

Chapter Management Awards Entry

IABC/BC - Membership Marketing



Based on 2019–20 chapter year

Background

IABC British Columbia (IABC/BC) is a vibrant community of communication professionals that includes the full range of member types, and numerous Fellows, SCMPs, ABCs past regional chairs, international committee members, gold quill award winners, blue ribbon panelists and more. During our 2019–20 year, we were very fortunate to oscillate between third- and second-largest IABC chapter in the world. Coming off the heels of a highly successful IABC world conference, we were able to harness an amazing energy and sense of pride that fuelled new and exciting membership marketing initiatives.

While BC consistently gained new members post world conference, we identified a need to focus more attention on *retention*, and making sure members continued to find value in being part of our chapter. To this end, like all IABC chapters, we faced *significant* setbacks from the IABC membership database issues which affected our retention. We diligently and frequently reported membership issues to International which, in turn, helped other chapters resolve their issues.

Fortunately, our membership director recruited a brilliant team of volunteers who helped us focus on higher-level strategic work to achieve our goals and objectives. This included taking a fresh, new approach to content the membership team produced. In this entry, we'll describe our 40th anniversary #MyIABCstory video series, an in-kind sponsored project which took membership marketing to a level of quality we'd never achieved.

Finally, the 2019–20 year, while hugely challenging in the face of COVID-19, brought with it some unexpected opportunities. Moving more initiatives virtual forced us to come up with exciting alternatives for networking and creating the kind of connections we were all missing in our daily lives during a time in our history when we needed to be physically distanced. More than ever, it was important to look for that engagement and connection with our members.

Portfolio SWOT Analysis

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Working closely with the Marketing & Communications team along with the Events team has really helped enhance the overall quality of our offerings in terms of online content and event management and provided new ideas for further collaboration in the fall.Personalized engagement with members continues to be positively received, especially with new members who appreciate being welcomed and pointed in the direction of available resources both at the chapter level and International's offerings. Overall, people are feeling heard and like the direct connection to the board through this outreach.Improved quality of membership data and strong relationship with International to identify and correct any issues that come up.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Losing our corporate survey sponsor was disappointing and has added more work to the Membership team's plate. While this loss is not critical to the success of our member survey, it does mean we no longer have the added benefit of professional analysis of data and future recommendations.Issues with reported inconsistent outreach by IABC International to members with expiring memberships makes it more challenging to ensure a higher renewal rate - emphasizes the importance of local outreach at the chapter level.While much improved, the quality of member data available via the Leader's Portal is not always up to date which makes it difficult to track down members. \
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none">On the heels of our first ever Vancouver Island Get Connected event, move forward with engaging members outside of the Vancouver area and look for opportunities to	<ul style="list-style-type: none">COVID-19 has turned our world upside down and impacted all chapters. With communication professionals overwhelmed with work demands and worried about financial impacts, we could see a drop in membership.

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<p>have more regional networking events. Member interest in more local events is high.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expand upon current outreach to new/renewed, lapsing soon and recently lapsed members that had to pivot to sensitivities around COVID-19, and finalize/implement general email templates. Membership numbers have returned to pre-World Conference levels after sustaining a drop earlier in the year. Important to build on this regained momentum to ensure new members are engaged and current members continue to see value in their membership. Find new ways of personalizing Member Month content provided by IABC International, to engage membership (both current and potential) in a way that better reflects the chapter. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> COVID-19 also impacting the board and portfolio volunteers' capacity to take on IABC related work. As a result of the financial impact on organizations due to COVID-19, we could see a drop in corporate/group memberships. With current restrictions on in-person gatherings, Get Connected events will need to be hosted solely online which may not appeal to all members. Any potential loss to volunteer resources would impact the Membership portfolio's ability to hit the ground running in the fall with developing new member story content, Get Connected events in multiple regions during Member Month in October and promotion.
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Goals and Objectives

Associated Chapter Goal	Portfolio Objective	Benchmark	Target	Outcome or Output
Grow: Increase chapter brand awareness and membership numbers by engaging new members while retaining current ones.	Maintain current membership and avoid a significant decrease in our numbers, following world conference membership bump	500 in August 2019	500 by June 2020	Outcome
Engage: Solicit feedback from members to ensure the chapter is providing a value proposition.	Increase member survey response rate by 5% and make up for the drop from the previous year	19% in 2018	24% in 2019	Output
Engage: Provide engaging, relevant and valuable experiences for members.	Increase attendance at <i>Get Connected</i> events	Increase by 30% over 2018–19	x10 people	Output

Budget

The membership portfolio got an amazing \$16,000 in-kind sponsorship deal with Six Degrees Productions to produce our refreshed #MyIABCstory membership marketing series, which is reflected as income on this budget.

- \$16,000 (in kind)
- \$750 registration fees for *Get Connected* membership marketing social events
- \$150 Vancouver Island *Get Connected* event (first on the island, in Victoria) Victoria (\$107.55)
- \$1,500 catering for events (this spend was paused due to COVID-19)
- \$500 for event venue (this spend was paused due to COVID-19)

Implementation

Membership on the Rise

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Despite challenges we faced in 2020 due to COVID-19 and the international membership database, we managed to increase membership to 507 in June 2020. This was 1.4% above our target of 500 members! To help get there, we became laser-focused on pinpointing membership database issues including data issues, renewal notifications and missing membership dues transfers, then working with IABC International to solve them. From the beginning of the board year to the end, we became intimately familiar with the membership database, made best friends with the amazing Micayla Felicion, and worked with her frequently as issues arose.

A Fruitful Sponsored Initiative

On the more creative side, our favourite membership initiative of the year came in the form of our refreshed #MyIABCstory campaign. In an effort to market IABC to external audiences, we used member stories to tell the story of what our community means to its members. We secured a fantastic sponsor – Six Degrees Productions – to work with. Having just opened a Vancouver branch, Six Degrees was keen to demonstrate their capabilities to local communicators.

Having developed occasional video content in the past with minimal viewership, we devised a content strategy to ensure higher impact. We invested more time in finding more creative ways to tell stories. We had *fun*. And it showed in the final product, which we distributed and promoted across multiple channels, ensuring high collective audience uptake.

To kick off our campaign, we developed our own version of Vogue's *73 Questions* celebrity interview series, in a video where we asked our chapter president 40 questions in honour of IABC/BC's 40th anniversary. We filmed the video over the course of a 7-hour day with volunteers and the sponsor's crew on-site at the offices of Bananatag, another sponsor.

We then planned another full day where we shot a series of **seven** whimsical and informative videos with members. We used storytelling, punctuated by whimsical rapid-fire rounds of comical questions, to help viewers connect with the subjects.

Getting Personal

We realized early on that the biggest opportunity to impact retention came in the form of one-to-one outreach. As such, we created and implemented personalized email templates to send to new / renewed / lapsing-soon members. When COVID-19 struck the world, we altered this template to make it more sensitive to members and how members might be feeling.

We then developed a process for publicly recognizing and welcoming new members to the community. Our membership volunteers posted monthly 'welcome' posts on LinkedIn for new members, at-naming them in the posts..

Volunteer Team

- Jasmine Bradley, Director, Volunteer Services (board member)
- Content Coordinator (potential future board member)
- Content Coordinator

COVID-19 and its Impact

Due to COVID-19 restrictions, we were unable to proceed with two of the three in-person networking events planned for the spring and summer. We did manage to plan a first of its kind *Get Connected* event on Vancouver Island. A few facts to explain this:

1. *Get Connected* is a casual, semi-structured networking event aimed to convert prospects to members, and members to volunteers, by introducing them to the board and other members
2. IABC/BC is a province-wide chapter, but the majority of our members reside in Greater Vancouver. As such, it can be very challenging to provide meaningful, well-attended in-person opportunities outside of Vancouver. For the Vancouver island event, several board members who were going to be in the region proposed to the board that we re-divert resources from one of our regular *Get Connected* events to a Victoria event. It felt great to expand our reach and provide value to those members in Victoria. Feedback was highly positive

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Challenges

Our March and April *Get Connected* events in Vancouver had to be cancelled due to COVID-19; however, this forced us to perfect a zoom version for 2020–21. In order to provide members with an alternate means of staying connected during a time when communication professionals are feeling stretched and overwhelmed in their working and personal lives, the Membership team worked with Vice-President Dana Higgins to host our chapter's inaugural virtual networking event. This was a well attended event that was very positively received by members, who appreciated the opportunity to engage with the board and their fellow IABC members. It was also a great way for us to gauge how people were feeling and to discuss what resources would be most valuable for the chapter to provide during the pandemic.

COVID-19 further impacted our annual member survey. With both our board and our members strapped for time, we opted for an abbreviated version that asked key questions only. This allowed us to still gather information to inform strategic decision making, while being sensitive to member's limited time and emotional capacity.

Measurement

Portfolio Objective	Benchmark	Target	Result
Maintain current membership and avoid a significant decrease in our numbers following last year's bump in membership due to the World Conference.	500/current	500	507 (1.4% above target)
Increase member survey response rate by 5% and make up for the drop from the previous year.	19%	24%	17%
Increase attendance at Get Connected Events during the current board year (July 2019 to June 2020).	Increase by 30%	x10 people	N/A (see below)

Results

This was a year unlike any for IABC/BC's Board of Directors, for our membership and for communication professionals around the world. All of this necessitated that we be flexible and adjust our expectations and plans. For an ambitious team, this was tough. But we acknowledged that these were indeed *unprecedented* times and that it was okay that we could not achieve all of our original objectives. Moving forward, we are committed to revisiting these objectives and setting new targets for the 2020-2021 term while keeping in mind the lessons learned from this year.

Our #MyIABCstory videos were our most viewed series ever (keep in mind if you visit our Youtube that we're also counting our higher viewership channels: Facebook and LinkedIn). These videos also resulted in lots of business for the sponsor. We provided so much referral value that they sponsored us again for 2020–21. Our membership survey results didn't meet our target, but two factors were at play: our total membership jumped to the highest in many years, and COVID-19 affected engagement and response rates.

Despite the challenges we faced, we found new and interesting ways of connecting and engaging with members. Members are finding a different type of value in being part of IABC/BC and are accessing resources to help them support their organizations through this crisis. And in addition to all of this - our membership remained high. We entered 2020–21 ready to face new challenges with dedication and persistence.