

PRIDE AWARDS 2016



Category: Community Relations Campaign

Company: Engage Comms

Entry title: Building community bonds with the new Harrogate Civic HQ

Brief and objectives:

Harry Fairclough (HFC) is a medium-sized construction firm working across the North of England. Following a competitive tender process, Harrogate Borough Council appointed HFC to build its new civic office accommodation. Engage Comms was tasked with delivering a community relations campaign to run alongside the build from October 2015.

The key objective was to ensure that HFC met community benefit targets regarding:

- positive engagement with the local community on the beneficial impacts of the project
- use of at least 75% local subcontractors and local labour
- provision of trade apprenticeships and work experience for non-employed young people and adults
- training for youths including school visits and input into education programmes.

Research, planning and strategy:

We began by analysing public consultation materials and using social media to understand local discussions around the project and identify relevant partners, agencies and influencers that we needed to engage with. We used this insight to shape the strategy and implementation plan, which was focused on complete transparency and personalised communications.

Careful planning and working in collaboration with the Council ensured that we could take a proactive approach to anticipating and answering any questions.

Rationale behind campaign, including tactics, creativity and innovation:

It was clear from our research that making the site team as open and approachable as possible was going to be key to creating dialogue, rather than an 'arms-length' corporate approach. We wanted to ensure that information and updates could be accessed easily and in 'real time' and that opportunities for local businesses, schools, colleges and residents to get involved were as widely available as possible.

The key tactic employed was a community engagement site blog, designed to give our target audiences a 'one stop shop' for useful, timely and engaging content about the build. An integrated approach to digital and social media maximised the impact of more traditional activities, enabling us to efficiently engage local stakeholders.

Implementation of tactics:

- We set up the blog featuring a live site camera/time-lapse video and visited the site regularly to keep up to date with what was happening so that we could create authentic content in the tone of voice of the site team. The blog was constantly monitored so that queries could be responded to quickly
- HFC's Twitter and LinkedIn accounts were used to disseminate information about progress on site, participate in local online networking events such as #HarrogateHour and drive traffic to the blog/site cam
- We organised and ran a 'Meet the Buyer' showcase event at Harrogate International Centre, involving engagement with over 150 local businesses to introduce the project, the on-site team and the packages of works being procured. Local training providers including the Construction Industry Training Board and Harrogate College were invited to exhibit, providing businesses with advice and access to funding for apprentices
- We wrote and distributed quarterly print newsletters and greetings cards to local residents living adjacent to the site in the voice of the site team providing progress updates, proactively inviting feedback and linking back to the blog for more information
- A partnership programme with local schools/colleges so far includes an official partnership with Harrogate College for which we have committed to providing work experience and training opportunities to construction and other students. We are also offering local schools the opportunity to use the project as a teaching resource and have devised a competition for local art students to design artwork for the finalised building.

Demonstrate tangible benefits to the communities where the campaign was targeted, including any sustainability:

The campaign has impacted positively on the local economy as part of the build, providing employment opportunities to local businesses and engaged the next generation of talent in career opportunities at the Council and in construction. The finished building will make the Council and public services more efficient, saving tax payers' money and reducing running costs.

Measurement and evaluation:

HFC has so far not only met but exceeded all community benefit targets set out in the tender, demonstrating tangible outcomes for the Council and local community, including:

- Residents living adjacent to the site are positive and 'bought in' and take a genuine interest, requesting site visits and regularly providing positive feedback. The site blog has received over 8,000 sessions from 2,000 local residents and stakeholders

- Employment opportunities for over 150 local subcontractors have been created as a result of the campaign, exceeding the 75% local labour requirement with 90% of subcontract packages (equating to over £7 million in order value) let to local businesses
- Partnerships with local schools and colleges has resulted in work experience opportunities for local construction students and the provision of career support and advice
- HFC scored 40/50 (38 is generally considered exceptional) in the Considerate Constructors Scheme site performance visit and was deemed 'Excellent' in all areas, with particular acknowledgment to community relations activity including the blog, resident newsletters and college partnerships.

Budget and cost effectiveness:

A huge amount has been achieved in the eight months since we started implementing the campaign for a cost to HFC of just £22,500; a minute percentage of the value of the multi million pound tender.

“There is an ever increasing pressure on Local Government through its procurement activities to secure added value for and provide a superior service to its local communities. These objectives are passed onto us via our construction contract, which in this case, incorporates our obligations in relation to enhancing community benefits by way of economic opportunities, employment, training and constant communication. It is the quality of that communication that impacts upon our ability to maximise these benefits. The community relations campaign delivered by Engage Comms has more than met these challenges and we have so far not only delivered our contractual obligations but more importantly, been able to deliver on our inherent promises made to the people of Harrogate, particularly those living in the Knapping Mount community close to the site.” - Phil Harris, director, Harry Fairclough Construction Group.