

# IABC Greater Cincinnati: Communications Management

## Introduction to IABC Greater Cincinnati

IABC Greater Cincinnati is a small chapter (average mid- to high 40s in membership) within the US Heritage Region. For 42 years, we have been serving communicators in four counties of southwestern Ohio and three counties of northern Kentucky.

Our chapter has remained steady in membership and activities, and we have been recognized in the past for member retention.

## Goals and Objectives

IABC of Greater Cincinnati is one of at least five associations in the region available to professionals in the communications, marketing, advertising and related fields, which the board perceived as a challenge to membership growth, program participation and overall brand awareness of IABC a resource. When planning for the 2019 – 2020 program year, the chapter board established an overall goal of “Being Relevant in a Complex World,” a statement that encompassed both the chapter’s aspirations and the recognition of challenges facing professional organizations that must compete for the attention of members and prospects.

Board members identified communications management as a lynchpin of achieving this objective. The Communications Sub-committee, consisting of the Vice President of Communications, Chapter President and two other board members, met in the fall of 2019 to establish a specific strategy to promote the core message and support other efforts that ladder up to the main objective. As the year progressed and the pandemic forced the chapter to adapt its programming approach, the communications goals established earlier in the year remained in place as they continued to support the needs of the chapter and its members in this new environment.

The Communications Sub-committee identified the below goals that would help the chapter attain greater relevance in the Greater Cincinnati community.

- Promote better collaboration among the communications sub-committee by documenting processes and tools for chapter communication
- Evaluate and, as needed, update channels to ensure they are effectively reaching the appropriate audiences
- Coordinate website, email and social media content to support programs and other key messages through multiple touch points
- Create and disseminate content that is valuable to professional communicators and goes beyond promoting chapter events

## Budget

IABC of Greater Cincinnati has a very small budget for communications consisting only of hosting fees for the website. The chapter engaged volunteers and leveraged sponsorships to achieve most of the goals for 2019 – 2020. Web design and support and the newsletter tool are all provided as sponsorships from local companies. Due to switching hosting vendors, the chapter ended up saving \$400 year over year. We also saved nearly \$580 a year by eliminating Constant Contact and using a combination of Eventbrite and our newsletter tool, Cerkl, for email blasts and event management (both of which are free to us).

## Implementation

### Goal 1: Increase Collaboration and Documentation in Chapter

The Communications Sub-Committee created shared documents accessible by all board members that include URLs, passwords and instructions for accessing and updating LinkedIn, Twitter, website, newsletter, YouTube, etc. The committee members cross-trained others in the chapter to ensure no channel could be managed by just one person.

### Goal 2: Evaluate and Optimize Communication Channels

In 2019, IABC of Greater communicated with members and non-member communicators in the area through a website, newsletter, email blasts, Twitter and LinkedIn. The Communications Sub-Committee evaluated all of the channels and decided on specific improvements for each:

Channel	Opportunities Identified	Actions Taken
Website	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Update the site, which was more than 10 years old, built on WordPress and had become unstable.</li> <li>● Refresh the branding to align with IABC global standards.</li> <li>● Expand the scope of the content, which was focused mostly on events without a lot of “value-added” articles.</li> <li>● Connect the site to the newsletter platform, Cerkl, to save volunteer time and create consistency.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Sanger &amp; Eby, a local design firm, became a chapter sponsor and completed a total redesign and replatform of the site in February 2020.</li> <li>● Sanger &amp; Eby used IABC’s branding guidelines, including logo usage and color palette.</li> <li>● The new site was integrated with Cerkl, the newsletter platform, to slot content into the newsletter without manual intervention.</li> <li>● The Communications Sub-Committee developed a calendar to ensure the chapter published relevant and interesting content on a regular basis throughout the year.</li> <li>● The chapter incorporated new types of content, such as videos, to engage the audience and addressed current events through articles and messages from the Chapter President.</li> </ul>
LinkedIn	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Optimize exposure and post-sharing capabilities. (The group page settings prohibited members from sharing group posts to their connections.)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Created a company page (2/1/20) and deleted group page (2/22/20) to optimize sharing capabilities and maximize exposure.</li> <li>● Created a campaign on the group page to get members to follow the company page before it was deleted.</li> </ul>
Twitter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Define how and when Twitter would be used.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● The Social Media Manager established guidelines for using Twitter primarily to drive traffic to website and promote events.</li> </ul>
Facebook	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Relaunch the chapter’s Facebook presence for events.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● The chapter’s Facebook page had been dormant for several years based on previous perceptions that the channel was not effective for the audience. Given Facebook’s relatively new focus on promoting events, the board decided to start using Facebook again to announce and promote events.</li> </ul>
Newsletter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Improve the awareness of IABC as a resource by increasing the distribution list to additional professionals in the area.</li> <li>● Demonstrate value of membership through members-only content.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Anyone who participated in chapter programs was added to the newsletter distribution list.</li> <li>● The Communications Sub-committee reprioritized member news and job postings as a means of creating interest for readers.</li> <li>● Certain topics, like our year-end chapter recap, were reserved for members by using Cerkl’s segment filters.</li> </ul>
Email blasts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Simplify the email blast process by using automation available through the newsletter tool, Cerkl.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● In early 2020 the chapter moved from using Constant Contact for email blasts and event management. Instead, the chapter uses Eventbrite’s free event hosting, which also integrates directly into the chapter newsletter, thereby reducing additional work for volunteers and saving the chapter money.</li> </ul>

Program Surveys	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Move from paper to online surveys.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● The VP of Communications created post-event Survey Monkey surveys for each program and collated results.</li> </ul>
Other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Increase engagement by adding YouTube as a new channel incorporated into the website, newsletter and social media channels.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● The Communications Sub-committee created a YouTube channel and published a video series called “Relevant in a Complex World,” which interviewed area communications leaders.</li> </ul>

**Goal 3: Coordinate Channels**

For each topic and program, the Communications Sub-Committee established a cadence of communications and channels and maintained this consistency throughout the program year. Every event followed the same communications process as detailed below:

1. Eventbrite set up by program coordinator
2. Posting on website as “Spotlight” story
3. Email blast invitation to entire list by VP of Communications
4. LinkedIn, Twitter, and Facebook event posts by Social Media manager
5. Newsletter article until two days prior to event date (automatic through integration with Eventbrite)
6. Two email reminders to entire list by VP of Communications
7. For virtual events, pre-event message to registrants
8. Post-event message to registrants with link to event survey and additional resources as relevant
9. Follow-up articles and content in newsletter and on website

**Goal 4: Increase Value of Content**

IABC of Greater Cincinnati wanted to make sure that both members and non-members see IABC as a resource to support them in the profession. The chapter uses Cerkl to power its newsletter. Cerkl allows for the integration of RSS feeds from other sites. By adding RSS links to content from IABC international, Wylie Communications and other sources, important and useful information is automatically included in newsletters.

In addition, the chapter has consistently culled content from the Heritage Region to reinforce regional key messages.

**Measurement**

Measurement tactics depended on the objective. For collaboration, it was as simple as producing the completed documentation. For the other goals, the Communications Sub-Committee tracked the following:

- Twitter followers, retweets and likes
- Facebook followers, shares and reactions
- LinkedIn followers and engagement rate
- Email blast open rates
- Event registration
- Newsletter engagement
- Distribution list totals

Unfortunately, the new website did not initially include a means to monitor site traffic, though there are plans to implement Google Analytics in 2021. As such, we are not able to determine if traffic has increased on the website.

**Results**

IABC of Greater Cincinnati achieved all of its communications goals in the 2019 – 2020 chapter year. Although topics evolved due to the pandemic and other events, the chapter pushed forward with its communications strategy. As a result, the chapter reached more people than ever, and the audience became more diversified and more engaged. The efforts also laid the foundation for expanded programming and cross-organization partnerships planned for 2021. IABC of Greater Cincinnati did, indeed, become “Relevant in a Complex World” as the world itself became even more complex than the board imagined.

The chart below shows the pertinent results of the chapter’s other efforts to remain “Relevant in a Complex World” through the communications improvements described in the Implementation section.

<b>Increase documentation and collaboration</b>	
Created process documentation and content calendar	
<b>Evaluate and Optimize Communication Channels (7/1/19 – 12/31/20)</b>	
LinkedIn	2/1/20 to 12/31/20 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Followers: 161</li> <li>Engagement rate: 10.48%</li> </ul>
Twitter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Followers: 363</li> <li>Total impressions: 43,574</li> </ul>
Newsletter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increased distribution list by 21%               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>387 subscribers on July 1, 2019</li> <li>470 subscribers on December 31, 2020</li> </ul> </li> <li>69.8% of distribution list interacted with the newsletter</li> <li>24,187 total impressions</li> <li>57% click rate on newsletter articles</li> <li>23% newsletter open rate for entire time period               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increased open rate 4% (from 23% to 26%) in 2020</li> </ul> </li> <li>Only 18 opt-outs</li> <li>Published 278 pieces of content</li> </ul>
Email blasts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>26.9% average open rate for entire time period</li> <li>Increased average open rate 4% (from 25% to 29%) in 2020</li> </ul>
YouTube	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Channel launched in January 2020</li> <li>Seven videos posted with a total of 168 views</li> </ul>
<b>Coordinate Channels</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Used new process to promote eight events, the majority of which were virtual</li> <li>Between 15 and 55 participants at each event</li> </ul>	
<b>Increase Value of Content</b>	
Content from other sources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>5 RSS feeds incorporated into newsletter</li> <li>201 pieces of content came from outside contributors, accounting for 72% of all content</li> <li>66.4% of the audience interacted with content from outside sources</li> </ul>

## Work Samples

1. Communications Documentation and Content Calendar
2. New Chapter Website (<https://cincinnati.iabc.com/>)
3. Social Media Pages (Twitter, LinkedIn)
4. Sample Newsletter, powered by Cerkl