AMEC Communication Effectiveness Awards 2012
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6. Integrated Communication Measurement/Research

Company Name: Westminster City Council **Client/Campaign: Responding to the new world of communications**

Objective/Brief:

Westminster City Council uses research and evaluation to validate and amend policies. We are in the midst of the most radical change in the way public services are delivered in the UK in a generation or more. The government's response to the financial crisis has been to deliver a challenging agenda of reform and budget cuts. Councils, such as Westminster, that respond the quickest and use research and evaluation to change the way they deliver services will be the ones that are able to serve their local residents best. Accompanying this is also the most radical shift in the way people consume communications. Within a few years we will be living in a world where individuals create an electronic bubble around themselves of the information they want to see. The City of Westminster at the heart of London will be the place that this bubble grows first, with the local population the most technologically savvy in Europe. Nearly nine in ten (86%) residents have wireless internet at home (compared to 72% nationally), a third have an iPhone (35% compared to 13% nationally). National figures are taken from the Ipsos MORI technology tracker from mid 2011 and are compared to the council's own polling.

Westminster City Council has the specific objective of using evaluation and measurement to steer the council through these difficult times for public services. We do this by keeping residents engaged and guiding the strategic direction of the council. This entry will show that the only way to do this is through combining communications measurement with other research techniques. This in turn forms measurable objectives within an agreed communications plan built on a firm statistical basis that models realistic targets for communications. The ALBERT model is a practical model that enables Westminster to pre-determine the amount of people to target and where to find them. It is a mathematical model based on conversion rates, so we can predict the outcome of any campaign. This entry is also about how this helped us engage with senior managers in the council over the challenges the council is facing. This ensured the objectives were not only specific and measureable but also attainable, relevant and timely (SMART).

Strategy:

Westminster's approach to communications is evidence-based. We research each area of activity before agreeing campaign plans, by monitoring and evaluating the impact of all our activities. In effect, our whole approach to communications and evaluation centres upon research, insight and action. This is enshrined into a yearly communications plan that includes how success will be measured. Every day a summary of media coverage of the council, including top tweets, is sent out in an email to the team and key members of the Council's Executive Board. Every month a dashboard of the key metrics are reported back to the Council's Executive Board. These include public opinion and media monitoring statistics, as well as a radar of key issues that are likely to impact on the council in the following month. Our evaluation framework enables our analysis to not only be retrospective, but to provide insight into possible future trends. We have developed a statistical model called ALBERT which helps set realistic targets for communications to deliver. On a quarterly basis all campaigns are reviewed using all the data available to see if the outcomes sought are on track to being achieved. In general around 80%-90% of each year's campaign plan is achieved annually. This validates both the ALBERT model and the overall communications approach.

We support the Barcelona Declaration of Measurement Principles created by AMEC members and do not use AVEs. These principles highlight the importance of goal setting and measurement, measuring the effect of outcomes rather than outputs, the effect on business results (where possible), measuring the media through both quantity and quality, the importance of measuring social media, and the importance of being transparent and replicable.

Execution/Implementation:

The key aspects that we deliver in terms of measurement and evaluation are:

- **Monthly dashboards** to inform the Council's Executive Board of key evaluation measures and the key challenges the council faces. These inform the strategic direction of the council
- **The Westminster Reputation Tracker** which is a market research public opinion survey of 500 residents to track perception measures. We also run similar surveys for other local authorities through our consultancy work which validates the usefulness of this approach across the sector
- Market research **surveys of businesses, stakeholders, staff and other key groups**
- A comprehensive programme of **media evaluation** including real time monitoring of **social media sentiment** through tools such as Tweetdeck (permanently set up on a screen for the media team to follow and react to)
- Over 47,000 people have signed up to our online services and we have started sending out regular **emails which are evaluated** through MailChimp and Google Analytics. This enabled us to develop experiments such as sending out different versions of email newsletters and understanding how people really respond to email. Nearly one in five local residents report receiving the email (measured through the Reputation Tracker) and these are among the council's most satisfied residents
- There are now more people interacting with the council through **Twitter** (with over 4,000 followers)
- Less than 20% of visitors to the council website are through the homepage which goes against the common wisdom in local government on how websites are used. Through Google Analytics, and a tool called Logonet, the team are now able to offer tailored **navigation on the website that adapts to user behaviour** by identifying what they might be interested in no matter how they come onto the site

Much of this work has been published in the report *Evaluating your communication tools: what works, what doesn't?* This sets out a strategy for the practical delivery of media evaluating, from a viewpoint that evaluation is a key part of the communications process, and recommends how others could do the same. This report has been endorsed by AMEC and PRCA, was launched in Prague at a conference of European Heads of Communications and has been very well received. It is available online and shares best practice and promotes the importance of research and evaluation. In testing these tools the clear conclusion was that evaluation was a key part of the communications process and not a bolt-on at the end, and thought needs to be put into understanding exactly what outcomes can and should be measured. This new developing evaluation framework has been delivered within a reduced budget for Communications and Strategy as it enables the more efficient use of resources.

Conclusions:

The senior leadership of the council understands that the strategy in reaction to the changing world of communications will help guide the council through broader social changes. Without research and evaluation there would be no clear path developing. Throughout this period of service change satisfaction with the council has stayed above 76% which is amongst the highest in local government. The research has helped:

- **Reinforce** the legitimacy of council policies such as **tri-borough** (the sharing of services between the three local authorities of Westminster, Kensington and Chelsea and Hammersmith and Fulham) by developing the first joint staff and resident survey programme across three local authorities
- **Add** the concept of "fairness" to the council's radical policy review called the **Civic Contract**
- **Defend** publications such as the **parents' magazine Children's First** from cuts by proving they work
- **Prioritise** the importance of **keeping the streets clean** in the council's Financial Review
- **Motivate** senior managers through showing how the staff survey results could help with the council's programme of **Renewing Purpose**
- **Show** the importance of research and evaluation through supporting LGinsight in developing a programme of **monthly national polling on the reputation of local government** and providing the data freely for all councils to use to contextualise their own findings