Communications and Marketing Strategy

2016 -2019

Communications Manager

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1. Forward

This Marketing and Communications Strategy, sets out our priorities and ambitions and is designed to raise residents' awareness of services and satisfaction with the Council. This will be carried out by promoting activities, keeping people informed, providing consistent messages to reinforce the value for money offered and by encouraging people to engage with local democracy.

The Communications team provides advice on and delivers: media relations, external communication, digital development, marketing campaigns and internal communications. All of this activity is designed to focus on the outcome of the communication – whether this is to enhance the reputation of the Council, generate income or achieve cost avoidance or savings.

These positive outcomes are only achievable through collaborative working with services across the Council, who manage service delivery, have a strong relationship with their customers and are relied upon to gather the information required for evaluation.

Strategic communications means that the piece of communication is not an end in itself – it has to deliver something that is important to the Council as a whole. This could include improving the financial stability of the authority, delivering what matters for residents or making the locality a more attractive place in which people are happy to live, work or visit.

The Council has a finite budget and needs to make sure that it is getting maximum value from its spend, but this isn't easy when having to choose from the growing number of channels available to reach customers, or the different types of content that needs to be created and monitored for each channel. To become more successful we need to look at segmenting our audiences. Segmentation is about recognising that all people are not the same or need the same services. It is the process of sub-dividing the district into groups based on their shared needs and characteristics. The aim of segmentation is to understand the differences between communities to enable more effective targeting and tailoring of local service delivery and ultimately, greater customer satisfaction. This also means that budget is spent where it will be most effective.

This is done in a way that aligns with the Council's corporate goals and the values contained in the Blaby Plan. Professional, effective and focused communications that deliver real outcomes must be the standard at all times to maintain a quality service with increasing demands and reducing resources.

Councillor David Freer
Partnerships and Corporate Services Portfolio Holder

2. Current Situation

People who feel well informed about what their council does are much more likely to believe it provides high quality services and that it offers good value for money.

The Residents' Survey carried out in 2015 found that 96% of residents were satisfied with the services that the Council provides, a 7% increase from the 2011 survey. Whilst 89% of residents are satisfied that the Council provides value for money, and 95% felt that the Council acts on the concerns of residents.

Delivering value for money and retaining satisfaction levels through effective communications is a priority, but this Strategy must take into account and operate within a wider environment given the period of change.

Digital revolution
The single biggest change to the way people live their lives is the digital revolution. Whilst this offers specific challenges for large organisations such as the Council, it also offers enormous potential to change the way we deliver services.

Over the last few years the Council has seen a fundamental shift to the way customers want to interact with the Council. People now want to communicate, transact and engage through digital channels. Whilst the telephone used to be the main access channel for customers to interact with the Council, this has now been overtaken by the website.   Social media is also increasingly popular and a tool which customers use to engage and have a conversation with the authority.

The Council needs to embrace these channels and design online services that are simple to use with an easy and accessible user journey. This will mean that those people who have a preference or are acceptable to digital will be able to use our services. In addition to encouraging the shift from traditional to online channels, another objective is to lower the transaction costs at the authority in order to create efficiencies.

2.1   Financial pressures

Budget
In recent years, the Council has received reduced Government funding and has needed to become more creative to bridge the gap in its finances. With the authority having to identify significant savings over the next few years, clearly the shape of the Council is likely to change.

Income generation
The Council is able to generate income from a number of services across the authority. Additional income can be generated from increased service take up and where possible advertising and sponsorship.

3. Our Audiences

3.1 Communication and engagement in the district, and beyond.

The Council needs to communicate, engage and promote services to a wide range of audiences, these include voluntary and partner organisations, local media, residents of the district, elected members, neighbouring authorities and its employees.   Set out at Appendix A is an analysis of our audiences.

3.2 Residents of the district

The demographics of the district are changing, also changing is the way that people live their lives – their habits, media consumption, needs and behaviours. In 2013 the population of the district was at 95,000 and it is estimated to increase to 102,208 by 2021. The number of households in the district currently stands at 40,936 and it is vital that we adapt to communicate and engage with our customers in a way that is preferable to them and cost effective for the Council.

What is changing

- The Council's own website has seen a significant increase in users that access the site via mobile devices, with 50% now using mobile technology.

- Digital campaigns (Facebook advertising, Email alerts) have seen around 80% of customers digesting our content through a mobile device. While access to the website using mobile devices is high, people accessing social media and email marketing through mobile devices is even higher.

- 87% of all UK adults now use the internet and 74% of those use a device other than a computer[1] (desktop/laptop/netbook).

- The increase in use of social media and online networks has continued to grow while traditional channels like newspapers and printed materials have declined. 68% of all internet users use social media sites.[1]

How we will reach our residents

The Council needs to achieve greater personalisation of communications to deliver even better value for money.

In order to achieve this, the Council will need to move away from a blanket approach whereby it used all communication and marketing routes to engage with customers, which was both costly and inefficient.

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[1] Source: Ofcom's Adults' Media Use and Attitudes Report May 2016.

Understanding the characteristics of our customers will allow us to effectively communicate with them by their preferred communication method and engage with them on services that may be of particular interest to them. Improved customer insight is critical as communications and marketing move beyond the traditional demographic groupings, it will allow a greater knowledge and understanding of the behaviours, motivations and preferences of individuals.

Information held by the services will be analysed and used together with profiling tools to allow us to achieve greater insight into customers' lifestyles and behaviours. This will allow us to have a better understanding of all types of customer groupings including the hard to reach and vulnerable.

3.3   Elected members

Members will be supported by clear timely communications by making sure that they receive:-

- Briefings, in relation to key national and local issues.
- Regular updates through the distribution of press and news articles, general news through the monthly Members' e-bulletin and support with briefings/statements for the media.
- Information and briefings on matters that are related to individual Councillors and their respective Ward.

3.4   Our employees

Employees are our most important communicators.

Better engagement with our residents starts with our employees. Our role is to build awareness, understanding and engagement among employees so that they can lead the delivery of positive outcomes. Effective communications enable and support employees in meeting the operational needs and the changes required to deliver our transformation vision. Leaders and managers at all levels have a role to play in listening and responding to employees, ensuring that communication is two-way.

Employee communications approach
- Delivering clear, consistent, honest and timely information to relevant audiences
- Ensuring communications are delivered in language that is free from jargon and easy to understand
- Tailoring communications for specific audiences
- Working in partnership to ensure messages are consistent and timely

4. Our Objectives

This strategy directly supports the vision in the Blaby Plan to ensure that the district of Blaby is made up of thriving and vibrant communities where people are happy to live, work and visit.

The objectives of this strategy relate to outcomes that are valuable to the organisation, such as increasing and retaining satisfaction, safeguarding reputation, generating income or savings. In all instances communication must be timely, open, trustworthy and focused on outcomes that matter.

That said, the Council will seek innovative and creative solutions so that it can continually improve as an authority and as a district in which people are happy to live, work and visit

4.1   Customer satisfaction

Customer satisfaction - by protecting reputation or targeting one of the three main drivers of this measure. These are:

- **How informed people feel –** good communication is about getting the right message to the right person in the right medium at the right time.

- **Value for money perceptions –** these are based on a number of factors including price, quality, levels of customer service and brand image.

- **How able people feel they can influence decision making –** there are three main areas of local activity that can impact on feelings of influence[2]:-

  - Provision of information
  - Consultation – listening to views and taking them into consideration
  - Attitudes towards local authority and partners

4.2   Improve the financial position of the Council

A key outcome of good communication and marketing is to improve the financial position of the Council by generating income, making savings and through cost avoidance**.** It is important that resources are directed at where they can make the biggest impact in both of these areas.

- **Income generation** - Campaigns and effective marketing has the potential to deliver substantial amounts of income across the authority in the coming year as a result of increased service take-up. Communications will seek to maximise income potential (taking into account cost of delivery)

- **Savings -** Alongside this Communications will be supporting the delivery significant savings proposals. One of the key aims to save money is to **move customers on to more cost effective digital channels**, to find information, engage or transact with the Council. Where possible and it is cost effective to do so, services will offer incentives to encourage the shift.

  Customer insight tools could be used to better understand the needs of vulnerable or troubled families helping the Council to reduce or avoid future costs.

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[2] Citizens and local decision making: www.cdf.org.uk/nep.

5. Principles

All communications will be underpinned by the values contained in the Blaby Plan, but the Council will seek to find innovative and creative solutions so that it can continually improve as an authority and as a district in which people are happy to live, work and visit.

The following key principles will be applied to plan, design, deliver and evaluate all communications.

- Evidence based
- Customer-focused
- Engaging
- Innovative and creative
- Timely
- Branded/Corporate Identity
- Integrated
- Flexible and agile
- Forward looking
- Value for money and efficient
- Fair i.e. open, honest and accessible
- Working in partnership.

5.1   How we will deliver Our Principles

- We will communicate as one organisation, so that the message is consistent.
- We will engage with all our audiences, through channels which work for them: listen and ensure we are easy to talk to.
- We will deliver clear, creative and value-for-money communication campaigns and activity based on the outcomes that matter to district residents.
- We will ensure Blaby's brand and profile are maintained and enhanced so that all our audiences recognise the Council's role in improving the lives of residents. All published promotional, information material, advertising, vehicle livery and building signage should conform to our corporate style as set out in the Corporate Identity Manual, and be easily identifiable as originating from Blaby District Council.
- We will enhance reputation and build trust by being consistent and transparent in everything we do and say.
- We will ensure our employees and Members are informed and engaged in all we do.

6. Delivery

Activities will take an evidence based and customer focused approach ensuring resources are allocated to achieve the desired outcome. To achieve this, the marketing budgets will be centralised and resource prioritised based on the following criteria, with a greater weighting on the two criteria shown in bold:

- Strength of alignment with Blaby Plan objectives
- Strength of alignment with national policy, statutory need and performance

- targets
- **Strength of potential to improve the financial position of the Council**
- **Potential to protect or enhance customer satisfaction**
- The contribution communications can make to achieve the desired outcome.

Underneath this strategy will sit an annual delivery plan setting out the tasks that will help us to achieve the objectives of the strategy.

Some of the key delivery elements of the strategy will include:

Digital – we need to design online services that are easily accessible and simple to use, so that those people that have a preference, or find it acceptable to use the internet will use them.

Brand – our brand will continue to reinforce the value for money message. This will become increasingly challenging as more services are delivered through different models, so contract negotiation on brand visibility will be critical.

Social media – the Council needs to maximise the use of social media to make sure that as many people as possible are engaged. Social media allows you to obtain information and gain understanding on what is going on in the area, connect and listen to what people have to say and get messages out. It can also be used to advertise and promote services and activities and allows you to segment and target particular groups based on their demographics, this could be based for example on their age or location. If you use profiling tools to further understand the needs of your customers this will allow you to target those specific groups that would have a higher preference to the service/activity that you are offering.

Media – the power of the media (including online news websites and local village magazines) continues in its influence and authority, but social media is playing an increasing role in determining reputation. This shift will need to be reflected in the way that resources are deployed over the coming years.

Employee engagement – delivery has increasingly moved to a more two-way approach. Some solutions have been in place a number of years such as the intranet with forums and light touch consultation capabilities. Digital will play an increasing role as the nature of the work force changes and this shift will need to be reflected.

Campaigns – targeted marketing campaigns will be delivered to directly support business objectives, which may include awareness raising, service take-up, behaviour change or achieving income targets or savings through cost avoidance.

Email marketing – this represents a new marketing channel where people sign up for news alerts from the Council on a range of subject matters.

Due to high level of people opening these type of emails and engaging with them, this cost-effective and efficient model will be grown further. Consideration will also be given to how email marketing can play a role in every stage of the customer journey.

Getting the right mix of communications channels (whether online or offline or a combination of both) is key.

7. Evaluation

The headline outcomes of this strategy will be evaluated against the objectives set out in section 4. Success will be determined by the following measures:

- Customer satisfaction levels

- Income generation – generate additional income through advertising, sponsorship and increase income within services

- Cost avoidance – collaborative working with services to support the delivery of cost avoidance. Costs can be avoided in promoting services. Examples of this include: to keep residents' living independently in their own homes eg disabled adaptations or by promoting services effectively to avoid repeat calls.

- Savings through channel shift and delivery of digital transactions – increase the number of transactions carried out on the website to reduce the Council's costs.

These outcomes will be measured by the Residents' Satisfaction Survey, channel shift project reporting, income generation figures, the implementation of service business cases and the evaluation of specific campaigns.

In evaluating digital communications, we will have a greater understanding of the services and topics that drive engagement, and start to understand what people find most interesting. This, coupled with the evaluation of specific campaigns, will help us to shape the message and method of delivery in future.

Appendix A – Audiences