

Application: Membership Marketing			
Chapter	IABC Ottawa Division 1 - Large	Chapter Board Term	July 1 to June 30
Region	Canada East	Timeline	1 July 2019 - 31 December 2020
<b>Contact:</b> Kayla Isabelle   613 407 6604   kaylamoniqueisabelle@gmail.com			

## 1. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

With over 200 members, IABC Ottawa brings together communications, marketing and creative professionals to develop skills, create connections, and learn about best practices all within a welcoming, active and diverse community.

**Our Value:** IABC Ottawa focuses on connecting you with the people and insights you need to thrive in your career. Whether you are a communicator, marketer, or creative professional, we connect you to the opportunities, resources, people, and information you need to advance.

**Our Benefits:** Joining IABC Ottawa means you enjoy unparalleled access to events and programs that hone your strategic communication skills and expand your network with the following benefits: monthly professional development events, our Members Connect Mentorship Program, Free Monthly Member Meet Ups, Networking Nine Events, Professional Certification, Volunteer Opportunities, and Jobline.

**Chapter History/Challenges:** Established in 1976, the Ottawa chapter of IABC has a rich history of striving for effective chapter management to benefit our members, community, and leaders. Despite stable finances and membership growing, we had a few challenges in the season that impacted our ability to execute certain tasks to the degree we would have liked, including: **1. Maintaining steady board member & chapter engagement. 2. Balancing member-only events that provide member value, while extending our reach to untapped audiences 3. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on overall program delivery.**

## 2. OVERVIEW

IABC Ottawa's focus is to empower communicators at all levels to build successful careers, develop skills, and create valuable connections. As part of the board's strategic planning, there has been a focus on *providing value to our members* as we work to keep them engaged in the chapter and in IABC more broadly. In June 2019 IABC Ottawa's board decided to shift its focus slightly and place additional efforts on enhancing *how we communicate and bring awareness* of this value to both current members and prospective members.

## 3. GOALS & OBJECTIVES

The overarching goal for membership marketing is to provide members with value that would lead them to renew their membership. This would be done by providing opportunities for members to deepen their connections in the community and opportunities for continuous development and learning. Overall the Chapter **goal for the 2019/20 season was to maintain an overall membership of approximately 240 members.** This was **updated in the 2020/21 season to an overall membership number of approximately 300 members** given a large number of student members "join" in January.

Objectives to meet this goal were: (a) Enhance visibility of member benefits and opportunities; (b) Retain 70% of members; (c) Capitalize on key IABC moments to promote membership and offer new member-only, free benefits; (d) Deepen the sense of membership community and prestige by providing members with tangible local benefits; (e) Feature IABC members in revised member profiles and showcase their contributions and accomplishments in the community. In Fall 2020, the membership team revisited these objectives and determined that while each objective continued to be relevant, objectives d

and e would become the key focus as it is these objectives that best align with the results from a membership survey conducted in Summer 2020.

#### 4. BUDGET

At the beginning of each season, the board holds a strategic planning session and develops an operational budget to support these goals. In the 2019/20 season we budgeted \$7800.00 in expected member revenue and \$2450.00 in expected expenses. At the start of the 2020/21 season we budgeted \$6,000.00 in expected member revenue and \$1300.00 in expected expenses because of the new challenges introduced by COVID.

#### 5. IMPLEMENTATION

Overview: The membership team worked closely with the marcom and website teams to promote the programming and content of IABC Ottawa across social media platforms (Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram) and through our website and e-newsletter.

Challenges: A membership survey was conducted in the summer of 2019 and a third of members identified a decline in feeling of belonging to the community. It was clear that the chapter was not fully reaching or engaging its members and two additional issues were identified from fully reaching and engaging its members and prospective members and two issues were identified: (i) unclear value proposition for members (ii) we struggled to highlight the expertise of our members in our online content. There was the additional challenge of COVID which forced us to pivot to finding new ways to engage and highlight our members digitally.

Resource #1, Social media: In September 2019, the board used the feedback from the membership survey to focus its content strategy for the season on highlighting the expertise in the community instead of only promoting upcoming events across its digital media channels. Moving forward, the marcom team focused two thirds of their month-to-month content on: (a) promoting news from IABC International and the Catalyst magazine, (b) repurposing International's social content for national awards and PD activities (such as the IABC World Conference and GCCC certification), and (c) developed monthly "Board Spotlight" articles to highlight expertise from chapters leaders. Photography of current members at events were also repurposed for social content to promote our members. This plan aligned with IABC's three strategic pillars to: create connections, advance the profession, and develop strategic communicators.

Resource #2, Website: In October 2019 the membership team sought to better articulate the "IABC Ottawa Value Proposition" and to more effectively describe the tangible member benefits. They updated the value proposition for the chapter by connecting IABC's strategic pillars to chapter activities and initiatives and used this text on our website, revised the social media descriptions across our channels, updated member collateral (such as postcards), and reflected these changes in e-newsletters to members and prospective members (WS#1).

Resource #3, Member Profiles: In an effort to illustrate the unique makeup of our community, the membership team, supported by the marcom team, revised the member profiles for a catchy written format where each profile addressed 10 quick questions. (WS#2). These profiles were shared on our social channels and through the e-newsletter and told the story of our members and why they joined this growing community. New to this season, the membership team chose to highlight multiple members at different levels of their careers, from early to mid to senior, and different sectors of the communication profession. This strategic approach showcased the diversity in Ottawa and built upon the 2018/19 strategy as we highlighted members from diverse backgrounds. These profiles were helpful to this chapter in building digital connections, as we were unable to connect in person due to COVID.

Resource #4, Hard Copy Collateral & Promotional Material: In 2019, the events team, working together with the membership team and marcom team, noticed a gap – when hosting chapter events, IABC Ottawa did not have any branded hard copy material (besides a pop-up banner) to display or give away. The chapter also continued to use plastic lanyards, which were becoming expensive and difficult to recycle. Together these teams developed and printed postcards outlining the key benefits of membership. Reusable button name-tags were also designed to easily recognize members at events. Multiple buttons

IABC Ottawa | Chapter Management Award Submission: Membership Marketing

were made as a way for members to network with one another. For example, member buttons, mentorship buttons and certification buttons were made as a conversation starter (WS#3) This was adapted to digital programming as we start each member-only event with introductions and encourage everyone to highlight how long they have been a member, why they joined, and any additional fun IABC facts about themselves.

### *Recruitment and Retention:*

Challenge: One key challenge in 2019 was the migration of the IABC member database. IABC Ottawa heard from members that they had difficulty renewing or joining for a period of time, and internally we found it challenging to trust the data, in particular for corporate members. A number of strategies have been put in place to re-focus efforts on recruitment and retention of members. Membership, and sustainability were also a concern during the pandemic, however, IABC's fairly stable job market allowed for sustained membership renewal in 2020. We simply focused on ensuring there was an opportunity for members to connect, when the need for connection had never been greater.

Membership Month Promotion and Prizes: During Membership Months, IABC Ottawa focuses on promoting membership and encouraging current members to take advantage of savings and renew. In October 2019 for International Membership Month we: (a) dedicated and executed a social media campaign using a blend of templated materials from International and (b) developed new content profiling chapter leaders and members. Overall the chapter saw positive results with a significant increase in social engagements. Unfortunately, during COVID-19 in March 2020, the membership marketing prizes/promotions were cancelled, but plans were stored for next year's team.

Member Survey: Members who filled out the 2019 membership survey (a total of 64 responses and 80% of respondents being members or lapsed members) identified a lack of member-only events and activities. In the fall of 2019, the board began to reflect on its season and noted that it felt challenged to develop new programming without data-driven insights from members. The membership team took these insights and connected with other Canada East Region chapters to determine unique ways to engage local members and developed a suite of programming for the 2019-20 season. Afterwards, a brainstorm session was held between the marcom, website and membership team to develop clear and concise call-to-actions and event descriptions for events and determine fresh imagery, highlighting the free member-only perks. In 2020, the survey was re-deployed, and a total of 70 respondents filled out the survey and there was a positive increase in how members felt connected to the chapter. It was also interesting to note that the pandemic had not affected members' financial capabilities to be part of IABC, after prompted by a new section developed to determine members interests and ability to continue paying for a membership (WS#4).

Better Communication to Members: in October 2019 the membership team recommenced sending personalized emails to those who joined or renewed outlining the key activities of the chapter, where in previous years the chapter relied on International to do this communication work. To date positive feedback has been received from new members as they felt connected to their membership team. This remained a critical component of the 2020 communications strategy, particularly during the shift to digital programming.

Corporate Membership Strategy: Building on the momentum from the previous year, a dedicated member of the membership team sets up one-on-one meetings with the corporate member liaison interested in securing membership for their organization, and walked them through what they will have access to at a local level. This helped build trust with the chapter and connect our corporate members with a liaison.

Student Member Ambassador: An unofficial partnership with one of the colleges in Ottawa had been in the works for many years and it became official during the 2020 season. The membership team dedicated a volunteer on its team to better help students and young professionals understand the value of an IABC membership. During May 2020 a student intern was hired from the college to support a lack of student placements due to COVID-19. This strengthened the relationship between IABC and the college and supported a strong foundation to build on during the 2021/ season. A volunteer from the membership team was invited by the college to present to the new cohort of students to profile IABC Ottawa and the perks of being a member. Through this work, the volunteer was able to secure an entire college cohort as IABC Ottawa | Chapter Management Award Submission: Membership Marketing

new members in October 2020, increasing the IABC Ottawa membership by 111 members (approx. 45%).

**New Member-Only Events:** With the newness of Member Meet-Ups and Networking 9s, the chapter was seeing an increase in senior membership participation that it hadn't in years. With the switch to online programming due to COVID, the number of attendees grew 50% from previous years as it was easier for members to pop-in and network. At the start of the 2020 season themes were also applied to member-only events to help members dive deep on one topic, linking back to recommended topics members suggested in the survey distributed in the summer.

**Mentorship:** In 2019/20, the chapter continued its mentorship program, designed to connect senior communicators with entry and mid-level communicators to advise them on career advancement. The 2019/2020 program officially launched on January 1, 2020 and ran through to June 2020. Promoted through social media, dedicated eblasts, and the e-newsletter, a total of 6 mentees and 6 mentors completed the program. COVID made it challenging to replicate our programming, but we were able to successfully move to virtual connections and even managed to connect all pairs together with an event to discuss the value of mentorship and how to deepen their relationships with one another. Unfortunately we weren't able to distribute certificates like we had in previous years. Many continued their mentorship relationships beyond the program.

## 6. MEASUREMENT AND RESULTS

### **Objective A: Enhance visibility of member benefits and opportunities**

- Shared member benefits on Twitter, LinkedIn, Facebook, and Instagram page to multiplying audiences: (i) Twitter: 47791 followers (up from 4657) (ii) Facebook: 1301 followers (up from 1273) (iii) LinkedIn: 400 followers (up from 188) (iv) Instagram: 292 (up from 180). Showcased member benefits in 11 e-newsletters from July 2019 to Dec 2020 with growing number of subscribers (1410 subscribers up from 1379). Open rate was an average of 25%.
- Added chapter specific value proposition to new website.

### **Objective B: Retain 70% of members\***

Corporate Members: Three active corporate memberships as of December 2020

Total Membership: Sept 2019: 217 (5%); October 2019: 228 members (1% growth) (95% retention); November 2019: 236 members (1% growth) (95% retention); Dec 2019: 235 members (94% retention); January 2020: 302 members (1% growth) (95% retention) February 2020: 304 members (0.5% growth) (95% retention); March 2020: 304 members (no growth 100% retention); April 2020: 303 members (no growth) (99% retention); May 2020: 304 members (no growth) (100% retention); June 2020: 321 members (1% growth) (94% retention); September 2020: 285 members (no growth) (88% retention); October 2020: 285 members (no growth) (88% retention); November 2020: 268 members (no growth) (77% retention); December 2020: 264 members (no growth) (75% retention). \*Membership numbers were measured approx every month. Summer months are not measured as board transitions during this time. Noticed a general decline in membership consistent with other Canada East Region chapters as a result of COVID.

### **Objective C: Capitalize on key IABC moments to promote membership & offer new benefits**

- Membership month results: 1st globally (retention) for a large chapter & 3rd (growth) in Mar 2019, and 1st globally (growth) for large chapter for Oct 2019;
- Actively promoted World Conference, Catalyst Magazine, and National/International awards.

### **Objective D: Deepen the sense of membership community and prestige by providing members with tangible local benefits**

- Held seven member-only meet ups in the 2019/20 and 2020/21 season. Launched one new Networking 9 event in February 2020.
- Ran member-only mentorship program. Had 12 participants from February 2020 to June 2020.
- Enhanced communication efforts to members: updated content strategy, recommended direct email, updated member value proposition text.

### **Objective E: Feature IABC members & showcase contributions/accomplishments in the community**

- Wrote six member profiles in the 2019/20 and 2020/21 season to highlight members; recognized two members on social media for achieving their CMP certification between May 2019 and Oct 2020.
- Recognized four Silver Leaf and Gold Quill local winners via social media and e-newsletter.