

Region: Scotland

CIPR PRide Awards 2010

Category 18: Best Newsletter

Entry Title: South Lanarkshire View – East Kilbride

Entrant: Drew King, MCIPR, Head of Corporate Communications and Public Affairs on behalf of South Lanarkshire Council

Aim

A central problem facing communications professionals in local councils up and down the country is how to counter the often negative image created by the media and convert it into a positive result.

Councils may be the beating heart of the local community, providing decision-making on core frontline services such as education, planning and social work but good news, we are often told, doesn't sell newspapers.

Consequently, a substantial amount of local authority media coverage tends to be controversy-based, with disinterest at best in good council news, and the challenge was how to bridge this gap in message delivery.

Thus the task that CCPA set itself was to devise a media strategy that would successfully deliver the council's positive message about services to the 14 local newspapers within the authority's footprint.

The additional challenge was to create a reader-friendly product that the newspapers themselves would clearly recognise as an enhancement to their titles, thus helping to bring them onboard as an ally.

Target Audience

A number of focus groups were drawn from the council's 1800-strong Citizens' Panel – representing South Lanarkshire's four geographical areas and composed on a strict socio-economic structure to mirror the area's population as a whole – to research their views on how effectively the council communicates its key messages.

It became clear that local newspapers were still viewed by the community as a key element in shaping public opinion.

The next stage was working with the focus groups on how the message should be relayed and in which format to ensure that it was not diluted or indeed distorted by a third party.

The objective was finding a way of communicating our message directly to the community and, by working with the focus groups, the solution became obvious – become an integral part of the local newspapers.

Design and Creativity

A pilot programme of eight-page supplements in key local titles was agreed with Trinity Mirror, the group with the majority of titles circulating in the area.

These were used to put real faces to the unsung heroes delivering council services, such as lollipop ladies, swimming pool attendants and home carers.

CCPA press officers – all former journalists – wrote the copy, the design was produced in-house as was the photography, and the finalised PDF pages were transmitted electronically to Trinity Mirror's print centre.

The pilot was a success, with the council not only effectively delivering its key messages directly to readers in a positive, reader-friendly manner but the supplements integrated well with the titles.

Evaluation and Measurement

The success of the quarterly eight-page pilots led to an agreement with Trinity Mirror for them to become a 16-page monthly and the South Lanarkshire View was born.

The success and appeal of the View was such that, within a very short space of time, two other local newspaper groups within the area approached the council with proposals to extend its reach into their titles.

However, the view was taken that the best approach for these was to produce a monthly four-page newsletter

In this way, CCPA was able to secure an attractive, cost-effective agreement with Johnston Press and Forth Independent Newspapers largely due to the fact they regarded the newsletter approach as adding genuine reader value to their titles.

To gauge reader feedback about the View, CCPA again turned to the Citizens' Panel to set up focus groups and members, selected at random, were supplied with copies of the South Lanarkshire View prior to the sessions taking place.

The feedback from the focus groups was highly positive, with participants being extremely complimentary about both the layout and content.

While the focus groups understood it was a council publication, they did not find this switched them off to the core messages, as can often be the case, because the presentation, content, use of photography and design all contributed to the creation of an attractive and interesting 'read'.

The sessions also generated several great ideas to further enhance the content and 'mix' of features, many of which have been implemented:

- **Given the current economic climate, it was suggested that an article on managing finances/debt counselling etc.**

- **Useful contact numbers**
- **Services available from mainstream Social Work services**
- **The role of and services provided by the voluntary sector**
- **Health features**
- **Day in the life of series**
- **Youth facilities**
- **Recreation: what is available on our doorstep**
- **School curriculum: explaining to parents how the curriculum has changed since their day**

A strong demand for the East Kilbride View's reach to be extended beyond local newspapers also emerged from the focus group sessions and we are now in the process of setting up a chain of distribution points in council outlets with high footfalls, in major supermarket outlets and shopping centres.

We believe the East Kilbride View is succeeding in delivering the council's message directly and effectively to local residents, reflected in the response of a survey recording the views of 11,201 households.

When asked if the council was: "Keeping you up to date with what the council is doing?" 77% said that it was, with 77.4% saying that they were "satisfied" with the quality of the information the council was providing to them.

Budget

[Band A] £0 to £10k