



Metrica & British Heart Foundation ‘Thinking Nationally, Acting Locally’

The British Heart Foundation (BHF) is the fifth largest charity in the UK and is at the forefront of the fight against heart disease – the UK’s biggest killer. Over the last two years extensive work has been undertaken within the communications division to modernise and improve internal and external communication.

In 2001 the BHF carried out an extensive communications review that involved consumer research, internal focus groups, benchmark media evaluation and key journalist profiling. The review identified a number of issues:

- ♦ General awareness of the charity was high yet public recognition of what the charity actually did was low.
- ♦ The BHF was generating a high quantity of coverage (approx. 12,000 items each year) but in many areas it was haphazard and unfocused.
- ♦ BHF coverage was not of a high quality, particularly at a regional level.
- ♦ Media coverage to support local fundraising was limited.
- ♦ National education and awareness campaigns were not maximizing potential at a local level.

The BHF used this research to devise a five year strategic communications plan that would build a strong business case for the recruitment of a new network of communications specialists.

Strategy – ‘Thinking Nationally, Acting Locally’

In April 2003 the BHF appointed nine regional PR officers to manage and develop the Marketing & Communications work in each of the BHF regions across the UK. The programme was a two-year pilot that would be disbanded if there was no demonstrable tangible benefit. The high volumes of coverage meant a highly flexible evaluation brief and reporting solution was needed. Different parts of the team would need to use Metrica’s planning and evaluation data in different ways.

The BHF’s reporting needs were well met by MyMetrica™, Metrica’s interactive online tool that allows users to access evaluation data at any time and from any internet connection. MyMetrica™ enables clients to interrogate and cross-reference their own data, producing charts and tables within minutes. Metrica’s online system allowed the team to identify problem areas in a timely way and produce regular reports for reviewing the performance of specific regions and particular campaigns/areas of work. Crucially, MyMetrica™ enabled the BHF to measure the overall success of the strategy over time.

As well as formulating PR plans, Metrica’s evidence-based analysis gave the BHF the information to set realistic and measurable targets for each of the nine regional officers. Metrica worked with the Regional Marcoms Manager to design a template report that would allow the regional officers to report back to HQ on a regular basis. Constant access to the data worked as a performance incentive, target review and reporting tool, and regional officers could compare coverage across regions.

Implementation

By comparing the 2003 benchmarking analysis with 2004's results the PR team assessed the performance of each of the new regional centres pre and post set-up, by business area and on an overall basis. A detailed performance profile of each region was built that included the evaluation of message delivery, breakdowns by media type and spokesperson comment, and the proliferation of photos and logos within BHF coverage. As a result the BHF was empowered to identify precisely where each region's strengths and weaknesses lay and address them in a systematic way.

How was the improved coverage impacting on the public?

Once the regional network was generating coverage effectively the PR team re-focused on the impact this coverage was having on the public and potential donors. The BHF continued to use focus groups and consumer research to track the public's perception of the charity and its work. MyMetrica™ allowed the PR team to build charts and tables focused entirely on particular aspects of the charity's media work including cardiac care, research and fundraising coverage.

Were the local offices promoting national campaigns?

Campaign coverage was tracked so the PR team and regional officers could view data broken down by campaign and region. The volume of regional coverage generated by the charity's Valentines campaign, for example, almost doubled from 154 articles in 2003 to 301 in 2004 and one region achieved a fivefold increase in the volume of coverage it generated. The regions were certainly beginning to 'think nationally, act locally.'

Was coverage more on-message?

The PR team also assessed message communication using MyMetrica™. Anti-smoking messages were tracked during the first major campaign since the implementation of the regional network. Messages were well-delivered on a regional basis - the 'Every cigarette we smoke makes fatty deposits stick in our arteries' message was delivered in at least 20% of regional articles each month; this was a clear indication that the regional network was on-message.

How did analysis help the regional officers?

The regional officers' constant access to data on MyMetrica™ kept them focused on targets, allowed them to compare performance across regions, learn from their colleagues' experiences and delve into the detail of their own coverage to identify strengths and weaknesses of their regional strategy. The regional officers also used MyMetrica™ in conjunction with a template to report internally/upwards on the progress in each region.

Conclusion

The BHF team use the integration of media evaluation, research and planning as part of their everyday work ensuring the best use of the charity's resources. By combining these three disciplines, Metrica and the BHF have built a more robust and insightful model of PR performance than any one discipline could hope to offer.

David Barker of the British Heart Foundation said:

"MyMetrica™ has been a revelation. It has given the charity detailed knowledge of the BHF's profile in each region and enabled us to strategically develop our communications work across the UK. Essentially it has ensured that we can properly measure the effectiveness of our work on a regular basis. As a charity reliant on the kindness and goodwill of the general public this regular tracking is essential and ensures that we continue to make maximum impact in the fight against heart disease. It is hard to imagine running the communications team without it!"