

Come together:

A partnership approach to integrated diversity communications

By Lyria Howland, APR

Diversity communicators are frequently involved in diversity issues as reputation managers working with supplier diversity, recruitment and retention of diverse employees, diverse thought leaders and diversity media.

However, they may also address tourism, insurance, politics, technology or anything else directed to diverse audiences.

Who is considered a diverse audience? Diversity communications is not limited to communications with people of color or ethnicity. Culture and color are more visible indicators, but they are not the only characteristics of diversity audiences. For example, women can be considered a diverse audience in the field of procurement. Other examples of diverse audiences are people with disabilities and people who are gay, lesbian, transgender or bisexual.

Diverse audiences do not consume general market media exclusively. They also access information through specialized media and organizations based on their culture, race, sexual preference or ability. Depending on their individual relationship with the prevailing culture, or simply on access or preference, people may choose to participate in organizations, vote, shop and live in a variety of environments. They also, however, tend to identify with a diverse group based on their differences, shared needs and experiences. Understanding the unique channels and values of each audience is fundamental to developing effective diversity communications strategies.

Focus on process

Each functional area in a company has a stake in diversity communication outcomes. Smart companies have strategies to address diverse employees, consumers, shareholders, communities, suppliers and other groups. When the messages are consistent, these areas can support one another. However, the opposite is also true. For example, the potential for inconsistent messaging is high for those who communicate with diverse consumers if they are not aware of the messages communicated to employees and other groups.

Responsibility for internal and external diversity communications may reside in several functional areas. Corporate communications, human resources, public affairs, procurement and marketing are all involved in communications strategies and implementation. Valuable information

is available in the silos next door. Are you incorporating this thinking into your diversity communications?

As important as functional silos are to managing an organization, they mean little or nothing to many stakeholders. In the eyes of potential employees, an organization either has a good reputation or it does not. Diverse audiences have specific expectations regarding these qualities. Each functional area contributes to the company's overall reputation.

Cross-function diversity councils are a growing best practice because they build synergies around shared diversity goals and values. Typically led by the chief diversity officer, diversity councils can be initiated in the early stages of an organization's diversity efforts or added to the strategy along the way. Councils like this mobilize the business case for diversity.

The business case for diversity is the company's imperative to increase long-term shareholder value by leveraging the brand, increasing competitive advantage and reducing risk. An organization's diversity strategy, including communications, will not be sustainable unless it's driven by the business case and supported by the CEO.

Sharing matters

Acknowledgement of shared outcomes fuels collaboration. When you understand how diversity communication impacts the entire organization, you can make informed and strategic decisions.

The chart gives examples of functional silos that have a stake in diversity communications. They are called Diversity Communications Measurement Partners. If your area is not listed, add it to the chart along with three of your high-priority communication outcomes. The chart is a tool to help you locate potential measurement partners.

Shared outcomes are results that impact both partners. Every shared outcome on the chart has the potential to impact every other shared outcome. Understanding this potential will assist you in uncovering opportunities to:

- Build strategies based on the business case
- Increase impact by sharing resources and information
- Strengthen credibility
- Compare data and track correlated events, i.e. changes in awareness
- Access additional influencers

Diversity Communications Measurement Partners and Shared Outcomes			
PARTNERS	SHARED OUTCOMES		
HUMAN RESOURCES	RECRUITMENT	RETENTION	COMPLIANCE
CORPORATE RESPONSIBILITY PUBLIC AFFAIRS	RELATIONSHIPS	ADVOCACY	EDUCATION
CORPORATE COMMUNICATIONS	MEDIA EDUCATION	COVERAGE	REPUTATION
PROCUREMENT	AWARENESS	DEVELOPMENT	ENGAGEMENT
MARKETING	BRANDING	ENGAGEMENT	SALES

Howland PR, Inc. 2007

Here's how it works

For the purpose of this example, I'll use the names Tony and Sandy. Tony communicates with diversity audiences on behalf of the human resources department to position the company as an employer of choice. Tony's department measures the company's recruitment and retention of people with disabilities, including how new hires learn about the company and the factors impacting retention.

Meanwhile, Sandy communicates with diversity audiences on behalf of the marketing department to build awareness of the brand's commitment to the Special Olympics. Sandy's department measures consumer awareness of the brand's commitment to the Special Olympics, including awareness among people with disabilities.

Tony and Sandy have a conversation about diversity communications and decide to share existing measurement data and collaborate on a few simple ideas.

While brainstorming, Sandy tells Tony about volunteer opportunities at a company-sponsored Special Olympics program. Tony incorporates this information into recruitment materials and employee communications.

Tony tells Sandy about a recruitment event where people with disabilities learn about employers. Sandy provides Special Olympics materials with company branding to Tony for the recruitment event as well as a pair of Special Olympics VIP tickets to use in a prize drawing.

The next time Tony surveys new hires and veteran employees, the data shows an increase in awareness of the

company's commitment to Special Olympics and greater employee satisfaction due to the company's alliance with the sports event. The alliance also differentiated the company from competitors at the recruitment event, according to applicants. As a bonus, Tony gets an inquiry at the event from a certified supplier regarding business opportunities.

Sandy now has data showing an increase in brand awareness and sales inquiries from people with disabilities due to the presence of company volunteers at the Special Olympics and branding materials at the recruitment event.

Focus on outcomes

Are you ready to test the Measurement Partner approach at your organization? Choose a high-potential measurement partner. Keep it simple. Focus on outcomes that are already included in your measurement systems. Sit down for 30 minutes and agree on a winning proposition.

You have probably noticed that the Measurement Partner approach is not unique to diversity communications. True. But, look around your organization and see if diversity communications is fully leveraged based on the business case. It will be obvious either way. Either way, you can make measurable improvements in your diversity communications by using this integrated approach. **T**



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