



CIPR PRIDE AWARDS 2019 GOLD WINNER

Category: Best Publication

Company: West Midlands Police

Entry title: Newsbeat

Brief and objectives:

The force has had an internal newspaper since 1978. In 2012 this changed to become a digital only daily publication.

Serving a workforce of over 10,000 people, Newsbeat's purpose was to be informative, engaging and the trusted voice of the organisation.

An extensive consultation exercise carried out between March - May 2017 showed that for many colleagues felt disengaged with the publication and as such readership was in danger of falling.

Following feedback, our objectives became:

- A less corporate, more attractive magazine style publication
- Greater engagement – both from the number of people reading the stories and the number of stories they chose to read
- More user-generated content, including pictures, staff suggestions for stories and comments on articles.

The idea, research and planning:

To gain insight we created a comprehensive survey about all elements of the publication which we distributed via focus groups. Carried out over a two month period with people at all offices and stations and at all levels, it revealed a number of common factors that prevented people reading.

- People were too busy
- Content was too corporate to be read in lunch breaks but it would be frowned upon if read in work time
- It was 'just another system to log into' when people already have lots to use
- Too many corporate messages – not seen as work critical

- Duplication of messages.

Based on that feedback we created a plan to redesign and relaunch Newsbeat with the plan to put the reader and their needs at the heart of the publication. The in-house internal communications team drew together a small team to work on the redesign.

Strategy, tactics, creativity and innovation:

The strategy was to encourage readership and trust by creating a more attractive publication, featuring more stories about and from staff. By using inclusive language it was hoped staff would adopt the publication and feel ownership.

The tactics were to create a publication that was less corporate and more magazine like in layout and style.

- Focused on our people and how they live the values of the force it would feature:
- New lifestyle features, pictures and local history sections.
- Shorter stories
- Engaging and intriguing headlines
- More and bigger pictures - with people encouraged to send in their own.

A triage system for stories would ensure Newsbeat was only used when it was the appropriate channel.

We employed an external design agency to work with us to overhaul the look and feel with a brief that it needed to:

- Be bright and modern looking
- Have clear sections
- Have strong headlines
- Be easy to navigate
- Encourage engagement with scrolling news stories
- Make excellent use of pictures - our research showed pictures were key to driving people to read stories.

We decided to run an internal marketing campaign at relaunch to communicate changes and increase engagement.

For the first time we took the very brave decision to allow staff to comment on stories – anonymously if desired - without a pre-approval process. This would give staff a licence to say how they felt about the organisation and with no filter applied we knew not all comments would be positive. However we felt that this met the spirit of openness and transparency and would help create interaction with the publication.

Delivery:

The final product was relaunched in March 2018.

The design agency returned with a new layout and our in-house graphic designers used this as the basis for a redesigned product at a very low cost to the organisation.

In look and feel Newsbeat is now much less corporate and more magazine style.

The tone of the writing is conversational, informative and positive. We use the words 'we, our and us' to create a more inclusive tone and first names are used rather than titles after the initial introduction of a colleague. There is a strong focus on telling individual stories and recognising the good work and positive contributions of colleagues. Newsbeat is used to engender pride in the organisation as well as to disseminate information.

Recognising time pressure on staff, the new format allows officers and staff to consume 'bite size' chunks of information. Each story has three bullet points at the start, summarising key information, giving staff options to skim for knowledge but read on for depth.

Three new sections were included to increase reading enjoyment and engagement. The new gallery, where staff can share photos of events and activity around the force, has proved extremely popular, with more than 60,000 page views in a year.

WMPeople is a section for human interest stories. History is a section to look back at events of the past with our team of historians.

To promote the new redesign a no-cost internal marketing campaign was launched featuring screensavers, briefing notes and targeted emails.

Measurement and evaluation, including engagement of target readers:

Pre re-design, annual statistics gained via Google Analytics revealed 1171 articles were published on newsbeat had 1,253,269 page views via 566,461 visits, where users read an average 2.21 articles per visit.

In the twelve months post-redesign, 1254 articles were published on newsbeat, which had 2,979,743 page views via 738,979 visits, where users read an average of 3.95 articles per visit.

These statistics prove an increase in engagement of 30 per cent, with visitors reading nearly twice as many articles per visit.

The success of appealing for user generated content has resulted in a seven per cent increase in the number of articles written. Recognising people like stories about people, stories about our staff such as WM People and our #HumansofWMP have proved to be some of the most well-read content, for which we have a ready supply of willing volunteers.

However, more tellingly the number of staff comments on articles have swelled from a mere handful pre-redesign to an astounding 1,754 post re-design.

The comment function has proved particularly popular on blogs from senior leaders and has created a new channel for them to receive feedback and comment from frontline staff.

Budget and campaign impact:

All resources apart from the initial agency fee are sourced in house. Members of the Corporate Communications team write articles and the in-house photographer takes professional quality photos.

Word association redesign fee £400

Our Deputy Chief Constable has said the new publication is invaluable as a way of getting truthful opinions from people and helping her understanding of the issues staff and officers are facing.

Comments are also well used on human interest stories, with colleagues offering support or congratulations to people who have shared their stories.

The increase in engagement has given new life to the publication and created two-way communication.