

You can win sweepstakes and contests!

Who doesn't want to enter the winner's circle? In her new book *How to Win Cash, Cars, Trips & More*, Carolyn Wilman (ContestQueen.com) shares the insider secrets that'll help you score big in contests!

Go for the gold!

● Play by the rules!

Many folks lose out because they don't read the official rules! "One company I interviewed said only 2% of people clicked the Official Rules button on their online sweepstakes entry pages, and another source told me that up to 40% of mail-in entries were disqualified because the official rules weren't followed," reveals Wilman. "The biggest things to look for include the start and end dates of the sweepstakes, how many times you can enter and how many people in your household can enter. Anyone can win—if you follow the official rules!"



● Start close to home!

You have better odds of winning in your own backyard where the pool of entrants is limited, so first, follow your local newspaper, TV and radio station on their websites and Facebook pages to enter their sweepstakes. Then expand your net to state and national contests. Also: Join a winning community! "The real joy of entering contests is the people," Wilman says. "You can find other contest enthusiasts in chat rooms, groups and forums, as well as through local clubs and even conventions and on sweepstakes aggregator sites, where other 'sweepers' share new promotions, answer questions and reveal what they've learned from their wins. I've made real friends from this hobby, and we get together whenever we can!"

● Think seasonally!

"Specific contests always pop up each season," Wilman says. "In the summer, you'll find barbecue giveaways, anything gardening-related and tickets to sporting events. Just do an Internet search for keywords such as 'win a BBQ' or 'win tickets to X local sports team.'" Also keep track of national "fun days." "Marketers love special days that they can use for promotions. For example, on National Donut Day, the first Friday in June, you'll find lots of giveaways on Twitter by following the hashtag #NationalDonutDay!"

● Zero in on the best sweepstakes!

Visit aggregator sites that have links to legitimate sweepstakes and contests, where any potential scams have been vetted out," advises Wilman. "The most popular are SweepsAdvantage.com, SweetiesSweeps.com and SweepstakesFanatics.com." Also smart: "Consider signing up for a newsletter subscription listing new sweepstakes and contests, such as SweepSheet.com, SweepingAmerica.com and iWINContests.com. Aggregator sites and newsletters make it so much easier to enter sweepstakes and contests because they're all in one place—no need to track them down yourself!"



Boost your odds!

● Pick "better odds" contests!

"Look for contests that run for a short time, have a limited contesting area (so you're competing against fewer people), offer lots of prizes and, most important, require you to do something, say, solve a puzzle or take a photo," encourages Wilman. "These contests boost your odds because the number of entrants is usually quite low due to the extra skill involved. If you have a particular hobby or talent, look for contests where you not only can enjoy what you're doing, but can also win cash or prizes doing it!"



● Enter, enter, enter!

Simply put, the more you enter, the better your odds. "If the rules permit, I'll enter five to 20 times and space my entries throughout the entire length of the contest to boost my odds," says Wilman.



Get "social"!

● Follow your friends!

"The most popular places to find contests are on Facebook and Twitter," says Wilman. "Just 'Like' or follow your favorite companies, products or services, and follow bloggers and fellow sweepers."

● Tweet your way to prizes!

The giveaways on Twitter fall into three categories: retweet to win, reply to win or quote to win, says Wilman. "By following your favorite businesses or bloggers on Twitter, you'll find links to giveaways hosted on other platforms, sweepstakes where you submit your entry via Twitter and Twitter party announcements." What's a Twitter party? "A live 30-to 60-minute conversation usually hosted by a blogger and sponsored by a product or service," she explains. "The typical party is a series of questions related to the sponsor. For example, a party sponsored by a sunscreen brand might include a question like, 'What is your favorite activity when it's sunny outside?' Most parties give away amazing prizes, so it's worth it to attend one or two a week!"