



**Break Through Communications Conference**  
**Presented by IABC Waterloo**  
**March 21, 2017**

**Introduction**

IABC Waterloo has been serving the Waterloo Region since 1983. We are a medium-sized chapter with around 115 members and serve Kitchener, Waterloo, Cambridge, Guelph and the surrounding areas.

Our members work in high-tech, insurance, education and a number of other industries. Member experience ranges from students and recent grads to those with well over 30 years of experience.

We communicate with our members via email approximately every four to six weeks about events and news within the chapter and International. Our mailing list also includes almost 50 non-members (either have chosen not to renew or just want to be in the know with chapter info). We do a member survey every year to gauge if we're hitting the mark with our PD offerings or if there is something we should be providing.

**Overview**

In 2016-17, IABC Waterloo took on the enormous challenge of holding a one-day conference for communicators in our Region. After a somewhat tumultuous board year in 2015-16, we knew that we needed something big to bring our members back to engage with us. After the success of our first IABC Waterloo Break Through Communications Conference, we knew that we had to up our game for 2018.

Nearing the end of the 2016-17 board year, the Board executive (VP, VP-Elect and President) decided to form a Conference Planning Committee introducing a Conference Director role to our board along with three supporting roles for the 2017-18 board year. During our first board planning meeting in September 2017, we decided to expand the conference to two tracks and add four more speakers to the lineup to make the 2018 conference bigger and better.

In 2017, we teamed up with students from the Conestoga College Bachelor of Public Relations program, but that wasn't an option in 2018. Although our board enjoyed working with the students, we decided against the partnership for 2018 for several reasons (Conestoga College did continue to be a sponsor of the conference) and went with the Break Through Conference Committee instead. In theory, this was a solid plan. Unfortunately, a college teacher strike side tracked our Conference Director (who is a college professor) and two members of the committee were unable to continue their roles after October (the third stayed on, but got a new job, moved to a new city in December and stepped down).

Waterloo's President and Vice-President then took the reigns to lead the planning of the conference. In 2017 we personally approached most of our speakers and accepted every speaker we got without asking for proposals. We were lucky that it turned out so well in hindsight. For 2018, we launched a call for speakers in November 2017 and had

all our speakers chosen by Christmas. We received 36 proposals for 10 spots (two keynotes and eight sessions). We were absolutely floored with the amount of interest we received and were sent some fantastic session topics to choose from.


Once our speakers were secured, we launched our brand-new conference website. This website featured all our speakers and enabled us to sell tickets directly using PayPal instead of Eventbrite (which takes a fee for every ticket sold). We also introduced an Early Bird ticket price after members requested it the year before. Early Bird tickets were the same price as 2017 tickets (\$149 for members and \$249 for non-members) and went up to \$199 for members and \$299 for non-members after a certain date. We sold 37 member tickets (59%) and 29 non-member tickets (41%) for a total of 66 tickets. Although we did not sell the 80 tickets we made available, we still made money on the conference which was one of our goals.

**Goals & Objectives**

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| Goals:  |
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Engage the Waterloo Region communications / PR community (members and non-members) in a targeted, high value professional development opportunity.</li><li>2. Promote the profile of IABC and the value of IABC membership within the Region, ultimately resulting in new members.</li><li>3. Expand the conference to two tracks and give attendees a choice between skills and strategy sessions</li><li>4. Gather at least 20 speaker submissions</li><li>5. Demonstrate fiscal responsibility through prudent management of expenses and a focus on cost recovery.</li></ol> |

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| Objectives:  |
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Deliver an event to attendees that gives them the skills and knowledge they need on-the-job, measured by at least 70% of attendees rating the event positively on a post-event survey.</li><li>2. Provide information to attendees on IABC membership and gain five new members.</li><li>3. Recruit a solid lineup of speakers and two keynotes to drive ticket sales.</li><li>4. Break even financially by selling at least 66% of tickets available.</li><li>5. Sell at least 35% of tickets to non-members to engage a new audience and make extra money on the per-ticket price.</li><li>6. Secure a minimum of \$1000 in sponsorship as well as \$500 value in gifts in-kind to offset expenditures.</li></ol> |

**Budget**

|   |  |                            |                       |
|---|--|----------------------------|-----------------------|
|  <b>International Association<br/>of Business Communicators<br/>Waterloo</b> |  |                            |                       |
|   |  | <i>AS AT June 30, 2018</i> |                       |
|   |  | <b>Prior<br/>Year</b>      | <b>Actual<br/>YTD</b> |
| <b>Revenue</b>  |  |                            |                       |
| Ticket Sales  |  | 13,960                     | 13,981                |
| Sponsorship   |  | 710                        | 1,000                 |
| <b>Total revenue</b>  |  | <b>14,670</b>              | <b>14,981</b>         |
| <b>Expenses</b>   |  |                            |                       |
| Venue/Food  |  | 6,870                      | 8,935                 |
| Speaker   |  | 2,446                      | -                     |
| Website   |  | -                          | 300                   |
| Marketing   |  | 529                        | 336                   |
| Other   |  | 266                        | 108                   |
| <b>Total expenses</b>   |  | <b>10,112</b>              | <b>9,680</b>          |
| <b>Net earnings</b>   |  | <b>4,558</b>               | <b>5,301</b>          |

The seed money for this event was \$10,000. However, the goal was cost recovery (break even) so that in the end we aimed to make back this \$10,000 investment. We exceeded this goal, banking \$5,301 after expenses. In-kind donations from Descendants Brewery reduced our expenses by not having to purchase speaker gifts. We were able to reuse our signage from the year before, but due to a larger venue, we also purchased two new signs (branding and directional) as well. We chose a more expensive venue, but also decided that we were not going to pay speakers this year, so that almost balanced out those two lines of the budget. The President printed agendas and attendee surveys at her place of work saving us some money as well. We spent some money on social promotion for the call for speakers as well as ticket sales

before the Early Bird deadline and the final ticket deadline 10 days before the event.

**Implementation**

We formed a four-person conference committee lead by a Conference Director. Unfortunately, the Conference Director became side tracked with her job and in November 2017, she let us know that she had to step away from the position until January 2018 (and even in January, she didn't jump back in charge, she only offered us assistance if needed). Members of the committee became unengaged when the Conference Director didn't engage with them and by the time the President took over the committee in November two had checked out. The third person stayed on to help but got a new job in another city and had to step down in December.

Once the President took over the conference, the first thing we tackled was the call for speakers. The previous year all speakers were from personal asks, so this was a new process for us. We used a Google Form and blasted the promotion out through our newsletter, social media and through any other Canada East Region (CER) chapter that would help promote it. We had two goals with speaker proposals: get at least 20 submissions and have speakers from outside of the Waterloo Region on the program.

Once the call for speakers was up, we moved on to creating a conference website. This task was led by our VP. The development of the website was complete by the time we had the speakers lined up and it went live in early January to start selling our Early Bird tickets.

Leading up to the conference date in March, the whole IABC Waterloo Board was called in to promote the conference to try and sell more tickets. The Board was asked to like and share all social posts and talk about the event with their network of communications and marketing people in the Region. It was an excellent team effort and working toward this shared goal was highly motivating for the board.

There were many lessons learned:

We believe we made the right decision to not partner with the PR students from Conestoga College for a second year. A college strike pushed the start of the second semester back almost a month, so we wouldn't have been able to work with the students until February and by then, almost everything was done for the planning stages.

The forming of the Conference Committee was a good idea in theory, but not in implementation. The people who were placed on the Conference Committee had applied for other board roles and weren't as engaged when they found out they weren't full board members. The Conference Director was side-tracked with the college strike and was unable to dedicate herself to the role once the strike happened. This meant our President and VP had to move into planning roles without a Conference Director and the entire committee before the call for speakers had even gone out. For 2019 we have recruited a Conference Director to lead the planning and board members will support her within their own portfolios.

We also realized that although we have many members who live and work in Cambridge, a majority live and work in Kitchener-Waterloo and some did not want to travel to Cambridge during rush hour. We have moved the conference back to Kitchener-Waterloo for 2019.

### **Event Summary**

The theme ***Break Through*** that we envisioned in 2017 and will continue with going forward was twofold:

1. How can communicators break through the noise and static of our industry and communication climate?
2. How can communicators break through to the next stage or opportunity in their careers and/or break through career obstacles and challenges (regardless of their career stage)?

The event took place at the Cambridge Mill in downtown Cambridge, Ontario. The venue is very popular in the region and offered us the ability to host a two-track conference using two of their larger rooms. The Cambridge Mill is a stunning venue and has an excellent reputation for food as well. We knew this would be a great follow-up venue to the Walper Hotel where we had the first conference, the year before.

The day was broken up into 10 sessions:

- opening keynotes;
- eight workshop speakers (four per track with two happening from each track at the same time);
- a closing keynote.

A light breakfast, lunch and morning and afternoon snacks were also included.

Our full speaker lineup and session topics can be seen on [www.iabcbreakthrough.com](http://www.iabcbreakthrough.com) and the basic lineup is attached via pdf.

We put 80 tickets up for sale, based on the capacity of the main room and our desire to set up both rooms with tables in half rounds so attendees would be able to take notes. We ended up selling 66 tickets, giving free tickets to the 10 speakers, inviting one person from both Conestoga College and McMaster to talk about their programs, and the VP and President attended for free bringing our total attendee number to 80.

We sold 21 member early bird tickets and 16 regular price tickets. We sold 4 non-member early bird tickets and 25 regular price tickets.

Board members were given a significant discount and only paid \$80 which was the venue’s per person cost.

**Promotion**

Promotion for this event was done via social media and newsletter, but we also did considerable personal and community outreach and tapped into Conestoga College’s alumni network.

We used our social media channels (Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn and Instagram) to promote the conference starting with the call for speakers right up until the close of ticket sales 10 days before the event. We continued to talk about the conference leading up to, during and after the event to continue the hype and share information with those who couldn’t join us.

We sent reminders via email to our mailing list and added information on the conference to every monthly newsletter from December to March, with a recap post on April.

We also e-mailed several thousand graduates of marketing, PR and business programs from Conestoga College using the Conestoga College’s email system through our Past President’s connection to the school. This cross-promotion significantly boosted our profile.

**Attendance**

We sold 66 tickets to make our ticket total \$13,836. Everyone who registered showed up the day of the conference.

We did a large social media push, but most of our success came from personal asks and people who attended the first year talking to their friends in the industry.

**Profitability**

*Tickets* – Early Bird member tickets were \$149 and non-member tickets were \$249. Full-price tickets were \$199 for members and \$299 for non-members. We wanted to make this event attractive to members by making their ticket price significantly lower giving value for membership. We wanted to sell 35% of the total tickets to non-members because the higher ticket price would help us recoup what we had spent on the event faster. We ended up having 59% members and 41% non-member attendees, which meant we made more money than our original goal.

| <b>Ticket type</b> | <b>Amount sold</b> | <b>Percentage</b> |
|--------------------|--------------------|-------------------|
| Member tickets     | 37                 | 59%               |
| Non-member tickets | 29                 | 41%               |

*Sponsorship* – we did not prioritize sponsorship beyond track sponsors and speaker gifts. We were able to reuse signs from the year before and print other materials at our places of work. We continued our relationship with Conestoga College and McMaster University this year even without session speakers from both institutions. With the Conference Committee being dissolved, we did not have a person dedicated to sponsorship and were very happy with the sponsors and in-kind gifts we received. Even without someone dedicated to sponsorship, we were able to raise more than the year before which help offset our costs as well. In 2019, our board Sponsorships Director will be taking the reigns for this part of the conference and our hope is to have more sponsors, both monetary and in-kind.

| <b>Sponsors</b>   | <b>Sponsorship</b>                 |
|-------------------|------------------------------------|
| Conestoga College | \$500 Track Sponsor                |
| Descendants Beer  | Speaker gifts at \$25 x 10 (\$250) |

|   |                     |
|---|---------------------|
| McMaster University Master of Communications Management | \$500 Track Sponsor |
|---|---------------------|

**Website**

For this year’s conference we launched a separate conference website for many reasons. The two main reasons were so that we could feature information on all the speakers and so we could sell tickets directly using PayPal. In 2017 we used Eventbrite to sell tickets and lost a significant amount of money to their fees system.

[www.iabcbreakthrough.com](http://www.iabcbreakthrough.com) was created using a Word Press template that would allow us to use video and lots of photos along with information to draw in visitors. The ticket purchasing system was quick and easy and although we had to purchase the website template and PayPal plug-in, we still saved money over using Eventbrite because their per ticket fees are so high.

One of our board members created a video to play on the website and we were able to use that video on other social channels as well.

\*The Break Through website will be wiped and edited to have 2019 information between Christmas and New Years once we have our new speaker lineup.

**Measurement**

We can classify the conference as a tremendous success based on achievement of our stated objectives. (See Results below.)

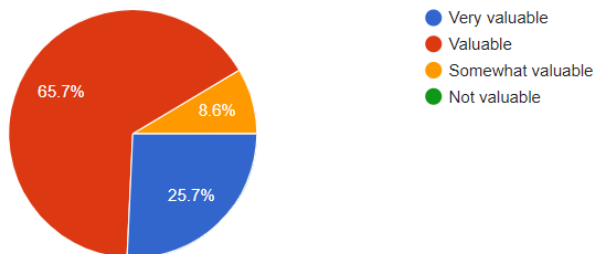
Our primary measurement comes from our event survey.

**Survey**

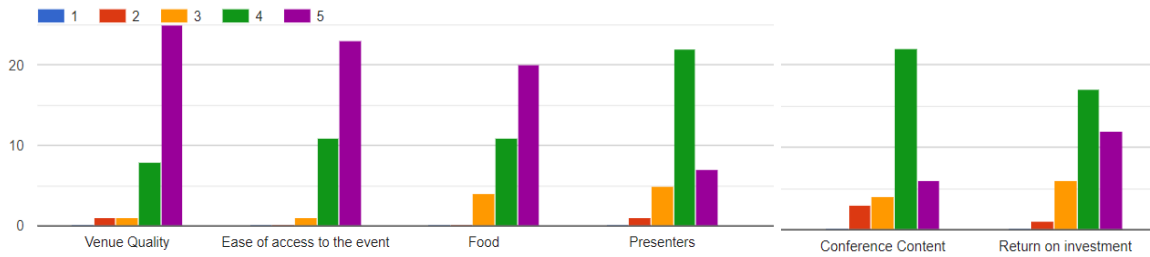
The post-conference survey was sent out via email during the last session of the day. We had 35/66 people fill out the survey for a 53% completion rate. Results indicated we met and exceeded our objectives. We measured value of the event, overall satisfaction with the event and whether attendees would return next year:

5. How valuable did you find the information presented at Break Through?

35 responses

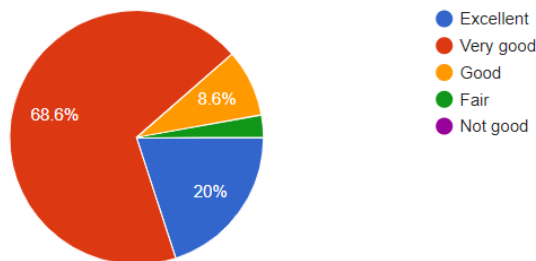


8. Overall, how satisfied were you with the following? (5 being the highest)



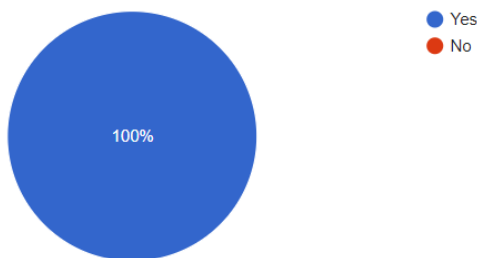
9. Overall, how would you rate this event?

35 responses



10. Will you attend a similar IABC event in the future?

35 responses



**Results**

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <p>Engage the Waterloo Region communications / PR community (members and non-members) in a targeted, high value professional development opportunity.</p> | <p>Using our new website, we were able to have a direct link to conference information (something we were missing last year). This enabled us to showcase our speakers, topics and venue earlier and more often than the previous year. We sold 83% of the tickets we made available.</p> <p>The survey data from the event shows that 88.6% of people rated the conference Excellent or Very Good as a PD opportunity. 91.4% thought the content was Valuable or Very Valuable. 100% answered that they would attend the following year.</p> |
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IABC Waterloo – 2019 Chapter Management Awards  
Entry Category: Professional Development

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|--|--|
| Promote the profile of IABC and the value of IABC membership within the Region, ultimately resulting in new members. | We sold more tickets to members than non-members this year. Some of the member tickets were to people who were non-members at last year’s conference which was great to see. Pricing member tickets at a significantly lower rate than non-member tickets gave current members value for their IABC membership. We gained two new members as a result of this conference and reengaged with a lapsed corporate member (a major local insurance company). |
| Expand the conference to two tracks and give attendees a choice between skills and strategy sessions                 | We were able to recruit enough speakers in certain disciplines that we could expand the conference to two tracks. This gave attendees the choice to go to either skills or strategy sessions or mix and match between the two streams. This was positively received by all attendees and we will continue this dual track conference layout in 2019.   |
| Gather at least 20 speaker submissions   | We received 36 submissions to speak at the conference from doing a good amount of free and paid promotion. We were very happy with this amount and even have some people we would like to approach for the 2019 conference.  |
| Demonstrate fiscal responsibility through prudent management of expenses and a focus on cost recovery.               | Through sponsorship and in-kind donations, reusing materials from the 2017 conference and printing agendas at our places of work, we were able to keep expenses low for the event. Because we had Early Bird tickets, we were able to raise the regular ticket price and make more per ticket (especially from non-members). We are happy to report that we more than broke even, we made a decent profit of \$5,301, which exceeded our expectations.   |

**Next Steps**

Planning for Break Through 2019 is already well underway. We took feedback from attendees and are moving the conference back to Kitchener-Waterloo (from Cambridge in 2018) and believe that simple step will help sell-out the 2019 event. We are holding it at the Inn of Waterloo which is close to the highway for out of city attendees and is located in the technology hub in Waterloo. We are continuing with the dual track conference and our call for speakers is currently receiving applications.

We are also allotting a portion of last year’s proceeds towards an educational bursary for students at Conestoga College, Wilfrid Laurier University and University of Waterloo to attend the conference. We will support two students to attend the conference free of charge. We believe this is a fantastic opportunity for students to learn from and with marketing and communications professionals. This is a terrific way for IABC Waterloo to give back, build profile and increase future membership among the next generation of aspiring communications professionals.