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# IABC/HOUSTON – PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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## General Overview

With a Designated Market Area population of 5.2 million residents spread over some 19 counties (about 5,000 square miles), Houston is ranked as the fourth largest city in the United States. IABC/Houston's 282 members (249 RMEM, 14 500C, 7 CORP, 5 STU, 3 F100, 3 FELLOW, 1 RET) are entrepreneurs, corporate communicators, agency professionals, government employees, editors, designers, vice presidents, photographers, new college graduates and communications veterans. Eight percent of our members are accredited. A number of our senior leaders have held or are active in international positions on the executive board, with Gold Quill, and with the Accreditation Council. All are technically savvy, which requires the Chapter to use a wide variety of communications media. As a result, IABC/Houston has a growing challenge to attract and retain:

- Younger communicators who are more interested in lifestyle than in life work.
- Middle-age entrepreneurs who have left the corporate world for a more flexible lifestyle or because they were laid off. This means that their dues must be paid out of their own pockets.
- Telecommuters that no longer visit the office on a daily basis.

## Chapter goals and objectives

Given IABC/Houston's 60-year history of chapter excellence, the 2005-06 Board committed to ensure the chapter's growth through compelling programming, engaging volunteers quickly and effectively, and increasing communications using all available tools. Board objectives that drove professional development included:

- Establish benchmarks that will help measure participation in chapter activities.
- Increase participation in chapter activities by 20 percent.
- Maintain chapter profitability.

## Professional Development Team's goals and objectives

- **Monthly programs**—Maintain an average of 50 attendees at monthly luncheons, including the summer months when attendance tends to drop off.
- **Entrepreneurs' Strategic Interest Group (ESIG)**—Maintain an average of 25 attendees at monthly luncheons. Promote ESIG services to general IABC/Houston membership.
- **Bronze Quill Awards**—Try a different venue other than traditional hotel ballroom for the awards dinner and still secure a profit.
- **Accreditation**—Offer an accreditation mentoring program, led by accredited chapter members, that includes a series of workshops and leads to the accreditation exam by year-end 2006.
- **Judging**—Increase volunteer participation in judging contest entries from other chapters and regions.
- **Profitability**—Achieve at least a five percent margin on all events.

## Monthly Programs

### Implementation

- Booked speakers far enough in advance to send out a direct mail postcard to promote programs. The first card was sent in the fourth quarter 2006 and will continue every quarter in 2007. An IABC member donated the design services. Printing and postage were paid for by the chapter. Direct mail complemented the already strong communications methods in place—monthly online newsletter, STET; broadcast fax; weekly e-blasts; printed bulletin at monthly meetings; and the chapter Web site.
- Presented a variety of internal and external communication topics to appeal to junior and senior communicators (See Attachment A). A Summer Reading Series was presented in May, June and July to encourage attendance during the "summer slump." Authors of books about industry trends were invited to talk about their books, then sell and sign them for attendees.
- Continued monthly meetings at Brennan's, a popular downtown restaurant known for its Southern menu and hospitality. An online survey of members showed the majority favored a downtown location.

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- Continued audience surveys to rate monthly meeting topics and speakers and ask for program suggestions. Board member in charge of hospitality was given the responsibility of measurement to track results and trends.
- Maintained the IABC International connection: Warren Bickford, ABC, 2005-06 International IABC chair, spoke at the February meeting; Ned Lundquist, ABC, marketing director for the International Accreditation Council, presented the March luncheon program and guided a free accreditation workshop; and local chapter member Mark Schumann, ABC, 2006-07 International Director at Large, presented the April luncheon program and workshop.

## **Results**

- Each monthly program from January to October 2006 attracted at least 50 attendees. The Summer Reading series resulted in attendance of 62 for May, 50 for June and 98 for July (an increase from the 35 or so during past summer months). The June and July speakers also were featured on a local business radio program and in business journal articles. The October program promoted by direct mail attracted 90 members and guests.
- Monthly program surveys consistently rated the speaker and topic at or above 9.0, on a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being the highest.
- Profitability—All meetings achieved at least a five percent margin.

## **Entrepreneurs' Strategic Interest Group (ESIG)**

### **Implementation**

- Provided a good mix of topics related to internal and external communications, client management, as well as entrepreneurial success issues at monthly luncheons (See Attachment A).
- Held an ESIG Marketplace at the October chapter luncheon during which seven ESIG members exhibited information about their businesses. A game was played in which visitors to the booths needed the signature of every exhibitor to enter the door prize drawing. Several sponsors contributed door prizes.
- Continued meeting at the “fabulous” La Griglia, one of Houston’s top-rated restaurants near downtown.
- Utilized audience surveys to rate monthly meeting topics and speakers and ask for program suggestions.

## **Results**

- Monthly attendance averaged 28 with one meeting attracting 45 attendees.
- Ninety people attended the general IABC monthly luncheon in October, which meant high traffic for the seven ESIG exhibitors. The success led the programming committee to plan a marketplace in the spring and make it a twice yearly event in the future.
- Monthly program surveys consistently ranked the speaker and topic at or above 9.0, on a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being the highest. (The only exception was January, where participants said the topic was “too technical.”)
- Profitability—All meetings achieved at least a five percent margin.

## **Bronze Quill Awards**

### **Implementation**

- The committee chose a summer theme--baseball--since the awards dinner was held in August and the Houston community was still excited about the Houston Astros’ 2005 World Series appearance as National League Champions. *A Salute to Houston’s Communications All-Stars* awards dinner was held in the Champions Pavilion at Minute Maid Park, home of the Astros.
- Attendees wore their favorite baseball attire and the menu consisted of ballpark favorites—hot dogs, burgers, nachos, peanuts, popcorn and ice cream sundaes. “Catch the Moment” provided a virtual picture of each attendee in a Minute Maid Park scene.
- Companies were invited to become sponsors at levels ranging from \$250 to \$5,000 (See Attachment B).

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- Special recognition awards were given. An MVC (most valuable communicator) was named based on the number of Excellence Awards received in the contest. The 7<sup>th</sup> annual Executive Communicator of the Year was presented to the chairman of a Houston-based prestigious law firm. And, the chapter Volunteer of the Year award was presented to Beth Miller, ABC, who was instrumental in the “marriage” of two districts that became the new IABC Southern Region.
- Media personality and host of Biz Radio emceed the event.

## **Results**

- The ballpark was a fun venue and provided a relaxed, casual atmosphere for the evening.
- Profitability—The event made a profit of more than \$3,100.

## **Accreditation**

### **Implementation**

- Held a free accreditation workshop after the March monthly luncheon, conducted by Ned Lundquist, ABC.
- Held an accreditation overview/application information workshop in April and a portfolio workshop in June that was led by ABC chapter volunteers.
- Promoted International’s accreditation incentives during October and November through our online communications channels.

## **Results**

- One board member who began the process in 2005 received her accreditation in early 2006.
- Twelve people attended the March workshop; there are currently eight members in the process of completing their portfolios. Those who receive their ABC before early 2007 will be recognized at the April 12, 2007, Bronze Quill Awards dinner.

## **Judging**

### **Implementation**

- Promoted the opportunity to volunteer as a judge through the chapter’s online communications channels.
- Provided sign-up sheets at the February monthly meeting in anticipation of several chapters needing judges in the spring and summer.

## **Results**

- Three volunteers signed up at the February meeting and several others responded to calls for judges so that no chapters had to be turned down in their requests. For the year, IABC/Houston judged entries for the Pacific Plains Silver Quill and Bronze Quill competitions for Columbus, Ohio; Sacramento and Pittsburgh.

## **Attachments**

- Attachment A – IABC Houston 2006 meeting stats
- Attachment B – Bronze Quill sponsorship package