

Communications and Marketing – Strategic Approach

1 Purpose of the paper

- 1.1 The purpose of this paper is to outline the roadmap towards a more strategic approach to communications and marketing at Food Standards Scotland (FSS).
- 1.2 The original intention had been to present a finessed marketing and communications strategy but considering recent developments regarding budget and the future focus and remit of FSS, this paper will act as an interim update until we have the clarity needed to shape our priority audiences, channels, and activity for the next three to five years.
- 1.3 The Board is asked to:
 - **Discuss and provide a view on the proposed direction of travel.**

2 Strategic aims

- 2.1 This work supports all FSS Strategic Outcomes as without effective communications the work of FSS will go unknown, both internally and externally. Having said that, outcome 5 is paramount; FSS is trusted and influential.

3 Background

- 3.1 Communications and marketing (C&M) at FSS have historically been seen as a support service focussed on producing campaigns and activity (brochures, web pages, press releases etc.) in response to the needs of the branches, often in isolation. This approach has helped foster some good stakeholder relations and has laid a solid foundation on which to further build the brand and reputation of the organisation, but a shift in approach is needed - one that will result in greater impact and reduced silos of activity and duplication of effort.
- 3.2 Switching the scenario from “waiter/ diner” (branches order and C&M deliver) to “doctor/ patient” (tell C&M where it hurts and they help write the prescription) will empower the team to lead and advise on the best course of action based on the challenges and strategic priorities at an organisational level, with a commitment to delivering integrated campaigns to drive efficiencies and streamline spend. Along with other areas of the business, a key shift change for communications and marketing is the more effective use of digital, both as a means of communication and analytics.
- 3.3 Our Goal as defined in the Strategy and Corporate Plan is “To engage with all parts of society in Scotland; understanding the issues that matter to consumers and providing information that is tailored to their needs. The strategy also references the use of an appropriate range of channels including mass media, social/digital

platforms and consumer engagement. To achieve those outcomes there are four key elements to our strategic approach to communications:

- 3.3.1 Being data driven
- 3.3.2 Being better connected
- 3.3.3 Being pro-active and systematic; and
- 3.3.4 Being benefit led with clear messages.

Key to the above is ensuring we are able to effectively measure our impact.

- 3.4 Section 4 provides more detail on the above element and highlights key shifts in how the C&M team will operate. Considerable progress has been made in many areas already, with others still a work in progress given continued resource constraints.

4 Discussion

4.1 Data driven

- 4.2 FSS is a science and evidence led organisation, so why should our approach to communications and marketing be any different? There are many tactics the C&M team are adopting to make the shift towards being data and intelligence led in all we do, including:

- 4.2.1.1 Increased acquisition of audience insights to understand behaviours, motivations and preferences to optimise the relevance and performance of activity. For example, in response to the increased cost of living crisis a consumer pulse survey is being developed to understand behavioural change because of rising prices linked to areas within our remit e.g., food safety, diet, and nutrition. The results of the survey will give us current data to help shape content and consumer messaging.
- 4.2.1.2 Improved and more regular reporting on performance metrics across all channels and outputs of the division, using analytics to inform future strategy and planning. For example, an audit has been completed of all active social media channels to better understand audience demographics, high performing posts, preferred formats, timing, and frequency of posts by platform. This is allowing for more effective targeting of organic (free) content to drive engagement and grow our following, improve relevancy, and increase reach.
- 4.2.1.3 Streamlining of pre and post campaign evaluation. This has always been important to measure the effectiveness of campaigns, but with improved analytics in-house and better use of existing channels, e.g. the Consumer Tracker Survey, it can be streamlined. For example, we can integrate questions related to the cost of living within future trackers to link with activity we run because of the pulse survey.

4.2.1.4 Increased data volume and accuracy within SEMs (the customer relationship management system) will drive more centrally coordinated email communications with our stakeholders. This will allow for forward planning to increase the frequency of communications and, with improved segmentation, to ensure the right people are receiving the right message at the right time.

4.3 **Better connected**

4.4 The imminent appointment of a Head of Public Affairs and Stakeholder Engagement will help to improve how FSS identifies and nurtures important relationships, with elected representatives (including UK (United Kingdom) and Scottish Parliaments and Local Councils) and the House of Lords to improve visibility, reach and regard of FSS. This will ensure FSS is abreast of relevant developments and that views are reflected accurately, as well as centrally coordinated. There's no doubt that FSS has a key role to play in improving public health, ensuring there is an effective regulatory system in place and being prepared to be accountable but to date, Parliamentary oversight has been relatively poor despite our direct accountability to the Scottish Parliament.

4.5 Considering the renewed focus on stakeholder engagement and strategy development, FSS is taking part in an annual Local Government Leadership and MSP Advocacy Survey. This will assess current perceptions of FSS amongst senior local government figures and Members of Scottish Parliament to establish a baseline from which to work. In addition, the exercise will help FSS better understand key figures in local government, their priorities and how to support them where relevant in their work.

4.6 **Proactive and Systematic**

4.7 The introduction of new processes, especially in relation to forward planning means that opportunities and potential challenges are being looked at 6-12 months in advance. This is ensuring resources and content are considered and coordinated well in advance and in a collaborative fashion across FSS. Being on the front foot, making better use of organic channels and adopting an 'always on' approach will reduce the reliance on big budget media campaigns.

4.8 A more proactive approach to press and media engagement has been adopted to ensure we are the go-to organisation for comment and opinion on key matters relating to food and dietary health. For example, an expert directory has been developed for key contacts and we have secured regular media spots, such as the P&J monthly opinion piece. We are not simply responding to media enquiries but seeking them out on our terms to communicate key messages and raise the profile of the organisation.

4.9 A newly formed Internal Communications Steering Group is proving valuable in including employees in shaping messages and content and initial meetings have flagged content that is relevant both internally and externally. The intention is that this group will feed the communications pipeline more generally in future.

4.10 **Benefit led and clear messaging**

- 4.11 Convincing target audiences of the impact of our activities and the benefits of our services, rather than just describing what we do is crucial. Whether it is substantiating how our science and evidence is helping to protect the people of Scotland or how we deliver timely and relevant business guidance and support for food business operators of all types and sizes, we need to demonstrate our offering in a distinctive way that is relevant and clearly shows a benefit to the audience in question.
- 4.12 In addition, it is important that we adhere to the FSS brand guidelines and tailor communication style to the audience in question: *General public - friendly and approachable; Food businesses, scientists and academics - expert and authoritative; and Government ministers – formal*. As an example, the way in which we present findings from science and evidence should differ enormously and information to consumers should be in layman's terms, without jargon and unnecessary complexities to ensure common understanding, and once again, with benefits clearly articulated.
- 4.13 **Key performance indicators**
- Volume and sentiment of print, online and broadcast media coverage.
 - Social media following and engagement.
 - Increased web traffic, dwell time and reduced bounce rates.
 - Increased awareness and regard of FSS in Consumer Tracker results.

5 Identification of risks and issues

The proposed approach works to mitigate the strategic risk around misinformation. Strengthening the FSS brand and reputation to cut through misinformation, stand out in a noisy landscape and be the trusted source for information based on science and evidence.

- 5.1 There are however risks to effective and timely delivery of this work, resource constraints being the main one. The C&M division is currently operating with 8 FTE, just over 50% of the intended full complement that was identified in the department restructure 18 months ago. With budget uncertainty and delays in the recruitment process, work will need to be prioritised in line with the skills and expertise available in the team, with a phased approach adopted for some areas of the work.
- 5.2 A second risk is the increase in incidents and support needed on communications handling. This can wipe out the HoD and dedicated communications resource leaving little to no time to push ahead with other work streams. This comes back to the point on resource but forward planning, active participation in the Tactical Tasking and Coordination and Horizon Scanning Group meetings will help to identify and plan for some challenges ahead of time.

6 Next Steps and conclusion

- 6.1 If the board is content, the C&M team will drive the activities detailed, reporting at appropriate intervals on progress.
- 6.2 Upon completion of the FSS prioritisation work a more comprehensive communications and marketing strategy will be presented to the board to include the mission, vision, target audiences, key themes, targets and key performance indicators.
- 6.3 The Board is asked to comment on the thematic approach and the key elements identified, as well as the shift from large scale intermittent ad campaigns to a more directed and integrated, digital first, 'always on' approach.

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