

IABC Kansas City: Professional Development – Work Plan 2019

Context

Kansas City IABC (KC IABC) is located in the heart of North America, straddling the Missouri and Kansas state lines. The organization began more than 60 years ago as the Kansas City Industrial Editors and has been named IABC Chapter of the Year seven times.

As a medium-sized chapter, KC IABC has diverse membership representing the professions of corporation communications, marketing, public relations, design, videography and photography. Members work in communications for large and small businesses, agencies and non-profits. We also have a number of self-employed entrepreneurs in our ranks, as well as college students who are looking forward to a career in the field. Our membership is 125 communicators, and we reach approximately 800 throughout the Kansas City metropolitan area.

Through the decades, KC IABC has become synonymous with outstanding professional development and networking opportunities for business communicators in the greater Kansas City area. The hallmark of KC IABC's professional development is a highly successful Business Communicators Summit (BCS). This all-day conference, patterned off regional IABC conferences, provides diverse professional development to nearly 300 communication professionals in the Kansas City metro area every year. We draw people from as far as Topeka, Kan. (75 miles away from Kansas City), and Bentonville, Ark. (200 miles away from Kansas City).

The chapter's ongoing professional development events are also highly successful, with nine events a year. These are attended by a mix of members and non-members, of which the latter are often a substantial proportion. Additionally, our three special interest groups – Masters for seasoned professionals, IndyComm for independent entrepreneurs and Young Pros with a focus on emerging communicators – provide targeted opportunities for learning and networking for members and guests.

The biggest challenge for the 2017-2018 board year was dealing with a declining membership. Despite this challenge, we continued to provide strong professional development, while maintaining a highly engaged board and a strong corps of volunteers.

The strategic cornerstone of the board year was to ignite our professional development offerings with the intent of re-engaging our membership and enticing guests. We also focused on rewarding board members by allowing them to attend monthly professional development events at no cost.

Strengthening our professional development programming was a critical component to re-engage members and entice guests. Primary strategies included innovative programming delivered by excellent speakers supported by timely, creative event communications.

Goals and Objectives

Our key goal in 2018 was to revitalize our monthly professional development program. We sought to attract more members and guests by planning interesting and relevant programming delivered by excellent speakers which provide value to area communicators.

Objective 1: Plan all nine monthly professional development events by the end of March.

Measurement 1: Speakers, topics and logistics secured for all 2018 events by the first quarter.

Objective 2: Publicize all professional development events with innovative, attention-getting communications resulting in increasing overall monthly professional development attendance by 20% and attracting 20 communicators who have never attended a KC IABC event before.

Measurement 2: Average number of attendees compared to 2017 and number of new attendees.

Budget

We have a break-even budget for these events, although we nearly always come out in the black. We charge \$25 for members and \$35 for non-members. Events include breakfast and training. Our cost is \$14.95 per meal, plus tax, gratuity and an audio-visual equipment fee. We have no funds to pay for speakers. All speak for free.

Implementation

Professional Development Overview

The reason professional organizations exist is to provide networking opportunities, professional development and career achievement recognition. In 2018, KC IABC sought a marked improvement in its professional development program. While member education has always been a high value of the chapter, a sudden and unexpected departure of our program director in 2017 hampered that year's professional development efforts. Other board members worked together to manage that year's programming in addition to their other board responsibilities. This departure early in the year required the board to share responsibility for this critical part of our identity. Although we usually hold at least eight monthly events, we only held seven in 2017. In 2018, a longtime board member took on the role with a goal of breathing fresh vision and energy into member education. We did not want to repeat our hit-and-miss efforts from 2017.

As with many chapters, the market environment for professional development is competitive. Although our aims are not fully in sync, we compete with PRSA, the Social Media Club of Kansas City, the Kansas City Direct Marketing Association and other groups. Given that Kansas City communicators have so many options, our professional development offerings are a critical component to attracting attendees.

The board subscribes to the "lazy leader" theory to give opportunities for growth and development to every board role. While it is often easier to handle issues oneself, KC IABC knows this can lead to burnout and disengagement. One way we have embraced the lazy leader idea in our programming is by keeping it at the same venue, time and day of the month for the entire year. We also give the venue free reign on determining our breakfast menu for each meeting. This allows our programming director to focus on identifying interesting and relevant topics, securing excellent speakers, and developing creative promotions to entice attendees.

1. Programs

- **Planning:** We began planning for 2018 in the Fall of 2017, beginning with a review of suggested topics and speakers from 2017 event evaluations. We also had expansive board discussion on relevant topics for membership and potential speakers, reviewing those suggestions as well. We contacted new speakers to assess their interest in contributing to our professional development program. We reached a consensus on the first quarter of programming before the end of 2017 and then completed the first year's schedule by March 1, 2018. This gave members and non-members a bird's eye view of what programs they wanted to attend for the coming year. Our diverse board represents our membership. The board consists of members from Fortune 500 companies, small businesses, non-profits and other sectors, all at different levels in their career. This diversity helped us strike a strong balance and ensure we were meeting our varied member needs and interests.

- **Topics and relevance:** When choosing a topic, we determined to make every subject relevant to as many audience-members as possible. Instead of promoting a program such as “How to improve your internal communications,” we chose a broader approach. In this instance, communicators who don’t work with an internal audience would find this topic irrelevant. Instead, we advertised every topic’s relevance to every segment of the communications field. Although someone may, strictly speaking, focus on internal communications, the principles they share will have much wider application. We sought to communicate the relevance of each topic for all.
- **Financial goal:** Professional development has been an area of revenue generation for our chapter. Our longstanding policy has been to finish the professional development year in the black in terms of finances. This is accomplished by charging a slightly higher attendance fee than we incur in expenses. The additional revenue obtained through the additional \$10 higher non-member fees also contribute to successfully operating in the black.

Expenses and profitability of programs are monitored by the VP of Finance and VP of Professional Development. The VP of Finance reports on program expenses/profit at each board meeting. The chapter budgeted for a profit of \$2,640 and actual profit, as of Nov. 15, was \$3,521.

- **Nature of events:** Each program is a stand-alone event offered from 7:30-9 a.m. at Brio Tuscan Grill on the third Thursday of the month.
- **Event budgets:** We have no budget to pay speakers at our monthly professional development meetings. Given our limited resources, we capitalize on the goodwill and benefit that presenting at a KC IABC event can bring to speakers. KC IABC has a longstanding and strong influence among Kansas City communicators, so participating in our professional development events is always a positive for speakers, providing them an opportunity to build their reputation and gain visibility in front of potential clients. We also seek to provide value and credibility to our speakers as we promote their events both before, during and after each date.

2. Providing value to communicators

- One of the unique ways we communicated our monthly professional development events is through video promotion (**Work Sample 1**). The Program Director created a video to promote each topic and speaker, which was shared through our social media channels. The Director also wrote a compelling description sharing what attendees will learn. Event information is posted on the KC IABC website and EventBrite, sent to approximately 800 communicators via our email newsletter and event email, and shared on our social media channels (Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter and Instagram). A Facebook event is also created to allow followers to easily invite their connections. While we have a Social Media Board Director, all board members are also asked to share event promotions through their own social media networks, which further extends our audience reach. This year we also created a postcard sharing the dates, topics and speakers for the year. It was mailed to our list of 800 area communicators. During the event our board members post on KC IABC Twitter and Facebook accounts so our followers can obtain valuable insights from the events even when unable to attend. Additionally, the Program Director emails each attendee following the event, providing the presentation if available, and promoting the next professional development event.

- Our approach to professional development includes nine professional development breakfasts each year. In addition, we offer a day-long Business Communicators Summit providing breakouts to increase the ability for attendees to obtain skills development relevant to their level of experience and type of position. We provide event evaluations (**Work Sample 2**) for our monthly programming and Business Communicators Summit, using feedback to shape future offerings.

We also facilitate three Special Interest Groups as additional opportunities to obtain professional development geared toward specific levels of communications expertise. IndyComm, provides learning and networking options for independent communicators. Young Professionals focuses on engaging professionals with fewer than 10 years of experience. Masters, which is for people with at least 10 years of experience or in a leadership position, allows our experienced professionals to discuss topics of interest at their level.

- In addition to our own local programming, we feature IABC webinars for members and free webinars in our monthly e-newsletters and social media. We also include regional and international training opportunities.
- Each of these are promoted on the chapter website, EventBrite, newsletter and event emails, and social media channels, including Facebook events.

Strategies and Tactics:

As a perennially strong IABC chapter, a cornerstone of the KC IABC Board is to encourage each board member to embrace IABC's pillars (advancing the profession, creating connection and developing strategic communicators). We are able to focus on all three of these pillars through our professional development programming. The professional development opportunities themselves provide for skills development and networking. Because we promote these events to members and non-members through our email communications, social media and website, we are increasing awareness of IABC, all of which help advance the profession.

Plan all professional development events by early in 2018.

Our board discussed 2018 topics beginning in the fall of 2017 and settled on the first quarter's topics by the end of the year. By March of 2018, the full year had been planned and publicized on our website.

In addition, there had been some inconsistency regarding meeting times and venues over the past few years. Venues sometimes changed to test their efficacy. Times changed to accommodate people who could not make a breakfast or lunch event. As a compromise, we held events at alternating times. However, the result of this inconsistency, along with our other programming challenges in 2017, hurt our attendance.

Determining a venue was not difficult. We chose the Brio Tuscan Grille in Kansas City, Mo., which is centrally located in the Kansas City metro area. It has a long record of good service and cooperation with KC IABC. However, we made a conscious decision to choose this singular venue for all of our events so that there would be absolutely no confusion as to where we were meeting. In terms of date, we continued with the third Thursday of each month, a longtime KC IABC tradition.

In addition, instead of bouncing back and forth between breakfast and lunch meeting times, we chose to have all of our meetings in the morning. We received intense feedback about this, with a few members strongly advocating for one time or the other. The amount of feedback was equal regarding either time slot. We decided to move all meetings to the morning for these reasons:

- The Social Media Club of Kansas City draws more than 100 people to its meetings, which are held on weekday mornings. Therefore, we had seen a track record of success.
- We were also persuaded by feedback that work commitments are more likely to interfere with a lunch event than an early morning event.

The fact that our attendance has doubled causes us to believe this was the correct choice. Please see **Work Sample 3** for an attendance charts for 2018 and 2017. This was echoed by an evaluation from an event attendee: “I like the consistency of the day, time and location. There is no need to figure it out each month.”

Publicize all professional development events with innovative, attention-getting communications.

Professional association communications often suffer from corporate-speak and a lack of imagination. Humor and creativity are rare. We sought to dust off a tired approach and spark some life into our professional development to get attention. We created, for the first time, a series of humorous and attention-getting videos to promote each event (**Work Sample 1**). These were featured on our chapter’s social media channels and promoted via our e-newsletter. In addition, events were described in vivid, concise text on our website and event registration pages (**Work Sample 4**). We used promotional videos in addition to Facebook Live interviews. The Facebook Live interviews were re-posted on LinkedIn and Twitter to achieve maximum audience exposure. During events, we encourage attendees to use the Twitter hashtag #kciabc to Tweet out highlights of the day’s training (**Work Sample 5**).

Our January event was “Humor: Unleashing Your Secret (Untapped) Marketing Tactic.” It helped communicators come up with creative ideas to inject levity into the often dour world of B2B and internal communications. For the promotion, we created a video featuring endorsements from Arnold Schwarzenegger, Liam Neeson and Elvis Presley. One of the presenters was in fact a voice-over professional and created all of the spots (**Work Sample 1**).

For our February event, we took what could be a mundane topic and energized it with humor as well. We featured a panel that discussed the strengths and weaknesses of email marketing vs. social marketing vs. print-direct mail. Instead of a dry and academic discussion, we entitled the program “Smackdown: Social vs. Email vs. Print in the Ultimate Marketing Cage Match.” We put boxing gloves on the presenter’s table and gave each of them a humorous wrestling pseudo-name. The panel discussion itself also included humorous back-and-forth between participants.

Some events did not lend themselves to humor, so we produced short videos (one minute or less) that presented a compelling case for each topic.

In addition, we asked each presenter to invite friends, colleagues and customers to join them at the breakfast to boost our attendance and increase awareness of KC IABC. Although we could not comp their meals, we did offer them the member rate through a private discount code.

And, as mentioned, due to the consistent attendance, we were able to offer board members complimentary tickets to all events.

Select topics and speakers of excellence.

Our collaborative approach sought to provide topics that were of value to all chapter members, regardless of their communications niche. Our year's agenda featured these topics:

- January – Humor: Unleashing Your Secret (Untapped) Marketing Tactic | Jeremy Wood, Cinematic Videos; Roy Harryman, Roy Harryman Marketing Communications
- February – Smackdown: Social vs. Email vs. Print in the Ultimate Marketing Cage Match | Clifton Alexander, REACTOR Design Studio; Jessica Best, Barkley; Angela Crawford, Lockton Companies
- March – *Business Communicators Summit (no breakfast this month)*
- April – Go Undercover: 007 Marketing With IP Targeting | Joel Hornbostel, NextPage
- May – Reaching Social Influencers to Advance Your Brand | Kristin Doyle, Dine and Dish; Shanley Cox, Out to Eat; Lauren Lane, Lauren Lane Culinarian; Sarah Ruhlman, SarahScoop.com
- June – *Kansas City Quill Awards (no breakfast this month)*
- July – You Finished a Campaign. Time to Uncork the Champagne? | Tara Saylor, Cerner
- August – Hit the Marketing Bull's Eye With a Buyer Persona | Tricia McKim, Tricia McKim LLC
- September – Build a Personal Brand for All Stages of Your Career | Eric Morgenstern, IABC Fellow, Morningstar Communications
- October – Net Totality: Turn Your Website Into a Marketing Powerhouse | Mistie Stevens-Young, Children's Mercy; Gabe Brady, Hallmark; Mohammed Azeem, ConstellationCK
- November – Get the "Corporate Speak" Out of Corporate Communications | Jessica Noble, Hallmark
- December – *All Clubs Fund-Raiser (no breakfast this month)*

We seek written feedback (**Work Sample 2**) at nearly all events and the responses were not only overwhelmingly positive, but sometimes adulatory. A few examples include:

- "The presentation was fantastic and very easy to understand."
- "Very helpful information that could be applied to a variety of fields and industries."
- "I enjoyed it and look forward to your upcoming events. I like that you plan so far in advance so I can mark my calendar."
- "The speaker used real-world examples and drew the audience out through an open, conversational approach. It was incredibly beneficial. I learned quite a bit from the stories and the role playing."
- "This was fun and energetic."
- "An inspiring talk. I loved it!"

Measurement

It was gratifying to not only hear positive words from members and attendees but to see hard numbers. We held nine professional development meetings in 2018 compared to seven in 2017, and all were planned by March 1, 2018. Total attendance in 2018 more than doubled the previous year, 298 vs. 139. Our average meeting attendance also vastly improved, from 19 to 33 and our high meeting attendance jumped from 27 to 41. Finally, according to event evaluations (of which not everyone completes), we engaged at least 30 communicators who had never attended a KC IABC event before.

Results

Objective	Result
Plan all nine monthly professional development events by March 31, 2018.	Exceeded. First quarter 2018 events were planned prior to the end of 2017. Programming for the rest of 2018 was planned by March 1, 2018

Increase overall monthly professional development attendance by 20%.	Exceeded. Our total attendance in 2018 was 298, 114% increase over the previous year (139). Our average meeting attendance also vastly improved, from 19 to 33.
Attract 20 communicators who have never attended a KC IABC event before.	Exceeded. According to event evaluations received, 30 communicators were in attendance who had not previously attended a KC IABC event.

Work Samples Attached in Support of Entry:

Work Sample 1: Video promotion links

Work Sample 2: Evaluation form

Work Sample 3: Attendance chart

Work Sample 4: Event registration page

Work Sample 5: Live tweets from events