

2004 New Zealand Post Management Excellence Awards

Category: Community Relationships

Project: Hastings District Council Puzzle Communications Strategy and Puzza Mascot

Executive Summary

The Challenge

To better engage our community in all planning for our Districts future.

The Solution

- ✚ A fresh communications direction.
- ✚ New identifiable imagery.
- ✚ Targeted approach with wide community appeal.
- ✚ Organisation wide support.
- ✚ A creative opportunity for staff.
- ✚ A direction for both the present and future.



Award Criteria

1. The need for and expected benefits of the project and how it furthers Council's vision and strategic direction.

The Hastings District Council required a new way to engage its community in both the community outcome process it was about to embark on as well as the Long Term Community Council Plan that followed. It needed to be something that was different to previous methodologies that had generated mediocre responses. The Council also wanted something that could be used for future projects and plans, and something the community could associate with.

The Local Government Act 2002 (LGA) has brought a new emphasis on community consultation and engagement. With a new purpose of local government (Sec 10), principles (Sec 14) and the various sections of Part 6 all pointing to engaging communities from the beginning to end of the decision-making process, local government is challenged to find new ways to fulfil this obligation in a meaningful and positive way.

Like other local authorities, Hastings District Council has found it difficult to engage a sometimes apathetic and uninterested community in an often complicated and technical decision-making process. Local government processes are often somewhat confusing for the public. They have been asked to comment on so many "plans" that it is often hard to understand which is which and the function of each plan. The community has been asked for input into District Plans, Annual Plans, Strategic Plans and Asset Management Plans, not to mention a large number of special purpose plans. They often affect the same people at a city or district and regional level. The Long Term Council Community Plan (LTCCP) has compounded this by its almost unpronounceable name and new concepts including community outcomes.

Council's strategic plan, **Hastings Towards 2011**, set out its vision "*Hastings, the lifestyle of choice a place of opportunities*" with Councils mission "*working with our people towards a proud and progressive community*". Not only did this vision and mission represent council direction, but it has been given emphasis through the provision of the new LGA.

If Council was to work with its community in the way it stated, then it needed a method to draw the community into its processes so that they could consistently recognise that it was council seeking their input - that this was the community's process.

Council needed to encourage contribution and ownership now and in the future. The forthcoming outcomes process and LTCCP seemed like an ideal time to develop this tool if the Hastings District Council was to be successful in engaging its community.

In conjunction with local communication agency Outloud Ltd, Hastings District Council developed a communications strategy based around the puzzle concept with key messages like:

- 🧩 We're just one piece of the puzzle.... (implying partnership)
- 🧩 Just one piece of the puzzle....(implying a component – just one part of an overall solution)
- 🧩 We're putting all the pieces together..... (taking a leadership role)
- 🧩 We're shaping the future.... (implying a planning role for council)
- 🧩 We're all a piece of the big picture.... (theme used for regional community outcomes consultation)
- 🧩 Be part of shaping the future of Hastings District..... (Expo theme)

The concept uses puzzle imagery, a puzzle character and puzzle mascot (who became known to local children as Puzza) to deliver on these messages by linking these through to Council with the puzzle character being an adaptation of Councils gannet logo.

The character also used a yellow and black fingerboard sign on its back to portray the appropriate message for the consultation purpose.

The strategy sought to use the puzzle imagery for the following reasons:

- 🧩 To positively demonstrate (in a non dictatorial way) that Council is responsible but everyone has a part to play in putting the puzzle together.
- 🧩 It associated the puzzle imagery with the consultation exercise without referring to the **plan** as the puzzle.
- 🧩 Prompted people to add their piece.
- 🧩 Was short and punchy but gave a strong indication of:
 - What we were doing
 - Why we were doing it and
 - What we needed from them



2. Effective project management techniques

The project commenced with the need to gain the management team support to find a new way to engage the community in the consultation processes required by the new LGA. This led to a small team being assigned to develop a communication strategy in conjunction with Outloud Ltd.

The strategy was designed to combat the need to develop an immediate one-off response to engage the community in the community outcome process and thereby link not only to the LTCCP, but to other council consultations that contribute further pieces to the puzzle. In the past there had been a variety one-off project specific consultation exercises that had been of limited success. This new methodology set about addressing this issue.

Once the communications strategy had been developed and endorsed by the executive a variety of project specific teams were set up to deliver particular projects in accordance with different project plans within the strategy. Examples include:

- 🧩 Hawke's Bay Show – community outcomes focus
- 🧩 Hastings District Council Expo – LTCCP focus
- 🧩 Community open days on specific issues

3. A participatory approach to communicating with and getting 'buy-in' from stakeholders associated with the project.

The primary purpose of the project was to improve community engagement and as such the primary stakeholders were the Hastings District community. In the first instance however, it was necessary to gain buy-in from the secondary stakeholder, staff at the Hastings District Council. We needed staff support for the project to be successful.

Key to success of the puzzle strategy was the support from all levels of the Hastings District Council. Initially driven by management all staff embraced the concept. This wide spread support was generated because:

- 🧩 A variety of staff were involved in the initial strategy creating a number of champions in different groups within the organisation.
- 🧩 Management allocated sufficient resources to enable the project to be developed through to the completed resource kit for staff to use (including mascot, graphics, templates, tee shirts and stickers).
- 🧩 This was novel and fun for staff to be involved in.
- 🧩 It encouraged and acknowledged creativity.
- 🧩 It touched people's emotional side.
- 🧩 The project was set up to be sustainable – staff could see that their effort was adding long-term value.
- 🧩 Support and encouragement came from elected members once the project connected with the public.

Primary stakeholder buy-in is best reflected by the results of the engagement processes where the puzzle imagery was used (these are discussed in section five).

4. Innovation and originality in the specific award category area

The concept of using a puzzle to describe a process is not new to local government or the corporate sector (State Insurance having based a campaign using a puzzle to represent pieces of insurance that represent combine to a total insurance package). What is innovative about this project is how the concept is used to:

- 🧩 Add a positive, friendly, recognisable image to a process and Council.
- 🧩 Wide appeal to different sectors of the community – children through to adults.
- 🧩 Give a process a public face.
- 🧩 Is simple and durable.
- 🧩 Provides an image for today and to build on for the future.
- 🧩 Is able to link a number of issues, processes and projects together.

5. Successful results in both financial and non-financial terms.

Puzzle Resources – Budget \$8,000

The main reusable resources for various events and include the Puzza costume, graphics, report templates, stickers.

Hawke's Bay Show – Budget \$3,500

Puzza, the puzzle message and imagery made their debut over three days at the Hawke's Bay Show in late October 2003. This was timed to coincide with the last week of submissions on the Hawke's Bay regional community outcomes identification process, the campaign "A Better Hawke's Bay Have Your Say". Using the "We're all a piece of the big picture" message the Hastings District Council stand at the Show council solicited in excess of 2,000 submissions to the regional community outcome process over three days, which was in excess of 80% of all the submissions received. Without doubt the key to this success was Puzza, the puzzle Mascot, the giant jigsaw puzzle and giveaways which stopped and held children long enough for parents to express their ideas on what Hawke's Bay should look like in the future for the community outcomes process.



Hastings District Council 2004 Expo – Budget \$30,000

The Hastings District Council held its second Council expo in April this year. The purpose of the Expo is to showcase Council activities and promote involvement in the Council's LTCCP. This year Council added a Schools Day and the puzzle mascot was used in promoting the event through street walking in Hastings and Havelock North CBD's preceding the event to promote Expo. Three years ago Council used public meetings to engage the community in its planning processes, last year it held its first expo and this year wove in the puzzle strategy. The results are tabulated below.

	Pre Expo	Expo	Expo with puzzle strategy
Number of participants in the process	>100	702	1195
Number of submissions	118	151	1285
Budget	5000	17,000	25,000
Cost per participant	\$50	\$24	\$21
Number of positive press articles	Nil	5	11

What the above analysis fails to acknowledge is one of the key reasons Council and management support the expo concept and the creativity introduced through the puzzle communication strategy. The project has created a positive opportunity for staff from across the organisation to work together and provides a significant boost for staff morale, team work and organisational understanding.



6. That the project was a 'good, sensible and the right thing to do'.

There is ample evidence to suggest that using mascots and associated imagery to make an event, activity or issue more appealing to an audience is a sensible decision. Companies like MacDonalds, sporting teams, radio and television stations to name a few, have all used mascots to gain public appeal. Therefore, the levels of risk and benefits associated with a project like this have been tested by other organisations and the concept has a tried and tested track record.

There is a need under the new LGA to involve the community more in the decision-making processes of local government. This has meant that we, local government, have to find new more innovative ways of involving the public. New ideas that are cost effective in engaging the wider community in local government business must be a positive initiative.

The project has been hugely successful for the Hastings District Council because it is:

- 🧩 Seen as unique to local government or as least the Hawke's Bay
- 🧩 Has a novelty value and appealed to the wider community
- 🧩 Has encouraged council staff to be creative and enthusiastic about a process
- 🧩 Been very successful and out-performed our expectations

For more information on this application please contact:

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