

CIPR PRIDE AWARDS NORTH EAST 2010

CATEGORY: Best Newsletter

ENTRY: Nexus - Nexus Matters

Nexus Matters is a stakeholder newsletter which goes out by email to more than 3,000 key stakeholders, keeping them up to date with our projects to deliver better public transport. A quantity of each edition is also printed for use at stakeholder and community events.

AIMS

Nexus identified the need for a stakeholder newsletter within its portfolio of communications tools in 2008. The organisation already had a strong presence in the local media and a fast-growing website through which it communicates to passengers and suppliers. The benefits of a newsletter to supplement these are:

- 1) Reach key stakeholders who may not consume information from existing sources and who may not use public transport, but who are nonetheless important in providing funding and support to us or who act as opinion formers.
- 2) Ensure through direct communication that key corporate messages and priorities were being delivered to this audience.
- 3) Provide stakeholders with a single regular overview of recent Nexus activities which at the same time underlines key corporate messages.

MEETING AUDIENCE NEEDS

We devised a concept for the newsletter after reviewing direct communication by similar organisations including local councils, utility companies and passenger transport executives. We also conducted telephone interviews with 12 people asking what format they would appreciate.

As a result we set out the following principles for the newsletter:

- 1) The target audience was stakeholders who, while interested in Nexus, did not have a lot of time to invest in reading the product.
- 2) Stories should be no more than 250 words, and the story count should be high.
- 3) The design should be colourful and accessible with strong use of images of our customers and infrastructure.
- 4) 'Men in suit' photographs, while inevitable is satisfying some of our enabling stakeholders, should be used selectively, and we should make sure the same people were not pictured or quoted repeatedly in each issue.
- 5) It should be published frequently to build an on-going sense of awareness of Nexus and its achievements.

In addition we set out the following corporate objectives:

- 1) Lead stories should mainly focus on one of Nexus' three core projects; Metro modernisation, The Bus Strategy, and the North East Smart Ticketing Initiative.
- 2) Beyond this each edition should cover the full range of Nexus activities and the whole geographic area we serve.
- 3) Content should underline our key corporate messages: that Nexus activities add value to the economic and social life of the region and activities of other service providers; that we are an efficient public sector organisation, and that we meet the needs of all.

In fact the newsletter is printed between five and six times a year. Rather than coming out on a regular cycle we decided it should be published to coincide with significant events – ensuring it always has an eye-catching front page image or story.

DESIGN AND CREATIVITY

The key feature that defines Nexus Matters is that the page designer determines the length of stories, keeping them short and digestible. This is normal practice in commercial newspapers and magazines, but is in contrast to many corporate newsletters where designers cram in all the copy they are provided with.

This took some getting used to for our in-house designers – they needed some persuading they could just cut copy, or send it back to the author for re-editing!

The newsletter is named 'Nexus Matters' as a gentle pun which itself underlines our key corporate message that Nexus activities add value for the region we serve.

The newsletter is of four A3 pages in a printed format, so it can be used at stakeholder events. In practice we print about 500 copies per edition.

Most stakeholders – more than 3,000 - receive Nexus Matters in digital format, where it comes as a compressed PDF document of four pages identical to the printed format. This significantly reduces the financial and carbon costs of a printed and posted-out newsletter, whilst still retaining visual impact when it is opened.

The design uses Nexus corporate colours in the margin to frame and headlines to signify pages about Metro (yellow), bus (red), ferry and network ticketing (both blue) and Nexus corporate (green).

Other than that the design is not complex – it is simply attractive and easily-digestible, short on opinion but heavy on facts, information and locations.

EVALUATION AND MEASUREMENT

Nexus Matters is sent to all transport ministers and shadows, MPs and local councillors in Tyne and Wear, plus a regularly updated list of leading business people and organisations, major employers in the public and private sector, travel planning officers, community organisations, media and suppliers.

Nexus managers are encouraged to recommend new recipients from among their own contacts, ensuring a growing database of recipients. More than 3,000 recipients now get each edition.

Each edition is sent in an email offering the recipient the chance to de-subscribe, but this has only happened six times.

A survey of key business/political stakeholders (April 2009) showed 88% were aware Nexus was seeking to invest in the Metro and wider transport network, up 14% on previous research.

The survey also showed these stakeholders (which have a very close correlation with recipients of Nexus Matters) had significantly higher awareness of the services Nexus provides than in an identical survey with the general public. For example 93% knew Nexus operate the Shields Ferry compared to 53% of the public, and 75% knew we subsidised bus services compared to 49% of the public.

The survey also showed these stakeholders placed a much higher importance on the services Nexus provides, compared to the public survey.

These results are in spite of the fact that the key stakeholder were more than twice as likely to be daily car users than the public group (57% to 23%) and so had much less first-hand awareness of Nexus services.

These results indicate that Nexus Matters is fulfilling its role in raising awareness of our projects and the added value we offer the region.