

## IABC/Toronto: Membership Marketing

---

IABC/Toronto is IABC's largest chapter with nearly 700 members. We serve communications professionals across the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) in a variety of industries and at varying levels of experience. Our members represent the diversity and multiculturalism of the GTA, and engage with the association for networking and professional development, as well as to recognize, mentor and amplify one another. One of our greatest strengths as a chapter, is the involvement of our engaged members who consistently work to create a chapter that is representative and supportive of career growth and personal development.

Our **2019-2020 purpose** was: To create connection between professionals in the brand, marketing and communication functions and the broader business community to elevate our profession. We convene thought leaders with a unique and relevant point of view to facilitate learning and development opportunities for our community, our volunteers and our board. Our **goals in 2019-2020** were to: 1) Keep our Purpose at the heart of all we do; 2) Be transparent and open with our stakeholders; 3) Maintain our financial health with a view to long-term sustainability.

### Membership marketing at IABC/Toronto

IABC/Toronto communicates member benefits to both internal and external audiences, and strives to build brand awareness and reputation through engaging events, thought-leadership material and career development opportunities. Each of these aids in recruitment and retention of IABC members. These initiatives are achieved with careful planning in several portfolios.

The Communication and Digital Media portfolio maintains our social media channels and develops our online magazine, *Communicator*, while the Membership portfolio works to grow and maintain IABC/Toronto's membership through presentations, social media, online communications, and personal outreach. Among other things, this portfolio seeks out ways to highlight the benefits of IABC membership. The Special Interest Groups portfolio engages and recruits members by identifying communities of interest within the chapter, facilitating learning and networking within those communities. This portfolio places a large focus on the highly engaged Professional Independent Communicators (PIC) group with specialized events, social media channels and a dedicated newsletter. This portfolio also manages the Senior Communicator's Circle, where senior communications professionals meet to network and learn from one another.

Our annual OVATION Awards and Communicator of the Year Award programs help to promote IABC/Toronto and build our brand within the community by recognizing excellence in Communications among both members and non-members. Our networking and PD events provide valuable opportunities to learn from and meet with peers.

### Goals & Objectives

Goals	Objectives
Increase awareness of IABC/Toronto and its initiatives on digital platforms.	Focus on graphic design, live-tweeting/streaming, community engagement; feature thought leadership pieces to drive increase in engagement of at least 25% and increase followers by 5%.
Utilize <i>Communicator</i> to amplify the expertise of members, increase brand awareness & engagement.	Increase engagement with <i>Communicator</i> by 15% by opening the magazine to the public; promote content via social media.
Increase awareness of the benefits of becoming an IABC member.	Communicate member benefits monthly through digital channels: eLert & social media. Includes promoting membership months, member benefits and member spotlights.

	Present at colleges and universities in the GTA to highlight the value of IABC membership.
	Engage new members through at least four “New member coffee” events hosted by a past-president.
	Personally reach out at least once throughout the Board year to lapsed or lapsing members, as well as non-members who attend at least one IABC/Toronto event.
Gain insight into what benefits are most valued by IABC/Toronto members.	Conduct a membership survey during the 2019-2020 Board year with a participation rate of 10%.
Support PIC members to deepen their knowledge and broaden their reach.	Host a minimum of four events tailored exclusively to meeting the professional development, networking and business-building needs of independent communicators.
	Publish monthly newsletters ( <i>The Buzz</i> ) to promote the core skills, interests and capabilities of PIC members.
Provide opportunities for meaningful engagement amongst senior communications professionals.	Host a minimum of four Senior Communicator Circles by invitation only to ensure target audience is engaged.
Maintain IABC/Toronto’s reputation for recognizing excellence in Communications.	Host the OVATION Awards gala in May, recognizing communications campaign winners from across the GTA.
Utilize the Communicator of the Year Award to drive brand awareness and improve brand reputation.	Recognize a member of the GTA outside of communications who has demonstrated excellence in communications in their own field through the Communicator of the Year award.
Provide opportunities to connect and advance professional development.	Host four to six professional development events throughout the Board year (outside of PIC).
	Host four to six networking events throughout the Board year (outside of the senior communicator’s circle).

## Implementation

*Social media & digital magazine:* We were successful in enhancing brand awareness of IABC/Toronto and its initiatives via social media and *Communicator*, and elevating the content produced for these channels. Our strategy involved elevating both the content and graphics produced by the chapter. By seeking out accomplished members to create thought-leadership content for our channels, and by creating member spotlight pieces to highlight our members’ stories and skills, we were able drive member value, more effectively communicate chapter initiatives, and elevate our reputation. Each issue of *Communicator* explored an important topic affecting professional communicators, including: diversity and inclusion; career advancement; internal communications; and technology and trends. These issues created valuable professional development opportunities for readers and further amplified members who contributed to these issues. This was partially accomplished by opening *Communicator* to non-members and the resulting increase in readership.

*Member and non-member engagement:* Along with engaging our members to contribute to our digital channels, we also regularly communicated with our distribution list through direct emails and our newsletter: *eLert*. We regularly promoted chapter events, initiatives and highlighted members. Finally, we conducted a survey to our members to gain insight into what they valued from their membership and what they wanted from a professional association. This allowed us to better tailor our messaging. We also utilized more personalized methods of communicating with members and potential members. By connecting with GTA colleges and universities with communications-related programs, we were able to directly communicate with the next generation of professionals to highlight IABC benefits. Personal calls and emails from our VP of Membership helped create a connection and sense of belonging with lapsed, lapsing, and potential members. New member coffee events allowed us to personally welcome new and returning members, and to reiterate member benefits.

*Special interest groups:* With such a large membership spanning a vast geographical area, it is important that we create opportunities for affinity groups to connect. The two groups we identified in 2019-2020 were PIC and senior communicators. Our goal was to increase member value by creating opportunities to learn and network in a space that was specific to each group's needs. PIC is a valuable support system for independent communications professionals, and the senior communicators circle is an exclusive-to-members opportunity to network and learn from peers.

*Brand management:* We are able to expand awareness of our brand by continuing to host our highly anticipated annual OVATION Awards Gala recognizing communications excellence, and through recognizing a leader outside of the field of communications for demonstrating excellence in communications. Both of these programs are highly visible and allow IABC/Toronto to bring awareness of who we are and what we do to additional audiences.

*Networking and professional development:* These are consistently identified as the top reason for engaging with IABC. Communications professionals view both networking and PD as essential to their career growth and personal satisfaction. These events are open to both members and non-members, and we take these opportunities to promote member benefits and upcoming chapter events and initiatives. Overall, about 50% of 2019-2020 registrations were from non-members.

*Challenges:* The pandemic forced a number of event cancellations and the necessity of innovation to continue to deliver member value. While COVID presented an opportunity to step up and support our members through professional development, as well as peer and career support, the pandemic also caused unforeseen disruptions in revenue generation, the ability to host in-person events, and the digital and physical engagement that would have resulted from the promotion and hosting of those events. We were also forced to move our high-profile OVATION Awards Gala to a digital platform with very little time for proper planning. We did so successfully, and ensured that award recipients were properly recognized through social media, our website and the *eLert*; however, it was a very different experience than in years past.

## Budget

Tactic/initiative	Budgeted	Actual
Social media	\$1000.00 (Hootsuite)	\$1,089.73
<i>Communicator</i>	\$800.00	\$348.00
<i>eLert</i> & direct email	\$1,100.00 (Mailchimp)	\$1,119.45
Membership promotion	\$500.00	\$27.48
Membership survey	\$350.00	\$361.07
Professional Independent Communicators	\$1,500.00 (cost) \$2,000.00 (revenue) \$500.00 (total revenue)	\$675.56 (cost) \$1,425.80 (revenue) \$750.24 (total revenue)
Senior Communicator's Circle	\$600.00 (cost only, not revenue generating)	\$0 (in-person events cancelled due to COVID)
PD events	\$6,200.00 (cost) \$15,500.00 (revenue) \$8,900.00 (total revenue)	\$1,568.51 (cost) \$1,014.82 (revenue) \$553.69 (total loss due to in-person event cancellations)
Networking events	\$4,500.00 (cost) \$4,000.00 (revenue) \$500.00 (total revenue)	\$1,452.34 (cost) \$3,158.85 (revenue) \$1,706.51 (total revenue)
OVATION Awards	\$57,100.00 (cost) \$76,000.00 (revenue) \$18,900.00 (total revenue)	\$14,279.41 (cost) \$44,443 (revenue) \$30,163.59 (total revenue)
COTY	\$590.00	\$560.00
Zoom	\$0	\$374.63

## Evaluation/Results

Objectives	Results
Drive an increase in engagement of at least 25% and an increase in followers by at least 5%.	<b>Objective not met:</b> We saw a 10% decline in social media engagements from the previous Board year. We were on pace to increase engagement by 27%, but this growth was disrupted following COVID-19 and the event cancellations. <b>Objective exceeded:</b> We increased our total social media followers by 7%, to 13,721 followers.
Increase engagement with <i>Communicator</i> by 15%.	<b>Objective exceeded:</b> The Winter 2020 issue, after the first 30 days of publication, had a total of 1,509 pageviews, which represents a 169% increase over the previous year's issue.
Communicate member benefits monthly through digital channels: eLert & all social media accounts.	<b>Objective met:</b> Member benefits and membership months were communicated monthly via all social media channels and the <i>eLert</i> , and a member spotlight was included in each <i>eLert</i> (~2/month).
Conduct a membership survey during the 2019-2020 Board year with a participation rate of 10%.	<b>Objective met:</b> Survey completed in December 2019 with a participation rate of 10%; 88 respondents.
Present value of IABC membership at colleges and universities in the GTA.	<b>Objective met:</b> IABC/Toronto presented at three educational institutions pre-COVID and two virtually after COVID.
Engage new members through at least four "New member coffee" events hosted by a past-president.	<b>Objective exceeded:</b> Five events were hosted; total of 42 attendees.
Personally reach out at least once throughout the Board year to lapsed or lapsing members, as well as non-members who attend at least one IABC/Toronto event.	<b>Objective met:</b> Personal emails were sent out promoting membership months to corporations, OVATION winners and judges. Personal emails were also sent to non-members who attended chapter events.
Host a minimum of four events tailored exclusively to PIC.	<b>Objective exceeded:</b> PIC hosted five networking events and two PD events with a total of 168 attendees.
Publish monthly newsletters to promote the core skills, interests and capabilities of PIC members.	<b>Objective met:</b> 11 newsletters were published; 10 throughout the Board year and one bonus Summer issue.
Host a minimum of four Senior Communicator Circles by invitation only to engage target audience.	<b>Objective not met:</b> Two events were held, with a total of 19 attendees; two events were cancelled due to the pandemic.
Host the OVATION Awards gala in May, recognizing communications campaign winners.	<b>Objective met:</b> A virtual event was held for all award winners and their clients May 7, 2021; over 100 participants.
Recognize a member of the GTA outside of communications who has demonstrated excellence in communications in their own field through the Communicator of the Year (COTY) award.	<b>Objective met:</b> Jodi Kovitz, founder and CEO of #movethedial was awarded the COTY award. She promoted IABC/Toronto and the award via her social media channels and attended our AGM as a guest speaker.
Host four to six professional development events throughout the Board year (outside of PIC).	<b>Objective met:</b> We hosted six PD events with a total of 384 participants.
Host four to six networking events throughout the Board year (outside of the senior communicator's circle).	<b>Objective exceeded:</b> We hosted five downtown or virtual networking events, total 164 participants; and three regional networking events (in-person and outside of the downtown core), total 10 participants.

**Work samples** - Work sample #1: Member benefits infographic; Work sample #3: OVATION Awards social media infographic; Work sample #3: OVATION judges social media infographic; Work sample #4: Student presentation; Work sample #5: January 7 2020 edition of eLert