

# Cobb PR and East Sussex County Council - Public Sector Campaign

## The campaign brief

### Background

You'd expect an affluent county like East Sussex (ES) to be at the forefront of internet connectivity wouldn't you? Well, you'd be wrong: only 3% of homes/businesses in ES have access to high-speed broadband (24mbps+) compared to 58% nationally, making the county one of the UK's poorest served areas.

### Brief

Knowing that enhancing the digital provision would make ES a far more accessible place to live and work, East Sussex County Council (ESCC) worked tirelessly and secured funding to install superfast broadband. All it needed was a telecoms supplier to come on-board, but a company wouldn't invest unless there was a strong demand for superfast broadband. So the challenge began.

## Objectives

In October 2012, local PR agency Cobb PR was appointed to devise a campaign with the following objectives:

- Stimulate interest in superfast broadband.
- Evidence and sustain levels of demand particularly in the target areas (mostly rural).

Achieving these objectives would maximise benefits to users and ensure long-term financial longevity.

## Strategy and tactics

Cobb PR and ESCC set the following strategy:

- 1) Communicate the benefits of superfast broadband.
- 2) Gather evidence of demand through a local marketing campaign.

The tactic was to get ES people to understand and communicate key messages like:

- Being able to access local services more easily, saving time and money.
- Helping businesses invest locally to create jobs, boosting the local economy.

## Implementation

### Dedicated website

The central part of this campaign was a dedicated website where people registered their interest in superfast broadband, providing the vital evidence of demand needed.

Key features included:

- **Broadband speed test:** to highlight just how slow the connection was. This was related to real life experiences e.g. download time for movies, music or books.
- **A call to action with separate registration forms** for businesses and individuals.
- **Clear explanation of the benefits** both for residents and businesses of having faster and more reliable broadband

### Social media

Playing a big role in this campaign, social media involved:

- Dedicated Facebook and Twitter sites with links to them on the website.
- Regular posts and interactions encouraging registrations.
- Interactive Facebook app showing sign-ups by parish, thus encouraging healthy competition.

- Unique reference numbers for everyone who registered their support via the app. Every time a friend signed up to the app via this number it was listed against the referrer's name.

## Peer-to-peer

### Community champions

Key to the success of the campaign was the engagement of champions (via social media and personal contact) to encourage friends, family, colleagues and neighbours to register. These champions spread the word by:

- Distributing posters.
- Door-to-door leafleting.
- Visiting schools.

### Champions

Another key strategy was to bring local bloggers and social network followers on-board to 'champion' the campaign by encouraging sign-ups in their community through:

- Blogging.
- Posting support on their social media accounts.
- Publishing articles and links to Go e-Sussex.
- Using the Facebook app.

## e-Publications

Cobb PR helped ESCC publish its own newsletters and distribute them to an ever-growing database.

## Printed materials

To engage with the community, posters signposting people to the website were put up in key locations with particular emphasis on rural villages. Individuals and businesses actively supported the campaign by distributing postcards and posters in their community.

## Stakeholder engagement

### Community

Discussion forums, breakfast meetings, 'round table' events, workshops, briefings and conferences were conducted in various local community locations.

Organisations including The National Farmers' Union and The WI were asked to spread the word to their members.

### Media

Cobb PR carried out a full programme of activities to ensure strong local media coverage including:

- Regular press releases and journalist liaison.
- Radio broadcasts.
- Identifying case studies.
- Articles written for parish newsletters and local magazines.

### Libraries

ESCC engaged all 30 public library sites to get involved in encouraging sign-ups. This included a campaign advert screensaver and desktop link being installed on all library computers.

### Businesses

To communicate its vision of 'future-proofing' businesses in ES, ESCC:

- Organised face-to-face meetings with key opinion formers in the business community, directing them to the website and encouraging them to spread the word by becoming champions.
- Worked with business representative organisations such as the Federation of Small Businesses and other local business groups who helped by sending regular 'Tweets' and emails to their partner base.
- Gave talks at Chamber of Commerce and business networking meetings.

## Research and planning

Prior to launching the campaign, awareness programmes and workshops with local communities to understand current broadband usage and stimulate interest were carried out.

In-depth research was carried out to categorise the residents and define the audience.

Case studies of residents and businesses were gathered to use as campaign tools.

The campaign needed a catchy, jargon free name and strap-line. After hours of research and brainstorming 'Go e-Sussex' was chosen as the name, and 'Say Yes to Superfast Broadband' as the strap-line.

## Budget

The campaign was delivered on-time and within the £25k budget.

## Cost effectiveness

With this tight budget, Cobb PR had to come up with some creative ways of getting the message out there such as encouraging local key opinion formers and community champions (100 were created) to spread the word to all audience groups county-wide.

An example of this was the first e-newsletter: sent out to c.2,500 people, it was forwarded so many times it was actually opened by 7,000 email addresses, resulting in a large peak in registrations.

## Results

To measure the level of website traffic and successful campaign elements, regular Google analytics were run. By the end of the campaign:

- 13,149 people visited the site, 8,904 being unique visitors.
- Social media was the second biggest driver of traffic to the site bringing in 1,400+ visitors.

## Press

Using local business' challenges with poor broadband connectivity as a platform for case studies played a critical part in the number of publications and front page articles in the local media. The high number of parish council meetings to keep local communities abreast of the project also resulted in numerous articles being published (see supporting material).

## Registrations

By day 10 of the campaign 1,000 people signed up and in February 2013 the campaign target (10,000) was reached.

However it hasn't stopped there, there are now 12,361 sign-ups and counting (coming both from paper sign-ups and online).

ESCC has now signed a contract with BT to bring faster broadband speeds to thousands of homes and businesses in ES, with some of the highest coverage figures meaning that:

- 96% of properties across ES and parts of Brighton & Hove will have access to superfast broadband.
- 99% of properties in ES will have access to high-speed fibre broadband.
- Every property in ES will be able to access a minimum broadband service of 2mbps+.

Mission accomplished!

*"This campaign has achieved truly remarkable results despite a tight budget and these could not have been achieved without our collaborative partnership with Cobb PR, their dedication, and support."*

**Jenny Devane, Broadband Engagement Manager, ESCC.**