

Automating the Awards that Celebrate Play

How The Toy Association Achieved 75% faster setup time with OpenWater

OVERVIEW

The Toy Association™ leads the growth, health, and innovation of the toy industry, representing more than 900 companies whose products and services drive the \$42 billion U.S. toy market. From advocating in Washington, DC and advancing toy safety to creating world-class industry experiences and championing the power of play, it serves as the unifying force for the entire toy community.

The Association leads the annual Toy of the Year (TOTY) Awards program from nominations to winner selection, with all proceeds supporting the vital work of The Toy Foundation.

PROBLEM

The TOTY awards submission process was fragmented and labor-intensive. Using their former awards management system, staff managed nominations and judging in-platform, but had to build and maintain separate voting sites using Google Forms and a consumer-facing website. Final vote counts were compiled manually via spreadsheets, often by tallying line-by-line across ballots.

This workflow introduced delays, errors, and required weeks of staff time. Additionally, the former awards management system couldn't properly support third-party nominators, such as PR agencies, which led to incorrect pricing and required manual corrections for over- or under-payments.

AT A GLANCE



INDUSTRY

Professional/Trade Association

SOLUTION

OpenWater

MEMBER SIZE

850+ company members

WEBSITE

toyassociation.org

“ OpenWater revolutionized our nominations and voting processes. It saved our team significant time and effort while delivering a vastly improved experience. ”

- Senior Director, Digital Communications at The Toy Association

SOLUTION

The Toy Association implemented OpenWater to centralize and automate the full lifecycle of their Toy of the Year Awards program, including nominations, judging, and voting. Ballots were generated directly from submissions, cutting setup time from one month to one week. Nominators could edit entries post-submission, reducing staff follow-up, while targeted access controls ensured only eligible voters could participate.

OpenWater eliminated the need for manual vote tallying—winners were identified within a day of voting close. Staff also automated all emails, reminders, and post-vote communications through the platform. These improvements led to a smoother process and record-setting participation across all voting groups.

Key features of OpenWater for The Toy Association include:

- ✓ **Eliminated** manual vote tallying, allowing staff to determine winners within a day of voting close.
- ✓ **Enabled** nominators to edit their submissions post-nomination, reducing staff workload and errors.
- ✓ **Automated** reminder emails and communications, cutting down on manual outreach and missed deadlines.
- ✓ **Simplified** post-event reporting and data export, accelerating end-to-end processing.

THE IMPACT



75%

Reduction in Ballot Setup Time



100%

Increase in Media Ballot Participation



1,000+

Bot Submitted Votes Eliminated Through Locked Ballot Access

“We used to spend hours tallying everything up - now, within a day of voting closing, we know who the winners are.”

- Senior Director, Digital Communications at The Toy Association