

LOYALTY TRENDS FROM THE INTERNATIONAL LOYALTY AWARDS FINALISTS



The International Loyalty Awards recognise and pay tribute to the brands building lasting and profitable customer relationships. This special global competition brings together the leaders in loyalty, to celebrate innovation, creativity and sheer brilliance. The industry awaits in anticipation for the winners' announcement on 13 June 2023 at the International Loyalty Awards' gala evening - London. I am super excited to attend to network with leading loyalty influencers and I strongly encourage you to join the biggest industry networking event; there is still time to book your table: <https://www.internationalloyaltyawards.com/book-your-table/>

I recently listened to the fascinating discussion between David Parker, Chair of the judging panel for the International Loyalty Awards and Paula Thomas on Paula's Let's Talk Loyalty podcast. All of the Let's Talk Loyalty shows are worth a listen, as the podcast series is ranked in the top 3% of all global podcasts, but #375 is particularly interesting as David reveals the key trends emerging from the 2023 awards entries. Listen to the full podcast [here](#)

*Let's Talk
Loyalty*

Here is my take out having listened to the podcast:- Top global loyalty trends from 2023 International Loyalty Awards:

1 Innovation

Brands must continuously innovate to stay relevant. This doesn't necessarily mean innovation for innovation's sake but innovation to add value to the customer's life and ultimately to add commercial return for the loyalty brand. Innovation also doesn't have to fit within a technology box. New thinking in terms of how customers experience the loyalty journey, as well as technology innovations, are all necessary to stay ahead of the pack.

2 Long-term consistency

One of the most coveted awards is the 'Best Long Term Loyalty programme'. The judges confirmed that long term is approximately five years or more and many brands shortlisted for this award have been in the market place for two decades or more. To stay ahead of your competition and to continuously offer newness, relevance and value over the long term are critical and super difficult to achieve. Ultimately, this is what it takes to be recognised as a leading long-term loyalty programme.

3 Bank-wide loyalty

Bank-wide loyalty programmes are particularly difficult to execute. It needs involvement, buy-in and execution across multiple, diverse business units within the bank. David made a comparison to a retailer running its loyalty programme but also managing business units which may be as diverse as a spa, a car rental firm and a garden centre. More and more successful banking loyalty programmes are tackling the bank-wide approach successfully and hats off to them for this enormous challenge.

4 Move from transactional loyalty to emotional loyalty

Whilst this is not a new trend, it resonates as an ever-critical trend. It is almost a given that transactional loyalty is part of the mix, but to also be able to really connect with customers in an emotional way. My take out regarding the real emotional connection, is that if something ever goes wrong with your experience with the brand and the loyalty programme has managed to create that sought-after emotional connection, you are more likely to forgive than if there was only a transactional loyalty relationship.

5 Loyalty programmes play a critical role in community/environmental causes

Again, this isn't necessarily a new concept, but re-enforced as an ever important part of the loyalty programme's relationship with customers. Brands are really becoming innovative in how this is interweaved into loyalty and how loyalty can add real value to society & environmental causes, in a real way, not a surface/marketing only way.

6 Loyalty programmes are no longer silo'd and battling for executive airtime

Those of us who have worked in loyalty for many years know too well the feeling of battling internally in an organisation to justify loyalty costs and to show impact. It is pleasing to see that loyalty leaders and their departments are now able to influence broader business strategy and feature powerfully in annual reports as integral to a company's success, rather than previously seen as maybe an uncertain cost line.

7 Multi-channel relevance

David gave the most compelling explanation about how multi-channel doesn't necessarily mean all channels, including leading-edge social media techniques. What may be channel relevant in Asia or Africa, may be seen as uninteresting in a market such as the UK or USA. Brands must determine which channels are most relevant to reach their customers most impactfully. The judging panel is cognisant that this is a global awards platform and hence major variance across markets needs to be recognised.

8 Technology for ease of use and programme education

There is an increasing use of technology to aid the customer's experience and programme knowledge. For example, chatbots are being successfully used to aid customer queries on redemption processes, relevant to that member. This channel however, must be available 24/7: i.e. with digital responses if real human interaction is limited to office hours. ChatGPT can also seriously intervene to recommend choices for customers which may or may not suit the operating loyalty brand's programme strategy, but that isn't necessarily in the brand's control.

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Amanda is also proud to be a judge on the International Loyalty Awards team.