



Industry Categories

Tips for Stella Awards Entries

A Note on the Use of AI in Award Applications

We recognise that many businesses now use AI tools to support their writing, and we agree with their thoughtful use. The strongest applications start with real experiences, genuine examples, measurable results, and authentic stories from your business. AI should only help refine your wording, not create the substance for you.

Please remember that finalists will progress to interviews with a judging panel. These conversations are designed to explore and validate the experiences, achievements, and examples shared within your written application.

Tips for using AI well

- Start with real stories and examples
- Use specific results and outcomes
- Avoid generic or overly polished language
- Keep your own voice and personality
- Be prepared to talk about what you've written

Authenticity and substance will always stand out.

Customer Experience Question 1

We ask for specific initiatives you have implemented to *enhance* the **customer journey**. The customer journey is literally how the customer experiences your business, from the landing page of your website to the look of your physical space to how they choose what to buy and how they pay for it.

Examples:

If you implemented a new ordering system, describe what is better about it.

If you created a new loyalty programme, what is it called, how does it work, and why will customers now be more loyal?

Have you spent time educating your team or upskilling in customer service? What did you do and how has this improved the customer experience?

If you renovated, redecorated or expanded your space, what did you do and how does the new look enhance how customers perceive you?

If you have expanded your line of products or services, what are they and how do these benefit your customers?

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Customer Experience Question 2

We ask for specific examples of outstanding **customer service**. We want to hear about situations that may have been challenging or especially fun, but certainly where you went above and beyond. Please be detailed with what happened, how you responded and how it impacted the customer. Include the product or services and team members involved.

Examples:

Did something go wrong and you went out of your way to fix it?

Did you spot an opportunity to offer an extra service that you knew would impress the customer?

Was there a tricky situation that took some creative thinking to turn it into a positive encounter?

Did a situation arise where every team member played a role in turning bad into good or good to great?

Virtual Experience Question

We ask specifically about your online presence as it pertains to how it benefits the customer experience. Is your website easy to use and attractive? What are your online reviews looking like? Have you replied to the not so rosy ones? Are you telling your story well in the digital space?

Examples:

Tell us about recent website upgrades, perhaps a new order checkout system or a renewed focus on the aesthetics of the landing page.

What social media tricks have you recently incorporated?

Are you upskilling in Canva, helping with the design of how you tell your story?

Are you effectively utilising AI, a professional photographer or other tools to improve your storytelling and image online?

Cross-Promotion Expertise Question

This one might be the trickiest...if you overthink it! We are looking for any way that you have expanded your audience through another organisation or attraction. Or likewise, helped another organisation expand theirs through you. How are you collaborating with others to strengthen the Taupō economy, ensuring no one business operates in a silo?

Examples:

Are you actively recommending a complementary business? Are other businesses actively recommending you?

Are you partnering on a marketing promotion with another organisation? This could be within your industry or outside of it.

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Do you sell the region to customers as a way to connect, make them feel welcome and potentially get them to stay longer or come back again?

Are you being subcontracted as an expert as part of a larger project? Are you getting your name out there through unexpected avenues?

Community Contribution Question

We are looking at all the ways a customer perceives your business. Many businesses want their customers to know them as a member of the community doing positive things without an obvious financial incentive. People take notice and align with your business. Be specific about your community based initiatives and the response from customers.

Examples:

Have you come on as an event sponsor for a community event like Winter Festival or a business house sports league?

Do you donate time or money to local charities?

Do you go above and beyond with your sustainability efforts in a way that leads your market?

Does your team volunteer at events like IRONMAN, Cycle Challenge, Graffiato or with local sports teams?

Have you taken extra steps to ensure your business is welcoming and designed for people with disabilities?