

Communications Strategy – 2003/4 Review

Overview

The 2003/4 strategy was a success in so far as it has laid the foundations from which to take HPC forward over the next 3-4 years. While all elements of the actual communications plan may not have been completed we have reached some important milestones over the past 12 months. The strength in the strategy agreed by the Committee last year lies in the fact that little adjustment is required for this year. We are on course and just need a steadier climate for the organisation on which to build our reputation and service levels. We review some of the key achievements of the 2003/4 strategy and communications plan below and overall we are on our way to achieving council's goal of becoming the UK's no.1 health regulator.

Milestones

Completing the communications team was a key feature of 2003/4 and despite the fact that Eleanor will be leaving HPC in April to travel the world we will have five full-time members of staff by the end of that month. Having appropriate resource makes the long term strategy all the more attainable.

Customer service training has been implemented across the entire organisation and a focus group created to monitor and implement its future development. Under the old regime no form of specialised training had ever been done in this area. In supporting the necessity for customer service provision within the organisation the Committee has set about changing the way the organisation deals with its external customers. It was the first point in last years plan under 'internal communications' and will be a building bloc upon which we can build our organisations reputation over the coming years.

We have been steady in the media relations field. Our honeymoon period has come to an end however and we started to receive our first criticisms in the trade press since our inception in 2002. From a communications perspective what we will learn from this is how to analyse our business after such criticism and put plans in place to ensure we are not exposed again in this area. It requires employee buy-in to the process and improved internal communications but just as starting customer service training was the key function for last years communications strategy, internal communications is the key area for this year. This very much forms part of the strategy for next year and we have already demonstrated our keenness to deliver in this area by holding a 'renewals' workshop for the CSP. On a more positive note we are starting to get national coverage through the Daily Express and BBC Radio and on-line and in specific local newspapers covering fitness to practise hearings.

The website has been another notable success. We wanted to place HPC at the forefront in using the internet to communicate and there are now four times the amount of people visiting the website as this time last year reflecting the increased content and information available. We are currently having the web-site market researched and will use the feedback to help in its future development.

The first annual report and accounts were published in December of last year and good feedback has been received on it's design and layout, especially from the Health Professions Wales who believe we have set the standard for our sister organisations to follow. Plans are already under way for next years report which will be launched at an AGM on July 16th in London. The Annual Conference for Partners is also in advanced planning for this year with the 23rd and 24th September earmarked as the dates for this groundbreaking event in the Manchester area.

Back to publications and 12 versions of the standards of proficiency along with 25 operating brochures, which included the 10 benefits of registration brochure, were also all produced and distributed. Particularly pleasing among this lot was the crystal marking of the standards of conduct, performance and ethics for all registrants. Feedback across the board has been good regarding our publications, and while a very small minority of people may complain about any literature we send them being a waste of money, this sort of documentation remains an economically sound way of portraying a modern and professional image of HPC to our customers.

Events play an integral part in helping us work collaboratively with our stakeholders. First hand views from the listening events are fed back into the business where possible and ideas are generated for the future. As such we will be looking to increase the number of listening events in particular we will attend over the next 12 months. Attendances continue to be good (130 people attending Nottingham 17/2/04) and allied to the burgeoning conference programme continue to give HPC a platform from which to deliver its key messages.

While much of 2003 was rightly spent communicating with registrants 2004 will see us start to specifically target the public with a range of different activities. One of the major features of this will be our first ever advertising campaign. Many months in the making has developed from a wide brief into something very specific and we believe pleasing. The proof as ever will be in the analysis of the campaign, but having been through market research twice and having heard feedback from registrants as to what they would like to see from a campaign at our listening events – we firmly believe it will be successful. It will be launched on April 4th and we wait with baited breath to see the reaction.

Conclusion

A successful year. A hard year. But 2003/4 has seen us take our first steps under our own rules and communications strategy. The strategy supported by its comprehensive plan of activities remains the basis on which to take HPC forward in terms of its reputation management and service delivery over the next few years.

As the organisation grows and adjusts to changes in its environment so the plan will adapt. One thing will remain constant however and that is that this strategy provides that necessary link between Council's strategic intent and the delivery of its communications objectives.

Chris Middleton

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