



BLUETRAIN
MARKETING

Stop Scrambling & Start Strategising:

The Fintech Marketer's Guide to Making Awards Work Harder



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Executive Summary

Awards are often treated as a deadline: find a category, write an entry, hit submit, and hope for the best. For fintech and payments businesses, the opportunity is much bigger.

The right awards strategy can build credibility, support sales, strengthen brand value, and give your marketing something tangible to work with. And it can be achieved with a low level of investment compared to other methods of achieving visibility.

In “Stop Scrambling & Start Strategising”, **Blue Train Marketing** explores how to shift the internal perspective of industry awards and their potential value. We’ll discuss how to make awards work harder for your business: choosing the right opportunities to pursue and finding the story behind your business. We’ll explain how to write for the judge rather than a brochure, and how to capitalise on being shortlisted through to the full glory of a win.

82%

of B2B decision-makers say industry awards influence their purchasing choices.

72%

of B2B decision-makers in financial services say industry awards influence their purchasing choices.

Along the way, we share real-world experience, industry insight, and the perspective of **Jeff Banks, Blue Train’s CEO**, who has years of experience as both a writer and judge of fintech and payment industry awards.



The Business Case for Recognition

So, what can a good award do for your business?

In your marketing materials, you probably tell prospects that your product is innovative, robust, end-to-end, or many other common adjectives.

But award shortlistings or wins are something you can't create on your own: third-party proof that your business, product, or work delivers what you say it does.

But the value of an award depends on who is giving it, how credible the judging process is, and whether the recognition actually means something to your target audience. Being shortlisted or winning the right award means you have an independent, credible source endorsing your marketing messages.

That matters in fintech and payments, where buyers have no shortage of providers to compare, and everyone has a list of impressive-sounding claims on their website. But third-party endorsements have become even more important in recent years for reasons we'll explain.



1. Awards Matter to LLM Visibility

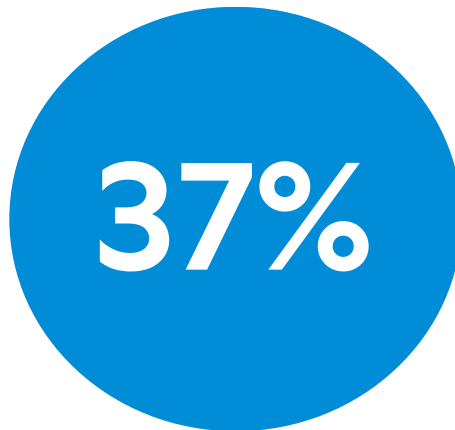
When a prospective buyer asks an AI tool to recommend a payments provider, how does it evaluate the options?

Your own website provides important first-party information, but it largely reflects what you say about your business.

The more interesting signals for an LLM come from elsewhere: industry media coverage, customer reviews and case studies, analyst coverage, partnerships, awards, and other credible third-party sources. These are the signals that help LLMs establish a view of your business and how it compares to the competition.

As companies look for new ways to earn the trust of LLMs and influence their conclusions, the appeal of awards is growing as a cost-effective and increasingly strategic component of a fintech marketing plan.

Winning industry awards correlates with an average



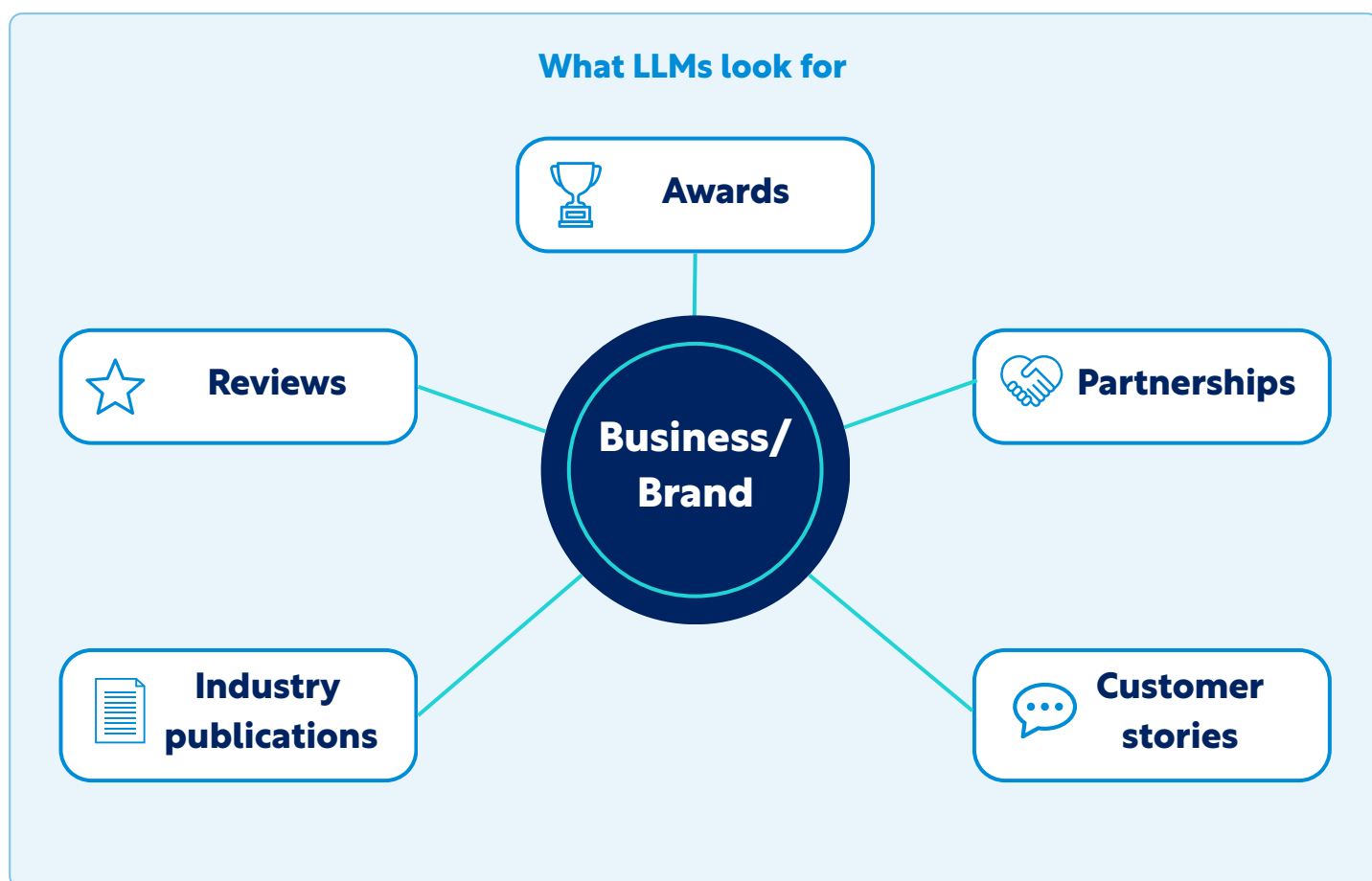
[increase in AI visibility and share of voice \(SoV\)
across major LLMs and generative search engines.](#)

That doesn't mean winning an award guarantees that **ChatGPT**, **Gemini**, or another AI platform will recommend your business. AI visibility is influenced by a broad ecosystem of information and signals, and the effect of any award will depend on its credibility, relevance, and online visibility.

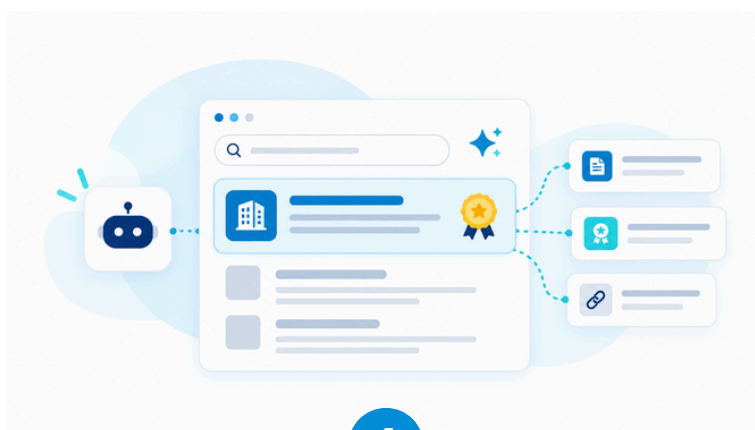
But it does suggest that awards deserve a place in the conversation about how businesses build credibility beyond their own websites.

Why Awards Matter

A credible, relevant industry award creates a much stronger signal than a badge from an organisation nobody in your market recognises. If you're trying to build authority with customers, prospects, and AI systems, where the recognition comes from matters.



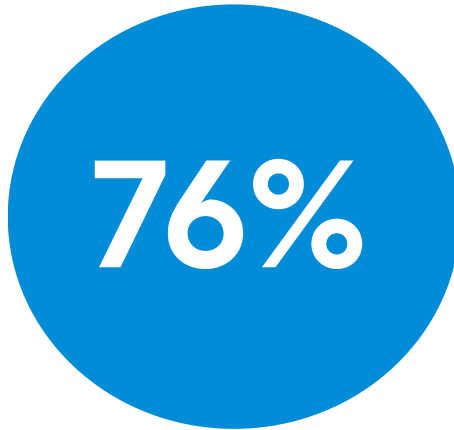
“WHERE THE RECOGNITION COMES FROM MATTERS.”



2. Add Impact To Your Sales Story

A recognised award gives your sales teams another proof point to share with prospects. It won't close the deal on its own, but it can help reinforce the story you're already telling.

And the value goes beyond the immediate sales conversation:



of business decision-makers agree that awards are important for building brand value and generating business.

3. Surface a Wealth of Unique Marketing Content

There is another huge benefit that is often overlooked – and it doesn't depend on a win or even being shortlisted for an award.

When you commence the journalistic process of writing an award (we'll explain more about that later), a wealth of content is likely to be surfaced.

This is likely to include stories of achievement and teamwork, how challenges were overcome by deep expertise, and customer success stories are all solid gold content that can be used elsewhere.

In an industry where companies can struggle to differentiate themselves from competitors, these stories can add real depth to case studies or web copy to help fintech and payment companies tell the story of their brand.

4. Make Your Team Proud

Awards aren't only external validation. They are a chance to recognise the people behind the work, celebrate their successes and even attract new talent to your team. Awards can also help draw attention to specific leadership skills that you see as especially valuable as the industry evolves.

In one survey of 1,200 business professionals,

95%

of leaders said CEO awards have a significant influence on company morale and public perception.

Workplaces with consistent recognition also report around 14% higher employee engagement and productivity. An award gives your teams something tangible to rally around – and a chance to celebrate the work that made the win possible.



From Scattergun to Strategy: Building an Awards Programme

We've all seen it.

An awards deadline pops up on LinkedIn. Someone forwards the email around the marketing team. There's a brief moment of excitement, followed by: "Do we have anything we could put forward?"

That's not an awards strategy. It's a scramble and an unwelcome distraction from the marketing team's real priorities.

1. Start With Your Business Strategy

A critical but often overlooked step is to start with the growth plan of your business. Cover the key commercial points such as:

- **What products** are you launching?
- **Which geographies** are you expanding into?
- **What verticals** are you targeting?

Then Think About Your Brand

- What are your **brand values**?
- What are your **competitive strengths or USPs**?
- What are its **perceived weaknesses**?



Think about the real purpose of the award and how it could help your business. Depending on your business strategy, an award could help you:

- **Highlight a capability** that competitors will struggle to match.
- **Warm up a new market.**
- **Highlight expertise** in a particular vertical with strategic importance.
- **Challenge market perceptions** of your business.

2. Choose Your Award and Category

There are a lot of awards out there. Some are highly respected within the payments industry.

Others are more niche, focused on a particular technology, market, or type of achievement. Some recognise companies; others recognise products, people, partnerships or specific initiatives.

Different Awards, Different Opportunities



Company awards

can recognise overall performance, growth, or contribution to the industry.



Product and technology awards

can put the spotlight on innovation, new capabilities, or a particular product launch.



Individual awards

recognise the people behind the business – from established leaders to rising stars.



Partnership awards

can showcase the results you've achieved together with a client or strategic partner.



Specialist awards

And then there are awards focused on specific areas such as financial inclusion, ESG, customer experience, or innovation.

The right choice depends on what you actually want to be recognised for. This is where a strategy becomes important.

Look at who runs the award, who judges it, who has won it before, and who will see the result. If your competitors are consistently showing up in a particular awards programme, that's worth understanding too. Not because you should automatically follow their lead, but because it tells you something about which forms of recognition carry weight in your market.

3. Read The Criteria!

Once you've identified an award, read the criteria properly. What are the judges actually being asked to assess? What does the category require you to demonstrate? Does your story genuinely answer those questions?

The judges will not fill in the gaps for you. On the contrary, it's the judges' job to spot gaps and call them out as part of their marking process.

“It's the judges' job to spot gaps and call them out.”

4. Build an Awards Calendar

Then build a simple awards calendar covering the awards you care about, the categories that fit, entry deadlines, costs, announcement dates, and who owns each submission. It doesn't need to be complicated; it can just be a spreadsheet.

Awards calendar • example planning grid

Award	Category	Deadline	Cost	Owner

The key to devising an effective awards strategy and plan is therefore largely based on the ability to think ahead – and think broadly across your organisation.

Your plan also becomes a great way to challenge those last-minute award scrambles – “If it's not on the plan, it doesn't get done.”

5. Writing Your Award: Get Your People Together and Find the Story

It's important to remember that your entry will be judged by a human being – one who knows the fintech and payments industry well. And one thing we know about humans is that we like a good story.

Engage your judge with a scene setter that clearly articulates the scenario and explains the problem in emotive language.

Don't just state facts or say something is important – always provide context. Don't just explain that the solution was delivered; capture a sense of the challenges and tough decisions that had to be made along the way.

Gathering these vital elements can take some time, journalistic skills, and questioning techniques.



The insights are likely to be spread across your organisation.

Some may be with the **product team** that built the solution or **sales team** who remember the commercial pressures faced by your **client** and how you helped them crack a new market. You may need to speak to the client who experienced a problem first-hand or your **IT leader** who had to ask his team to work all night.

Talk to them. Ask questions. Understand what happened before, during, and after the work. Start with the problem. What needed to change? Why did it matter?

Then explain what you actually did. Not just what the product does, but how the people behind it tackled the challenge.

And then prove the result. Numbers matter, but context matters too. The useful number is the one that proves your story.

Writing Your Award

**Problem
and context**



**What we did
and why it
was difficult**



**Results with
testimonials and
datapoints**

Don't Write a Brochure

An award entry shouldn't read like your website copy.

Judges don't need or want another list of everything you can do. They need to understand why this particular piece of work deserves recognition.

Give them the context to understand why the result matters. Compare and contrast your solution with your competitors. Highlight the key differences.

Judges are chosen because of their industry experience and can tell when entries are recycled by an LLM from your website.

Avoid the common marketing clichés. Describing your solution as innovative or groundbreaking is a risky strategy unless it's absolutely true and you can immediately justify the claim in the next sentence.

And, of course, your LLM can't discover those important story elements – the challenges and difficult decisions made – from your internal teams that we outlined above.

6. Maximise Your Award ROI

A good entry is an investment of time, effort, and resources. So, once you've developed a strong narrative and gathered the evidence to support it, don't throw it away after one submission.

Look for other relevant awards and categories where the same work could be recognised.

That doesn't mean copying and pasting the same entry everywhere. The core story should remain true, but the emphasis should shift based on the category and criteria.

Writing Your Award

Build a Bank of Evidence

Now you've got an award strategy, you'll know what evidence and data you'll need to gather for future entries.

Keep track of results, customer stories, testimonials, product milestones, partnerships, launches, and standout projects as they happen.

Evidence Worth Collecting

- ☒ Results
- ☒ Partnerships
- ☒ Customer Stories
- ☒ Launches
- ☒ Testimonials
- ☒ Standout Projects
- ☒ Product Milestones

That way, when the right category comes up, you're not starting with a blank document and a looming deadline.

It also means you're less likely to discover, three days before submission, that the one statistic that would have made your case is sitting with someone in another department who is on annual leave.



Awards in Action: What Does This Look Like in Practice?

You don't have to build an awards programme alone.

For fast-moving fintechs and payment companies, one of the biggest challenges can simply be identifying which stories are worth entering, where they belong, and how to turn them into compelling submissions.

That's where an agency can add real value.

At Blue Train Marketing, we recently worked with an established payments business going through a significant period of growth and repositioning. The business had plenty to talk about – but like many fintechs, the challenge wasn't a lack of achievements. It was identifying the right stories, matching them to the right categories, and communicating them effectively.



The Situation

The business was expanding its position in the Banking-as-a-Service market and needed to strengthen its authority in a competitive space.

It had years of experience, strong technology, established customer relationships, and several significant deployments to its name.

The challenge was turning all of that into a compelling external narrative.



The Approach

Rather than treating awards as individual opportunities, we looked at the bigger picture.

We conducted deep-dive interviews with the client's subject matter experts to identify the strongest stories within the business, matched them against relevant award categories, and developed submissions around the things that genuinely differentiated the organisation.

That meant digging into the detail and finding the evidence that made the story credible and compelling.

A Judge's Perspective

Our CEO, Jeff Banks, on the good, the bad, and the award-worthy.

Jeff Banks, has decades of experience writing award entries and judging some of the payments industry's leading awards. He's seen plenty of entries cross his desk – and knows what makes one stand out from the crowd.

Here, he shares his take on everything from storytelling and proof points to choosing the right category and what judges really think of your entry.

**“ You need to take a
journalistic approach. ”**

Jeff Banks, CEO of Blue Train Marketing.





You've been on both sides of the awards process – writing entries and judging them. After all these years, what still makes a great award entry stand out to you?



If I were to boil it down to a single word, it would be context. This provides the substance and comparison of why one product or solution stands above another.



When you open an award entry for the first time, what makes you want to keep reading – and what makes you think, “Oh no ...”?



The first thing I do when I review an award entry is to read the whole thing through. I very quickly notice whether they've got proof points and a real foundation for what they're saying.

If there's a lack of proof points, that immediately puts me off because I know that they're expecting me to just take their word for what's being said.



What's the biggest mistake you see companies making when they write about their own achievements?



They forget to tell a story. They will tell you what their product does, they will tell you who it's there for, and they will tell you what it has achieved in terms of impact. But what they forget to do is tell you how they've got to that point.



How do you turn a list of achievements, products, and results into a story that actually makes judges care?



Those stories are usually buried in the organisation, and the only way you can surface them is by getting people who are involved with the product, clients, and the development, in a room together and talking about it.

You need journalistic skills and a tenacious approach, so you can have the conversations, connect the dots, and add some colour to the picture.



Everyone talks about the importance of results in an award entry. What actually makes a result impressive to a judge? Is it always about having the biggest numbers?



It depends on the sort of entry you're writing. If you're trying to show the scale, you need to show big numbers and good data points. But you can actually use smaller numbers when you're trying to show the emergence of a trend or impact in a niche. So small numbers that are clearly increasing in a meaningful way can tell a strong story too.



What do you think about companies trying to enter as many awards as possible? Is there a point where more becomes less?



It can certainly have a negative impact on your time and resources as an organisation.

Judges will evaluate every entry on its own merit but occasionally some companies might submit a whole bunch of entries for one set of awards. I'd be very sceptical about that approach, as judges will always check that each entry meets very specific criteria. It's much more efficient to have a clear target win in mind and really go for that.



What have I not asked you about awards that you think people get completely wrong?



Organisations sometimes forget that judges are people who are deeply experienced in our sector (fintech and payments). They know what a standard offering is. They know what areas of innovation are coming through. And that means you probably shouldn't say your solution is ground-breaking if it's more of a 'me too' play. That's likely to mean the judge approaches the rest of the entry with some degree of scepticism.

Ready to Stop Scrambling & Start Strategising?

At Blue Train Marketing, we combine fintech and payments expertise, award-writing experience, and insider judging knowledge to help businesses build entries that actually have something to say.

When we talk about understanding what makes an entry stand out, we're not just talking about the criteria on the page. We've seen what happens when that entry lands on a judge's desk.

We work with clients to identify the right opportunities, find the strongest stories, interrogate the evidence, and turn them into entries that give judges something to remember.

And when you've put that much work into a great story, we can help you make it go further – across other relevant awards, categories, and wider marketing activity.

Want a little help with your next submission?
Explore Blue Train Marketing's award services.



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