

2019 Chapter Management Awards – IABC Canberra Entry for ‘Chapter Events Category’

Submission highlights

- ✓ Successfully partnered with two other local associations to broaden appeal and promotion, attracted over 250 registrations in a six week campaign.
- ✓ Attracted international speakers to our local market and secured ‘event day’ sponsorships to offset cost
- ✓ Partnered with local well regarded association for sharing of resource-intensive tasks associated with hosting largest event

Background to IABC Canberra (Australia) Chapter

Australia is a Commonwealth made up of six states (New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia, Western Australia, Queensland and Tasmania) and two territories (the Northern Territory and the Australian Capital Territory). The capital city of Australia, and the Australian Capital Territory, is Canberra. IABC Canberra is medium sized chapter located in Australia’s capital city and home to the Australian Government. We have 84 members. Our catchment (the Australian Capital Territory) has a population of 408,000, giving us a market penetration of 0.02%. The Canberra chapter penetration is five times larger than any other chapter in Australia.

As a market, Canberra is unique in Australia. Our major industry is Government, and the industry associations and advocacy groups that lobby government, and the professional services firms that service them. As a government town, Canberra doesn’t have large corporates or significant industry sectors to draw on. As a result, the mainstay of many chapters, like financial services, health, oil and gas, and [non-government] internal communicators aren’t part of our market mix. Canberra also has a large transient workforce made up of contractors and consultants coming from interstate to deliver services to Government. This is reflected in part by the high percentage of non-members that attend our events.

IABC Canberra’s reputation is founded on our professional development events. During 2019 IABC Canberra [held ten events](#) across a variety of topics and attracted a range of communication-related attendees. The highlight of the year’s event program was our ‘blockbuster’ [Corporate Rebels event](#) which attracted 250 attendees in August 2019.

Background to the Corporate Rebels event and Event Strategy

IABC Canberra is mid-way through implementing a three-year strategic plan. In 2017 (pre strategic plan), we had held an opportunistic event with the Institute of Public Administration (IPAA) ACT through a visiting UK Government communications professional. IABC Canberra had partnered with IPAA ACT to deliver a highly successful event to a broad range of policy, government administrators and communications professionals which attracted over 350 attendees to a breakfast briefing. Since that event, IABC Canberra and IPAA ACT were keen to replicate this successful partnership should the opportunity arise on a topic or speaker of mutual interest to both associations.

Goals and Objectives

In early 2019 while maturing a draft events program for year, the IABC Canberra Board decided to invest a portion of the Chapters funds into securing a high profile speaker for a ‘blockbuster’ event for the chapter, preferably in the middle of the year which was traditionally a quiet time during Canberra’s chilly winter.

The goals and objectives for this activity were:

Goal: Host one large-scale event with high profile paid speaker for maximum exposure for the Chapter during a quiet period in the events calendar.

Objectives:

- 1 Partner with other local associations where possible to share cost and workload in hosting the event;
- 2 Attract large attendance numbers for greatest exposure to our Chapter for the effort and funds invested;

3 Through partnerships and additional sponsorship, ensure the event budget was break-even at a minimum.

Within several weeks the Board had identified the [Corporate Rebels](#), a duo from the Netherlands who were attracting attention with their ‘bucket list’ of visiting and studying the most innovative companies across the world to reveal their insights into employee engagement, corporate structure and breaking the traditional workplace hierarchy and culture. We thought the Corporate Rebels fresh ideas outlook would appeal to Government administrators, human resource and communications professionals in Canberra. In addition, these topics were being widely discussed in Canberra due to the ongoing [Independent Review of the APS](#), it was timely to bring an event of this nature to our market.

Budget

The Board had set an interim speakers costs of \$5-10k at the start of the year to spend on this activity, plus event hire and catering fees. These costs would be variable depending on the demand we anticipated the event would attract, for example the higher the number of seats required above about 75 people, the event costs would be higher as the cost of the venue and catering would be higher.

With the attraction of event sponsors and partners to offset costs and administration, the goal was to offset any speaker costs as much as possible and to ensure the Board’s funds to run our usual program of events for the year was not compromised.

We settled on a target of 200 attendees at the price of \$70 member/\$90 non-member as the ticket price ceiling we would need to charge to cover costs.

Implementation:

Soon after identifying a short list of potential ‘blockbuster’ speakers for 2019 we had identified the Corporate Rebels were heading to Australia for the first time for research and to conduct workshops in Sydney. The Board approached the Corporate Rebels with a proposal to run our event in Canberra and they were immediately interested. Unknown to us at the time, the Rebels had just agreed to provide the keynote address to the IABC Global Conference in Canada in June – so the timing couldn’t have been more perfect as we could piggyback off the World Conference promotion to entice our own attendees to the event.

Prior to confirming we would proceed with the event, a full promotional plan was drafted, outlining all possible costs and mitigation strategies including partnerships and sponsorship. In addition a communication and promotion plan was outlined with key activities across all channels including direct mail and paid Facebook and LinkedIn posts.

A date was negotiated (7 August) which meant the clock was ticking for a six-week sprint to making this event a success. We approached IPAA ACT who agreed with our summation that the Corporate Rebels’ talk would be highly attractive to our respective memberships and came on board immediately. IPAA ACT runs over 50 events per year and have a paid staff to organise events. We were able to capitalise on their arrangements and as such IPAA ACT provided full event support including sourcing quotes, booking the venue and catering, arranging the registration and payment details and providing on-day event services including name tags, speaker’s gifts and AV liaison.

This left the IABC Canberra Board the time to pursue value-add activities such as attracting event sponsorship and broader promotional opportunities. As such, we were able to package the event promotion to two local companies, Cordelta Digital and Synergy Consulting, for a price of \$4500 per company, to each receive exclusive event sponsorship right and further providing us \$9000 to offset speaker costs (almost the full cost of the speaker).

In addition to promoting the event to our own membership and mailing lists, we were able to promote the event through IPAA ACT's extensive direct marketing list and also the mailing list of the Australian Human Resources Institute ACT for broader promotion, free of charge. Within two weeks of opening registrations for the event, over people had 190 registered. We also produced a novelty promotional postcard (see Attachment A) for a small fee which tied in with the event theme and promoted our 'cause' to attendees and provided a high level benefits summary of our association and membership.

Measurement

Our objectives and corresponding measures for success are outlined below:

Objective	Measure
Partner with other local associations where possible to share cost and workload in hosting the event.	IPAA ACT were our official partners and AHRI ACT agreed to promote on our behalf. We offered access to membership pricing for both association in recognition of their support. Partnering with both organisations provided us with a range of benefits we could not have achieved if we'd executed the event on our own.
Attract large attendance numbers for greatest exposure to our Chapter for the effort and funds invested.	250 people attended the event which was a sell-out. We surpassed our objective of at least 200 attendees to make the event financially viable. Through the promotion of the event to the three Association direct mailing lists, we reached at least 15,000 people directly plus those reached through our social media channels. Even greater exposure was achieved after the Board shared our event strategy with the IABC Asia Pacific Chapter Leaders which led to IABC Victoria being able to leverage our initiative and have the Corporate Rebels follow on from Canberra to Melbourne for a 100-attendee event the following day. IABC APAC also provided direct mail and social media promotion support to both chapters' events. In addition, we received media coverage for the event by reputable government and political commentary site, <i>The Mandarin</i> (see Attachment A for link to story).
Through partnerships and additional sponsorship, ensure the event budget was break-even at a minimum.	Though the event costs were far greater than any one of the Chapter's standard events, we were able to achieve this event result with a small profit of \$500 to the chapter after all costs were paid. Given the massive reach and the international profile of the speakers, this was an incredible result for a Chapter with a small Board of eight people. A mishap with our (free) MC a week out from the event meant we did spend a small amount on a replacement MC at short notice.

Of course there are always lessons learned when running events at this scale. While we were not out of pocket for this event, with some additional time to plan and a larger venue we could have sold more tickets. In addition, acquiring more sponsors would also add to our revenue stream. The event could have been a profit making exercise had we'd had more time to execute these strategies, which could have led to us investing in planning another event of this scale in the near future.

Results and Conclusion

The event was a resounding success! The vibe was amazing, the crowd was appreciative and very engaged and we achieved our three objectives set at the start of the year. Through the evidence provided, our Chapter's reputation was enhanced by staging this event: as a small volunteer chapter with much competition (PRIA, AMI and CMI all have chapters in our small market) we have set the bar high as a Chapter who has the connection and means to attract international and trending speakers to our Association's events for the benefits of our members.

The timing was also great for such broad exposure to our chapter as it was only two months before IABC October Member Month promotions would begin and as such our brand was highly visible during this normally very quiet time in Canberra. The success of the event and the benefits to our members certainly reinforced our value proposition: the place where Canberra communicators come together for insight, connection and professional development.