

Secrets of the sweepstakes pros

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As the adage goes, you can't win if you don't play. Sweepstakes pros take the words to heart, but there are other tips and tricks expert sweepers say could increase your chances of winning:

From Carolyn Wilman, "The Contest Queen," a sweeper and author of "You Can't Win if You Don't Enter."

1. Read the rules: "If you can't read them, that's the biggest tip-off (that it might be a scam)."
2. Enter in "concentric circles: "Start with locals, then regionals, then nationals. Your odds are better when it's just your state and city."
3. Think positive: "You have to think you're lucky and think you're going to win. If Sir Edmund Hillary had thought he'd never climb Mt. Everest, he never would've done it."
4. Don't get discouraged: "You're going to lose 99.5 percent of what you enter, but you don't stop entering because you think of the stuff you've won."
5. Remember the Three P's: "Patience, Postage and Persistence."

From Craig McDaniel, president and founder of online sweepstakes newsletter Sweepstakes Today.

1. Play for prizes you really want or need.
2. Enter early and often: "Members who enter 50 times a day have really good odds of winning a grand prize; close to 20 percent."
3. Learn to put up with losing: "It's like the baseball player who hits .300. People might think 3 out of 10 is a loser, but he's a Hall of Famer."
4. Be tough as nails: "You're going to feel like the loser on the block sometimes, but when you win, you'll be the biggest winner on the block."

From Robert Hoffman, Bay Area sweeper and participant in TLC reality show "High Stakes Sweepers."

1. Be consistent: "You need to stick with it for at least six months."
2. Read the official rules.
3. There's no reason to spend money: "They don't want people to know about 'no purchase

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necessary."

4. Be organized.

5. Spruce up your mail-in entries: "If it's fancy and glittery it can stand out, and the minimum wage person (who handles the drawing) is going to pick that out."

For more on sweeping:

A couple of the more popular online newsletters are Sweepsheet (sweepsheet.com), Sweeping America (sweepingamerica.com) and Sweepstakes Today (sweepstakestoday.com). The Contest Queen website with resources for sweepers is at contestqueen.com.

-- Jeremy Thomas, Staff