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**LONDON**

AI analysis

## The Changing Landscape of Awards – Insights from the Experts

**Donna O'Toole**

Founder & Managing Director at August Recognition

**Gary Clement**

CEO & Co-founder at Evessio

**VOXO**

## Summary

The session explored the evolving landscape of awards, highlighting both opportunities and challenges within the industry. Initially, it was noted that the events industry, particularly awards, is a significant market, valued at over £8.6 billion globally with substantial year-on-year growth. Awards are seen as powerful drivers of revenue and reputation, and the session underscored the various ways revenue can be generated through awards ceremonies. However, the industry is facing transitions and challenges, including scams and the credibility of awards programs, which requires vigilance and proactive measures.

Donna O'Toole, who runs a global awards agency, discussed the increasing prevalence of scams within the awards industry. She noted that many leaders are unsure whether an award is credible and worth entering. Some awards programs have been entirely spoofed, leading to significant losses for entrants. One particular scam involved 'link farming,' where badges given out by fraudulent awards programs embed malicious code that can harm the recipient's website. Donna stressed the importance of verifying the credibility of awards and educating entrants on identifying trustworthy programs.

Gary Clement added that the industry must ensure the integrity of the judging process, which should involve human judges rather than relying solely on AI. He mentioned that while AI could be used to vet and filter entries, the human element is crucial for authentic assessment. Donna concurred, highlighting the challenges judges face with the increasing use of AI-generated entries, which often lack the depth needed for a credible evaluation. Both emphasised the importance of maintaining transparency and human interaction in the judging process.





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The session also touched on the importance of ongoing engagement with entrants, not just those who win but also those who do not. Both speakers agreed that it's vital to provide value and feedback to all participants to encourage continued participation. This includes benchmarking and providing detailed feedback, which can help entrants improve and feel valued even if they don't win. Feedback mechanisms are seen as a way to enhance the overall experience and drive business improvements.

Donna discussed the need for awards programs to evolve continually, reflecting current trends and societal changes. For example, during the pandemic, many awards shifted to recognise human-centric achievements, such as employee engagement and community support. This shift brought new industries into the awards sphere, showing the importance of adapting categories to remain relevant and inclusive. The evolution of awards programs can drive broader participation and recognition across different sectors.

Looking forward, both speakers agreed that the future of awards lies in balancing technological advancements with human connection. While AI can support the entry process and enhance accessibility, it should not replace the human element that brings authenticity and credibility. The session concluded with a call to action for awards programs to use technology to foster deeper connections and engagement, ensuring that awards remain a positive force for recognition and motivation in the business world.

# Takeaways

## The significance of the awards industry

The awards industry is valued at over £8.6 billion globally and is growing year on year, making it a substantial part of the events market. Awards are important drivers of revenue and reputation for businesses and organisations. Understanding the landscape and opportunities within this industry is crucial for stakeholders.

## Challenges with scams and credibility

The session highlighted the prevalence of scams in the awards industry, such as spoofed programs and 'link farming.' Many leaders are unsure about the trustworthiness of awards, necessitating education and verification processes. Ensuring the credibility of awards programs is essential to protect entrants and maintain the industry's integrity.

## Balancing technology and human connection

While AI can support the entry process and enhance accessibility, the human element in judging and engagement is crucial for authenticity and credibility. Awards programs should use technology to foster deeper connections and provide value to all entrants, ensuring awards remain a positive force for recognition and motivation.



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