



# EYE ON THE PRIZE



Amateur competition enthusiasts - 'compers' - spend their free time trawling shops, businesses and the internet for potential prizes and the rewards can be substantial. **Linda Aitchison** explores the comper world and meets one of its most successful members



## WINSPIRATION: TOP TIPS FOR NEW COMPERS

We asked comping expert Di to share her best advice. Now, go out there and win big!

- **Be positive, patient and persevere. Making comping friends online or locally is a great way to share comps and tips!**
- **Don't expect to win straight away - consider it a hobby where the prizes are a bonus rather than guaranteed.**
- **Set up a new email address for your comping.**
- **Join Twitter and Facebook to search for new opportunities.**
- **Write a wishlist of prizes to keep you focused.**
- **Only enter competitions on websites or social media pages of companies and brands you trust.**
- **Read the terms and conditions carefully before you tick any boxes.**
- **Avoid clicking on adverts for 'survey' type prize draws - these sites sell your details on and you'll be bombarded with spam emails and phone calls.**
- **Always look for a cheaper entry route before making an expensive phone call.**

**H**ave you always dreamed of winning out of this world prizes from the comfort of your armchair? Some £300 million worth of goodies are given away in UK competitions every year. Or perhaps, like many, you reckon the prize draws to be found everywhere from the back of a cereal packet to dedicated social media accounts are one big con?

If you're serious about winning then you need to think like winners think. Comping takes dedication. When was the last time you mowed the lawn dressed as a banana or cleaned the house as Wonder Woman? If you want to win big these are the sorts of creative stunts you will need to pull off - except of course they have all been done now, so you will have to think of something else!

This is perhaps where I went wrong. My imagination was limited. I couldn't see past writing a few words or clicking a button on my computer. I decided to adopt comping as my new hobby and during a six-month stint, I won £50 in a competition for raising a complaint about Next's customer service on Facebook and £10 worth of vouchers for frozen pizza for - if I remember correctly - writing a few words on why I deserved them. Living the dream indeed.

So I remain a tiny bit envious of those

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featured in headlines such as ‘Is this Britain’s luckiest woman?’ where a wealth of prizes are revealed to have been won by the same people. What are these people doing right?

Di Coke is one such avid comper. She estimates that over the last 18 years she has won a staggering £250,000 of prizes, including a car and luxury holidays. Little wonder then that she is known in the comping community as Super-Lucky Di.

It’s not a title that has been easily won. Di, 41, who lives in Brighton with husband Rob, 43, a creative director at a design agency, and son Ryland, five, says she spends two to three hours a day finding and entering competitions - usually entering about 20 or 30 daily.

“These might be radio phone-ins, text messages, postal entries, Facebook, Twitter or photo competitions,” Di says. “I prefer to spend time searching for local, low-entry or creative competitions rather than entering easy prize draws.

“A lot of non-compers think that every promotion is a scam, and the prizes are never given away. They always seem surprised to hear of people actually winning iPads, holidays and cars - but only a tiny percentage of prize promotions are fake.”

Compers need bags of enthusiasm if they’re to achieve any kind of success rate, Di concedes. “People have the idea that being a comper is a full-time occupation - it’s actually just a hobby with fantastic benefits. Anyone can have a go if they’re enthusiastic - even if you don’t have much

## WEBSITES TO HELP YOU WIN

Check out these online treasure troves for hints, tips and competition leads

- [superlucky.me](#): Di Coke’s own website is packed with tips and news.
- [compersnews.com](#): Long established specialist title for comper enthusiasts.
- [loquax.co.uk](#): Online ‘competitions portal’ with a compers’ community.
- [theprizefinder.com](#): A wealth of resources and competitions listings.
- [moneysavingexpert.com](#): Search for the dedicated comping forum where members share news of comps and wins.

time to spend comping, having the right attitude is enough to get started.”

Part of the appeal is, of course, the chance that the next win may be the life-changing one... but even the small prizes are a bonus to compers. For Di, the best thing about entering competitions is that it adds a touch of magic to her life. “The postman brings surprises for you and your family, and you’re never quite sure what your next adventure will be,” she says.

And those adventures can be pretty spectacular. “I’ve flown an aeroplane, met Michael Caine at the BAFTAs, presented a Man of the Match Award, and arrived backstage at Glastonbury in a stretch limo! Thanks to comping I’ve been to Japan, New Zealand, Brazil, Antigua and America - it’s the most incredible way to see the world.”

But Di admits that in order to stay ahead of your competitors, you have to be prepared to stand out and think big. Creativity is a huge advantage, as Di says: “I love creative competitions, particularly fun photos or videos. I’ve recreated scenes from *ET*, *Psycho* and *Homeland* - and Kylie’s first album sleeve.

“I’ve cleaned the house dressed as Wonder Woman, and mowed the lawn dressed as a banana. My friends and family used to think I was crazy, but many of them have taken up the hobby themselves with lots of success. I love any challenge that keeps my son and I entertained - art, crafts and cooking are popular with him.”

In common with many competition hobbyists, Di first caught the comping bug when she was a child. “My first competition win was when I was six - I coloured in a

picture of the Queen Mother on her 80th birthday and won a VIP family break in London,” she remembers.

“I didn’t enter many more comps until the late 1990s, when I started sending off home-made postcard entries to magazines and won guitars, festival tickets, beer, clothes and holidays! That’s when I realised what a lucrative hobby comping could be. Over the next few years I discovered online chat forums and *Compers News* magazine, started entering creative ‘tiebreaker’ competitions and won myself a VW Beetle.”

She admits not everyone is always delighted with her lucrative hobby. “It’s incredibly difficult to resist when you constantly spot ‘WIN!’ on products and in shop windows,” she says. “It can be terribly annoying for your friends and family. I’ve never considered quitting. I’ve had breaks from comping but if I get fed up I prefer to try something different - TV gameshows, or radio comps for example.”

But family and friends have also benefited from Di’s good fortune. She says: “I’ve passed tips on to many friends, and a good percentage of them have won big prizes as a result. My family don’t comp at all, but that’s probably because I tend to give prizes to them anyway - my sister-in-law recently had £1,000 of furniture and my brother-in-law got a new PC, while my mum and niece got brand new tablets.

“I’ve sold a few prizes on eBay in the past, but I enter for prizes I want to win, rather than prizes to sell. I donate prizes to charity raffles and schools too - my

son started school last year and I’ve already won paint for their walls and fences, football equipment and an oven for the kids’ kitchen!”

The internet changed the competition industry in myriad ways, and comping in 2016 means keeping regular tabs on social media. “It’s really changed comping,” explains Di, “compared to the days of postcard entry and slogans - these days most competition entries are public, so



She’s a winner: Di on her prize trip to New York, and with goodies including iPhones and designer labels



everybody can see your entry on Twitter, Facebook or Instagram.”

This has pros and cons. “The advantage is that you can see instantly how many entries a competition has, and what you’re up against, but there’s also the risk that someone might see your amazing slogan or photo and copy it!”

“Many compers aren’t keen on entering on social media, so it’s possible to find comps on Pinterest, Instagram or Twitter that have just a handful of entries. They are often random draws rather than judged competitions too, so everyone is in with a chance of winning regardless of their photography or cooking skills.”

But with the growth of social media, there has also been an increase in a particular type of scam. Now there is a massive trend of companies big and small running competitions on Facebook, there is a tiny percentage of unscrupulous firms who ‘fix’ the results - and end up giving their prize to a friend.

Di offers a word of warning. While

she is positive and upbeat about most competitions being open to rigorous investigation - and playing by the rules - she confirms a few bad apples have surfaced. “The worst offenders are small companies who run ‘like and share’ promotions on Facebook to increase page likes. I’ve seen several companies award iPads to their friends.”

Be vigilant and trust your instincts. “Luckily most companies are genuine - I prefer to see small businesses give away prizes that are relevant to what they do, rather than iPads,” says Di. “I always feel suspicious when a small business gives away an iPad on Facebook.”

So after nearly 20 years what’s left for the queen of compers to win? What’s on her wishlist? “I’d love to meet Kylie Minogue, or a trip to the Himalayas. Even better would be meeting Kylie in the Himalayas.”

One thing’s for certain. Should a competition be invented with such an eclectic prize, Di would be the first to enter. ■

## WIN, WIN, WIN! DI’S PRIZE HAUL

Since the late 1990s, Di has won prizes including:

- VW Beetle
- Dozens of holidays and short breaks including three weeks in New Zealand plus £1,000 spending money
- Trip to the Grand Prix in Brazil
- A week at Sandals Antigua
- Ten days in Japan
- A week in Tokyo
- Cash and vouchers: amounts from £100 to £7,500
- Washing machine
- Eleven TVs
- Five iPhones
- A signed Damien Hirst print
- A signed Noel Gallagher guitar
- Bodyweight in chocolate

