

# **IABC Wellington**

## **Events Management work plan 2018**

### **6 December 2018**

#### **Key highlights**

- Significantly raised awareness of IABC Wellington events with 4,197 page views of Eventbrite registration pages for IABC Wellington events in 2018, compared to 2,512 in 2017
- Improved gender diversity of speakers with 61% women in 2018, compared to 64% men in 2017 and 59% men in 2016
- Significantly improved the financial position of events, our largest expense. Income for events in 2018 totalled \$15,530.70; expenditure was \$15,649.41; leaving a shortfall of only \$118. This compares to income for events in 2017 of \$15,955.48; expenditure of \$19,546.31, with a shortfall of \$3,590.83.
- Maintained level of event registrations – 609, compared to 685 in 2017 and 389 in 2016
- Increased number of events held – 14, up from 13 in 2017 and 12 in 2016
- Built upon success of diversified approach to events by introducing interactive events, holding two workshops and responding to 2017 feedback by tweaking our boardroom lunch series

#### **Context**

Wellington is the capital of New Zealand and its activity is centred on government, as well as the creative industries.

IABC Wellington is a medium-sized chapter, (re)-established in 2007 after losing membership and winding up in the late 1990s as a result of the economic downturn and associated foreign exchange fluctuation. Currently it has a membership of 126 senior communicators and a reach of approximately 530 drawn largely from the public, private and not for profit sectors, agencies and freelancers.

In 2017, IABC Wellington celebrated its 10th anniversary with a significantly boosted events calendar and dedicated celebrations. This created a lot of hype, with positive results. Membership numbers grew during 2017. The audience on our social media channels increased by 40%. That same year, IABC Wellington introduced a 'Future of Communications' programme of events and video resources on how technology is changing the profession. This programme showed strong thought leadership. We held an upscale end of year event at a premium theatre-style venue, and a celebration mid-year at the residence of the British High Commissioner to New Zealand.

After such a strong year in 2017, the challenge for IABC Wellington was that events needed to maintain momentum during 2018. Our events needed to continue to prove the value of membership to the chapter's new wider audience, continue to demonstrate thought leadership, and provide speakers that were appealing and relevant.

## **Events management overview**

A strong local events programme has long been one of the key characteristics of IABC Wellington. It is a drawcard for members and has come to be something they rely on. Our members expect us deliver a variety of relevant events throughout the year.

The events programme is important for our offering, given our market. With New Zealand isolated by distance, culture and time zone from a significant proportion of IABC international member benefit activity (such as webinars and professional development courses), IABC Wellington chapter's deliberate focus has traditionally been on delivering value through excellent events that complement the international network and resources.

The standard programme comprises between eight and ten evening events spread over ten months of the year (avoiding the Christmas period and summer holidays) on a range of timely and topical themes. We used international, regional and local speakers to create brand value for IABC in the Wellington communications community, to deliver member value, and to help us grow membership among non-member attendees in our target market of senior strategic communications advisors.

We compete for market share in Wellington with three other professional communications organisations and several specialist or not-for-profit groups. Our events programme jostles for attention alongside theirs at the risk of saturation and brand confusion. To distinguish IABC Wellington, we have long positioned ourselves selectively at the senior end of the communications profession, focusing on the values in our name: international and business, characteristics that are not the domain of our competitors. This positioning provides a point of difference, and guides our event programme.

Individual events typically run at a loss or break-even, with most being offered free to members. Our events programme is therefore heavily subsidised by \$10,000 worth of annual cash sponsorship from two premium sponsors – plus individual event sponsorship by key partners and a dedicated catering sponsor – and a small proportion of member fees.

Despite the competitive environment, and the tight financial model, our core events programme of evening seminars is well established, having been strategically considered, and developed in response to member preferences and event feedback. The format allows for networking between senior communications professionals and their colleagues over drinks and canapes, and for professional development through a reputable speaker and subsequent discussion. Sessions are well attended, and registration numbers vary. Each event typically attracts between 40 and 80 registrations, with an even mix of members and non-members. A more popular event may attract up to 100 attendees. A niche event, around 40-50.

At our board strategy session in late November 2017 we considered our programme for 2018 and it became clear that our 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary year and the introduction of our Future of Communications series would be tough to top! During 2017 we delivered a record-breaking events agenda that included distinctive and special events. It was a significant increase in activity and a lot of work for the board. We were concerned about how to maintain momentum during 2018 without having repetition or creating fatigue among our volunteer board members.

Events remains our largest category of expenditure – income for events in 2018 totalled \$15,530.70; expenditure was \$15,649.41; leaving a shortfall of \$118.

### **Strategy**

For the 2018 calendar year, the IABC Wellington board strategy was to advance the profession, create connection and develop strategic communicators; with a theme of how 'comms is critical' guiding our activities.

### **Goals and objectives**

Our goal was to maintain momentum, deliver a strong programme of diversified events with appealing and relevant speakers, while demonstrating thought leadership and breaking even financially.

To achieve this goal, our specific objectives were to:

- **Improve the diversity of our event speakers** with at least 50% women
- **Improve the appeal of event speakers** with more speakers from outside Wellington and at least one event with a high profile speaker
- **Improve the awareness of our events** with an increase in Eventbrite page views
- **Maintain the number of attendees** at our events
- **Maintain the number of events held** in the course of the year to ensure brand presence for IABC in a competitive market, while maintaining consistent event attendance and avoiding 'event fatigue'
- **Diversify the events we offer** by introducing interactive events and holding more workshops
- **Host IABC Global Chair** to position the IABC brand strongly with members and non-members and to provide a high quality professional development opportunity
- **Improve overall financial position** by breaking event on events

### **Measurement**

We measure the effectiveness of our event programme through a mix of output and outcome through qualitative and quantitative, means including:

- Number of events held
- Attendance at events
- Willingness of sponsors to continue sponsorship beyond a single event or on an annual basis
- Profit/loss position for events
- Annual member survey feedback
- Eventbrite page views
- Informal feedback
- Membership retention
- Overall financial position

### **Budget**

We increased the non-member ticket price from NZ\$30 to NZ\$45 in 2018 for regular evening events, which improved our earnings. We also increased all pricing for our Budget event from NZ\$30 for members to NZ\$40, and from NZ\$45 for non-members to NZ\$65 for non-members. Despite the increased pricing, registration numbers were maintained.

In 2017 we had one successful workshop where we charged a high ticket price of early bird NZ\$400 for members and NZ\$550 for non-members, and regular pricing of NZ\$500 for members and NZ\$650 for non-members. By holding two workshops at a high ticket price in 2018, we brought in significant amounts of cash.

Our 'Developing measurably effective communications strategies' workshop sold out with early bird pricing of NZ\$199 for members (six tickets sold) and NZ\$248 for non-members (seven tickets sold). Our 'Stronger strategy for communication professionals' workshop sold out with a mixture of member and non-member tickets at both early bird and regular pricing. The early bird prices were NZ\$599 for members (seven tickets sold) and NZ\$699 for non-members (five tickets sold), and regular prices were NZ\$699 for members (three tickets sold) and NZ\$799 for non-members (two tickets sold). The early bird pricing structure encouraged people to buy tickets before the 'regular' pricing became effective, creating a sense of urgency.

We were conservative in purchasing of beverages and catering for events, and all but one of the venues we used for events were free of charge. Most venues were workplaces where board members were employed or the premises of our sponsors.

## Implementation

- Evening seminars
  - February: Wellington Mayor Justin Lester (85 registered, 700 page views)
  - March: The Spinoff: Smart, funny, provocative media (95 registered, 559 page views)
  - April: Strategic female communications (41 registered, 624 page views)
  - May: Budget night exclusive with Bernard Hickey (57 registered, 338 page views)
  - July: Comms quandaries: interactive event (43 registered, 366 page views)
  - August: The inside word: Prime Minister's Press Secretary (81 registered, 405 page views)
  - September: Building influence at the top table (interactive event) (45 registered, 160 page views)
  - October: DIA's award-winning promotion of He Tohu exhibition (Gold Quill winner) (31 registered, 269 page views)
  - November: Unlocking emotional connection to build brand trust (65 registered, 256 page views)
- Boardroom lunch
  - Transpower Chief Executive on confronting our energy future (9 registered)
  - Air New Zealand head of communications Marie Hosking (16 registered)
  - Wayne Eagleson, former Chief of Staff to former Prime Minister John Key (11 registered)
- Workshop
  - Measurement with Angela Sinickas (13 registered, 178 page views)
  - Stronger strategy for communications professionals (17 registered, 342 page views)
- Total = 14 events in 2018

### ***Evening event programme***

The evening seminar remains the core of our events programme offer. We aim for one seminar every 1-2 months. Speakers are drawn from local and national organisations with topical stories of communications challenges and best practice. Two evening seminars are pillar events in the annual programme with reliably strong interest - our February AGM which featured a high profile speaker (the mayor of Wellington in 2018, in 2017 it was the Chief Press Secretary to a former Prime Minister) and the Government Budget Day event with political economist Bernard Hickey (of keen interest to Wellington senior communicators).

*Audience:* senior communications advisers, corporate communications managers, sponsors

*Attendee numbers:* 40-100 (approximately half members)

*Pricing:* Members generally free, non-members NZ\$45 (up from NZ\$30 previously). Associated costs are covered by supplier discount arrangements and individual event sponsorships.

### ***Speakers/topics:***

- February: Wellington Mayor Justin Lester (85 registered, 700 page views)
- March: The Spinoff: Smart, funny, provocative media (95 registered, 559 page views)
- April: Strategic female communications (41 registered, 624 page views)
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### ***Boardroom lunch series***

In 2017, continuing a sponsorship agreement with executive recruitment company Jackson Stone and Partners, we held 4 invitation-only boardroom lunch and learn sessions. This series, piloted in November 2015 with an event led by IABC Global Chair Michael Ambjorn, is a boardroom table format, targeting those executive directors and general managers for communications who have influence over their team. Topics are selected according to feedback on the greatest challenges for communications managers, and speakers are typically a Chief Executive, along with their strategic communications advisor. These events are an opportunity for free and frank discussion in the room and as such are limited to 20 attendees. Invitees arrive from 12.30pm for lunch and conversation for a 1pm start round table discussion, closing over coffee by 2pm.

These events are a very useful sales tool for membership as we invite the heads of communications, who find the events valuable - they are then encouraged to see value in IABC Wellington membership for their teams as they found it personally valuable too.

While these events were successful in 2017, we found one or two people always failed to arrive at lunch time due to the nature of communications jobs - issues emerge during the day or arise unexpectedly. We changed the time of these events in 2018 to breakfast, before the work day has begun, and found attendance was more reliable.

In 2018 we held fewer of these events, with very high profile speakers, and carefully selected guest lists.

*Audience:* General managers, managing partners, communications directors

*Attendee numbers:* 10-20 (approximately 50 percent members)

*Pricing:* Free. Associated costs are fully covered by sponsorship.

*Speakers:*

- Transpower Chief Executive on confronting our energy future (9 registered)
- Air New Zealand head of communications Marie Hosking (16 registered)
- Wayne Eagleson, former Chief of Staff to former Prime Minister John Key (11 registered)

### **Workshops**

In 2017 we offered one workshop, on leadership with international speaker Adrian Cropley. We found that people were willing to pay several hundred dollars for a strong learning opportunity with a respected speaker/facilitator. We charged a high ticket price of early bird NZ\$400 for members and NZ\$550 for non-members, and regular pricing of NZ\$500 for members and NZ\$650 for non-members.

Following the success of the 2017 workshop, we doubled the number of workshops we offered to two in 2018.

*Audience:* Mid-senior career level communications practitioners

*Attendee numbers:* Approximately 15, small enough for interaction and relationship building

*Pricing:* Our 'Developing measurably effective communications strategies' half day workshop sold out with early bird pricing of NZ\$199 for members (six tickets sold) and NZ\$248 for non-members (seven tickets sold). Our 'Stronger strategy for communication professionals' full day workshop sold out with a mixture of member and non-member tickets at both early bird and regular pricing. The early bird prices were NZ\$599 for members (seven tickets sold) and NZ\$699 for non-members (five tickets sold), and regular prices were NZ\$699 for members (three tickets sold) and NZ\$799 for non-members (two tickets sold). The early bird pricing structure encouraged people to buy tickets before the 'regular' pricing became effective, creating a sense of urgency.

*Speakers/Facilitators:*

- Developing measurably effective communications strategies with Angela Sinickas (13 registered, 178 page views)
- Stronger strategy for communications professionals with Professor Stephen Cummings (17 registered, 342 page views)

## **Event engagement and communication**

To ensure maximum engagement by members in our events programme, and reach to non-members we take a multi-channel approach with a mix of mass and targeted communication. We use our website [www.iabcwellington.co.nz](http://www.iabcwellington.co.nz) as the source of current event information, and maintain a database of just over 530 Wellington communicators (including members) to whom we email event information directly, and also through our monthly e-newsletter.

To supplement this mass marketing, we target particular individuals and organisations to engage them directly depending on the topic and audience, through our member list and our own networks. In particular, we use the boardroom breakfast series as a means to engage communications directors with influence over their teams, to encourage their staff to attend upcoming events. We also invite our corporate members directly through their point of contact.

We use sponsors, like-minded organisations and other communications organisations such as the network of public sector communicators, and the Government Social Network to cross-promote relevant events. We also cross promote through IABC Auckland and Christchurch communications channels in case their members are coming through the capital.

## **Challenges**

The environment for membership and sponsorship in Wellington is challenging, with employment and financial conditions constrained, and a competitive market among communications organisations. Wellington is a government town and a high proportion of communicators work in the public sector. Agencies are increasingly working within capped budgets and headcount, and professional memberships can be hard to retain. New sponsorships are hard to secure.

There are three other players in the communications association space in Wellington: the Public Relations Institute of New Zealand, the Network of Public Sector Communicators, and the Internal Communications Network. All these associations are also competing for market share, brand position, reputation and sponsorship in the small Wellington environment. We have had to be mindful that our requests for support, particularly with recruitment agencies or communications suppliers, do not conflict or cut across support agreements for other associations. We have to be careful that we do not saturate the market in terms of event offerings, and that we do not conflict in terms of speaker, themes and dates.

Our 2017 success was always going to be hard to beat given the record breaking events agenda and the high calibre of speakers. It was a significant increase in activity and a lot of work for the board. We were concerned about how to maintain momentum during 2018 without having repetition or creating fatigue among our volunteer board members.

## **Results**

In a tight and competitive environment, we nonetheless had considerable success with our event programme in 2018.

We held two interactive events and held two workshops to advance the profession, create connection and develop strategic communicators.

- Significantly raised awareness of IABC Wellington events with 4,197 page views of Eventbrite registration pages for IABC Wellington events in 2018, compared to 2,512 in 2017
- Improved gender diversity of speakers with 61% women in 2018, compared to 64% men in 2017 and 59% men in 2016
- Significantly improved the financial position of events, our largest expense. Income for events in 2018 totalled \$15,530.70; expenditure was \$15,649.41; leaving a shortfall of only \$118. This compares to income for events in 2017 of \$15,955.48; expenditure of \$19,546.31, with a shortfall of \$3,590.83.
- Maintained level of event registrations – 609, compared to 685 in 2017 and 389 in 2016
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By asking our audience what they want, building a strong proposition, establishing and maintaining strong relationships, responding to member feedback and remaining professional and ethical at all times, we have achieved outstanding reputational and financial results.

<p>Improve the diversity of our event speakers with at least 50% women</p>	<p><b>Exceeded</b>  <b>Benchmark:</b> At least 50% women speakers.  <b>Measure:</b> 61% women in 2018, compared to 64% men in 2017 and 59% men in 2016</p>
<p>Improve the appeal of event speakers with at least two speakers from outside Wellington and at least one event with a high profile speaker</p>	<p><b>Exceeded</b>  <b>Benchmark:</b> At least 2x speakers from outside Wellington, at least 1x high profile speaker  <b>Measure:</b> 5x speakers from outside Wellington including 2x international (Alex Casey from Auckland from The Spinoff, Toby Manhire from Auckland from The Spinoff, Angela Sinickas from USA for measurement workshop, Ginger Homan from USA for increasing influence interactive event, Marie Hosking from Auckland from Air New Zealand). 6x high</p>



	<p>profile speakers (Alex Casey and Toby Manhire from The Spinoff, Marie Hosking from Air New Zealand, Bernard Hickey for Budget event, Prime Minister's press secretary, former Prime Minister's Chief of Staff).</p>
<p>Improve the awareness of our events with a 20% increase in Eventbrite page views</p>	<p><b>Exceeded</b>  <b>Benchmark:</b> 20% increase on 2,512 Eventbrite page views in 2017  <b>Measure:</b> 4,197 Eventbrite page views in 2018, a 40% increase</p>
<p>Maintain the number of attendees at our events</p>	<p><b>Met</b>  <b>Benchmark:</b> 685 attendees in 2017  <b>Measure:</b> 609 attendees in 2018</p>
<p>Maintain the number of events held in the course of the year to ensure brand presence for IABC in a competitive market, while maintaining consistent event attendance and avoiding 'event fatigue'</p>	<p><b>Exceeded</b>  <b>Benchmark:</b> 13 events in 2017  <b>Measure:</b> 14 events in 2018</p>
<p>Diversify the events we offer by introducing interactive events and holding more workshops</p>	<p><b>Exceeded</b>  <b>Benchmark:</b> 0 interactive events and 1 workshop in 2017  <b>Measure:</b> 2 interactive events and 2 workshops in 2018</p>
<p>Host IABC Global Chair to position the IABC brand strongly with members and non-members and to provide a high quality professional development opportunity</p>	<p><b>Met</b>  <b>Benchmark:</b> IABC Global Chair visit in 2017 (Sharon Hunter)  <b>Measure:</b> IABC Global Chair visit in 2018 (Ginger Homan)</p>

Improve overall financial position by breaking event on events	<p><b>Met Benchmark:</b> Income for events in 2017 of \$15,955.48; expenditure of \$19,546.31, with a shortfall of \$3,590.83.</p> <p><b>Measure:</b> Income for events in 2018 totalled \$15,530.70; expenditure was \$15,649.41; leaving a shortfall of only \$118.00</p>
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**Attached in support of entry:**

- 'Comms is critical' strategy
- Event descriptions
- Example of personalised boardroom breakfast invitation
- [Photos from events](#) (Please click link to see albums on our Facebook page)