Marketing Communications Plan Outline

The purpose of this paper is to provide an outline of the Communications Plan being prepared for Imperial College Union, including the component sections, the rationale for their inclusion, and the overall objectives that the plan hopes to achieve.

Section 1: Introduction

Rationale
Objectives

Section 2: Situation Analysis

Demography - understanding our membership
Survey - what members think of us
Channels & Metrics - how well do we currently engage members
SWOT Analysis

Section 3: Messaging

Assessing the offer
Simplifying the offer
Deciding our value proposition
Language, tone of voice, visuals

Section 4: Strategies and Tactics

Timelines
Marketing Mix
Audiences
Tactics
Campaigns
Partners
Calendar of activities
Resources

Section 5: Measuring Success

Metrics
Milestones

Section 1: Introduction

Rationale for the Communications Plan
In order to fulfil our charitable objects, all registered students of Imperial College London need to know that we exist, our role in their lives, and must make use of their membership through our various offers, programmes, activities and events.

To do so, our 18, 000 + members must be aware of:

- The fact of their membership - since they're not required to opt in, it may not be immediately apparent.
- The evolving benefits of membership - so they will continually engage with the Union throughout their time at Imperial and after graduation.

The purpose of this Marketing Communications Plan is to ensure that there is a deliberate and targeted plan to achieve the above that:

- Is based on a clear understanding of our members: who they are and how to reach them
- Has strategies and tactics to reach all members and not just some
- Is clear and simple enough for all staff and Union members to immediately adopt and make use of in their own interactions with other members.

Good communications will allow members to readily identify us amidst the din of information they receive daily. **Consistency** in language, tone of voice and visual identity, as well as **simplicity** of messaging, are key to achieving this.

Done properly, good communications should also make members feel more connected to the Union and therefore more likely to engage while they're registered students, as well as increase the chances of them becoming active Life Members.

Objectives of the Communications Plan
The Plan is expected to achieve the following, progressively, over the course of 2018/19:

Greater awareness of:
- Membership
- Benefits
- Activities

With a third of our members replaced every year, and many evolving programmes and projects, *awareness* as a communications objective is never adequately fulfilled. The Communications Plan for each year should include an awareness campaign component to address the varying levels of knowledge among students about what the Union is,

membership as a mere fact since it's not something they opt into, as well as the general and evolving benefits to that membership. This is where segmentation is key, as a Year One International student may have a significantly lower level of knowledge about Unions than a Year one domestic student. This is a noticeable gap in our current communications as we tend to talk about the component parts of the Union, without a focus on the whole. With fewer than 50 percent of our students being domestic, this may be having a snowball effect on participation rates. The Communications Plan will address this.

Higher engagement among:
- First years
- Non-UK students
- PGs
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The most fertile ground for our messaging is our Year One students. They are excited, receptive to new experiences and information, eager to get involved, and less likely to have had any negative perceptions of the Union. The quality of their induction has a ripple effect on their engagement over the course of their studies and affects how much more work we have to do to achieve high participation rates year on year.

With a whopping 59 per cent of Imperial students from outside the UK, it's important that we have a plan to address not just the (Union) knowledge deficit, but to actively create communications and programmes that will make them feel included, and represented by the Union. Introducing WeChat is one example of a tactic which recognised that a significant proportion of our students (17 per cent) are from China. We must scrutinise the data and create programmes that satisfy all our populations groups, if we are to fulfil our mission.

If Year Ones are the most fertile ground for our messaging, Postgraduates are the least receptive. As a group, they tend to be more focussed on their core academic pursuits while on campus as they may be juggling more responsibilities, and have a perception of the Union as being for UGs. Since they are a significant portion of our membership, and an underrepresented group in our participation data, this has to be addressed. The Communications Plan will include tactics to address this.

Increased participation in:
- Communications channels
- Training Programmes
- Uptick in Volunteering
- Elections

The first two objectives must translate into increased participation rates across all segments of the Union. The Communications Plan will include clear measurable targets for defined areas.

There will be clear targets and hence, a strategy, for increasing followers on all our social media accounts and other communications channels, while targets will be set for increased use of recreational spaces, specific programmes, campaigns and activities.

The main areas assessed for 2018/19 should align with our main strategic priority projects and the success of the Communications Plan should be assessed solely on these metrics.

Consistent engagement throughout membership life cycle

- A level Results
- Welcome period
- First year settled
- Successive years
- Alumni

Maximising engagement with the Union requires an understanding of what matters to our members at key points in their journey. From their offer confirmation on A-Level Results Day through to their retirement, it would be useful to map the life cycle of the average member and devise programmes as well as communications strategies to reach them and ensure they feel connected to us from day one.

Section 2: Situation Analysis

Demographics - understanding our membership

The Union has 17, 054 members who are enrolled at Imperial full time, and 1, 361 members who are on a part time course. In order to craft proper tactics, determine channels, properly segment our audiences and develop messaging that works, we must rigorously understand our membership. Who they are and how to reach them are questions that can be answered via detailed data already available through College.

Below are the key questions to be answered in order to adequately craft the Communications Plan, the data that will be mined to get those answers, and what components of the plan the answers will shape.

To determine channels, tactics and segmentation
1. Where are our members?
    a. Campus breakdown for PGTs, UGs and PGRs
    b. Faculty breakdown for PGTs, UGs and PGRs
    c. Halls breakdown by numbers, year, and Course
    d. Commuter students' profiles and numbers
    e. Mapping their days/ nights/weekends

To determine content and messaging
2. Who are our students?
    a. Age breakdown of membership

  b. Country of origin data
  c. Ethnicity data

Raw Data 2017/18
Our membership - full time programme numbers
How our members split across each campus
Which departments host which members
Gender profiles
Age groups of our members
Ethnicity of our members

Survey Results: what our members think of us
A brief survey has been opened to members to get a snapshot of their awareness of the Union, and how they feel about us. The results will be used to help guide our approach to the brand review section of our Communications Plan.

Survey Questions

So far, there are 150+ respondents allowing for some broad generalisations. Key emerging theme: Union values are unclear.

Channels & Metrics: how well we currently engage our members
This section is where we will review our existing channels and review our engagement so far. It will include details for the following:
- Communications metrics – newsletters, website, social media accounts, campaigns
- Engagement metrics –membership activities, projects, programmes and events

SWOT Analysis
- What are we doing well at so far?
- What are the strengths, weaknesses and opportunities and threats?

Section 3: Messaging

The Union offers a lot to its members. This means overlapping activities throughout the year competing with each other for the attention of students and for communications resources. With the Union also competing with other messages from College on a daily basis in never ending channels, members experience information overload and message fatigue. To get through the din, it's important that we have clear, readily identifiable messaging which can be communicated *simply*. This is the hallmark of good branding.

It's proposed that we develop no more than 3-4 clear categories under which each Union activity sits, each of which are connected by a common theme that represents a value to students. This kind of paring will make our website easier to navigate, our spaces coherent,

keep our messaging tight and consistent, thus allowing us to communicate our value proposition much easier and quicker. Members will therefore absorb it faster.

Developing our message involves the following activities currently underway:

Simplifying the offer:
This involves looking at all the activities within the Union and categorising them according to connecting themes. Each category will represent a specific value proposition.

Deciding our Value Proposition:
Our value proposition is what we ultimately offer to make our members' lives better. It should be expressed from the perspective of our members, and not from an operational perspective. At the end of the messaging development process we should know what our main overarching value to students is, with the various categories (identified in the previous step) supporting that main value.

Empathy Mapping:
This involves the creation of personas for different segments of members in order to capture their hierarchy of needs and ensure we are meeting all of them (if that is our aim) or some (if that's our aim). We should then be able to match each category to a specific need. Staff and Union members should know what need is being fulfilled when they execute or take part in an activity.

Messages:
Done properly, the above steps should make the creation of messages clear. All Union staff and members should be able to clearly identify in simple language:

- Why the Union exists – **our mission**
- What we are working towards collectively as a membership body – **our vision**
- How we go about doing this – **our values**

These threads will then form the basis for our communications content, and will be a thread throughout our various channels and spaces.

Language, tone of voice, visuals
These are already contained in our brand guidelines and will be reviewed to ensure they support our messaging.

Section 4: Strategies and Tactics

This section will outline the actual activities that will form the plank of our communications. It will include audience segments, strategy and tactics for each segment, the main campaigns, as well as the activities, events, and partnerships that will support our effort.

This section will also deal with subprojects like the web and space refresh as well as the plan for internal sensitisation.

Timelines
Milestones and communication flashpoints

Marketing Mix
Defining our channels and regular communication and marketing activities

Audiences
Defining our segments

Tactics
Specific communications activities we will use to achieve our results

Campaigns
The key communications projects that will be prioritised throughout the year

Partners
The internal and external stakeholders who will support delivery of the plan

Calendar of activities
A list of specific activities with timelines and specific responsible persons

Resources
What we will need to achieve the plan

Section 5: Measuring Success
This section will outline expected outcomes with clear targets that should be used to measure the success of the plan.

Metrics:
What success looks like in actual numbers

Milestones:
When we expect to achieve them.