

IABC Chapter Management Awards

IABC Detroit: Sponsorships/Partnerships – Renaissance Awards and Silver Quill
Division 2: Medium chapters (76 to 200 members)

Context

The IABC Detroit chapter was formed in 1970. It is a medium-sized chapter, with approximately 105 members. The chapter introduced its Renaissance Awards program in 1981 to recognize communication excellence for members and non-members within the state of Michigan and the surrounding areas of Windsor, Ontario, Canada and Toledo, Ohio. The Renaissance Awards program has traditionally been the chapter's largest source of revenue outside of membership dues.

IABC Detroit is a part of the 17-state IABC Heritage Region, which has offered the Silver Quill Communication Awards Program to communicators in the region for more than 16 years.

In recent years, the Renaissance Awards (RA) and Silver Quill (SQ) offered separate award programs, each using an electronic submission and evaluation platform. The electronic platform was well-received by entrants and substantially streamlined the processes for the awards chairpersons. Both programs use the processes, categories, evaluation criteria and rigor of the IABC Gold Quill Awards.

In 2018, the online platform vendor raised its price to \$2,000, forcing IABC Detroit to critically examine the viability of its awards program and subsequent ramifications:

- The online submission/judging platform was critical to a successful awards program, as it streamlined the process for entrants and administrators alike;
- The chapter counted on revenue from the awards program to sustain chapter operations;
- There was no guarantee that we could make up the \$2,000 cost of the submission/judging platform through award entry revenues, as the number of entries had been declining over the past few years;
- The increased cost threatened our ability to successfully offer the IABC Detroit Renaissance Awards in 2018;
- Our efforts to find sponsors to help defray the cost of the platform were unsuccessful.

An innovative pilot program, developed in partnership with the Heritage Region, was devised in 2018 as a stop gap measure to sustain the chapter awards program. This entry focuses on the pilot's initial success and subsequent refinements for the 2019 Renaissance award program.

Goals, Objectives and Strategy

The IABC Detroit board challenged the Renaissance Awards team to develop a creative solution that would meet the following goals and objectives:

- Continue IABC Detroit's 37-year Renaissance Award tradition, with the same high level of integrity as past programs
- Develop a sustainable solution that can be easily replicated and/or refined each year
- Attract at least 20 entries for the 2019 Renaissance Awards
- Generate revenue of at least \$1,000 from award entries in 2019

Research

Our solution began in 2018 by reviewing survey data from past years and conducting informal interviews with members as well as non-members. We intentionally included those who had entered the awards program in the past, as well as those who had not. Below is a synopsis of our findings:

- Strong brand recognition for IABC Detroit Renaissance Awards in the metro Detroit community
- Time/resource pressures limit organizations from submitting more than 1-2 entries
- Organizations prioritize their resources by entering awards programs that provide significant visibility for winners (e.g., prioritizing national/international awards over local programs)
- Electronic submission are a “must”
- Local programs are more price-sensitive than regional or national awards

We contacted five individuals from around the U.S. who organized communication award programs (IABC, PRSA, others) for their experiences with various platforms. Unfortunately, there did not seem to be a solution that would meet the needs of our chapter.

We reached out to then-chair of the Heritage Region Silver Quill Awards (who was also an IABC Detroit member), to see if the region had found an alternative electronic platform. The Heritage Region was planning to use a vendor that the IABC Southern Region used successfully, in hopes of improving some of the technical and administrative challenges of the previous year. The new vendor’s cost was still in the \$2,000 range. However, because of the larger number of entries in the Silver Quill competition, and the ability to command a higher entry fee for regional-level recognition, the Region was in a better position to absorb the increased cost of the platform for Silver Quill.

Solution & Implementation

The chairs for the Renaissance Awards and Silver Quills determined that the Heritage Region’s Silver Quill submission/judging platform could be used simultaneously for both programs while providing significant benefits to each organization. This was possible because the categories, evaluation process and entry timeframe were the same for each awards program. From the 2018 pilot, IABC Detroit and Heritage Region felt there was enough success in terms of member acceptance and functionality to make a few refinements and launch the dual program for a second year.

Here’s how it worked:

- IABC Detroit partnered with IABC Heritage Region to offer a dual program, where both chapter and region awards would be kept separate yet realize cost and other efficiencies through shared resources.
- Michigan entrants would experience the convenience of submitting their entry once and being entered into both programs.
- The categories and entry guidelines are the same for RA & SQ, and are patterned after Gold Quill.
- The entrant submits the entry and work samples, then makes one payment
- All entries are reviewed by the Silver Quill evaluators
 - Each entry was reviewed by two evaluators according to IABC’s global 7-point scale of excellence and the scores averaged for the final score
- The scores for those who opted for RA+SQ are extracted and sent to IABC Detroit’s awards chair.
 - Entries with scores that fell within the Silver Quill threshold earned a SQ award
 - Entries with scores that fell within the Renaissance Awards threshold earned a RA award

- Based on the scores, entrants had the opportunity to earn two awards for each entry
- Winners are notified separately for SQ and RA; separate award ceremonies are held for each
- Once the entry period closed, Heritage Region remitted a check for chapter entry fees back to the chapter.

The partnership had the following benefits for the Detroit chapter:

- Ability to offer local recognition plus the higher visibility of a regional program with one entry
- Less time to enter, since entrants could enter two award programs with one entry
- One entry fee for both programs; The Detroit chapter established its entry fee. That fee was combined with the Silver Quill award fee so that the entrant only paid one fee.
- Award program administration (including judging process) conducted by Heritage Region
- No up-front costs for Detroit chapter; chapter agreed to pay \$10 administrative fee per entry to the region
- Entrants had the potential to earn two awards
- Regionally coordinated judging added credibility to the local winning entries' achievements

The partnership had the following benefits for the Heritage Region:

- Potential to increase number of SQ entries from Michigan (and therefore, increased revenue)
- Supports region's mission of supporting its chapters

Challenges

The IABC Detroit team faced a number of challenges in implementing this solution:

- **Board approval (regional and Detroit).** The solution required the approval of the IABC Detroit and Heritage Region boards. The Detroit chapter board recognized that the change could result in fewer entries than in past years and would require significant work to educate entrants about the combined program. However, the per-entry fee allowed them to anticipate costs and realize a profit regardless of the number of entries. The Heritage Region board was concerned about offering a program that would benefit only one chapter and the additional administrative costs associated with the combined program. However, with many chapters discontinuing their award programs or struggling to offer them, they viewed the partnership as a pilot that could be expanded to other chapters if successful. The \$10 per entry fee paid by the Detroit chapter helped alleviate concerns about administrative costs. Both voted to support the new approach.
- **Keeping the award programs separate.** It was important for both award programs to keep their individual identities despite the use of a common submission/judging platform. To avoid confusion, the Detroit chapter handled marketing activities for the state of Michigan to ensure marketing messaging consistency, an important factor given Michigan entrants would receive the two-for-one-price (the option of only applying for RA was not provided in 2019 because only one entrant took advantage of that option in 2018). Silver Quill marketed as per usual with other chapters within the region. Award announcements and celebrations remained separate, as well.
- **Educating entrants about the two-for-one program.** We developed a fun campaign to educate entrants about the dual program.
- **Technical issues/vendor support.** We were concerned that the submission/judging platform vendor would insist on charging both the region and the chapter for use of the software. The Heritage Region SQ chair and RA chair worked closely to craft a solution that required minimal customization (basically, the addition of one field). Significant testing was done prior to launch to ensure that the proposed solution was seamless for users. In 2019, the online platform

vendor had changed again due to technical issues not related to the dual awards program. This also required additional testing and some modifications to the dual program in 2019.

Budget

The Renaissance Awards program has traditionally been the chapter’s largest source of revenue outside of membership dues. We would not have been able to offer the program without some relief from the \$2,000 cost of the submission/evaluation platform. The partnership with Silver Quill allowed us to continue to offer a high-quality recognition program to members while maintaining the program as a chapter fundraiser. We did agree to pay the region a \$10 per entry fee to cover the additional administrative expenses of credit card fees and chapter entry remittance. This per-entry fee allowed us to anticipate costs and realize a profit regardless of the number of entries. The cost per entry was \$85. Winner trophies were approximately \$40 each.

Our partnership with IABC Heritage Region/Silver Quill did not impact the region’s overall cost for the submission/evaluation platform.

Measurement

We used the following measures to determine the campaign’s success:

- Ability to continue the IABC Detroit Renaissance Awards in 2019 and beyond (was in jeopardy due to increased cost of submission/judging platform)
- Number of RA entries
- Revenue from RA award entries

Results

Below are our results for each of the goals set out for the program, which recently completed its second usage:

Goal	Result
Continue IABC Detroit’s 37-year Renaissance Award tradition, with the same high level of integrity as past programs.	The IABC Detroit Renaissance Awards enters its 39 th year in 2020.
Develop a sustainable solution that can be easily replicated and/or refined each year.	The RA + SQ partnership was piloted in 2018 and continued in 2019. The Heritage Region plans to expand the program to at least one other chapter in 2020.
Receive at least 20 Renaissance Award entries in 2019	Renaissance Award entries grew that to 27 entries in 2019.
Generate revenue of at least \$1,000 from award entries alone in 2019	Renaissance Awards generated nearly \$2,000 in entry fees in 2019