not misled, all prizes are awarded and distributed, and that everything is conducted in a transparently fair way.

Part of the Rules in most jurisdictions is that lists of Winners must be made available to entrants and anyone else that wants to get them in a reasonable time. Usually, the lists will be published in the major newspapers of each State where the competition runs. The lists usually may also be obtained by sending a stamped, self-addressed envelope to an address which is provided by the promoter, or the list can be viewed on the sponsor's website.

C] "They only want to make you buy their product."

That's a prime motivation for any company, but the promotional competitions only succeed if many of those who first buy the products when they enter the competition, continue to buy and use the products, even if they don't win.

Otherwise, the extra costs for the sponsor in having the competition:

- \$ Special packaging with the entry forms and tokens
- \$ Legal services to ensure compliance with all those regulations
- \$ Extra, trained staff or consultants to handle the entries and distribution of prizes
- \$ Promotional services and
- \$ Extra advertising

would be wasted. Also, the Regulators limit whether entrants must buy something to enter the competition and, mostly, require that you can obtain one free entry form for most competitions if you want to.

D] "The odds are too great!"

The odds are high but, generally, nowhere as stacked against you as, say, lotteries. The people who use this excuse for not entering are probably buying a heap of lottery tickets every week of their lives. You could reduce the odds of winning any competition which you enter by following the tips in this book; being organized, preparing your entries carefully, maintaining a positive, cheerful attitude and persisting.

And, remember, there are more and more competitions every week which you can enter to increase your chance of winning. Many will only cost you the price of a stamp and, maybe, buying something which you buy some brand of anyway.

The Only Competitions You Can't Win.

You can't win:

× Crooked competitions.

That includes ALL those competitions which spammers fill your email box with, especially those where they say you may already have won a major prize in a foreign lottery and they'll follow it up for you if you just send a *small* authorization fee to them.

× Competitions which you don't enter.

× Competitions where you are unable to meet the entry criteria.

× Competitions where you try to get around the Rules.

× Competitions where your entry breaches the Rules.

The odds of your carefully-prepared entry pulling in a prize in a properly run contest are much better than the chance that you will win a prize of equal value in a properly run lottery. The trade-off is that, most of the time, you will have to invest more effort in your competition-conquering campaigns.

With the lotteries, most of the work is done for you by the ticket sellers and employees of the lottery organizers. They have to work pretty hard but don't feel sorry for them - they are paid very well from the proceeds of all your losing tickets!

I'll give you all the help I can from my experience and research, so that you can be confident that you're not wasting your time and, possibly, money which you invest in your competition campaigns.

With this ebook, you can give yourself a greater chance of winning more competitions or, at least, pulling in some nice consolation prizes while you're having some fun!

Here's the first of my rules – decide up front, early in your research about any particular competition, if you are comfortable with the effort needed to prepare your entry or entries.

Would you even want the prize if you win? Most competitions have a rule that prizes cannot be exchanged for other goods or cash so, if it requires you to do things you don't enjoy doing, think first whether your possible pay-off is worth the trade-off in your time and effort.

There's some benefit, at this early stage, in trying different types of competitions including some that may not greatly appeal to you because of the task involved (maybe you hate trying to rhyme anything) or any other reason.

But, if the pain is not likely to be great, I suggest you give it a go and, if you don't want the prize, perhaps you could quietly donate it to a worthy cause after any promotional commitments to the sponsor are over with. Of course, at that time, you could probably just as quietly sell it and use the money for something you really do want.

The rule about not exchanging the prize for cash has no bearing on what you decide to do after the prize is delivered and any publicity about the competition which you are committed to is out of the way, except in the case of some specific types of prizes such as travel. The travel companies may require that the Winner named on their records is one of the people taking the trip for both promotion and security reasons.

Otherwise, it's your property and you can sell it privately or give it away as you wish.

What's In It For YOU?

The obvious answer is to obtain products, prizes and even piles of cash with less effort (note – I'd never say, "NO effort"!), and in less time than just about any other legal method which I am aware of.

If you win a major prize such as a car, it's likely to be the top of the line model with all the extras you might want but maybe couldn't afford if you bought the vehicle for yourself. You might also get the various on-the-road and dealer preparation charges paid for your first year. You might even find that your prize comes with gift certificates for enough gas to make the first few runs entirely cost-free!

But, there are other rewards for the time and effort which you put into chasing those prizes.

Few of us are using our brains to anything like their potential, especially in our spare time.

You can improve:

- ✓ Your organizational skills to keep track of competition dates, entry forms, second-chance draws and announcements of results. Always file copies of both your winning entries (for claiming prizes) and losing entries which contain your original work. You may sometimes be able to recycle parts of your previous work in future competitions. You can't do that if you submitted the earlier entry to a competition where the rules include something such as, "All entries become the property of the Sponsor".
- ✓ Your general knowledge and ability to locate information by searching for answers to questions in the competitions or to check the accuracy of your answers.
- ✓ Your mental agility and ability to express your thoughts in brief, interesting ways.

That will all help you have a happier and more successful life all around.

Your trips to collect your mail, and probably sorting your email as well, will be more interesting. When the announcements of your successful entries start to arrive, that will help to compensate for the spam and junk mail which blight all our lives today.

What's In It For THEM?

The sponsors want the competition to help sell more of their products and to encourage people that currently use their competitors' products to try theirs.

If the product is at least as good as what the customer has been using previously, the sponsor knows, from market research, that a significant percentage of these new users will keep buying their product until lured away by the competitor's contests or other inducements.

Of course, if the users believe that the sponsor's product is better than their previous choice, then the percentage of new customers will rise sharply. The word of mouth from those happy, new users will generate many more long-term customers.

With all their advertising costs increasing rapidly and their battle for space on shop shelves growing more intense and expensive, contests and prize draws give sponsors a chance to get their promotional message into the editorial sections of the media among the articles and stories which generally have a higher credibility with readers.

Stories about Winners, especially if they live in that newspaper or magazine's circulation area, are usually popular with editors because it's good news which helps to balance the dramas which fill so much of the media today.

Preparing Yourself Mentally

I think you will greatly improve your chances of success by preparing yourself mentally for the campaigns. That's because I've noticed that my mental attitude and focus has had great bearing on the success I've had just like my negative focus that I've carried with me for many years was probably a factor in my earlier lack of success with competitions.

Most importantly, you should decide that you're doing it for fun and mental stimulation. That's particularly important when you start, because you may have to put in a fair bit of effort without seeing any reasonable return. Like any other activity which you take up, it's easy to get tired and discouraged, especially if you have to do it as a solo effort.

Success IS Possible and Almost Inevitable if ...

I found that my results improved after I read a self-help article. I am sorry that I've forgotten the title and author. The magazine was recycled a long time ago.

The author posed one question, "Can you accept success?"

My immediate reply was, "Just give me success and we'll see!" You probably would say much the same if you were asked that question.

But, the point he (or she) made was that many people are conditioned to believe that they are doing as well as they ever will be able to.

Their teachers, parents and other family, as well as their close friends and work colleagues, pigeon-holed them as being unable to achieve more than anyone else in the group and, many times, a bit less than others.

This judgment, expressed in statements which they heard several times every day, often molded their own view of their abilities and blocked them from progressing above the expectations of those around them.

When I told a few people that I was starting my own business (a dream that I'd had for a long time but always put off to concentrate on making a living in a regular job), I got another example of this obstacle to improving my situation. The views expressed, or just subtly implied, that:

- × it was too **big** an undertaking.
- × maybe I wasn't up to it – why leave a well-paying, but frustrating, job?
- × I would stress out and get too ill to continue! (That almost happened but I got through it with proper medical help and by focusing on the benefits rather than all the new problems having my own business brought with it.)

... etc etc!! I think that much of this is well-meant because your friends and family are concerned that you'll be over-whelmed by the extra work which you take on or that you'll really suffer if the project doesn't become as successful as you hope. But, some other people believe that you're just getting "above yourself" or greedy.

That's easy to deal with. What other people think about you is really not your concern so long as you're not breaking any laws or commitments to other people.

So, when you hear your friends' views about entering contests, don't waste your time trying to put a more positive view to them in the early stages of your contest campaigning.

If you can get the cooperation, not necessarily the active support, of your immediate family, that's great but, in the short term, the only person you need to have in a positive, active mood is **YOU**.

Discussing this subject with your friends, and even your family, can wait until you've won so many cars that you can't fit them all in your driveway!

You'll probably find that they'll be a lot more prepared to listen to you then!

Seriously, my experience has proved to me that consciously focusing on positive outcomes and getting rid of negativity, whenever my mind gets infected by some, has real benefits.

That definitely helps me to prepare better entries, so that my chances of success are improved. It also helps me to accept the inevitable disappointments when some of my best entries don't get any sort of result.

It also seems to have improved how I cope with other upsets, physical and emotional, which everyone gets as they go through life.

You'll realize that maintaining a positive outlook and enthusiasm is a lot easier to say than do but the effort is really worthwhile.

There are many ways which I've seen different people use to re-enforce a positive outlook in themselves. Many people post small inspirational texts, or even pictures of the sort of prizes which they want to win, in their diary or on their computer monitor or the door of their refrigerator - or even in all three places.

Here's a technique which might help you just like it has helped me... I've worn a small rubber band behind my watch strap for some weeks. Any time that I notice some incoming negative emotions, I flick the band and force my thoughts on to a more positive track.

It may seem weird, but I think that the little packet of bands, which cost me around 50 cents, has probably been worth more than several packets of pick-me-up pills or drinks and without the side-effects!

Because of the positive results which I've got, I don't mind the small red marks on my wrist!

Organizing Your Campaign

You won't need to research the history of competitions or the fine details of all the relevant legislation but you will need to make an investment of time in setting up the area where you'll research and prepare your entries, gather the books and other reference material and launch your attacks on the prize lists.

That investment will pay off – if you fail to plan first, then you're just planning to fail.

Your Tools of Trade.

One charm of entering competitions is that your costs are low and you are pretty much in control of your expenditure. But you do need to assemble some tools and resources so that you can do your campaigns efficiently.

Start a new habit of carrying a spiral notepad, a pen that you know does write and a couple of pencils just in case. You'll strike some competitions where all you have to do is fill in the form and put it in the box and you can do all that before you leave the store if you came prepared.

The notebook will be handy for ideas which pop into your head at odd times. Of course, a small tape recorder is also handy if you have one or can afford to get one. But, sometimes the ideas will come while you are in a situation where it would be inappropriate to whip out a tape recorder and start mumbling into it.

Your Filing System (It's Essential!)

You need to set up a record system for the written details of the contests you enter and also have a box, or some sort of strong, sealable container, where you keep these easy-to-lose items and, most importantly, you can also find the right ones quickly when you need to.

You may decide to use different procedures and devices than me for your personal system. That will depend on what equipment you have, what you can afford to add and what you are competent and comfortable using, so the whole process is as easy as possible for you.

You may want to keep all your records on the computer where you are reading this ebook. That's fine and could save you some time and effort, especially when you are fully into the swing of competing and have several campaigns afoot at the same time. But, I hope you will make regular back-ups and regularly print out and file a fairly

comprehensive record which you can refer to if you are not near your computer and for the times when your computer is being serviced or upgraded.

My Ledger

I, personally, keep a ledger-sized book with each page ruled into columns – it's okay to say that this is very old-fashioned but it's also simple and fool (or Shaw) proof. This is something I started doing when a friend lost the most recent month of her business records after her computer hard drive crashed instantly, never to be recovered.

Whether you keep your records in a computer file or a paper ledger, you need to have the following sections;

DATE	Sponsor/ Product	Closes	Entries	Sent	Sent 2cnd	Result
14 Aug	BeansInJam	10th Oct 2cnd 10 Nov	4 OK	1 st Oct	14 th Oct	Nil 2cnd \$40

Let me explain:

DATE: the date I find out about the contest or get the entry form(s).

Sponsor/Product: Sponsor or Product

Closes: Closing Date for the main contest and the 2cnd Draw if there is one

Entries: How many entries are permitted. 1P means 1 per person. 1H means 1 per Household (yes, they do check and disqualify otherwise worthy entries which break these sort of conditions.)

Sent: The date when I sent my entries. I send all my entries for a particular competition at the same time, while other people like to send a few batches of entries on different

dates. The only exception for this with me is when there is more than one closing date during the competition. Then, I might pop a couple of extra entries (where they are allowed) in the post as soon as the results of the earlier draws are known and I didn't win.

Sent 2nd: Date I sent my 2nd Draw entries. I don't send them until after the announcement of the Main Prize Winners if there is a wide enough gap. If I won a Major prize, I would not feel right trying to get a 2nd draw prize as well, or even trying. Others, of course, feel differently but that's part of my mind-set for all the competitions which I enter.

Result: Whether I won anything and, if so, the details of what I won.

My Success File

I've got another file which lists the successes I've had. It's on paper, but there is also a copy on my computer too – I flick to it when I want to refresh myself after I'm finished wading through a load of spam or hassles on a Forum, whatever.

I'll give you the columns for that too:

DATE	Sponsor	Product/ Service	Prize	Rec'd	Tyou
10/25/04	PuppyToys	PostmanChews	Inflatable kennel	11/09/04	11/10/04

DATE: Date the win was officially announced

Sponsor: Full address and contact details

Product/Service: Name of the product or service being promoted by the competition, and their current slogan, properly spelled.

Prize: Details of the win

Rec'd: When I got the prize

Tyou: Date I sent a hand-signed thank you letter. This doesn't mean you'll do as well in their future competitions but I think it's very important.

If my writing wasn't worse than my doctor's, I'd hand write the whole letter too. Just a personal touch. Although I don't decorate my entries, I'll certainly include a picture of the new prize and its happy owner with the letter if I had one.

This is my system *right now*, but I've changed around quite a bit and it could be changed again by the time you read this. My ledger has space on the right side of the page for a couple more columns.

I'll change the purpose of columns or even remove some if I get what I think is a better idea. Doing that with a computer spreadsheet is much easier, of course.

If something isn't working for you or it starts to cause you any hassle, give it some thought and then decide; change it, scrap it or just put up with it.

Other Files and Useful Books

You will also need the box I mentioned before to securely hold your entry forms, proof of purchases and other miscellaneous, but necessary, bits.

Get yourself a few cardboard files (maybe different color folders or, at least, tabs to clip to the files) to hold copies of your entries and all your entry forms (used and future), prize announcement lists and copies of any published winning entries (yours and other people's for you to refer to).

You will probably want a separate diary or perhaps a wall calendar to mark the closing dates, prize announcements and second-draw dates for all the contests which you have entered or intend to compete in. They're already in your ledger or computer spreadsheet but I find this extra copy well worth the extra effort. Having the information for the next couple of weeks in plain sight all the time is extra insurance that you never miss the closing date with that perfect entry which you invested so much time and effort into.

Another wise purchase is a wide variety of reference books, either printed or in the form of ebooks like this one. If your budget allows, you should look for reference material and

online links which cover subjects that you don't deal with regularly. Store the material on CD ROMs, DVDs or even print it out and clip the sheets into your files.

Always put at least the essential information about where you got the information from right with the information you have copied. You need to be able to verify any answers which you give on your entry forms. Having the source listed with the clipping or copy of a web page will also mean that you can very easily and quickly go back and get more information if you need it later on.

Some of the types of books which are worth gathering up are:

Dictionaries: A recent one for your own language, but also get some which cover technical subjects such as the Internet, medicine and other specialized areas.

Thesaurus: Great for sparking ideas as well as providing possibly more interesting alternatives for the key words you use in your entries.

Book of quotations: You won't win prizes just with the thoughts and witty sayings of other people but skimming through them may produce some useful quips of your own. Many successful entries have been famous quotations that the Winner has given a smart, original twist which ties it to the product being promoted in the competition.

Books of one-line jokes can help to spur your imagination and also perhaps lighten your mood after a heavy brain-storming session. You can also find **collections of humorous graffiti** (slogans and comments sprayed on walls). Keep in mind that these types of books may contain material which you might find offensive or not want to leave around for your young children to read.

Also, remember that almost all competitions will not ever award a prize to any entry which some people might be offended by, even if it catches a judge's eye and they all fall on the floor laughing.

You will find a **current Atlas** invaluable too.

That is probably a hassle to get together but you only need to update it occasionally. Having your main research material at your fingertips can save you a lot of time and frustration when you start working up your competition entries and are short for time to complete them because of your other commitments.

Select Your Targets.

Start by deciding the sort of competitions you want to enter and the sort of prizes which would be worth the time and effort to YOU.

At the beginning of your organized competing, you may want to look at a wide range of competitions, including some that you may feel are beyond your current ability and some that may not have the sort of large prizes you want to concentrate on but don't require any sort of major commitment in time or effort.

Entering almost any competition in a systematic and determined way during the early stages will help you to hone your skills for later, longer campaigns. Spreading your net widely at first will help you find out if there are any types of competitions which are more testing for you than you thought they would be. You may also be pleasantly surprised to find out that you're much better than you might have thought at some other kinds of competitions.

Entry Forms

Gather entry forms for as many types of competitions as you can, especially when you are just starting out on your contesting. Always check whether or not you can submit multiple entries for each competition.

Don't take more entry forms than you can use. Always leave some for other contestants but you should get 1 or 2 spares for the times when you, or your cat or children, muck up your entry. It is often a condition of entry that you must use an original entry form supplied by the sponsor or promoter, not a copy. You may want to get a reasonable number when you first see them for those competitions where you are allowed to submit more than one entry. If you don't get them right away, you may find that no more are available when you go back to that store. They'll probably try to get more but the smart Competition Commando doesn't leave things to chance.

You won't have to expend a lot of energy or petrol/gas to gather a bagful of entry forms. When you begin to really look for contests, they'll spring out at you when you would have thought there were none!

There are usually contests promoted in your newspaper, favorite magazines and almost every type of shop will have forms for competitions offered by their suppliers or themselves.

Supermarkets are like a competitor's goldfield with competitions on wrappers, boxes and more entry forms hanging from hooks beside the sponsors' products in every aisle. Look on the back of your sales docket for entry forms too.

Some stores gather a lot of the entry forms for the various competitions in one permanently-sited stand in their store. That's great for you when you are in a hurry but:

- You've still got to go to where the sponsors' products are to get the specially marked packets or, at least, look over the details about the product and its packaging which might be significant in the competition.
- These racks are attractive to small children, so a lot of the neatly filed entry forms can disappear or be scattered on the floor, never to be used.
- My guess is the sponsors will not get the same sort of response when their forms are not in the aisles where they can help to draw the shoppers' eyes to their products and sales away from the competitors' products.

There are some competitions where you just have to fill out your details on the entry form and put it in a box right there at the store. Those competitions are about 100% luck but still worth entering, of course.

You'll also find that sort of Lucky Draw at exhibitions such as Home Shows. Many exhibitors use those entries to compile a mailing list for an after-the-exhibition campaign. You may feel differently but, if the follow-up is spelled out on the Exhibition stand and is not full of hype, I don't mind.

Proof of Purchases

You may need to send off the wrappers of the sponsors' products with the entry form(s) and keep your sales docketts as proof of purchase if you enter the related contests.

That means bits of paper and plastic - often small, odd-shaped ones - that you will have to store, maybe for months at a time.

You should mark the contents and any other important details such as "Best Before ..." date, on cans if you take the labels to enter contests. Use a waterproof marker. Otherwise, you could be surprised to find out what canned products look the same when you hurriedly dump them in a pot!

Your Entries

Your entry, or entries where the rules permit you to enter more than one, must comply with all the Rules for the competition.

That's just common sense but it's also the point where a significant proportion of the entries in every competition are disqualified.

When you have written out your first ideas, put them aside for, say, 24 hours and then re-examine them. You'll probably think of better ones or, at least, ways to significantly improve your first efforts.

Don't worry if your ideas seem very average when you have only just started. You've got to expect your output to improve as you exercise your creativity more – it would be terrible to think that you will never produce anything better than your first few entries. Giving each entry you produce some time to mature or rot is what many writers learn to do when they're developing their stories or plays.

Later in the book, I'll share a great technique which will help you to produce plenty of valuable ideas, almost at will. Of course, that will require an investment on your part – about 20 minutes should do it!

Discussing your ideas with anyone else is probably not going to help. If they submit an entry which is influenced by your discussion, both your entries may be treated with suspicion as being too similar.

Apart from that, some people will actively try to discourage you. Their comments may be well-meant but could inhibit your own enthusiasm and creative drive when you're just beginning.

When I tried to write a different book a couple of years ago, I mentioned it to a couple of friends. I talked about it very enthusiastically - in fact, at every opportunity.

The combination of the cool reception which my family and close friends gave to my ideas, their obvious disbelief that I could write a book and the energy I expended in just talking about my book brought me to the point where I abandoned the project.

Don't let that happen to any of your competition campaigns!

Pack Carefully.

When you submit your entries, you may have to include a token such as a bottle cap, flattened packet or wrapper. You have to pack them well enough that they will pass safely through the postal system and yet not with such defenses around them that they might take two of the promoter's staff ten minutes to unwrap them.

Use common sense with your packaging and consult your Post Office who probably have pamphlets, or even web pages on their site, describing the recommended ways that you should wrap such items safely and to comply with the Post Office regulations in your country.

Make sure that you check your entries, especially those which have tokens, packets etc., enclosed, have sufficient postage. No promoter is going to accept any entry which requires them to pay missing postage and fees!

Don't put unnecessary decoration on your entries. I've heard about people that are skilled artists and they decorate their entries. I am no artist so it's a no-brainer for me. But, I also believe that regular entries which are neat and correct probably have as much chance as the decorated variety which take a lot more of your time to do well.

If they say that entries should not be fastened then send all sheets without fastening them. If I'm sending more than one page always enclose these in a clear plastic sleeve.

Don't use pins and, if you use staples, make sure that the points are pressed down so they won't interfere with the mechanical letter opener or injure the clerk who has the task of opening all the entries.

The Coding Secret

You should also adopt a tactic used in Mail Order selling for your entries in those competitions where you are allowed to submit more than one entry.

You'll want to know the actual wording of the entry which won so that you can look at it more closely when your excitement dies down and try to see if there are particular tactics you used in that entry which you can use for future competitions.

The coding secret is for you to use a different variation of your name and address for each entry which you submit to multi-entry competitions and record the changed address with the details of that particular entry in your files.

If your address is

Mr. Shaw Finn
19 Freedom Road
Nanley
Utopia

You might use some variations like these;

Mr. Shaw Finn, 19 Freedom Road, Nanley, Utopia
Mr. S Finn, 19 Freedom Road, Nanley, Utopia
Mr. S. T. Finn, 19 Freedom Road, Nanley, Utopia
Shaw Finn, 19 Freedom Road, Nanley, Utopia
Shaw Thomas Finn, 19 Freedom Road, Nanley, Utopia
Mr. Shaw T. Finn, 19 Freedom Road, Nanley, Utopia
... etc, etc.

Key	Text	Win
Mr. Shaw Finn	Happy Faces	
Mr. S Finn	Happy Phases	
Mr. S. T. Finn	Happy Phrases	
Shaw Finn	Happy Riches	2cnd
Shaw Thomas Finn	Happy Britches	
Mr. Shaw T. Finn	Happy Potatoes	

Now, when you get confirmation that you have won a major prize in the competition, the way your confirmation letter is addressed will help you to check which of your carefully crafted contributions paid off this time.

Second Chance – Best Chance

A lot of competitions which require the purchase of a bottle of soft drink or packet of soup, offer a second chance draw with smaller prizes or to soak up the prizes which are not claimed after the main prize allocation has been announced (yes, it happens – sometimes even some of the most valuable prizes wind up in the second chance draw! The promoters, under the law, are required to distribute all the prizes.)

So, don't mislay the token for the second chance draw and make sure you get your entry in for the consolation draw within the specified time.

The extra time and cost is negligible and a win would certainly help soothe your hurt from missing out on the big prizes in the Main Draw.

The Competitions.

The easiest competitions are those which need the least effort and skill.

Drop Your Entry in the Box

Many stores have competitions where you pick up the entry form, put your details on it and drop it in a prominently displayed place right in the store. No skill required beyond correctly printing your name and contact details, the prizes will probably not be major ones and the number of entries is likely to be high because it's so easy. But, why not use it as a test of your new, positive mind-set and enter?

Email Contests – NO Thanks!

Forget about those which arrive in your email with the other spam. You probably won't win a prize – there may not even be a prize as the whole thing may be set up just to get your email address and confirm that it is active so they can sell your address to other spammers. Or, they use the lure of the contest to get your personal information (two words – identity theft!) and even plant spy-ware in your computer!

Phone-in Competitions

There are also competitions, usually promoted through media advertisements and television shows, where “all” you have to do is to phone a special number and leave your name and home phone number. The calls to enter these competitions cost more, sometimes much more, than your regular local calls. It's important to make sure that your children don't enter these competitions, maybe with the generous motive of trying to win a prize which they can give you or your partner for your birthday or Christmas. If they really get hooked, you could end up paying as much as the prize is worth and still win nothing at all!

The newspaper or television programs which promote the competition often get a share of the phone call costs and so do the promoters. You can now see why there are so many of these competitions.

Mark the Spot

While the competitions like 'Spot the Ball' - where you have to mark the actual center of a pictured object such as a football - is a skill-based competition, there's really more luck than skill in winning these.

Differences in the pens the entrants used can make the competition no more skillful than the 'Pin the Tail on the Donkey' game at the Sunday School picnic.

What are the Differences?

With these, you have to identify and mark a specific number of differences between two almost identical pictures.

These used to always be line drawings, mostly funny cartoons. Now, some contests offer two very similar photos with the differences introduced by digitally altering one of the pictures.

That makes for a better competition because some earlier contests were marred by some entry forms having additional differences which were not actual differences between the 2 versions of the same drawing that the artist actually produced, but extra marks that had been caused during the actual printing process!

I can't give you much help with these contests except that I always used a cardboard square, about a third the size of the picture, with a square hole in it. I felt this simple device helped me to focus on particular areas of the picture more carefully. Looking at the pictures through a magnifying glass never seemed to help me at all because the dots which composed the picture showed while the picture's details could be distorted, especially near the edge of the glass.

In my home, there were always plenty of cereal boxes, with the entry forms removed, to cut my cardboard square from.

Order of Importance.

In these competitions, a little skill and care may greatly increase your success rate though you can't discount there is also some chance involved.

Maybe you're not the 'ideal user' which the company's carefully researched list of desirable features represents. If not, you might be able to put together a profile of the sort of consumer that the company is focused on from their promotional material, the wording of their competition form, the media in which it appears and the packaging of their products.

You can submit more than one entry if that's allowed in their Rules, but that requires more time and possibly the cost of extra products to obtain the required forms or tokens.

You will have to carefully review each of the listed benefits.

Some may reflect points which are highlighted in the sponsor's advertising. That could mean that they have found them the most compelling features in their research.

There may be some points which have great appeal but just to a relatively small number of potential customers. Those points would usually rank lower, depending on the specific wording of the information supplied on the entry form.

At the other end, there may be points which have wide appeal – saving money, reducing stress or making the customer more popular. They would be points which most customers would rate highly, whatever their situation.

Another tip is to look at the list from a different point of view. This may give you an advantage over many competitors who will stick with the task exactly as stated on the form.

Instead of just asking yourself, or the ideal customer whose profile you've worked up, what are the most appealing features, look for those which have less appeal. Then you eliminate them or put them at the bottom of your list.

This can shake your mind out of a rut and cause you to explore the problem more widely.

Don't be surprised if you see a couple of the listed features almost jump out at you as having less appeal than most of those listed.

You have to be as sure as you can that your list gives the features in the order which you believe the judges are most likely to want. This reverse-focus exercise can bump you a little closer to producing another winning entry.

You may think that it's quite easy to rank, say, 6 features in order of their appeal. After all, that's only about 700 possible combinations. Of course, if you have to rate 10 features, there are over 518,000 possible combinations!

Whatever the number, there will probably be more than one correct entry! The promoters will have a tie eliminator for those people with the right answers. It will usually be a test involving some skill rather than a simple draw.

Be assured that, if a draw is used to select the eventual winner, it will be properly done and supervised to ensure that it complies with all regulations and expectations.

The test may, for instance, have you write a short promotional paragraph about the most important features of the product or a caption for a supplied photograph.

The eliminator will probably be harder than you found the original problem when you had to rank the features in order of merit. You will have less time to complete and return your answer for this too.

Complete This Sentence

A short, original and relevant paragraph may seem very hard but this type of competition, where contestants have to finish a given, incomplete sentence presents more difficulties:

- Most of the sentence is already written and that part cannot be altered.
- Your contribution has to be just a few words and they have to be relevant, positive and, if possible, have a little humor.

Don't push too hard to find a humorous angle because something you may put together with a lot of sweat might not strike the judge as very funny or even turn them away from your entry altogether.

You will get some clues from the promotional material and the packaging. Concentrate on submitting something which stands out from the great majority of entries and is tightly focused on the product's main appeal to customers.

If you're praising a packet of soup, decide which are the most obvious features which the majority of entrants can be expected to focus on and then try to find something else, equally enticing to customers but not so obvious.

For instance, there will be plenty of entries mentioning the taste and warmth of a nice cup of soup in cold weather.

Perhaps the sponsor's soup has:

- ✓ more of the main ingredients than their competitors or
- ✓ more eye-appeal on the plate
- ✓ a greater variety of ingredients or is
- ✓ locally made,

✓ more economical.

Creative Captions

Although there are about the same number of words in the sentences usually provided for the previous type of contest and a caption, the caption gives you more breathing room in my opinion.

That's because you don't have to use just those words specified by the promoter and you can arrange them however you want to get the best possible effect.

But, of course, it still isn't easy to come up with 3 or 4 potential winners about, say, a packet of potato chips.

They're probably very nice chips but finding something new and enticing (and short) to say about a product which has been around in various forms for that long is tough work.

But, remember that the rewards can certainly make all your effort worthwhile.

Produce Better Answers More Quickly!

You can get the very best out of your mind with this simple technique. No, you don't have to send me another \$25 dollars and you don't get any steak knives with it.

I've put this tip here because it can really help you in those competitions where skill and creativity are important.

I've read of authors, quite good ones, that can write their books while they are listening to the radio or watching sports.

Most of us lack their skill and powers of concentration.

To improve the results which you're currently getting, all you have to invest is just 20 minutes every time you write your entries for a new competition. You lock yourself in a quiet room for that period.

If you can't do that, then lock everyone else out and switch off or unplug anything which might distract you. Then, focus on the entry for the whole 20 minutes, just you and the reference material you have on hand.

Don't surf to Google or any other site because they will distract your focus.

It sounds easy, but you'll probably find it hard to complete your first session without drifting on to something else.

Pretend your life depends on it.

It's almost that important.

The benefits will surprise you. You'll get more and better captions, limericks or whatever and then you'll get a valuable bonus - even more powerful, potentially-winning ideas that pop up over the next few days as well.

That's because your subconscious mind absorbs what you focus your conscious mind around (the important word is *focus*). You might go and have a shower, cup of water or play with the kids after each session.

But, the power in the 85% of our brains that most of us rarely access will be quietly turning the thoughts and information you focused on even while you sleep – about 85% of your mental power will be working on what you had barely 10% working on before.

Carry a notepad and 2 pens, which you know work, with you. Put your notebook and both pens on the bedside table. Get yourself a pocket tape recorder, check the batteries and then put in a fresh tape.

Yes, it's worth the trouble. This simple but powerful mental exercise will improve the quality and quantity of ideas you get. You've probably already realized that this technique will also give you improved results if you apply it to other problems which you have to contend with, didn't you?

Be Creative and Original

They say, "20 Words and NO MORE!"

This type of competition is very popular and may even be used as a tie-breaker for competitors that have entered correct entries in, say, a competition where they had to rank several benefits of the sponsor's product.

The first thing to remember is that the cleverest entry will probably win if it complies with the rules.

If they say 20 words, try for 18.

Count similar joined words as 2 words for safety.

Make sure to give your efforts a 24 hour rest, then come back to re-evaluate them. That's even when you feel you may be producing your very best creative stuff.

Make sure that you get some rest yourself. You will do your chances no good and possibly cause some harm to yourself if you keep driving yourself to find that perfect word or phrase in one session.

The most important qualities of entries in these sorts of contests are:

✓ Brevity

They said, "No more than 20 Words" and this is one time you can give them less and get more in return – 15 words, even 10 which are *just right* will impress them mightily. Remember, Abraham Lincoln said that he could write a long speech in almost no time while a short one would take him a week.

✓ Simplicity

Don't obfuscate with a cacophony of verbiage. Be clear and easy to understand. Like the boxer, give them your shortest, most powerful punch.

✓ Novelty

Many judges have already judged similar competitions. They've probably read all the quotation books, joke books and they remember probably more of the entries they've already seen than they really want to. They can easily tell when someone is 'recycling' other people's material.

If you can provide a spark of originality while remaining focused on the target of, say, promoting the sponsor's product, then you'll make them forget most of the other entries!

That's something you should always try for with every entry and every competition. Your strike rate will improve as you attempt more competitions and improve your strength of focus.

A friend summed it up with, "Keep them short, simple and fresh!"

Winning Words

You need the most relevant words that tie in with the sponsor's product, the features which they promote most heavily and the benefits which they promise the customers will get from using the product.

Obviously, the standard thesaurus and its online equivalents are very useful though you may feel that they are almost drowning you in possibilities.

Prepare lists of words under such headings as product/benefit/feature, then try to link them together in an engaging way – puns and using similar sounding words to replace the word a reader (or judge) might have expected to see you use, can raise your point score quickly.

Another useful book is a rhyming dictionary. Almost essential when you are composing an original limerick or completing one with a couple of words of your own, but imagine the impact if you can pack a relevant rhyme into your 18 words.

Re-read the rules and any other guidelines. Take special note of any emphasis which they give to particular features of the product.

Then, see if you can cut even just one word without harming the sense or impact of your entry.

If you can, maybe you can cut another one!

Can you apply a quote about something different to the product or graft the name of the product into a well-known saying?

Make sure that there is no way that any of your entries could be viewed as negative or have religious, political, ethnic or sexual overtones.

It's in the Rules

Every company which offers a competition has to comply with national and state legislation. Competition in the United States must comply with laws and regulations supervised by the Federal Trade Commission (<http://www.ftc.gov/>) and the States' Attorneys General.

They're the authorities which you should contact if you are an American and have any concerns about a competition which you see information about.

Readers in other countries should contact their own State or National authorities.

If you are unsure who to ask, contact the Consumer Protection authority in your State.

If the promoter does not restrict access to the competition to residents of one country, then the operation of the competition must comply with each country's legislation.

For that reason, most competitions have a restriction about who can enter based on national boundaries. The company may have versions of the same competition running in different countries where the National representative of the company ensures that their version of the competition complies with that country's laws and state regulations.

These laws are among the most frequently amended because of changing technology and as new promotions are offered which are barely covered by the current rules.

Only a few years ago, promoters could advertise large numbers of prizes, then draw one winner for each prize but only had to distribute prizes to those who claimed their winnings within a time period set in the promoter's rules. Now, in most places, all advertised prizes must be awarded and this is often done by means of a second chance draw where all the entries have an opportunity to win an unclaimed prize. Sometimes, the second chance draw requires that entrants have submitted a special token with their entry.

Rules are always carefully prepared with the advice of lawyers that have experience in these areas. It's fortunate for contestants that the laws usually specify that all rules must

be easily understandable by prospective entrants or there'd probably be a lot more legal-speak in them.

All competitors are bound to accept the rules as published by the promoter (remember the famous phrase, 'and no correspondence will be entered into'). That's usually the first of the published rules for obvious reasons.

Rules will cover:

- State and Federal permits issued for the competition, if any.
- The contact details of the sponsor and the company promoting the competition.
- The dates between which the competition is run, the closing date of the competition, also when and where the results will be published.
- How entrants can obtain a copy of the list of Winners.
- How people may obtain a free entry form without purchasing the sponsor's product.
- Whether there is a limit on the number of entries which a person or household may submit.
- Restrictions on the prizes such as no exchange for other goods or cash equivalent.
- That Prize winners will get notification by mail and when results will be published in specified major newspapers and on the sponsor's website.
- All entries become the property of the sponsor.
- Winners agree to limited personal details and (perhaps) a picture being used for post-competition promotion as required by the sponsor.

- In the United States of America, there will be a Kraft clause, restricting the promoter's liability if there are printing or other errors in the entry forms, tickets and related material. This does help with the costs incurred from such errors (for instance, if there are 50 times as many winning coupons available as were intended) but the sponsor and promoter will also need to have planned how to address the public relations problems that such errors inevitably lead to. That can be a long, expensive process in itself.
- The judges decision is final. No correspondence will be entered in to.

Points About Some Common Rules;

Don't write in pencil if they specify ink (regular ink, ballpoint or rollerball ink is usually acceptable, blue colored pencil is not).

If they say BLOCK CAPITALS, then you use BLOCK CAPITALS.

Don't send plain paper or photo-copied entries if it says 'Original entries only'.

If they require your signature, don't just put it in BLOCK CAPITALS

If it says "No Correspondence ..." don't include or send any type of letter or note. If you are sure there is something terribly wrong with anything on the Form, politely contact the promoter directly either by phone or by separate letter to their regular address – not the contest one.

Sometimes they require a stamped verification with the name of the business where you bought the product. Supply exactly what they want. That may mean the supplier is also eligible for a prize if your entry wins.

"All entries become the property of the Sponsor" means that your creative but unsuccessful entry cannot be used for any other competition with that promoter or any other. This also permits them to use all or part of any entries as they see fit but I've never

heard of any sponsor using entries which were not awarded prizes. They are mostly just covering themselves against claims by disappointed, losing contestants.

And remember, such complaints are useless (“Judges decision is Final”) and can only reduce the energy and time you have to prepare entries for the other contests you want to win.

Fine Print and Conditions

Always read the fine print at least twice.

- First, to ensure that your entries comply with every part of the rules.
- Second, you also should check the obligations which those rules place on you as an entrant, especially if you win a major prize.

Most promoters require that Winners permit their picture and limited personal information be used when the results are announced. You may also have to appear at a presentation.

Prizes, especially for things like trips, may have to be taken at certain specified times, probably excluding the most popular peak periods such as school holidays, Christmas etc.

You may have to pay for special clothing, meals and all the other things which make a trip a holiday.

Such prizes may just be for 2 adults, so you may have to pay full cost for your children to accompany you or arrange, at your own expense, for other people to look after them while you're away (as well as the presents you'd be wise to bring them when you return.)

There's also the necessity for you to check first with your employer that you can get time away during the specified period. Whether or not there's a problem there, it feels weird to be asking, “Boss, can I have four weeks off next year if I win this trip?”

Prizes may have other limitations. The promoter may only pay for the travel component and some accommodation for your trip. You could have to pay for flights and accommodation just to get to the city where the prize trip which you won begins and ends.

Check Your Tax Liability

You must consider any potential tax liability with all prizes that you win. That varies widely from country to country. You should check with your Tax Office and Accountant. If you have to declare any Winnings, don't "accidentally forget".

Where it's allowed, the sponsors and promoters may pay the relevant taxes. But, this is something you must check for yourself.

Wow, You WON!

It's going to happen to you, sooner and probably more often than you think.

The more entries you send in on time and the more care you use in crafting your entries, the greater the chance that you'll start winning major prizes.

The excitement is something you have to experience – maybe that's why reporters keep asking big cash winners, "How did you feel when you heard you won a million dollars?" even though the question has been answered more than a few times now. Do they think they're going to get a better answer each time?

If you're asked to be part of a public presentation, this is your chance to be generous to the promoter and sponsors –make them glad that you are the one they delivered the yacht to. But, please remember that, although you're an essential part of the event, the *sponsor's product* is the real star.

You should wear neat, conservative clothing. That means no T shirts and, especially, no slogans unless it's a surf shop contest and the slogan is the sponsor's. Even then, it'd be a great idea to check first because they may be using the presentation to launch a new slogan – maybe the one you won the contest with!

Talk nicely to everyone. There will, almost certainly, be reporters among the crowd at the presentation and probably also at any non-public gatherings. Be careful what you say because anything you do say may appear in a press, radio or television report later on.

Something which you thought would be funny to say during the event may appear very negative when people, including the sponsor, see it in the newspaper a few days later.

Keep your speech short and to the point – "Thank you" always goes down well and anything else is pretty superfluous.

Oops, You Lost!

Of course, this happens to all of us but, remember, that it is not your inevitable fate. Get what value you can from the experience and get on with it.

**The only real losers
are those who never try
and those who give up!**

Record all your entries in a special book or computer file for your future reference. You can't use them again as the Rules almost always state that the entries become the property of the promoter, but you can use them to kick-start your mind at the almost inevitable slow times before you've had your first coffee of the day or after you've had your tenth!

Look out for the winning entries which may be published with the announcement of the prizes or even used in future advertising by the sponsor.

Don't waste any time at all grumbling that your entries were much better –it's over.

Don't look for excuses but try to find what it was about those entries which got the judges eyes and, consequently, their vote. You can be sure it was NOT special envelopes, fancy decoration or any of the other gimmicks which some people still believe work – they will mostly get those entries disqualified.

Entries which are crumpled up, then straightened out so they are bulkier than normal folded entries and the others, including ones which are chemically treated so they almost jump into the hand of the person selecting the winners, inevitably jump into the disqualified pile too.

Put yourself in the judge's position. You see an entry which stands out, but only because it is a crinkled mess in an ocean of neat, carefully prepared entries – or it leaves a greasy spot on your hand. It caught your eye but would you really want to spend extra time flattening it out so that the almost unreadable contents could be deciphered?

Better Luck This Time

Entering and winning competitions will bring more rewards than the cars that line your driveway and even the cash in your checking account.

You'll find that keeping your mind more active will increase the success you have in other areas of your life.

The last and most important rule is to PERSIST. If you need more motivation, look up the story of Abraham Lincoln, one of the most respected Presidents of the U.S.A. His is a history of great accomplishments and many disappointments. We all have them but we're not losers until we give up.

Good luck and keep your pencil sharp!.

Shaw Finn

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