

The logo features the text 'CIPR PRIDE AWARDS 2019' in white on the left, and 'GOLD WINNER' in large, multi-colored letters (pink, orange, yellow, green, blue, purple) on the right, all set against a black background.

CIPR PRIDE AWARDS 2019 GOLD WINNER

Category: Internal Communications Campaign

Company: South Tyneside and Sunderland NHS Foundation Trust

Entry title: Stronger Together (Our ambition to become one Trust)

Brief and objectives:

Brief:

Since 2016, South Tyneside NHS Foundation Trust and City Hospitals Sunderland NHS Foundation Trust have worked in a strategic alliance with a single CEO and Executive Leadership Team. Strategic efforts have focussed on a major reconfiguration of hospital services which has been subject to intense political scrutiny and media attention with an active campaign group fiercely opposing any changes and causing high levels of angst amongst staff.

In May 2018, the Boards of each Trust confirmed a shared intention for the two Trusts to formally merge and become one single NHS Foundation Trust. An extensive programme of internal communications and engagement activity was required between July and September 2018 to ensure a successful merger progress.

Objectives:

- Actively seek views from 8,000 staff and key internal NHS stakeholders about the merger
- Clearly articulate the strategic vision and improve understanding of merger benefits
- Give a clear and consistent message about the positive future for both local hospitals
- Understand any key concerns from staff in order to address them
- Ensure successful employment transfer of staff into new Trust
- Provide assurance on robust staff engagement process (an essential requirement for the merger to be approved).

The idea, research and planning:

Having worked together since 2016, we could clearly demonstrate multiple benefits of the strategic alliance so far and developed an internal campaign branded 'Stronger Together' to tell a clear story and explain how the merger would bring more positive benefits for staff and patients.

From researching the success (and failures) of previous NHS mergers we were aware of the critical importance of strategic communications being embedded from the outset.

Our Head of Communications was part of the leadership team overseeing the merger transaction which ensured appropriate planning and strategic advice. Working with local union leaders, a staff engagement campaign was planned. Key representatives invited to approve campaign materials, key messaging and agree tactical delivery in order to reach as many staff as possible.

Strategy, tactics, creativity and innovation:

Strategy and tactics:

It was vital that staff understood that the merger was completely separate to the ongoing hospital reconfiguration programme and would not circumnavigate any due legal process around moving services in future.

To address this, we developed one clear, compelling narrative and set of key messages about the merger which was used consistently during nine weeks of engagement. Tactics included:

- Developing core narrative, briefing presentation, key messages and Q&As
- Line manager briefing pack shared in advance of wider staff communications
- Monthly face-to-face team meetings
- 'Stronger Together' staff briefing sessions led by Executive leadership Team (open to all staff in various locations)
- CEO roadshows (open to all staff in various locations) and verbatim video recording shared for staff unable to attend or on nightshift
- CEO briefings held with senior managers to help answer queries from frontline staff
- Ongoing updating and sharing of FAQs through internal communications.

Creativity and innovation:

To encourage as much feedback as possible and make it easy for frontline staff to share views, we used a mixture of online and offline mechanisms. We created 'Stronger Together' feedback boxes which went on tour across hospital and community sites allowing staff to write down views on comment cards and post them. This was actively promoted internally as the boxes changed location and via our social media channels recognising that almost 80% of our staff are active on Facebook. We also developed an online survey for staff, a short

video animation to easily explain the merger benefits and used an online engagement tool called Sli.do to allow staff to ask questions anonymously if they wished.

Delivery:

All staff engagement activities were delivered in-house under the strategic direction of the Head of Communications. This included:

- Copywriting and design of core narrative and materials
- Regular internal comms and updating of FAQs
- Social media management
- Co-ordination of all staff briefing sessions, engagement activities and 'Stronger Together' boxes on tour across over 40 locations
- Development of online survey
- Collation of feedback and 70 page analysis report which formed part of the strategic business case to be approved by Trust Boards, Governors and NHS regulators.

It was also important to strategically align external communications, recognising that many staff live and work locally and are influenced by what they read or hear from external sources. Briefings therefore took place with key local media to convey strategic messages and ensure the merger was not confused with wider work taking place to change hospital services.

Measurement and evaluation:

- 1,558 staff actively engaged, representing just under 20% of 8,000 workforce
- 825 staff gave formal feedback, representing just under 10% of 8,000 workforce
- 'Stronger Together' video animation viewed over 12,500 times
- Facebook audience reach of 69,139 with engagement rate of 3.5 % and Twitter audience reach of 84,009 with engagement rate of 1.16%. (Engagement rate between 0.33% and 1% considered very high)
- Attendance at eight key internal NHS stakeholder meetings
- 97% of media coverage about merger either positive (67%) or balanced (30%) in tone.

Budget and campaign impact:

Budget:

Non-pay budget of £2,782 was allocated for design, print and production of all materials. There was no additional staffing resource and all activity was delivered by a small team of 3.8 whole time equivalents (WTE) working across both Trusts whilst also managing day-to-day business (this compares to the average size of an in-house NHS Trust comms team of seven WTEs). Estimated staff time costs for delivering campaign were £11,675 (NHS mergers in other areas have spent around £100,000 in comms staffing).

Campaign impact:

- 85% of staff had read the 'Stronger Together' core narrative
- 69% understood the merger key benefits
- 71% of staff felt well informed
- No negative noise from unions or local campaigners (despite high profile opposition to hospital service changes)
- Support from key internal NHS stakeholders with five letters received in favour of merger
- A successful merger transaction was delivered in less than 10 months
- Over 8,000 staff successfully transferred employment into new Trust
- New hopper bus service launched as a direct result of staff feedback and concerns raised around travel and transport.