

PRide Awards 2010
Thames and Chiltern Region
Category 15, Best Newspaper

Dacorum Digest

Summary

The aim of the publication

To provide the Council and its services with a cost-effective and reliable means of communicating with residents.

Dacorum Digest is the council's residents' newspaper. It aims to be an informative publication containing material that represents the interests of all the diverse communities and age groups within the Borough and seeks to encourage active participation in Borough life, strengthen people's sense of community and generate civic pride.

How it meets the needs of the target audiences

As a community newspaper Dacorum Digest is targeted at all residents of Dacorum across diverse communities and age groups.

In a survey of the Borough's Citizens' Panel (October 2009), representing a cross section of the Borough's population, 74% of residents named Dacorum Digest as one of the most effective methods of finding out about Council Services, more than local papers or local radio.

Dacorum Digest includes easy to read articles, from our customers' perspective, that highlight local issues and promote Council services, with direct links to the Council's priorities. It helps enhance the Council's reputation within the local community, by explaining services, and how to access them, in a straightforward clear way. There is a good balance of shorter news items and longer human interest features.

The dedicated youth section 'Young Dacorum' highlights particular news and events for young people of the Borough, and involves local young people in researching and writing the articles.

Strong community links ensure that each issue of Dacorum Digest includes information from local community organisations and groups, both in editorial features and the What's on section, to ensure that content reflects the interests of a cross section of our community.

Clear sections make it easy to find the information that interests our readers. Articles include links to further information on the website, or contact details for further information. The newspaper encourages input from readers with suggestions such as sharing environmentally friendly tips and advice, from which we get a good response.

Feedback from the Plain English Campaign in the newspaper's assessment for a crystal mark describes Dacorum Digest as ...'clearly written, interesting and informative' and 'attractive without losing clarity' (see supporting information for full evaluation).

The newspaper meets accessibility standards using clear, readable type and colour schemes that offer good contrast. Audio cassette versions are also available.

There is also an online version of Dacorum Digest, an interactive version with live links direct to online services and other related information. This also gives readers the option to subscribe to the publication to be notified as soon as a new issue is published.

Design and creativity – what makes the work stand out?

Dacorum Digest has been redesigned from an A4 magazine to a tabloid newspaper. The new format has retained the lifestyle feel of a magazine, with striking use of colour within the clearly distinguished sections and article headings, along with stylish and creative use of professional images and photographs. Dacorum Digest is designed to be visually interesting with colour and images playing a key role in communicating our messages.

The cover design follows a new style guide for the use of the Council brand, incorporating a striking flash of greens to clearly and attractively mark the newspaper as a Council publication.

Dacorum Digest follows a consistent design and colour palette to build brand loyalty and help readers find articles of interest by providing regular sections and features. These include a section on opportunities to influence local decisions (Engage), a distinctive What's On section, and a strong front cover image linked to contents. Limits are set for the amount of text, to keep pages clear of clutter, and information is presented in manageable chunks.

Articles for Dacorum Digest are sourced, written and edited by our in-house Communications team and the design is carried out by a professional agency.

Evaluation and measurement

Dacorum Digest is subject to ongoing monitoring and evaluation and is continually developed in line with findings from consultation with our residents and customers. For example, the Place Survey in 2009 identified that many local people didn't know how influence local decision making. As a result Dacorum Digest now includes 'Engage', a section that highlights current public meetings, issues and consultations in which local people can have a say.

Dacorum Digest is also regularly assessed by the Plain English Campaign to make sure it continues to present information in a clear and understandable way.

Since the introduction of the newspaper format we have surveyed our readers and Council customers. The majority of residents asked said they either preferred the newspaper version (35%) or liked the newspaper and magazine formats equally (49%).

One local residents called us on receiving his new format Spring 2010 issue to tell us 'this is a wonderful, wonderful paper...it's given a lot of detail, it's extremely well put together, I am very impressed.'

84% of residents surveyed rated Dacorum Digest as good or very good and 87% of readers agreed that they felt better informed about Borough Council services after reading it.

A survey of the Council services and partners who contribute articles and use Dacorum Digest as a communication tool has received positive feedback. 92% of respondents agree that Dacorum Digest is a good way to raise awareness of local issues, and 83% agree that it is a cost effective way of promoting their service.

In terms of value for money, the move from a magazine to a newspaper has saved £8000 per year in production costs, reducing the per copy price from 17p to 14p. In addition we achieve £7500 income from advertising in Dacorum Digest to offset some of the costs and further increase the publication's value for money.

Total budget

Dacorum Digest costs £8810 per issue including distribution to 59,000 homes in Dacorum. A further 2000 copies are distributed through local community venues.

With four issues per year, including staffing costs, Dacorum Digest costs fall into category f) £11k-£50k annually.