

Considering the Convergent Award Show

“*Gold Derby* and Audience-Facing Online Awards Coverage”

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The internet has dramatically expanded the visibility of award “seasons,” wherein studios, networks, and other forces campaign for Oscars, Emmys, and other awards, whether through “For Your Consideration” (FYC) ads plastered on industry trade websites or interviews focused on upcoming award shows hosted across a range of entertainment sites. While industry-facing Q&As, screenings, and billboards in Los Angeles or New York remain central parts of “FYC” culture, increasingly this campaigning emerges as audience-facing content, such that regular viewers are just as likely to consume the content in question as the voters it is ostensibly intended for.

Central to this move toward audience-facing “For Your Consideration” content is *Gold Derby*, a website originally founded by Tom O’Neil. The site, which is now part of the Penske Media Company (*Variety*, *Deadline*) family, has three central functions.

The first is **predictive**. *Gold Derby* features award predictions from a collection of journalists as well as their own editors for a range of award shows, including the Emmys, the Oscars, the Tonys, and the Daytime Emmys, along with related awards (Golden Globes, Screen Actors Guild, etc.). The site also offers odds calculated for major awards (typically in series and acting), along with the opportunity for users to make their own predictions.

The second is **informative**. *Gold Derby* features news stories which either discuss news about category eligibility and award submissions or frame ongoing events—new movie releases, particularly eventful TV episodes, etc.—within the context of their effects on the awards race, immediately filtering news through the lens of award recognition. In this way, *Gold Derby* effectively begins “FYC” campaigns before they even exist, creating year-round campaigning through reporting.

The third is **conversational**. *Gold Derby*’s culture is primarily found within its forums, where users engage in year-round dialogue on the award chances of particular programs, films, performers, etc. However, this has also expanded to its main form of “FYC” coverage: live Google Hangouts with a wide range of primarily Emmy and Oscar contenders (which are then archived). These interviews have become a central space for industry campaigning, drawing both major and minor contenders ahead of the nominations, and again once the nominations are announced.

Theoretically, the idea is that those voting on major awards are visiting the site to consume this content, and there is some evidence of this: the *Gold Derby* Emmys forum users include one voter (“helmetz”) in the Academy’s writers group who posts yearly asking for advice on narrowing down the submitted scripts to consider when casting their votes. In this way, the site’s embrace of convergent media logics creates a convergence between industry and audience that could conceivably have a meaningful effect on the Emmy results—users on the forums often list their favored candidates in their signature,

with each post theoretically informing a visiting voter who they should be considering when casting their ballot.

However, such explicit points of convergence between industry and audience are uncommon, and ultimately misleading. As “FYC” culture expands into spaces like *Gold Derby*, it dramatically expands the visibility of this campaigning without simultaneously expanding the audience’s ability to impact the process. The site has been influential in improving the transparency of the process, including the release of “Top 10” lists during a two-stage voting process beginning in the late 2000s as well as episode submissions for acting and series categories that might otherwise remain private. However, public knowledge of these details creates only a false sense of objective knowledge, as award processes remain deeply subjective, and there is no evidence the membership at large is engaged with these practices. The site’s primary function, then, is to allow the audience to live vicariously through the experience of Emmy voters, without ever actually gaining the power or influence that this access suggests.

Thus, convergence’s introduction of audience-facing “FYC” campaigning through *Gold Derby* and other sites has had two inverse impacts on awards culture. First, it has created a space where audiences can gain considerable information on how the process works, becoming experts and shaping their media consumption through the lens of awards and their byzantine procedures. It is now possible for regular viewers to be more knowledgeable of how awards function than the people who are voting for them, which has subsequently expanded the visibility of yearly ballots and opened space for critique of how awards are determined.

Second, however, it has also created the illusion that awards are likely to be determined based on an ad on *Deadline* or an interview on *Vulture* or a live chat on *Gold Derby*, and that it becomes possible for Emmys or Oscars to be determined by forum posts or #EmmyFor hashtags. *Gold Derby* exemplifies the potential for audience-facing convergent media to make awards procedures more legible, but it stops short of creating space for meaningful impact on those processes.