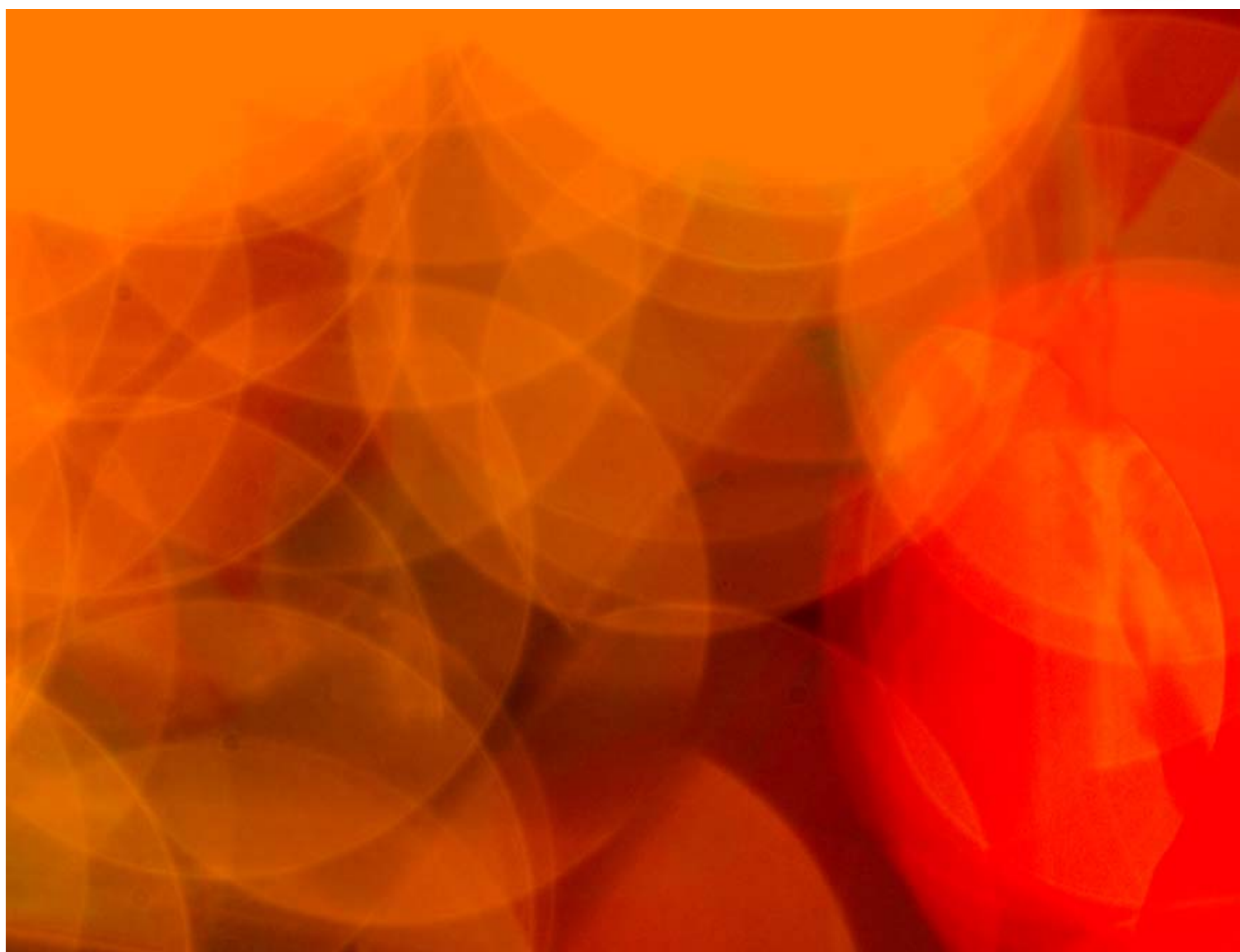


WCS

Developing Responsive Provision



Smarter marketing to engage employers with Train to Gain

York College evaluated its branding and improved its performance in engaging employers.

Introduction

Pure Business Solutions is the commercial division of York College and deals with all aspects of employer engagement from full cost commercial work to work based learning, distance learning and Train-to-Gain. The project team assessed how Pure Business Solutions could contribute more to the College's performance in engaging employers. Three key priorities were identified and an action plan developed to:

1. improve their use of an electronic customer relationship management system
2. evaluate marketing campaigns in three areas: Hospitality, Health and Social Care, and Engineering
3. assess implications for future Train to Gain employer engagement activity.



Modern Apprentices from York College's Hair & Beauty curriculum area

The organisation and the Programme

York College was one of 10 providers focusing on converting employers into committed users of the Train to Gain service by improving their approaches to relationship and account management. The Improvement Project ran from November 2006 to July 2007 with support from the Development Programme.

Context

York College participated in one of the Improvement Projects supported by the Train to Gain Development Programme last year. It began by auditing three curriculum areas to determine how effectively they engaged employers. The views of five key stakeholders: three from within the college, a representative of regional employers and one from the local Learning and Skills Council were then obtained and compared with the self-assessment findings. These confirmed the analysis that relevant expertise and systems were in place to facilitate good standards of employer engagement, but the real challenges were how to improve communication, make better use of data internally and how to make sure they always get things 'right first time' when responding to employers' needs.

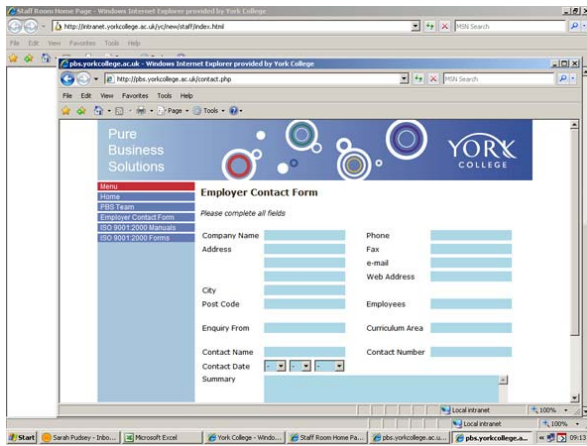
A detailed action plan was drawn up to address the three key issues identified through this process and clear responsibilities allocated to members of the management team for each action point. The committed involvement of senior managers was a real incentive to push forward the plans despite the emergence of conflicting priorities from time to time. Gaining the active involvement of the Customer Relationship Management (CRM) software provider in the project was invaluable in tailoring the functionality of the system to meet local needs more effectively.

Substantial outcomes have been achieved against all three priorities and the College has clear plans for building on what has already been accomplished.

Challenges and Solutions

The Business Services Manager, who prepared the project bid, left the organisation half way through the project. Fortunately a number of meetings and consultations had taken place and this ensured work on the project continued despite such a setback.

The pending move to a new building significantly reduced the project team's ability to call upon the College's IT Support for their assistance in examining and making improvements to the CRM software and how it was used. Some of this work has been extended beyond the initial project timescale, but is in train.



Pure Business Solutions web page provides an easy interface for data collection

'These findings will be the driver for how we undertake future campaigns; the use of telemarketing has clearly been beneficial. Equally crucial though is the approach of the College staff who liaise with the employer.'

Sarah Pudsey, Project Lead

'So far the campaign has secured us several company visits and there are more to come – hopefully leading to successful bids for work.'

Sue Newton-Brown
Business Development
Coordinator

Key messages / learning points

Effective communication among all stakeholders as well as systems for clearly documenting plans and progress in any major improvement activity are extremely important. This can be invaluable in making it possible for the project to continue successfully despite unforeseen staff changes.

Assess the potential impact of any major operational issues or other developments in other parts of the organisation that could affect the project in advance. Impending relocations of key groups of staff (such as the IT team) need to be taken into account.

Confirm the availability of staff to which you may need to refer as early as possible in the planning process.

Organisationally, this project has played an important role in raising the profile of the College's employer engagement activity. It has also been a very positive developmental experience for staff in terms of gaining practical experience in auditing, data analysis and report writing.

Impact

The marketing campaigns have succeeded in raising awareness of York College's offer in the relevant industrial sectors. As a direct result, the College is now working more effectively with both new and existing clients. Additional income from increased take-up has justified the investment in direct marketing and telesales. Following the success of the initial campaigns, more are planned for these and other curriculum areas.

Face-to-face meetings with employers by staff with the appropriate skill sets have been invaluable in forging new links and smoothing the process from enrolment through to delivery.

The College has developed its capacity to make better use of its Customer Relationship Management software and anticipates using it to undertake direct marketing and on-line data gathering in the future.

Top Tips

- Being part of a peer group of providers working on similar projects was invaluable in generating ideas and comparing issues that emerged.
- Be aware that, through the time-period of a project such as this – particularly within a large organisation like an FE College – many changes are likely to occur which will alter the way in which the project develops. Be prepared to adapt plans and be flexible.
- Good forward planning and organisation is required to make time to meet with people whose schedules are always busy and to manage your own time and workload effectively.

Next Steps

1. Commitment to using the more coordinated approach to marketing and delivery has been included in the college's current Employer Engagement Strategy.
2. The synchronised, drip-feed approach to direct marketing supported by telesales follow-up will be maintained and cost benefit analyses will continue to be carried out so that the effectiveness of the approach can be constantly reviewed.
3. Protocols are being developed for using the employer contact form.
4. The systems to support e-marketing and tracking functions will be further developed to facilitate the assessment of the impact of particular initiatives.
5. Basic training in the use of the Customer Relationship Management software will be cascaded to other members of the team in the coming months.