

IABC British Columbia: Engaging Students & Young Professionals

Introduction

Currently the third largest chapter in the world, IABC British Columbia serves the province of British Columbia. While a large percentage of our members live in and around the city of Vancouver, we have members scattered all over the lower mainland and further afield which gives us unique challenges with regards to engaging and providing value to all of our members. We also have a very diverse membership in terms of industries, career levels and professional development needs, and we have a large percentage of senior and corporate members.

Our aim is to increase our membership base, nurture a sense of community while raising the profile of IABC/BC to its members, and position communications as a strategic function in every organization. We believe that we can do this by building relationships with current and prospective members, other organizations, businesses and post-secondary institutions, while providing engaging and meaningful professional development and networking opportunities which offer value and fulfilling experiences for our members, volunteers, sponsors, partners and communications professionals.

Our challenge: Building long-lasting relationships with Students and young professionals

We have always found it difficult to build long-lasting connections with students. While we have always had student members, in differing numbers, we have struggled to retain them especially when they graduate, and their membership fees increase when they have to switch to a transitional membership. Additionally, we feel passionately about helping students and young professionals. We know that they are the future of IABC, and we want to help them to grow their careers in the challenging BC job market especially with regards to securing jobs in Vancouver where competition is fierce. Its vital that these students and young professionals stand out, and build their networks in this busy, competitive market place where connections matter.

In 2017, we took steps to dedicate more time and resources on students and young professionals by creating a new Student Director role. This director, along with Student Ambassadors would focus on engaging, and providing meaningful professional development to students and young professionals Over the past two years we have felt that strategically the best way to tackle the challenges that we face is to offer practical and supportive programming while building relationships with post secondary institutions. Going into the 2018/2019 year our goal is to provide students with a safe space for them to develop their skills and showcase their talents while they are studying and launching their careers. We believe that in doing so, this will lead to better recruitment and retention rates, with more students and recent graduates getting involved in our association and staying with us. This would also help us to grow brand awareness and increase engagement with post-secondary institutions.

Going into the 2018 board year we expanded the student portfolio to include newcomers in British Columbia as well, but this CMA submission will focus purely on our activities with students and young professionals.

Goals and Objectives

In close alignment with both the chapters strategic plan, and International's 17-20 plan we set three goals with specific measurable objectives for the 2018/2019 year:

Goal #1 - Increase brand awareness & membership base.

Objective: Increase the number of student members by 5% by May 2019 (25 student members on May 2018).

Objective: Convert at least 50% of student members to transitional members once their student membership expires.

In order to ensure the longevity of IABC as a professional association that supports communicators.

Goal #2 - Increase community engagement

Objective: Increase the number of student nominations to SAIL Award by 40% (5 nominations in 2018).

Objective: Establish strong relationships with at least two different post-secondary institutions by the end of the term.

In order to provide communication students with the opportunity to be recognized by their hard work, which will help them

see the value of the IABC community. We also wanted to increase the opportunities for both IABC and professionals to connect, develop a positive relationship and grow as a community.

Goal #3 - Provide engaging, relevant and valuable experiences to our members

Objective: Have 90% of respondents say that they are likely to recommend IABC events to friends.
In order to know through surveys that participants of our events see value in what we have offered.

See **work sample #1** for an expanded view of the Students and New Communicators 2018/2019 Strategic Plan

Budget

The expenses for student activities were primarily tied to event costs. Using the previous years' event costs as a guide we budgeted \$600 for catering, \$500 for venues, \$100 for printing and miscellaneous event materials, \$200 for couriers and \$1000 for the Wave Awards scholarship award that we give to students. We set a target of \$900 registration fees across the three workshops. The registration fee target was set at a relatively low figure because we knew that we wouldn't be charging more than a maximum of between \$15 and \$25 for student workshops because we wanted to try and make these learning opportunities as low cost and affordable as possible.

Implementation

Based on the success of a workshop we held in 2017/2018, we decided that the best way to provide supportive and practical programming was through interactive skills-based workshops that would complement students existing studies. By offering these workshops outside of classroom hours in partnership with the schools, we were able to engage students while also building relationships with key people at the schools at the same time.

By taking this approach we also benefited from free venue spaces, and some of the schools were so supportive that they actually bought registrations for their students.

A key theme for the BC chapter was digital and technology, both from an operational perspective to future proof the chapter, but also crucially from a professional development perspective. It's important that our members, and communicators stay up to date with digital trends and students are no different. Some of the schools echoed our direction and two out of three of the workshops covered digital skills while the other covered the important process of communications planning.

Workshop 1: Comms Planning – From A to Z was led by an experienced IABC/BC past president who facilitated an interactive workshop covering the entire process of building a communications plan from scratch so that it is aligned and consistent with an organization's goals. This workshop was held at SFU Beedie as part of a Chapter wide event sponsor package that we had secured with them at the start of the 2018/2019 chapter year.

Workshop 2: Driving Engagement with Content and Technology led by marketing strategist Paula Skaper focused on marketing automation. Attendees learnt how to leverage marketing automation technology to deliver content automatically in response to customer behaviour, and strategic marketing techniques such as dynamic content on landing pages emails to drive engagement. We held this event at the Langara School of Management, thanks to the ongoing communications and support from the Digital Media Marketing Club who also promoted events relating to technology. As a door prize for this event, we held a draw to give one attendee a student membership.

Workshop 3: Social Media Marketing: The do's and don'ts led by Jessica MacLeod, PR Coordinator at Jelly Marketing covered key concepts of social media marketing for businesses and best practices, with attendees drafting content calendars at the end of the workshop. This workshop was held with the Simon Fraser University Communications Co-op who approached our Student Director to team up with them thanks to the success of previous student events.

Marketing and Communication Efforts

Alongside the promotional efforts of the schools — with occasional purchase of tickets for a group of their students — and particularly the support of lecturers of the three workshops, we also ran integrated promotional campaigns on the IABC/BC

channels to reach the broadest possible audience with consistent messaging and ultimately drive registrations for our workshops, programming. Our marketing and comms volunteers worked with the career development team to create on brand creatives, and tailored copy that were used in our Connect newsletter, event invites and social channels. For all three events, all of the promotional activities drove traffic to a website landing page which included a link to register. See **Work sample #2** for an event website landing page.

Event Surveys

After each of these events, in order to get timely feedback from attendees, we sent out an event survey the following day. This survey features the same questions for event so that we can effectively compare events to see what members liked and didn't like. By keeping the questions consistent in every survey, we can also effectively track trends, particularly with regards to important areas like member satisfaction. However, with limited volunteer resources, we do not always effectively analyse results because it requires dedicated volunteer time to really dig into survey results to identify trends and provide reports on results.

Speed Mentoring for Students

Alongside the three practical skills workshops, we also offered speed mentoring events in 2018/2019 with topics tailored towards students and new communicators. These bite size mentoring sessions provided peer to peer learning and mentorship with successful established communicators from local and global companies. They focused on providing practical tips to give attendees the edge to succeed. Between Nov 2018 and May 2019, we offered three events that covered themes of building your career, hard skills such as perfecting presentations and pitching to media, and interpersonal skills such as handling conflict.

IABC/BC Wave Awards Student Award

Since the BC chapters local Wave Awards program was created in 2016, we have always had a student award known as the SAIL Award (Student Advancing in Learning). This winner of this award every year receives a \$750 bursary plus either a student membership or \$50 towards a transitional membership. This award is open to any student who is currently enrolled in a communications, marketing or public relations post-secondary education program in British Columbia and will still be a student at the time of the awards event. Open to members and non-members, the student needs to demonstrate an eagerness to learn and show promise in the profession through their work, and students can nominate themselves or be nominated by others.

In 2018 we struggled to get student nominations, so we set a goal to grow awareness and nominations in 2018/2019. In order to do achieve this, we promoted the SAIL Award extensively amongst post-secondary institutions, student unions, school advisors and co-op coordinators. Alongside these efforts we promoted the Wave Awards, and specifically the SAIL Award across of our IABC/BC channels. We highlighted in all possible communications and documents that students could nominate themselves and set deadlines that avoided exam dates as much as possible. We also revised the nomination form to ensure that the judging criteria was very clear.

Student Volunteers

We actively encourage students to volunteer with us and we have some student volunteers including student ambassadors within the Students Portfolio.

Sponsorship and partnerships with post-secondary institutions

We took a collaborative approach to building relationships with post-secondary institutions in British Columbia with the Student Director, Sponsorships Director and members of the Executive all working to build relationships. Our Student Director had already begun to form relationships with some institutions when she returned for her second year, and she was able to build on these through the workshops that she organized. Alongside her efforts, our Sponsorship Director and Executive team established an in-kind venue sponsorship, \$1000 cash sponsorship and a partnership resulting in 15 student memberships with a large post-secondary's institution.

Results

Our biggest success was the student workshops that we held in partnership with post-secondary institutions. Over the three

events that we held we exceeded the targets that we had set. For registrations, we had set an overall target of 75 paying attendees across the three workshops and we increased this by 40% with 105 attendees. As a result of this we exceeded our revenue target by 272% with \$3,349.20 in revenue against the \$900 we had forecasted. Our expenses were slightly higher than anticipated because although we were able to hold workshops in partnership with local schools which eliminated venue costs we found that the catering costs at the schools, because we had to use specific caterers, were higher than we anticipated so our venue and catering costs were \$1389.67 against a budget of \$1,100 but we saved \$500 on venues so we were only \$289.67 over budget.

In terms of meeting the goals and objectives that were set for the Student portfolio our results were mixed:

Goal #1 - Increase brand awareness & membership base.

Objective: Increase the number of student members by 5% by May 2019 (25 student members on May 2018).

Objective: Convert at least 50% of student members to transitional members once their student membership expires.

RESULT: We currently have 15 student members and 14 transitional members, so we fell short of the targets that we set. However, this is also reflective of the fact that we have seen a decline in our overall membership.

Goal #2 - Increase community engagement

Objective: Increase the number of student nominations to SAIL Award by 40% and we exceeded this target.

RESULT: We exceeded this target with a 80% increase year on year. In 2018 we received 5 entries for the SAIL Award versus 9 entries in 2019.

Objective: Establish strong relationships with at least two different post-secondary institutions by the end of the term.

RESULT: We exceeded this objective by strengthening relationships with four post-secondary institutions.

Goal #3 - Provide engaging, relevant and valuable experiences to our members

We had set a target that 90% of attendees would be likely to recommend IABC initiatives to friends, and from the event surveys we achieved an average of 93.3% of attendees surveyed after the events saying that they were likely to recommend us. The communications planning workshop was the most effective with 94.7% likely to recommend.

See **Work Sample #3** for a sample of our event surveys

At the chapter level we had also set an objective to increase sponsorship from higher education institutions from 0% to 100% year on year which we exceeded with three sponsorships and partnerships valued at over \$5400.

Overall, although we didn't meet our objectives to increase student and transitional memberships, we were able to meet all of our remaining objectives and we have set ourselves for success in the future. These successes were achieved despite very high turnover of volunteers in the student portfolio. We found it very difficult to recruit and then retain committed volunteers and most of the programming was delivered by a team of two. As a result, some elements of the strategic plan and tactics identified were scaled back to reflect the limited resource. Our biggest takeaway from that was to never be afraid to pivot and adjust strategic plans if resources become constrained. Its clear from the success of the workshops that low cost practical workshops on interesting topics will attract working professionals as well as students, and hosting events at post-secondary institutions is a very effective way of building connections.

Work Samples

#1 – IABC/BC Students and New Communicators Strategic Plan

#2 – IABC/BC Website event page

#3 – IABC/BC Event Survey Sample