



International Association
of Business Communicators
Waterloo

IABC Waterloo: Chapter Events

Lead Like a Pro—Senior Communication Leader Power Panel

Work Plan

In the past five years, IABC Waterloo, a small chapter, has provided value to many young communicators and mid-career professionals. Since our inception in 1983, we have had many long-standing members. Most of them are senior communicators who have “lost touch” with the chapter. They are still on our mailing list, they follow our social media channels, but they rarely come out to our events.

In short, we struggled to find meaningful ways to engage them. Therefore, when we kicked off our 2019-2020 board year, one of our member engagement strategies is hosting one event targeting senior communicators.

Goals and Objectives

Our goal is to re-engage senior communicators. Simply put, we want to get many senior communicators out to one event to increase their visibility and rekindle their connection with the chapter.

Senior communicators’ participation is key to our chapter’s success. As experienced professionals, they bring unique perspectives and valuable lived experience to the IABC community. They are the role models our young communicators look up to, and in some cases, work with.

Active participation of senior communicators create rich connections, valuable mentoring and job opportunities. They are also the key drivers in developing the next generation strategic communicators.

However, in our previous survey, many senior communicators expressed that they don’t find value in coming to our events. In most cases, they are approached for job opportunities by other event participants.

So we set an objective to design an event that’s valuable for senior communicators to participate, where they will see a lot of their peers.

Implementation

1) Event strategy

Format

Collectively, our board decided to invite several senior communication leaders from different industries to share their experience as panelists. The panel format allows the panelists to be treated as experts, shares their wisdom in a relatively relaxed environment, and provides inspiration and learning opportunities for younger communicators and their fellow senior communications.

Our board made a list of communication leaders to reach out to, representing different industries in the region: private sector, not-for-profit, education and government, etc. Most of the leaders we contacted generously agreed to join. Within two weeks, we settled on four panelists. One leader who couldn't be the panelist generously offered to be the moderator, adding icing on the cake. Puff, our super panel was formed!

Theme

What should the panel discuss? Instead of determining the theme ourselves, we assigned one of our board members, a senior communicator, to ask the panelists and moderator suggestions. Each of them provided valuable suggestions. Several email exchanges later, we have a theme— leading as a communicator, and key topics for discussion: effective team, trust and empowerment.

2) Event marketing

Venue

To match the high profile of the event, we wanted to find a place that's central, chic and modern. The Centre for International Governance Innovation, located in a refurbished historical building in uptown Waterloo, checked all the boxes.

Promotion

The event was scheduled for the end of February 2020. Due to senior communicators' busy schedule, we started discussing and preparing for this event in November 2019, giving us enough time to book the panelists and promote the event.

Once the venue and date was determined, we started promoting the event at the beginning of February on all our social channels with engaging visuals of the panellist photos and bios and blasted it via our newsletter.

Our board members emailed the event details to their own network, adding a personal touch and importance to the event.

3) Event management

Every board member contributed to this event. Our Membership Director was the liaison between the board and the panelists, who did a phenomenal job fine tuning every detail and keeping everyone on track with the progress. Our Vice-President and Event Director secured the venue and ordered food and drinks. Our Social Media Director did a fantastic job creating engaging posts on all social media channels. Our Communication Director sent out a newsletter to promote the event. Our Sponsorship Director secured terrific prizes for the event, adding extra draws for people to sign up. It was indeed teamwork!

Budget

We usually break even on our events. Considering the event's high profile, we decided to put more money on renting the venue and speaker gifts instead of on the food and drinks. Most people will be drawn by the profile of the panelists, not on food.

Our Sponsorship Director did a great job convincing some local businesses to donate gifts for our events in exchange for social promotion. Due to the well-attended event, in the end, we managed to break even on this event.

Measurement

Despite an impending snowstorm on the day of the event, and a last-minute drop out of one panelist due to a car accident, we had more than 30 people attend the event. 11 members, 14 non-members registered, and several people showed up without pre-registration.

It was one of our most attended events, surpassing our average participants' number of 15 to 20 people per event. There was also a mixture of demographic of attendees: one third are senior communicators, one third are mid-career communicators, and the rest are a mixture of students, business owners, consultants, etc.

Our total member is at around 65. The participation and engagement rate of the event was high. The panelists shared their experience – challenges and success stories, in pure candour. The audience asked many questions during the panel discussion and after the networking portion of the event.

Overall, we were proud to pull this event off and reached our goal. Unaware of the time, this was also our last in-person event before COVID-19.