

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 tipoff (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 Kevin Rader, Southland sweeper

1. Find sweepstakes by looking at displays and products at supermarkets and drugstores (bring a pen to write down info, you probably won't need to even buy the product), reading Sunday newspaper ads and looking online (see below).
2. Read and follow the official rules. If it says print your name on a 3" x 4," use that size card.
3. Enter sweepstakes with name-brand sponsors. Skip ones from local restaurants and car giveaways at malls that just want to send you junk mail. And never send money — legitimate sweepstakes will never charge you anything.

4. Don't send all your entries into one sweepstakes at the same time. Spread them out over time.

5. Make your entries stand out. Unless the rules forbid it, decorate your envelopes, use funky cards.

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.
