

2026

effective entry guide



SECTION 1: CHALLENGE, CONTEXT & OBJECTIVES

QUESTIONS 1A & 1B

This scoring section is the glue that shapes the other elements of the case. Elements are assessed for both, suitability and ambitiousness within the framework of the strategic challenge.

Keep in mind that judges are looking for:

- **Context** that clearly frames the situation and the category, especially what success looks like in that particular category.
- The **challenges** of the marketing goal(s) in relation to the category, competitors, the brand's history, and/or marketplace issues or trends. Why was this a challenging situation?
- Clear **objectives & KPIs** that relate to the business challenge and are not retrofitted to match the results of the case.
- Explanation of the significance of the objectives to the brand/business/cause. If the entrant did not have objectives upfront or they were open-objectives, they should explain this.

Judges may not be familiar with your brand or category, so use this space to provide them with this background.

JUDGE ADVICE

- Lack of context is one of the most common judge complaints.
- The best cases clearly articulated the challenge for the brand, the category and competitive landscape, and what the overall goals were. They also had KPIs that aligned well to that challenge that were clearly not retrofitted to the resulting outcome.
- “Make sure the objectives are clearly defined. If awareness is the goal, what lift were you looking for and from where to where? Leaving the goal broad makes it hard to give credit for the difficulty of the challenge”.

“If the Challenge section was weak, it weakened the entire entry because the context wasn't there to understand how big the idea was, or how profound the results were.”

- “Telling me what your objectives were, and more importantly telling me **why** those objectives matter is the difference between passing through Round One and not.”
- “You shouldn't have 10+ objectives just because you have 10+ data points you want to share in the results section. It's clear when cases are trying to share every positive number they have, rather than focusing on what's most important to the campaign goals.”
- “Share the context completely so judges understand the situation fully. Ensure that the difficulty in achieving the goal is clear and mitigate the impact of activity outside of the campaign”.
- “Be SPECIFIC and measurable with your objectives. Help the judges understand the context of that goal/objective”.
- “Set measurable objectives to help evaluate if the results were actually good, great or just okay.”
- “Those that communicated their target audience clearly made it easier to put the case into context and made it much more compelling in understanding how they brought the idea to life.”
- “Why is your challenge a challenge? If you can articulate that, then your objective should be easy to state.”
- “**Framing the category** appropriately is critical, as some judges may be unfamiliar with the specific nuances of the category.”
- “Really focus in on ensuring you have the correct challenge and objectives identified and clearly state how you will measure those. It's OK if you don't have a quantitative way to measure, but be clear about what that will be -- don't try to show a quantitative measurement IF you truly don't have one that meets up to the stated objectives.”
- “Connect results to objectives very clearly. **Don't try to fake it and write objectives to meet existing results.** We can tell and will ding you for it.”

SECTION II: INSIGHTS & STRATEGY

QUESTIONS 2A - 2C

Judges evaluate how inventive and effective the Idea and Strategy are in meeting communications challenge and how closely the Idea, Strategy and Results address the Challenge.

Keep in mind that judges are looking for:

- **Insights - not just facts or observations**, but what came out from the data points/research. State your insight in one sentence and explain how you came to them.
- An understanding of **why these insights are unique** to the brand and are positioned to address the brand's particular challenge and business situation.
- An explanation on **how the insight links with the strategy**, informed the strategic idea, brought to life the creative execution and ultimately, the results.
- A **clear definition of your audience**, including demographics, culture, behaviors, etc. Why is this audience important to the brand and the growth of the brand's business?
- The **core idea** or strategic build that drove the effort and led to a solution. Remember to state your answer to **in one sentence**. This is not your tag line – it is the core idea that drove your effort and led to your results.

Judge Advice on the Insight

- "Describe fully the "ah-ha" consumer insight that made your idea unique and effective."
- "Insights need to feel **new and different**, with a sense of **tension and actionability**. The idea needs to take the insight and activate it in an interesting, compelling and useful way. And, most importantly, in a way that helps achieve your stated objectives."
- "Write stronger insights - why should your brand own a truth is very different than simply identifying a truth exists."
- "Find a real insight, not an audience observation or category convention. It should be a deep human truth that not only drives emotions and behavior but enables the strategic idea and creative execution to be effective and successful."

SECTION III: BRINING THE STRATEGY & IDEA TO LIFE

QUESTIONS 3A - 3C + CREATIVE WORK + INVESTMENT OVERVIEW

In this section, entrants should articulate the creative and media strategies (not just tactics) and how the idea and strategy were brought to life. Ensure your response details the 'why' behind your choices.

Keep in mind that judges are looking for:

- An understanding of how you activated your strategy (e.g., CRM programs, pricing changes, promotions) and the main marketing vehicles for your creative executions (e.g., end line, call-to-actions, format choices).
- The direct connection between the creative/media strategies and the objectives and insights.
- The importance of each channel used for the case, and how each was used - why were your creative output(s) and channel choices right for your specific audience and idea? Why did you choose these over others?
- A clear depiction of how the campaign was executed in the public marketplace. Was there a 'path' consumers were meant to go on, and what was it? The evolution and optimization of your marketing and communications over time.

INVESTMENT OVERVIEW:

A. Paid Media Expenditures (Media Addendum)

Paid media expenditures (purchased and donated), not including agency fees or production costs, for the effort described in this entry.

Given the 'spirit' of this question use your judgment on what constitutes fees, production and the broad span that covers media – from donated space to activation costs.

- Traditional and non-traditional paid media. Examples: purchase of a TV spot or purchase of a mobile ad.
- Out-of-Pocket activation costs. Examples: For something like an event, what did it cost to have the pop-up store? What did it cost to buy the key search terms on Google?
- Value of donated media. Example: If you are a film festival, did a sponsor give you 2 hours' worth of free TV ad time? Estimate what it would have cost you if you had paid for it.

B. Owned Media and Sponsorship (Media Addendum)

- Any owned media. Examples: company owned real-estate, either physical or digital, that acted as communication channels for case content (e.g. corporate website/social media platforms, packaging, branded store, fleet of buses, etc.)
- If you select owned media checkpoints in the Communications Touchpoints chart, be sure to explain your use of these channels in the Owned Media question.
- Any sponsorships that provided communications benefits. Examples: As part of a sponsorship of the tennis finals, I received free ad space for my logo during primetime.

Judge Advice on Explaining How You Brought the Strategy & Idea to Life

- "Remember that communications strategies include both creative and media strategies - not just tactics."
- "Integrate the media strategy and show how it links to the full extension and influences the creative strategy and explain how it evolved with the campaign"
- "Give rationale for why these specific channels were selected. Why are they meaningful to the audience and the challenge? How and why did you place importance on some channels over others?"
- "Find a real insight, not an audience observation or category convention. It should be a deep human truth that not only drives emotions and behavior but enables the strategic idea and creative execution to be effective and successful."
- "Tie the communication strategy directly back to objectives and insights. Without that it's just a media plan, not a communications strategy."
- "Clearly depict how the campaign was executed in market. Was there a "path" you wanted consumers to go on and what was it?"
- "With so many channels available to marketers now, part of the challenge is conveying how you achieved reach across them. How and why did you place importance on some over others?"
- "Too many people focused only on the creative execution. Talk about how you reached your audience in effective ways in the same breadth and depth that you talk about the creative idea."

CREATIVE REEL

The creative reel is your place to show examples of your work – not to repeat what you outlined in the written case. Judges review the written case before watching the creative reel, so it is important these elements are created with each other in mind.

Judge Advice on the Creative Reel

- “Be sure the written case and video **complement each other** and **do not repeat** each other. It isn't about the quality of the video itself but more about the content.”
- “In many cases the creative failed to live up to the story. In others, the video totally obscured the ability to view creative. It became a rehash of the story/case and a lot of salesmanship vs. a true showcase of the work.”
- “Keep the storytelling and results out of the creative reel, and highlight the creative, especially the different executions. **The more different types of creative shown, the better.** I took the judging seriously and read through the written case carefully, so there was no need to duplicate the story - what I was missing was how everything was brought to life.”
- “Make sure your creative reels **do not have results** spelled out in them. It could ruin an otherwise worthy submission.”
- “**Don't turn the reel into a pitch** -- it reduces credibility.”
- “The creative reel should showcase all of the work that I've just read about and want to see. **I'd rather clearly see the different executions over hearing setup.**”

“Don't completely repeat the case in video form.

Use the video to bring to life the key elements of the campaign.

We've read the written

SECTION IV: RESULTS

QUESTIONS 4A – 4B

Judges are looking for **direct correlations between real objectives and results**.

If the objective is to improve brand awareness, the proof cannot be an increase in sales. If you achieved additional results, explain what they were and why they are significant. If you did not achieve a particular objective, explain this.

Make a compelling argument **why the communications is linked to the results achieved** rather than a different factor and make a compelling argument regarding why the results you achieved are significant.

Keep in mind that judges are looking for:

- Explain how the results impacted brand and the brand's business.
- Make a compelling argument to prove the marketing led to the results achieved.
- Provide context with historical brand data, industry benchmarks, competitors, etc.
- If you achieved additional results, explain what they were and why they are significant.

Address other factors that could have contributed to your results, whether positively or negatively. Judges value thoughtful answers in Question 4B vs. indicating that no other factors could have impacted your case. Some entrants will use this space to prove the limited impact of these factors on the results to give the judges more confidence in the results presented.

When key metrics are withheld without explanation, judges may assume it is because the results were weak.

“Results are critical. Show how your results tie back to the challenge and objective and focus on how the big idea drove these results specifically.”

Entries range from small cases in regional markets to nationwide blitzes. Judges take into account the environment in which each case exists. It is important to **include category context**, as judges may not be knowledgeable of the nuances of your particular category. For example, a small percentage move in a highly-segmented, high volume category is more difficult to achieve than a large percentage change in a small, less-competitive or non-competitive category. Likewise, a large sales increase for a product that has never advertised before might be less impressive than a smaller sales increase for a product that has no budget increase but changed its marketing

communications strategy.

Presenting Results Effectively

- Restate objectives/KPIs in the results section so judges can easily reference this information.
- Provide context with historical data, industry benchmarks, competitors, etc.
- Explain why the results you are presenting are important. How did the results tie together and impact the brand and business?
- Explain how you know it was your marketing efforts that led to the results.
- Retrofitting objectives against results is one of the most common judge complaints.
- Eliminate or address other factors in the marketplace that could have contributed to your success. Judges value honesty – they are senior members of the industry and will down score where information is withheld.

Data


- For confidentiality, proof of performance may be indexed or provided as percentages.
- If you cannot provide certain business results, explain why or why they are less important. Think through creative and meaningful ways to present the significance of the results you cannot share. For example, the results achieved were the equivalent of opening a new 200,000 sq. foot store in that market. When key metrics are withheld without explanation, judges typically imagine it is because the results were weak.
- Charts and graphs are useful tools to present your data clearly.
- Source all data (source, type of research, dates). Do not include any agency names in sources.

Judge Advice on Presenting Results Successfully

- “Make sure you provide context. If you show results, help the judges understand if the results are good and why. Explain what the numbers mean - don't just say ‘engagement.’ Define engagement.
- “There was a significant amount of obvious hyperbole and loose connection to strategic goals. Entrants should focus on using the results to tie up their story in a neat bow.”
- “Be clear to articulate why the results are meaningful for longer-term impact (for the brand.)” Clearly demonstrate the business results. The more context the better.
- “Too many entries failed to quantify the true impact of their work. Many could benefit from more extensive measurement before, during and after campaigns to show the net change in perceptions or behaviors. Too many squishy KPIs.”
- “Some results were just sloppy and did not align with the objectives established up front. If you set a sales goal, give some context as to why that goal is relevant; don't just report a metric without some context.”

- “It's all about the results, right? I felt that many cases could show that the work was somehow linked to a movement in sales, but they were weak in **being clear about specifically how the work was effective** in driving sales and/or what specifically the work affected in order to drive sales.”
- “Provide benchmarks, provide rationale for goals, and illustrate how the work presented drove the results.”
- “**Isolate your results by eliminating other variables.** And don't cook the results. Lots of misleading stats, charts, etc.”
- “Don't fudge the results. Your peers will know. **Honesty is more effective.** We have all had wins and we have all had fails. Every campaign does not need to be perfect.”
- “Don't get caught lowballing or avoiding inconvenient other factors - judges are looking for it. Admit more and provide real-world context: give credit to things like economic trends in addition to your campaign. You'll gain credibility by being honest about all the factors that created success.”
- “**Be transparent and honest with data.**”

“Tie together the story of how your work drove the results - the best cases did this seamlessly, the worst cases just threw the results out there as somehow a self-evident proof of the value of the work without explaining why or

 **Effie insight:** Entries that provide an explanation of **why** the results are significant to the business of the brand tend to perform better in the Effie competition.

Judge Advice on Metrics

- “Some of the cases used very soft measurements for results like CTR, or visits to sites. These measures are a start but should not be the ultimate goal. There needs to be concrete business results.”
- “In addition to marketing goals, I would love to see business metrics tied to those goals. In other words, how was a \$10mm spend with a \$4mm uplift in sales really a win? Yes perception changed, or awareness rose, but **how did it move the business?**”
- “Results need to be quantifiable and should be from real sources that can be verified.”

“Anticipate objections/questions and address them. Exhaustively eliminate variables. Prove your work led to your results.”

Judge Advice on Linking your Objectives and Results

- “The strongest cases immediately and overtly **tied back to objectives.**”
- “Saying things like ‘exceeded by 520%’ just makes me think that the objectives were stupid rather than results being good.”
- “While they all cite results, sometimes the results are not adequately tied to the stated objectives, or the KPIs aren't appropriate for the goals.”
- “Clearly tie results back to your initial objectives. When the results presented felt vague or disconnected from the case objectives, I found myself assuming that this was due to an absence of truly convincing positive metrics to be shared.”
- “I would **copy and paste your objectives/KPIs into the results section** - and without fanfare, call out exactly what the result was. I found I had to scroll up every time to see if the KPI reported on was the one they actually took.”

Addressing Other Marketplace Factors (Question 4B)

- “Admit more and provide real-world context: give credit to things like economic trends in addition to your campaign. **You'll gain credibility by being honest about all the factors that created success.**”
- “I'm more likely to believe your campaign was effective if you acknowledge what other factors might have driven results and give me some reasons to believe they weren't responsible in this case.”
- “Be really explicit re what “other factors” could have impacted performance. Be honest about what you can attribute and what you don't know.”