

IABC Houston – 2020 Chapter Management Awards Entry

Category: Chapter Events

WORK PLAN

IABC Houston represents one of North America's medium-sized chapters, composed of 140 members. As the fourth-largest metropolitan city in the United States, represented by a vastly diverse population of more than 2.3 million, IABC Houston is no stranger to navigating the challenges of bringing together business communicators in the city's 665 square miles. IABC Houston will soon celebrate 50 years as a chapter, and was founded decades earlier as a local association of corporate editors. Throughout its history, the chapter has served greater Houston's communications profession by presenting many programs and events, on which this work plan will focus.

In July 2018, building upon the groundwork laid by IABC Houston's previous years of strong leadership, the chapter launched a new event series aimed at delivering more frequent opportunities for professional development. In observing IABC San Francisco's successful introduction of its 'Networking Nine' program – otherwise referred to as 'Net Nine' – the Houston Board sought to present this unique opportunity for its body of members in Houston, meeting several goals and objectives, which are outlined in detail below.

- **Goals and Objectives:** IABC Houston offers a unique professional development and networking program called 'Networking Nine.' Featuring a handful of small-group dinner discussions on communications topics, Networking Nine gives members the opportunity to explore new ideas, share real-world challenges and build deeper IABC relationships. This is a members-only event and limited to nine guests per event. RSVPs are required. **Overall Goal: Host at least four (4) Net Nine events per quarter (e.g. five-month ranges from August to December and January to May) or eight (8) Net Nine events per calendar year in alignment with the specific objectives outlined below.**
 - **This goal was set in alignment with the following objectives:**
 - ✓ **Small-Group Networking Opportunity:** Provide members with a unique opportunity to network with an intimate group (nine maximum attendees) of fellow IABC members
 - ✓ **Topical Discussion Format Appeal:** Appeal to IABC Houston's diverse membership base covering many industries, entrepreneurial interests, and business communications disciplines at all levels
 - ✓ **Geographic and Time-Bound Accessibility:** Offer an alternative for members who may have challenges in attending the monthly chapter luncheons – due to work conflicts and/or location difficulties – by holding Net Nine events in various regions of the greater Houston area
 - ✓ **Low-Cost Participation Option:** Address any financial constraints for self-funded members to remain involved with the chapter at a lower cost (\$5 which is later reimbursed) than a typical monthly chapter luncheon (\$40 early-bird rate or \$45 regular rate). The five-dollar cover charge was established in August 2019 to help regulate attendance for its maximum of nine, as well as to ensure commitment at the time of registration to uphold the event's integrity. Upon attending the event, each guest's \$5 charge is returned to them in the form of a future IABC Houston event credit. Any costs during the event are elective for food and beverages, per each guest's desired spend.
 - ✓ **Membership Incentive for Prospects:** Establish an incentive for 'prospects' involved in IABC Houston chapter programs to join as members and enjoy Net Nine as one of many benefits of membership. *Word-of-mouth marketing, social media promotion and announcements at IABC Houston monthly luncheons offer many opportunities for non-members to hear about this initiative.*
 - Meeting this overarching goal and supporting objectives was important for the chapter, as it would allow members throughout the greater Houston area to extract further value from their involvement with IABC Houston at a low cost.
 - This type of event format had never been introduced for IABC Houston; however, the market growth in the latter part of the decade underscored the critical need to make networking and

- professional development events accessible for all chapter members in the greater Houston area, which encompasses 665 square miles.
 - Event discussion leaders ('hosts') for each Net Nine were sourced from IABC Houston's Board, leaders in the chapter's Entrepreneur Strategic Interest Group (ESIG) and chapter volunteers.
- **Budget:** In addition to meeting the strategic goals and objectives outlined above, the Net Nine program was also a no-cost initiative for the Houston chapter. The dinner reservations would be booked in advance by the volunteer host with the identified local restaurant at no charge, and no costs would be incurred by the chapter for the entire event.
- **Implementation:** At its inception, members registering for Net Nine could purchase a ticket at no cost to reserve a seat from the limited nine openings maximum. However, one lesson learned by employing this approach was that a no-cost registration made it easier for confirmed member attendees to cancel on short notice, due to conflicts or other reasons. This left the session host and other committed attendees with a smaller group than expected. As the benefits of Net Nine for participating members are maximized by a full attendee base of nine guests, the IABC Houston Board voted to apply a small fee for Networking Nine starting in August 2019. All attendees are now charged a five-dollar registration fee to confirm the seat, with fulfillment of their participation granting them a five-dollar credit for a future IABC Houston event as a reimbursement. The success seen from this change was evident with the first Networking Nine of the 2019-2020 term. A full table of nine participants committed and were all in attendance for the August session on Mentorship. This improvement continued with the October session. To date, the chapter has not experienced any further 'no-shows' at a Net Nine event.

Methods of marketing communication efforts for the program overall include direct email to all members, the monthly chapter newsletter distributed to all members and non-member subscribers, word of mouth, personal outreach to members to make them aware of the program and how they can join a future session, social media promotion (content posted on all IABC Houston social media platforms), and other one-on-one opportunities for members to share information about the event with other members.

2019 Calendar Year 'Networking Nine' Program

January: 'Creating a Winning Bronze Quill Entry,' led by Shea Sullivan, IABC Houston Vice President of Programs (2018-19) and current Vice President of Membership (2019-20), and Communications Manager at Covestro; featuring Alice Brink, IABC Fellow and Principal at A. Brink & Co. Communications Consulting
We're six months away from the 2019 Bronze Quill Awards, and IABC Houston will be calling for your entries soon! This Net Nine event will discuss not only how to craft winning entries, but how to incorporate award-winning thinking into your communications strategies. Alice Brink has won countless awards for her work over the years, and has entered, won, and judged for many Quill contests!

February: 'Reaching Internal Audiences,' led by Ruth Elliott, IABC Houston Vice President of Finance and Internal Communications Advisor at Shell Oil

In the era of information overload, how do we grab employees' attention? In this month's Net Nine networking event, we will discuss new and alternative ways we are connecting with internal audiences, through original content, digital opportunities and out-of-the-box thinking.

March: 'Identifying Influencers,' led by Michael Nord, SCMP, MBA, IABC International Executive Board Member and Client Partnership Director at The Fifth Business

Some say that being able to identify the influencers inside your organization is the 'ultimate strategy.' Why? Because it reduces friction and increases impact. It's about finding the bulls-eye segment, the uber target, and turning it into your ninja channel. The idea of identifying influencers goes back to Abraham Lincoln. This topical discussion focuses on demonstrating how identifying the right people inside any organization can help managers reach all corners of the company, support communicators in their work to identify the 'real' issues, and propel any company into a more coherent and connected organization.

April: 'The Successful Entrepreneurial Mindset,' led by Carole Minor, IABC Houston ESIG Co-Chair (2019) and President at Encore Communications

During our April Networking Nine session, we'll discuss what makes an entrepreneurial mindset and why it's important in today's business environment. Entrepreneurs control their own destiny. They take charge and take risks, whether running their own business or contributing to a corporate profit center. Find out how in this interactive networking session.

May: 'Best Practices in Crisis Communications,' led by Andrew Van Chau, IABC Houston President (2018-19) and current Past President (2019-20), and Principal at Quo Vadis Strategies

Recent instances of corporations in crisis highlight the critical connection between effective crisis communications and a company's license to operate. Poor planning and execution can bring a company's very survival into question. A few have figured out how to turn disasters into golden opportunities that strengthen their brand and build new market opportunities. Join us for a deep dive on the things that work and those that don't when things go 'boom' in the night.

June: No Networking Nine; the monthly event for June was the annual IABC Houston Bronze Quill 2019 Gala & Awards Ceremony

July: No Networking Nine; the monthly event for July was the annual new Board election Happy Hour and launch of the 2019-20 term

August: 'Mentorship & IABC Houston's Mentorship Program Launch,' led by Hayley Ross, IABC Houston President-Elect (2019-20) and Marketing Communications Manager at ITC Global

Mentorship: What's the best advice you've gleaned from your experience with a mentor in your career? What was the impact of applying this advice to your day-to-day routine? Regardless of whether you were assigned to an 'official' mentor via a formalized program or you informally 'adopted' one within your industry or organization, a good mentor can greatly impact our professional development and challenge us to sharpen our effectiveness in the communications discipline.

September: Postponed to October due to Tropical Storm Imelda flooding in Houston

October: 'The Employee Experience & Communications,' led by Amanda Swennes, IABC Houston Vice President of Professional Development and Internal Communications Manager at Crown Castle

Employee experience – what does it mean? How is it different from internal communications? And how should we move our companies and our discipline in this direction?

November: No Networking Nine; two alternative events for November included a special 'members only' tour of NASA's Johnson Space Center and a crisis communications training workshop.

- **Members Only: NASA's Johnson Space Center Tour**
Effective communications plays a pivotal role at the Johnson Space Center (JSC), where thousands of civil servants and contractors work and over 100 astronauts train, to realize its mission as NASA's hub for human spaceflight. Staff at JSC handle the planning and training for the U.S. Astronaut Corps, and the Center houses critical components to prepare astronauts for spacewalks like the Sonny Carter Training Facility and the Neutral Buoyancy Laboratory. On Nov. 22, this 'Members Only' tour offered a first-hand look at these facilities, as well as the International Space Station (ISS) Mission Control and the new Orion training mockup. During the tour, members met JSC's communications team who offered insights on how they execute comprehensive communications efforts and showcase NASA accomplishments.
- **Crisis Communications Workshop: 'When Disaster Strikes: Planning for the Unexpected'**
When a crisis hits, your company's reputation is at stake. Remaining silent during a crisis impacting your company – in an age of 24/7, instant news and social media coverage – guarantees public relations doom. [Bill Salvin](#), Founder and President of Signal Bridge, joined IABC Houston for our November luncheon to recount his lessons learned and to share nuances of communicating in a crisis, bringing his vast PR insight from his service in the U.S. Navy Reserves to training thousands across a broad range of industries. Following the luncheon, a three-hour workshop was held with a focus on in-depth media training and crisis response training. The training covers all aspects of the communications environment, whereby attendees learned:

Media and Communications Training

- Communications fundamentals
- Interactive case studies
- Crafting a message
- Maximizing social media
- On-camera interviews and feedback

Crisis Response Training

- Preparing and testing your crisis communications plan
- Developing targeted crisis response messages and recovery strategies
- Understanding what reporters and key stakeholders want during a crisis
- Learning what to say when information is scarce
- Identifying and remaining focused on people impacted by the crisis.

December: *No Networking Nine; the monthly event for December will be the third-annual joint holiday networking mixer with Houston chapters of IABC, ANA Business Marketing (ANA), American Marketing Association (AMA), Society of Technical Communicators (STC), Houston Interactive Marketing Association (H/IMA) and the Public Relations Society of America.*

- **Measurement:** The chapter weighed the effectiveness of the initiative by the following metrics:
 - **Participation Value:** Appeal to IABC Houston's diverse membership base covering many industries, entrepreneurial interests, and business communications disciplines at all levels. Specialty areas represented by our membership include internal and external communications encompassing the areas of social media, marketing, public relations and media affairs; corporate communications; graphic design, videography and photography, business services; and independent consultants. **Statistics of representation by member attendees at 2019 IABC Houston Networking Nine events:**
 - ✓ Unique member attendees during calendar year 2019: **33 (or 23% of total IABC Houston membership base)**, representing the communications field in varying professional disciplines, career levels and industries
 - **Geographic and Time-Bound Accessibility:** Greater Houston regions reached via Net Nine locations held in a designated area of town: **Six (6) (Midtown, Uptown, West Side, Central Houston, Pearland and the Woodlands; covering more than 60 miles between the two locations farthest apart within the greater Houston area)**
 - **Budget Adherence:** **100% cost free for Houston chapter** as set by initial goals and objectives
 - **Overall Quantitative 'Net Nine' Goal: Met annual goal of holding four (4) Net Nine events per quarter; eight (8) per calendar year.**
 - **Additional Quantitative Events Goal: Met 50% of annual goal** of holding two (2) workshops per IABC Houston term year.
- **Results:** In evaluation of our results outlined above compared with our chapter's goals and objectives, we have concluded the following:
 - **Lessons Learned:** IABC Houston has experienced success with the new Networking Nine event initiative, considering the unique participation rate from IABC Houston membership and return participation rates also ranking highly.
 - **Goals Achieved:** Additionally, despite the postponement of the September Net Nine due to Tropical Storm Imelda, IABC Houston was still able to reach its goal of holding eight (8) Net Nine events per calendar year, along with holding one (1) of our outstanding goal of two (2) workshops per term year.
 - **Conclusion:** IABC Houston looks forward to continuing Networking Nine programming into 2020, building upon its successful first calendar year!