

CIPR Pride Awards 2009

Category: Internal Communications

Entry Title: Best newspaper or magazine

Billboard [internal magazine for Devon and Cornwall Constabulary]

Background

Devon and Cornwall Constabulary has printed a bimonthly magazine since 2004. In 2008, after the launch of the Forcewide internal communications department, it was decided to look at the publication to ensure the frequency, content and focus was up-to-date and in line with the Force's vision and direction for the future.

The budget of Billboard also needed to be considered. The design had been outsourced to a freelancer since launch and the Force needed to make use of its in-house reprographics department. At the time, the future of the reprographics department was under review so it was felt that by bringing the magazine back in-house, this would be further justification for its existence. It was also calculated that the Force could save money by bringing the publication back in-house.

A staff survey was undertaken to find out what staff and officers thought of the existing design and content and what they would like to see in the future. The internal communications department also wanted to find out if staff and officers wished to continue reading a printed publication or would prefer to receive information via the Force Intranet (also recently re-launched).

Objectives

- To discover how valuable Billboard was as an internal communications tool
- To discover what staff and officers wanted from their Force magazine
- To save money on the overall cost of Billboard by bringing the magazine in-house and utilising the services of the internal reprographics unit
- To discover how we could best use Billboard as a key communications tool to fit in with other Forcewide internal communications tools, such as the new force Intranet

Results and analysis

The results of the staff survey found that while staff and officers wished to be able to access Billboard via the Intranet, they still valued a printed edition and that it was still a key communications tool for the Force. They wanted to receive Billboard on a more frequent basis preferring a monthly rather than bi-monthly edition. They also wanted the articles to be shorter and more reflective of the Force's own vision and direction. It was clear that staff and officers wanted to receive key messages from senior members of the Force within Billboard.

However, staff and officers were also keen to see more light-hearted news such as sports stories and articles that were of a more personal nature.

Content management

It was necessary to re-think how the magazine was run, especially as the frequency was increasing from bimonthly to monthly. Previously, two members of the team worked solely on the publication, limiting the amount of other internal communications that was generated. It was decided instead to train all members of the team to edit Billboard. This has also helped with ongoing Forcewide communication projects the team works on, allowing them to use Billboard more effectively to disseminate key and timely information across the Force.

Distribution and costs

Previously, Billboard cost £12,000 per annum to produce on a bimonthly basis. By turning the publication into a magazine style format, it now costs £10,800 a year and it is now published monthly saving the Force £1200 a year even though the publication is now published more frequently.

Further money has also been generated which has been offset against the cost of the publication by inviting advertising from external companies. Although this is a new initiative, since the re-launch of Billboard in April, a further £1200 has been generated. A media pack has recently been created for interested businesses. This extra income can also be used if the communications needs of the Force dictate that the pagination of Billboard needs to be increased in the future or the internal communications team is asked to justify the existence of a printed magazine.

The distribution of the magazine was analysed when considering its future. Previously, boxes of the magazine were delivered to each station and department throughout the Force area. However, as a result of the survey, it was discovered that some people had not received Billboard for some time and on occasions when they had received it, there were not enough copies to go round. As a result, it was decided to review the magazine's distribution completely. Now, there is a contact within each station that distributes the magazine on behalf of internal communications. The team also personally delivers the magazine to some key departments including the Chief Officer Group.

Previously, 2500 copies of Billboard were printed with 1200 posted to retired officers. As a key internal communications tool for current staff and officers, we decided to write to all retired officers to find out if they would still like to receive Billboard and if they did, whether they would prefer it to be emailed to them in PDF form. This helped us to cut the number of copies to retired officers significantly. Rather than cutting the print-run by this amount, we decided to use these extra printed copies and send them to existing staff and officers. We are continuing to review the distribution of Billboard in order to ensure it is still cost effective and staff and officers are receiving it on a monthly basis.

Style and content

Previously, Billboard was a newspaper style publication. However, as a result of the survey, it was discovered that staff and officers would like to see Billboard monthly in a magazine format with shorter, punchy articles more aligned with the Force's vision and goals.

As a newly created department it was also felt that the profile of the internal communications unit also needed to be increased. Therefore, the editorial letter now comes from the team rather than an individual editor. Within the editorial letter, we also ask for feedback on issues within the Force and provide information about various internal communications initiatives.

The magazine is now more aligned with other communications tools such as the newly-launched Force Intranet and readers are directed to the Intranet for more in-depth information on topics in the magazine.

Ongoing evaluation and measurement

Internal communications is committed to evaluating the impact of Billboard with regular staff surveys about the focus, design, content and future direction of the magazine. We have also recruited a team of 'communications champions' from across the Force area to tell us what staff and officers like and dislike about the magazine on a regular basis. We are also considering setting up an editorial panel made up of staff and officers across the Force.