

IABC Kansas City: Professional Development
Work Plan 2018-2019

Context

Kansas City IABC (KC IABC) is located in the heart of North America, straddling the Missouri and Kansas state lines. The organization began more than 60 years ago as the Kansas City Industrial Editors and has been named IABC Chapter of the Year seven times.

As a medium-sized chapter, KC IABC has diverse membership representing the professions of corporation communications, marketing, public relations, design, videography and photography. Members work in communications for large and small businesses, agencies and non-profit organizations. We also have a number of self-employed entrepreneurs in our ranks, as well as college students who are looking forward to a career in the field. Our membership is 125 communicators, and we reach approximately 800 throughout the Kansas City metropolitan area.

Through the decades, KC IABC has become synonymous with outstanding professional development and networking opportunities for business communicators in the greater Kansas City area. The hallmark of KC IABC's professional development is a highly successful Business Communicators Summit (BCS), an all-day conference that draws professionals and students from as far as Topeka, Kan. (75 miles away from Kansas City).

The chapter's ongoing professional development events are also highly successful, with around nine events a year. These are attended by a mix of members and non-members, of which the latter are often a substantial proportion. Additionally, our three special interest groups – Masters for seasoned professionals, IndyComm for independent entrepreneurs and Young Pros with a focus on emerging communicators – provide targeted opportunities for learning and networking for members and guests.

Our biggest challenge continues to be dealing with a declining membership. Despite this challenge, we provide strong professional development, while maintaining a highly engaged board and a strong corps of volunteers.

The strategic cornerstone of the board year was to ignite our professional development offerings with the intent of re-engaging our membership and enticing guests. We also focused on rewarding board members by allowing them to attend monthly professional development events at no cost. Another goal was to have the entire year of professional development set before the end of January 2019.

Goals and Objectives

A key goal in 2019 was to develop an entire year's worth of monthly professional development programming at the very beginning of the year. The 2018 year was not planned completely out, so we were not always able to provide our members and followers information in enough time for them to reserve time on their calendar.

Another advantage to having the entire calendar year planned out would ease the transition of one programming director to another, as KC IABC's board year begins in July. This would allow the new director, who ended up being brand new to IABC, time to become familiar with her new role and plan for 2020 events.

We sought to attract more members and guests by planning interesting and relevant programming delivered by excellent speakers which provide value to area communicators.

Objective 1: Plan all nine monthly professional development events by the end of January 2019.

Measurement 1: Speakers, topics and logistics secured for all 2019 events and ready to promote.

Objective 2: Publicize all professional development events with innovative, attention-getting communications resulting in overall monthly professional development attendance of 25 or more guests.

Measurement 2: Number of attendees at each month's session.

Objective 3: Create a consistent date, time, and location

Measurement 3: Securing a partnership with a Kansas City restaurant.

Budget

We have a break-even budget for these events, although we nearly always come out in the black. We charge \$25 for members and \$35 for non-members. To encourage board participation, KC IABC board members are not charged. Events include lunch and training. Our lunch cost is roughly \$18 per meal, plus tax, gratuity and an audio-visual equipment fee. We have no funds to pay for speakers. All presenters speak for free.

Implementation

Professional Development Overview

The reason professional organizations exist is to provide networking opportunities, professional development and career achievement recognition. In 2018, KC IABC sought to continue providing Kansas City communication and marketing professionals quality programming and networking in hopes of having strong participation in a competitive market.

As with many chapters, the market environment for professional development is competitive. Although our aims are not fully in sync, we compete with PRSA, the Social Media Club of Kansas City, the Kansas City Direct Marketing Association and other groups. Given that Kansas City communicators have so many options, some of which are low cost or free, our professional development offerings are a critical component to attracting attendees.

The board subscribes to the “lazy leader” theory to give opportunities for growth and development to every board role. While it is often easier to handle issues oneself, KC IABC knows this can lead to burnout and disengagement. One way we have embraced the lazy leader idea in our programming is by keeping it at the same venue, time and day of the month for the entire year. We also give the venue free reign on determining our menu for each meeting. This allows our programming director to focus on identifying interesting and relevant topics, securing excellent speakers, and developing creative promotions to entice attendees.

1. Programs

- **Planning:** We began planning for 2019 in the fall of 2018, beginning with a review of suggested topics and speakers from event evaluations. We also had expansive board discussion on relevant topics for membership and potential speakers. We reached a consensus and then completed the first year’s schedule by January 2019. This gave members and non-members a bird’s eye view of what programs they wanted to attend for the coming year. Our diverse board represents our membership. The board consists of members from Fortune 500 companies, small businesses, non-profits and other sectors, all at different levels in their career. This diversity helped us strike a strong balance and ensure we were meeting our varied member needs and interests.
- **Topics and relevance:** When choosing a topic, we determined to make every subject relevant to as many audience-members as possible. Instead of promoting a program such as “How to improve your internal communications,” we chose a broader approach. In this instance, communicators who don’t work with an internal audience would find this topic irrelevant. Instead, we advertised every topic’s relevance to every segment of the communications field. Although someone may, strictly speaking, focus on internal communications, the principles they share will have much wider application. We sought to communicate the relevance of each topic for all.
- **Financial goal:** Professional development has been an area of revenue generation for our chapter. Our longstanding policy has been to finish the professional development year in the black in terms of finances. This is accomplished by charging a slightly higher attendance fee than we incur in expenses. The additional revenue obtained through the additional \$10 higher non-member fees also contribute to successfully operating in the black.

Expenses and profitability of programs are monitored by the VP of Finance and the Programming Director. The chapter budgeted \$6,070 for 2019 monthly professional development schedule and, as of Nov. 30, expenses (food, audio/visual equipment, and name tags) totaled under budget at \$4,400.

- **Nature of events:** Each program was scheduled as a stand-alone event offered from 11:30 a.m. - 1:00 p.m. at Brio Tuscan Grill on the third Thursday of the month.
- **Event budgets:** We do not have a budget to pay speakers at our monthly professional development meetings. Given our limited resources, we capitalize on the goodwill and benefit that presenting at a KC IABC event can bring to speakers. KC IABC has a longstanding and strong influence among Kansas City communicators, so participating in our professional development events is always a positive for speakers, providing them an opportunity to build their reputation and gain visibility in front of potential clients. We also seek to provide value and credibility to our speakers as we promote their events both before, during and after each date.

2. Providing value to communicators

- One of the unique ways we communicated our monthly professional development events is through video promotion (**Work Sample 1**). The Program Director created a video to promote each topic and speaker, which was shared through our social media channels. The Director also wrote a compelling description sharing what attendees will learn. Event information is posted on the KC IABC website and EventBrite, sent to approximately 800 communicators via our email newsletter and event email, and shared on our social media channels (Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter and Instagram). A Facebook event is also created to allow followers to easily invite their connections. While we have a Social Media Board Director, all board members are also asked to share event promotions through their own social media networks, which further extends our audience reach. During the event our board members post on KC IABC Twitter and Facebook

accounts so our followers can obtain valuable insights from the events even when unable to attend. Additionally, the Program Director emails each attendee following the event, providing the presentation if available, and promoting the next professional development event. Additionally, a flyer (**Work Sample 2**) at the beginning of the year was created to highlight the full year of monthly programming; this was given to each attendee at KC IABC's one-day conference, Business Communicators Summit, in February.

- Our approach to monthly professional development includes around nine professional development lunches each year. In addition, we offer a day-long Business Communicators Summit providing breakouts to increase the ability for attendees to obtain skills development relevant to their level of experience and type of position. We provide event evaluations (**Work Sample 3**) for our monthly programming and Business Communicators Summit, using feedback to shape future offerings.

We also facilitate three Special Interest Groups as additional opportunities to obtain professional development geared toward specific levels of communications expertise. IndyComm, provides learning and networking options for independent communicators. Young Professionals focuses on engaging professionals with fewer than 10 years of experience. Masters, which is for people with at least 10 years of experience or in a leadership position, allows our experienced professionals to discuss topics of interest at their level.

- In addition to our own local programming, we feature IABC webinars for members and free webinars in our monthly e-newsletters and social media. We also include regional and international training opportunities.

Strategies and Tactics:

As a perennially strong IABC chapter, a cornerstone of the KC IABC Board is to encourage each board member to embrace IABC's pillars (advancing the profession, creating connection and developing strategic communicators). We are able to focus on each pillar through our professional development programming. The professional development opportunities themselves provide for skills development and networking. Because we promote these events to members and non-members through our email communications, social media and website, we are increasing awareness of IABC, all of which help advance the profession.

Plan all professional development events by the end of January 2019.

Our board discussed 2019 topics beginning in the fall of 2018 and settled on topics by the end of the year. By mid-January 2019, the full year had been planned and publicized on our website.

Determining a venue was not difficult. We chose Brio Tuscan Grille in Kansas City, centrally located in the Kansas City metro area. It has a long record of good service and cooperation with KC IABC. However, we made a conscious decision to choose this singular venue for all of our events so that there would be absolutely no confusion as to where we were meeting. In terms of date, we continued with the third Thursday of each month, a longtime KC IABC tradition.

Publicize professional development events with innovative, attention-getting communications.

Professional association communications often suffer from corporate-speak and a lack of imagination. We sought to dust off a tired approach and spark some life into our professional development to get attention. We created a series of humorous and attention-getting videos to promote each event (**Work Sample 1**). These were featured on our chapter's social media channels and promoted via our e-newsletter. In addition, events were described in vivid, concise text on our website and event registration pages. We used promotional videos, and occasional Facebook Live interviews (**Work Sample 1**). During events, we encourage attendees to use the Twitter hashtag #kciabc to Tweet out highlights of the day's training (**Work Sample 5**).

Our March event was "Writing for Maximum Impact," where communicators were encouraged to use words strategically and not rely on images alone. Attendees heard about identifying their audience and tailoring messages to them and removing stiff, unfeeling corporate speak from their writing. For promotion, a Facebook Live interview between KC IABC President Tara Litzenberger and the presenter Roy Harryman was published (**Work Sample 1**). It has gained 496 views.

One of our most well attended sessions was September's "Creating Striking and Effective Visual Presentations." Promotion included the use of an eye-catching image featuring vibrant, rich colors sparking from a match, set against a black background (**Work Sample 4**). Presenter Clifton Anderson used humor and an engaging speaking style to give attendees ideas on live polling tools and design hints (**Work Sample 5**).

In addition, we asked each presenter to invite friends, colleagues and customers to join them at the lunch to boost our attendance and increase awareness of KC IABC. Although we could not comp their meals, we did offer them the member rate through a private discount code. And, as mentioned, to encourage participation and serve as guest ambassadors, we offered board members complimentary tickets to all monthly luncheons.

Select topics and speakers of excellence.

Our collaborative approach sought to provide topics that were of value to all chapter members, regardless of their

communications niche. Our year’s agenda featured these topics:

- January (was rescheduled to April 2, 2019 due to weather) - “A View From the Top: Panel of CEOs for Key Insights on Communications,” partnership with University of Kansas Edwards Campus
- February - No event due to KC IABC’s Business Communicators Summit all-day conference
- March 21, 2019 - “Writing for Maximum Impact,” presenter Roy Harryman, principal of Roy Harryman Marketing Communications
- April 18, 2019 - “Stake Your Claim With a Winning Content Campaign,” presenter Jolean Olson, an Emmy-award winning content producer
- May 16, 2019 - “Where’s the Panic Button? Creating and Updating a Crisis Communication Plan,” presenter Matt Tidwell, Ph.D., APR
- June 20, 2019 - “Break Through to Your Audience in a Brave New World of PR,” presenter Megan Neher, founder Megan Neher Public Relations
- July - No event due KC IABC’s Quills Awards Banquet
- August 15, 2019 - “Turn Events and Sponsorships Into Brand Building Experiences,” presenters Branden Connelly and David Steffano, Evenergy Events and Sponsorships
- September 19, 2019 - “Create Striking and Effective Visual Presentations,” presenter Clifton Alexander, founder and president of REACTOR Design Studio
- October - No event due to Southern & Pacific Region conference Connect2Comms begin held in Kansas City.
- October 17, 2019 (rescheduled to November due to October conference) “Time for a Jailbreak: Busting B2B Out of the Box” panel discussion
- November 2019 (moved to January 2020) “Once Upon a Time, a Marketer Told an Amazing Brand Story,” presenter Natalie Jackson, marketing director for emfluence

We seek written feedback (**Work Sample 3**) at nearly all events and the responses were not only overwhelmingly positive, but sometimes adulatory. A few examples include:

- “I personally feel the presentation was constructed very well.”
- “Nice Job! The programming [at IABC] is excellent!”
- “Loved the engaging activity.”
- “The interactive component was enjoyable. I felt this was very well thought out.”
- “Got people involved! GREAT - need more like this.”

Measurement

It was gratifying to get the entire year planned and hear positive feedback from members and attendees. We ended up holding eight professional development luncheons in 2019 (one had to be moved to January 2020) and all were planned by the end of January 2019.

Results

Objective	Result
Plan the full year of monthly professional development sessions by the end of January 2019.	Goal Exceeded. All programming dates, times, and speakers were set by mid-January. This allowed us to promote at our February conference.
Reach monthly professional development attendance of 25 or more guests.	<p>Goal partially met. Only four events brought more than 25 guests.</p> <p>This may be due to the fact that our guests have a hard time getting away from work during the day for lunch and is a thought we are considering as we plan 2020 events.</p> <p>Across the eight monthly events held, our average attendance per month was 26.</p>
Create a consistent date, time, and location	Goal met - A partnership with Brio restaurant was formed, allowing us to book the entire year of luncheons at a set day of the month, time, and location. Luncheons began at 11:30 a.m. on the 3rd Thursday of the month.

Work Samples Attached in Support of Entry:

- Work Sample 1:** Video promotion links
- Work Sample 2:** Promotional flyer with upcoming events
- Work Sample 3:** Evaluation form
- Work Sample 4:** Event registration page
- Work Sample 5:** Live tweets from events