

CIPR PRide Awards 2010 (North east)

Category 24: Outstanding in house public relations team

Entrant name: NHS North East (2007/08 – 2009/10)

North East Strategic Health Authority (SHA) / NHS North East ensures health services are fit for purpose and high quality on behalf of the Department of Health (DH).

Our recipe for success

- Take seven enthusiastic professionals.
- Add over 50 years of communications and marketing experience.
- Include determination to do things differently.
- Fold in passion for improving people's health.
- Add a dollop of creativity and a portion of fun.
- Mix in political, private and public sector know how.
- Place together and leave to work.
- Add consistently high standards, evaluate results and sprinkle with awards.

Our happy and motivated team provides communications, marketing and engagement expertise to a range of colleagues and stakeholders, in line with NHS North East's vision and business plan. We influence strategic direction, provide a professional service to DH and guide the region's 23 NHS organisations.

The team has a range of degree and post graduate qualifications and professional memberships, including CIM and CIPR, and our work always incorporates professional best practice and evaluation.

Objectives

- Develop and implement proactive communications, engagement and marketing activity in line with organisational business plan and regional improvement strategies.
- Protect and enhance reputation.
- Inform and engage staff.

Media

Our monthly media evaluation looks at our own coverage – compared to other regions – and the performance of every local NHS organisation. This allows us to strategically manage communications.

In 2009, we were England's best performing SHA for tone of coverage, with 81 per cent including positive messages.

As regional leader of the NHS, our proactive approach has seen our media profile rise 300 per cent in the past year - from 291 to 814 articles, generating an AVE of over £5m.

Reputation management

We work closely with colleagues across several teams to ensure appropriate handling of sensitive issues with key stakeholders, including DH, MPs and media.

We have strong strategic relationships and a good ongoing dialogue with local politicians and regional partners.

In 2008, we won a national NHS communications award for our crisis communications.

More recently, we led on managing NHS reputation through the flu pandemic and the north east obtained the most positive swine flu media coverage in the country.

We coordinated regional NHS communications throughout election campaigning - recognised in a personal letter of thanks from the DH director of NHS communications.

Online

In 2008, we launched www.northeast.nhs.uk as a flexible, interactive communications tool, which also signposts our social media accounts. We have nearly 600 Twitter followers, 140 Facebook fans and our videos on YouTube were viewed over 4,000 times last year. Our website attracts around 6,500 hits a month.

Shortlisted in the 2009 CorpComms awards, the website is a gateway to the local NHS, career opportunities and what we are doing.

Internal

We manage all internal communications with a clear, sustainable strategy encouraging two-way dialogue at all times, especially during change management.

This includes staff meetings with the chief executive, monthly team briefings, weekly team stand-ups and an e-newsletter.

Our 2009 staff survey showed 80 per cent of employees felt management set out a clear vision which was communicated well.

Campaigns

Scrub up

In 2008, our regional 'Scrub up' campaign - starring local NHS staff - was launched to help tackle healthcare associated infections and improve perceptions of cleanliness.

The campaign included: PR, TV and radio advertising and promotional materials in waiting areas, toilets and wards.

Pre and post evaluation showed:

- Worries about catching an infection almost halved, from 34 per cent to 19 per cent.
- 84 per cent recall of message.
- 20 per cent increase in confidence in the NHS reducing infections.
- 50 per cent reduction in C Difficile and 28 per cent reduction in MRSA.

The campaign won best health TV campaign (IPA Best of Health Awards), best communications campaign (national NHS Communications Awards) and best integrated marketing campaign (Northern Marketing Awards).

Live and Train

In 2008, the north east suffered from low recruitment to junior doctor training posts, with only 85 per cent of positions filled.

An innovative campaign - *Live and Train* – was developed to show benefits of training in the region, including a new microsite www.northerndeaneryrecruitment.nhs.uk and other materials.

In 2009 and 2010 we saw a significant increase in applications with many clinical specialties achieving a 100% fill rate for the first time in several years. The campaign generated savings of around £700k by reducing the number of locum doctors employed.

Other campaigns include: *Keep it or cancel it, don't waste it* - to reduce missed appointments; *Good news, you choose* – to increase awareness of patient choice and *Choose well* – to promote best use of NHS services.

Measuring performance

Our work is always underpinned by planning, insight, research and evaluation. As well as monthly media evaluation, we produce quarterly management reports about key areas of our performance.

We undertake regular market research, through surveys and focus groups, to understand public perceptions in order to inform future communications.

Budget

Our budget has remained circa £200,000 for three years and covers media monitoring and evaluation, PR, website, design and print, training and development, travel expenses and ad hoc consultancy. We always take a cost effective, partnership approach in our work and deliver results with real value for money.

Retention and development

Since 2007, only one member of the team has left to have a family.

Everyone has a personal development plan and annual appraisal. Courses undertaken over the past year include: stakeholder engagement, social media, strategic marketing, board communications and crisis management.

Our value

Our director of communications attends SHA board, strategically placing communications as a priority. The team has daily contact with the chief executive and directors and is highly regarded by senior management.

We help to shape the national NHS communications agenda through strategic input channelled via our director of communications to the DH.

Ian Dalton, chief executive:

“Our communications team delivers a high quality service for the whole organisation. They work incredibly well together and can consistently be relied upon to manage our reputation, handle the media and bring robust but creative communications solutions. They always

deliver a good product and add value to our work. Professional and well informed, the team is a vibrant and energetic part of NHS North East."