

Post Office Communications Plan 2015/16

Our work in 2014/15

The heart of our work as a Communications and Corporate Affairs Team is focused around three core priorities. We will:

- promote our business in order to change perceptions, drive sales and footfall
- protect our business from reputational challenge
- engage with our people in order to drive their support for our strategy and our transformation

We made significant steps forward in 2014/15 while at the same time facing the challenge of a major restructure and the delivery of more than 1m in non-staff savings. All who work in the team should be proud of their role in supporting and driving the Post Office's journey towards becoming a commercially sustainable business with a unique public purpose.

Surprising the nation

Changing perceptions is at the heart of our promotion of the Post Office. Increasing awareness of the changing Post Office is therefore a core aim of the Communications and Corporate Affairs Team: there is no more visible symbol of our transforming business than on high streets across the UK. In promoting this story we are also challenging perceptions around our business and we made major steps forward in 2014/15. An average of 200 press releases a month were released to accompany the opening of transformed branches, generating 13.5m in PR value, while negative sentiment in relation to the Post Office network fell from 11pc in 2012 to 3pc. This is a critical metric in relation to demonstrating perception change.

Our wider PR agenda generated a total PR value of 110m, with a 42pc increase in coverage in media channels year on year. Positive coverage made up 52pc of this: slightly below our 60pc target but increasing from xx in the previous year.

[ALANA/RUTH]

A core element of this was the launch of Post Office Money, which drove significant PR coverage and demonstrated the business as a serious player in the financial services market. The Post Office maintained its place at the forefront of the travel money market while we made great strides in establishing the Post Office as a leading commentator on mortgages and savings issues.

Financial services coverage was up 31pc year on year, with comment from financial services spokespeople up by 9pc. PR value of £37.5m was secured in this space from a budget of £450k.

We also secured a contract with a leading production company to produce a three part documentary (to be aired in autumn 2015) about the value of the Post Office to the UK and the communities it operates in.

At the same time we were integral to another successful year for the BBC's Children in Need appeal, further establishing ourselves as the appeal's number one corporate partner with over £1.2m raised. The Be A Hero campaign resulted in over 250 pieces of media coverage. BBC support leveraged with Post Office referenced on BBC TV

trials for the first time. And 10 million viewers saw our "Thank you" film broadcast on the appeal show.

At the same time we are driving increasing engagement behind our strategy from the crucially important postmaster community. Subspaceonline was relaunched and has attracted more than 23,000 unique users in its first year, with its approval rating among its core audience rising by 25pc in the engagement survey. Approval for Subspace News, our weekly newsletter, rose by 21pc, contributing to an overall improvement in postmaster communications scores of 10pc.

We have also launched runapostoffice.co.uk in order to attract new operators alongside continuing retail trade activity to raise the Post Office's profile as a franchise brand.

We also play a critical role in developing and implementing the Network Transformation strategy, including the launch and administration of the Community Branch Fund for the crucial "last shop in the village" branches.

Our people

In a challenging year, Post Office Communications was at the heart of explaining, informing and supporting our people around significant internal change as part of the wider Business Transformation agenda. We led the communications approach around two waves of people change activity, shaping core messaging and tactics, led the organisation, content and delivery of a supplier townhall event and implemented a crowd sourcing initiative which resulted in more than 100 ideas which were taken forward by the Business Transformation team (directly resulting within our area in a move towards further digitisation of communications and savings of more than 1m a year. We also led on the communications strategy for the move from 148 Old Street to Finsbury Dials.

These achievements were completed against a backdrop of an increasing beat rate of communications through the Teamtalk suite, with key developments including Teamtalk Live in July 2014 which led to significant uplift in engagement and the introduction of a new monthly SLT leadership communications event from January 2014 and now scheduled as a central channel for the foreseeable future.

Influencing key opinion formers

Our Public Affairs and Policy team has a critical role to play in promoting the business - influencing external stakeholders in relation to our business strategy and priorities. This is critical in relation to seeking to prepare the environment, and identifying opportunities and challenges, which support the delivery of our transformation. This includes working with our shareholder, the wider civil service, pressure groups and campaigners and parliamentary and political influencers, policy-makers and opinion formers.

It also plays a core role in protecting our reputation: liaising with MPs and other stakeholders and supporting the delivery of core transformation programmes by highlighting stakeholder management issues and engaging with stakeholders to support business strategy. At the same time it performs a critical role promoting the business and its strategy to core stakeholders but also by identifying key opinion formers and engaging with them.

In 2014/15 our core priorities lay around the general election. We created a core set of aspirations for manifesto content and sought to utilise existing relationships to influence the respective party approaches so that they did not place onerous challenges on the business. This was successful.

To lay the ground for this we held a series of Westminster events for MPs. We engaged during the financial year with xxx MPs and approached half of the UK's 12,500 unitary, district, community and parish councils to ensure that our transformation plans and commercial strategy is understood. Our MP survey results showed that xx are now aware of our strategy compared with xx (more details).

[JANE]

We hosted more than 70 customer forums and public meetings in support of Crown transformation and trained more than 80 middle and senior managers as media spokespeople.

We created and managed the Post Office Advisory Council, a major undertaking which is now firmly established in the business and with a range of members from inside the business and beyond to organisations such as John Lewis, Google and e.on.

We also secured and supported the creation of the Post Office Design Lab at South Bank University, hosting sessions for all three major political parties in advance of the election and other key stakeholders.

Our priorities for 2015/16

We will build on a track record of excellence in corporate and consumer communications in 2015/16, based around our three priorities of promoting the business, engaging with our people and protecting our reputation. As we do so we will strive to enhance Post Office communications, build the capacity and capability of our team and support the development of all Post Office communicators.

Our campaigns will promote our products, our branches, our corporate story and our people with the aim of driving footfall and increasing sales. We will use world class communications across all functions to engage with all Post Office people, motivating them to drive our changing business and supporting commercial priorities.

We will reach out and collaborate with all parts of the business to deliver. Communications is our business: but it is everyone's responsibility.

Content and innovation will be at the heart of this approach. Content which drives sales and footfall. It will be driven by relentless communication touching all parts of the Post Office business.

At the same time we will stand up for our business, enhancing its reputation and seeking to protect it from reputational challenge, working tirelessly to do so in order that the business is able to land our transformation in line with our ambition of creating a commercially sustainable business with a unique and vital public purpose.

Post Office Vision

We will lead the development and communication of the Post Office's vision, purpose, transformation and strategy, reaching out to all parts of the business to drive a 10%

increase in understanding of our strategy. We will ensure that our senior leaders are equipped with the communications support and tools they need to deliver this critical communications strategy and work particularly closely with the Group Executive to do so. We will ensure that through our communications channels we can penetrate deeply into our audience groups and ensure that a structured programme of opportunities is available for delivery and engagement.

This will include a new strategy narrative based on '1000 words for a 1000 day plan' which will describe our transformation across all its elements and be relentlessly communicated through all our channels.

This over-arching narrative will be aimed at telling the Post Office change story in order to engage our people but also to change external perceptions. This will be undertaken through a structured engagement programme with key media, seeking opportunities to showcase our change story. This will be underpinned by the vision and strategy narrative set out above, as well as existing corporate opportunities such as the Annual Report, Interims and new financial year.

We will also, through our planning and production approach, develop a 'war room' approach to capitalising on communications opportunities which support this aim of telling our story. We will seek to be innovative and cost-efficient in doing so, developing the capability of our team to seize opportunities to make impact with communications strategies and tactics off the back of mainstream news and other issues.

Lead responsibility within the communications team will be Alana Renner.

Future funding and strategy

We will deliver a strategy for influencing the new Government, using all opportunities to enhance our reputation and support the creating of a policy climate in which Post Office priorities are understood and, where possible, aligned with those of policy makers. To do so we will deploy a number of tactics, working particularly close with the Head of Strategy and Corporate Planning and Chief of Staff to the CEO.

We will use the Government Relations Steering Group, chaired by Mike Granville, to bring together key colleagues from across the business to assess strategy and tactics. We will take a proactive approach to managing our relationship with BIS, using the GRSG as the key forum to consider action. Led by Jane Hill we will use public affairs strategies to develop wider understanding of, and support for, Post Office strategy. This will include the development of a 'top 100' stakeholder map stretching across Westminster and Whitehall alongside a strategic engagement approach.

We will continue to identify NT/Crown hotspots and work across the business to manage stakeholders and media in a balanced and proportionate manner.

We will engage proactively and constructively with all Post Office stakeholders, but focus in particular on a wider range of interest groups in order to build understanding of our strategy and transformation. We will focus in particular on groups representing rural affairs and small businesses, in line with both business priorities and Government policy focus. We will work to develop a new relationship with Citizens Advice/Consumer Futures.

Led by Jane Hill, we will build on the successful first year of the Post Office Advisory Council in order to develop the body further, increase its influence into the business and ensure clear focus on adding value to the business.

Building our reputation as a challenger in financial services

We will build Post Office Money as a destination brand for financial services by raising awareness of the brand and our product range, using every opportunity (product launch, thought leadership, 'newsjacking') to do so. We will ensure that the Post Office Money offer is part of wider debates around the future of banking, financial and digital inclusion. We will build on our breakthrough year in financial services PR to bring greater value. We will build awareness of our financial services offer and strategy among internal audiences. In doing so we will work closely and collaboratively with colleagues in the financial services team and commercial team, in particular marketing.

We will also build further on our strong travel PR reputation in order to drive further understanding of our role in this market and with associated products.

Winning in mails and retail

We will develop a PR strategy to defend our market share in mails and link this to a drive to place the Post Office as the 'go to' retail partner, taking a robust and positive position to external positioning around network and Crown transformation, working closely with the network and wider engagement teams to develop the Post Office brand in the retail market, building on the runapostoffice initiative. We will defend our position robustly through all channels when under attack from hostile stakeholders and adverse, inaccurate comment.

We will showcase innovation and new developments in product and customer experience to underpin our long term strategy of 'surprising the nation' about Post Office transformation, changing perceptions and increasing customer consideration.

The digital high street

The digital revolution is changing Britain. The Post Office has an active role to play, both through the development of digital sales capacity and capability, but also as a key player in many digital journeys and as an interested advocate for increasing digital skills: the potential for sole traders to transform their businesses by embracing digital and using the Post Office as a critical link is significant. We will combine PR, thought leadership, stakeholder engagement and our CSR activity to develop an integrated communications campaign which places the Post Office at the centre of debates around digital inclusion, positions branches as critical physical check steps in a post-digital age and highlights our growing digital capability. We will take an active and leadership role as members of the Go On UK movement aimed at raising digital skills, leading on engagement with the SME community and working with partners in the London target boroughs of Lewisham and Croydon. We will link this work to our membership of the High Street Forum.

We will work with commercial team colleagues to build our relationship with the Government Digital Service and with key influencers in government, working closely with the Shareholder Executive to identify opportunities to influence and develop in line with business priorities, particularly in the identify verification space.

Corporate Social Responsibility

CSR is not an add-on for the Post Office. Service to our communities is central to our role: our public purpose is to connect communities and enhance the powerful role they play in all our lives, and our pursuit of commercial sustainability is in service of this purpose.

We will continue to harness the support of our branches and our customers as the key corporate partner of the BBC's Children in Need appeal, building our work this year to hold the first ever Post Office Charity Ball in aid of Children in Need.

We will support other causes when appropriate. In particular we will support the Rowland Hill Fund and work with the team to raise awareness of the Fund within the Post Office. As a team we will continue our support for the inspirational Choir with No Name. We are proud to chair working groups on diversity and disability within the Post Office.

These are our priorities. We will focus on other issues based on availability of resource and prioritise as appropriate where competing issues emerge and requests are made. We will ensure a 24/7 approach to news management to ensure that when reputational issues emerge we are able to respond effectively, accurately and, where appropriate, robustly to defend the Post Office's reputation. Such issues in 2014/15 included media interest in Horizon, industrial relations and one off issues such as the Whitstable sit-in and high profile NT issues.

Tools

We are committed to developing our outstanding communications team. Our aspiration is world class communications for the Post Office which is innovative, eye-catching and content driven in pursuit of our core strategy.

In order to support these aims we will develop the way we work over the course of 2015/16, focusing harder on content, channels and measurement as we do so.

We will seek to develop the way we measure the value of external communications and in particular earned media coverage in order to present the business with the case for further investment in PR as a core channel to customer consideration and sales. To do so we will examine innovation in measurement and make recommendations.

We will deliver a regular beat rate of communications through our calendar of regular content, ensuring that 15/16 is the year in which this calendar is firmly established within the business while at the same time creating space for the generation of creative content which responds to internal and external demands and opportunities. To that end we will promote a 'newsjacking' approach to generating communications content, seeking to develop a journalistic approach to the way we communicate internally and externally, going direct to channel and often doing so without engaging with traditional intermediaries in the media (and in some cases challenging media voices).

We will support the development of our senior leaders as communicators, recognising that face to face communications founded on compelling story-telling techniques are the most effective ways of engaging and enhancing understanding and motivation.

We will give our team opportunities to develop their skills as communicators, providing access to training and development opportunities so that they are able to develop as all round communicators, fully aware of developments in the industry, leading in innovation and building on the platform of excellence we have established within the team and the wider business.