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# Should You Enter Contests To Boost Your Business' Profile?

**Thursday Bram**

Writer, Wise Bread, Wise Bread

## SUMMARY

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There's a certain sense that if you're in business, you should focus your time on building up your company as much as possible. Betting on anything less than a sure thing, in terms of increasing your business, can be tough to justify. But the fact is that a contest may be just the jump-start your company needs.

Contest opportunities vary dramatically between niches and industries. But there are plenty of opportunities out there. [The X Prize Foundation](#), for instance, has challenges open in the fields of space travel, oil cleanup, and genomics. Sites like [Genius Rocket](#) offer regular contests for creative professionals and agencies. Even the U.S. government offers contests and challenges regularly, such as the [CDC's challenge](#) to create an app that effectively uses flu-tracking data. You can find a list of more federally-sponsored challenges at [Challenge.gov](#).

## Using contests to land future gigs

Melinda Rainsberger, the founder and creative mind behind [They're Using Tools!](#), has used contests to both land new clients for her videography business and to expand her portfolio.

"Video contests," she says, "have allowed me to break out of what I traditionally do and try out new styles and production techniques. This has expanded my portfolio and made it possible for me to present a larger range of interesting and unique projects to clients. In addition, winning a contest marks a creative person with many stamps of approval. Not only did I 'win' and make something that was creatively correct, but more than likely I did it quickly/under pressure— something many clients are looking for these days. A few of the contests I participated in even helped me connect to other agencies and clients. They saw my quality and passed my name along as a good creative to work with."

Contests, challenges and competitions can be effective in many industries in proving your expertise. Being able to label your company as 'award-winning' can be useful in landing new clients, as can having contest entries that you can show off as a part of your business' portfolio. Relying on cash prizes from contests does not necessarily make sense, especially for a creative business in need of the money—you never really know if you're going to win, after all—but when you can make use of a competition to land future gigs, the return on your investment can become much more dramatic.

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#### Potential contest pitfalls

Like any business strategy, there are companies for whom contests may not be a great fit.

- You may not be able to use every contest as a marketing tool. Rainsberger has worked through GeniusRocket, which uses a contest format to crowd-source creative projects. Some of the projects completed through GeniusRocket come with a rider that limits a creative's ability to include the project in her portfolio.
- Some potential clients may not be impressed by contest success. Rainsberger says, "[Small clients] tend to see contests as more luck or popularity based than skill based. This is because of very large contests, like the video Super Bowl challenges, or any number of 'contests' online that either have a huge number of submissions or require friends and fans to vote on your submissions. Both types are hard to stand out in, and don't really reward the effort that goes into them. If I can help the client understand what I did, they are impressed, but otherwise see it as a fluke."
- There are some contests that are actually scams or are otherwise detrimental to your business. Do your homework before you enter.

These problems are easy enough to deal with if you're willing to invest time in a contest strategy. But the challenges and competitions you take part in have to be worth the effort you put into them. The deciding factor is whether your company has a good chance of winning at least enough —either in terms of cash prizes or exposure for the business—to make up for the time you're not spending on client work or selling products or pushing other marketing efforts.

#### Choosing the right contests


For Rainsberger, the contests she enters are a question of convenience.

"Truthfully, how did I find the contests I enter? Happenstance. A friend did the [48 Hour Film Project](#) and wouldn't let me on their team. The next year, I formed my own team, and it was a crazy amount of fun. I'd never heard of it before they told me, and I might have stayed unaware for quite some time.

"With Genius Rocket, I was sick on Christmas Eve and my Nyquil wasn't kicking in. I was browsing a job board and read their contest model (paid stages of production) and thought, 'Why not?' Other people have brought contests to my attention, but since then I've become very picky and generally don't do something if it doesn't fit my style, schedule, or financial needs."

She goes even further and cherry-picks the contests that are the easiest for her to work on. "Pretty much the overriding factor that has me participating in a contest is low threshold of effort (does that sound terrible?). With the 48 Hour Film Project, it's only a weekend. With Genius Rocket, I only have to write the pitch unpaid. I'm not going to spend weeks on a project, just to lose. In that time, I could work on expanding my software/video skill set, going on vacation, attending a conference, or drumming up more business."

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