**Culture Comms notes | Leading from the Press Office**

• Sharon Atkinson, Director of Communications, York Minster **(SA)**

• Josephine Chanter, Head of Communications and External Affairs, Design Museum **(JC)**

• Will White, Head of External Affairs, National Media Museum **(WW)**

• David Bryan, National Council Member, Arts Council England **(DB)**

**DB**: Communications in cultural organisations is part of interaction and goes beyond the boundaries of ticket sales. This session is about being a change maker for the organisation by leading from the Press Office.

**Josephine Chanter**

**JC**: The Design Museum has been focused on moving from the Shad Thames site to South Kensington.

From the Press Office I was able to challenge the teams to look at things in different ways. To build the stories again the way the building is being rebuilt.

**JC**: In order to continue driving stories and to keep awareness of the brand during the move comms centred its activity on the Shad Thames location and we celebrated 25 years of the Design Museum telling the full story of the museum. We were lucky to work with design all stars celebrating the museum old and new and creating myths ahead of the new museum.

**JC**: We worked with top designers including Johnny Ive, Paul Smith creating a major news moment around design education.

**JC**: The communications plan allowed the museum to nurture its relationships with industry experts both famous and not famous.

**DB**: What is the key for comms to lead within an organisation?

**JC**: Build alliances with different parts of the organisation and find the people that understand how comms works.

**Sharon Atkinson**

**SA**: York Minster is part of the heritage of our nation and 2nd cathedral of England. It was easy for the Minster to get press to come to the outside to get images of this spectular building but when I joined we wanted to do more. We needed to find out what the Minster stood for and give it to congregation to encourage new members but to also inspire and educate.

**SA**: We created a campaign during the refugee crisis that was hash tag refugees welcome. This campaign spoke to wide public feeling at the time. The right wing protestors were a sign that we’d achieved more than we ever expected to.

**SA**: It had full support of the clergy and the congregation but reached beyond what the church normally does to communicate to a wider audience.

**DB**: Again what is the key in your opinion to creating buy-in for comms within an organisation?

**SA**: We are lucky that our Dean has a modern approach and understands the importance of comms, so having a champion is very important. Find that person.

**SA**: I would also say that funding was an important part of getting people within the organisation and the congregation on board. To keep the Minster functioning we need money from funding bodies and from visitors. The way people like HLF work is to demand more diverse audiences and in order to achieve those visitors we had to put the cathedral on the map and increase awareness with the general public and maintain messaging to keep it at in the forefront of minds.

**Will White**

**WW**: The National Media Museum lost touch with local audiences in Bradford. The museum had not changed with the changing attitudes of the people of Bradford.

**WW**: Our challenge was maintain status as a national museum but to make people believe in the Museum.

**WW**: We conduct a full audit and found that the Museum used very shallow ways to connect with the young Asian community within Bradford. They weren’t trying to relate to the audience but using quite crude ideas that didn’t connect with the real audience such as an exhibition of posters from Bollywood movies, which although from the culture isn’t reflected of the Asian population within the city.

**WW**: We needed to treat people differently and understand better in order to get them and get them to visit the museum.

**WW**: Our research showed that Bradford men are young, wannabe entrepreneurs from an Asian background. Once we knew this we could design exhibitions that really appealed to this group of local audiences and therefore increase visitors from the community.

**DB**: Again what is the key in your opinion to creating buy-in for comms within an organisation?

**WW**: Be hard headed about what you are trying to achieve but equally try to subvert structures in the subtle way and relate to what each department is trying to achieve.

**Questions from the audience**

**Pauline from HRP**

**How do you cut through cynicism?**

**SA**: We did face quite a lot of cynicism from our traditional audiences of white middle class people. We chose to ignore it and stand on the principles of our ideals and the strong public mission our campaign had. We wanted to seen as open to all people but weren’t interested in converting people to the religion. We honestly had to be bold and know that people will complain. Having strong leadership of the organisation makes a huge difference.

**WW**: Echoing what Sharon said I would say you have to have vision and be honest about where your organisation is and where it needs to go.

**JC**: I would say be brave but not foolish. Keep rooted in the ethos of the organisation. It is okay to create media controversy if it comes from the museums values. We for example have commented quite heavily on Brexit as this was important to the organisation. Go into anything like that as a team and it will be a strong message.

**Phoebe from Arts Council England**

**How do you deal with internal communications issues?**

**SA**: My department had to show the museum that to get outside help such as funding we to communicate differently to the outside world. We had to explain that by marketing ourselves properly the organisation would be in an overall stronger position, financially and within the region. We did lots of talking, lots of meetings, looks of cake was consumed. We didn’t want to make people feel isolated or like they weren’t being listened to.

**DB**: I think this question comes back to leadership. You have to think long term.

**JC**: We are in an privileged position to have an external perspective and can relay this back internally to advocate the change. Don’t be afraid to use that knowledge it’s a powerful position. I would also say that its important to come into decisions at the beginning rather than being handed something that has already been decided upon.

**WW**: I come back to the trust and to find networks of people within the organisation at all levels who will respect your point of view.

**Jackie from NMRN**

**How do we monetise or see the monetary value in communications?**

**WW:** We can’t make water into wine but I would say that coverage does equal visitors who will spend money.

**SA**: You can monetise other aspects of the building such as filming. I also think its really important to improve partnership working and to work closely with tourist bodies such as Visit England. I would also suggest setting metrics or measurements for success.

**JC**: You can use traditional KPIs or AVE to measure success but I would also say that out of coverage comes sponsorship and the development team can work with you to generate money for the organisation.