

Programme

CommsFest 2021: Connecting housing's comms community

Throughout February 2021

Sponsored by Hough Bellis Communications

Communications has never been so necessary!

Everyone has an opinion on how messages should – or shouldn't – be put across.

But those of us who have steered our organisations to speak with clarity, empathy and timeliness throughout the Covid-19 pandemic will have enhanced the reputation of our brands and built a new, deeper relationship with our audiences.

It's been a tough year and we know you're probably feeling exhausted.

CommsFest 2021 is a chance for you to get off the treadmill for a few hours each week and recharge your batteries.

Throughout the month we'll be hosting sessions that give you a chance to reflect, to learn and to refresh including:

- A series of masterclasses to explore the latest best practice in key areas of comms
- Presentations, panel debates and expert analysis on the future of our industry from those inside and outside of the sector
- A chance for people from different organisations to meet up and share their comms challenges over a brew and a cake.

So come and join us, connect with friends, and get set for the year ahead. You've earned it!

And if you're joining us let know using #CommsFest21 on Twitter.

Monday 1 February 2021

10:00-11:00 Redefining the role of communications, public relations and marcomms: The Dublin Conversations – a better map and toolkit to survive and thrive
Andy Green – international lecturer and founding member of the Dublin Conversations

Andy Green is pioneering new thinking and practical tools to transform communications, comms and public relations.

He lives and breathes transformative communications, generating creativity, storytelling and social capital. Winner of the CIPR UK-wide '*Outstanding PR Practitioner of the Year*' award, author of seven books translated into eight languages. He lectures at five universities.

Andy has worked around the world, from Austria to Australia, for leading blue-chip brands and major public bodies.

In this session Andy will be talking about the [Dublin Conversations](#) which is a global community of professionals who are redefining a new era in comms, advertising and public relations and looking to accelerate changes in the creative industries.

The group is co-creating a new roadmap and toolkit to tackle the challenge of a society where people cannot talk to each other, work together, or trust one another.

Thursday 4 February 2021

10:00-11:00 Social media masterclass: what's next for social media?
Helen Reynolds, founder of Comms Creatives

In this session comms legend Helen Reynolds will offer up her latest take on the ever-changing role of social media.

We'll take a look at current trends, and how Covid-19 has changed the way we deliver content with a greater focus on empathy and kindness.

Helen will also help us understand 'what's next' when it comes to social content.

A session not to be missed for all communications professionals.

Friday 5 February 2021

10:00-11:00 The CommsFest Un-Conference: Informing, engaging and motivating colleagues – how internal comms will define 2021

Conversation to be led by Steve Hayes – Head of Communications at Citizen

Grab a brew and a cake and join our un-conference session for a chance to chat with people across social housing's comms community about the challenges you are facing.

In this session Steve will facilitate an open, relaxed and honest discussion about the future of internal comms and the journey Citizen has been on since lockdown.

Tuesday 9th February 2021

09:15-10:15 Comms and leadership: What has Covid taught us about the role of communications within our organisations?

Jo Miller, Chief Executive, Hutt City Council, New Zealand

Hayley James, assistant director of communications, engagement and campaigns at Great Manchester Combined Authority

More speakers to be announced

Whilst communications have always been important, the past year has highlighted just how essential good communication is to the success of any housing organisation. This panel discussion will take a look at what we know now, and how this alters the future of our comms teams.

Thursday 11 February 2021

10:00-11:00 Crisis Communications Masterclass: The lifespan of a crisis

Amanda Coleman, author of Crisis Communications Strategies: How to Prepare in Advance, Respond Effectively and Recover in Full

Does a crisis just arrive and then disappear? Are there different types of crisis and different stages? Amanda Coleman, crisis communication specialist, will talk through understanding the crises that exist and what phases a crisis can move through before it reaches recovery and beyond.

She will use her own experiences as well as other case studies from around the world to highlight essential learning. The session will conclude with some points on the actions that can be taken now to make sure that you are in the past position for whatever the future may hold.

Tuesday 16 February 2021

10:00-11:00 Communications and diversity: Tackling unconscious bias and reaching diverse communities.

Mark Hudson, head of early talent – News UK

Leicia Feare - communications and engagement lead for the NHS Diabetes Programme and lead for vaccination comms to the BAME NHS workforce

A major challenge for communicators is ensuring that our messages land in every community – and that we reach as much of our audience as possible.

Many so-called ‘national’ or ‘regional’ communications campaigns tend to speak to the same audience segments. Those that miss out are more often than not those from black, Asian and minority ethnic groups.

Our organisations are committed to diversity, and movements such as Black Lives Matter are providing a catalyst for changes in our society – but are we doing enough to attract, retain and nurture diverse talent?

In this session Leicia Feare – who is currently leading comms around the vaccination programme for the NHS’s BAME workforce – will explain why she’s talking to comms people about race and ripping up traditional comms strategies so that health messages reach a much wider audience.

We will also hear from News UK’s Mark Hudson who will outline his plans to bring more diversity into newsrooms of the future – and why that could be so important to the survival of newspapers.

Thursday 18 February 2021

10:00-11:00 Masterclass: Influence and change: delivering successful campaigns

Ben Powell, campaigns organiser at Nautilus International

Paul Gerrard, group policy director – The Co-op

Campaigns are an important tool in getting our message out to our audiences. They are how we can influence individuals, communities, politicians and wider society.

For landlords – who are so often at the whims of political decisions – they are a chance to ‘make the weather.’

The efforts of people such as Marcus Rashford in 2020 have shown that, when done right, campaigning can lead to big changes in how society works.

But do landlords campaign enough, and how can we be more effective in changing the minds of politicians and stakeholders?

In this session we speak to a number of the UK's leading campaign strategists about how to get your message across.

Friday 19 February 2021

10:00-11:30 Masterclass and panel discussion: Access to information – what does it mean for housing associations?

Jonathan Hulley, Partner, Birketts Solicitors – social housing legal expert

Sue Fox – Hough Bellis Communications - author of “Freedom of Information: is it changing the way we do PR?”

The Government's white paper on Social Housing mentions transparency nearly 30 times.

It proposes new regulations which mean housing associations must share more information with tenants.

Find out what this means for your housing association and learn from the experience of those who are already used to operating to Freedom of Information rules.

Tuesday 23 February 2021

10:00-11:00 Panel discussion: Power without responsibility: what's the future of the media and is it really losing its relevance?

Tom Rostance, BBC Sport

Mark Lawrence, Editor of The Governor and former editor of 24 Housing

Anna Youssef, ITV

Mark Hudson, News UK

Is the media still relevant and how do landlords harness its power to tell their stories?

In this session we'll look at how the media landscape is changing on a local and national level and what that means for communications professionals.

We'll explore the type of stories that journalists are keen to cover and how the press is maintaining its influence in the age of social media and dwindling readership.

Thursday 25 February 2021

10:00-11:00 Masterclass: will 2021 be the year that video kills the press release? - Ben Horrigan – digital video producer and founder of Studio 91 Media

No other area of comms has developed faster in recent years than video production. Video on mobile for social is an essential part of the in-house toolkit, and as we move to more remote working it will play a bigger role in internal comms.

In this session we'll dive into the latest trends of video production and offer up some practical tips for creating video on a budget.

Friday 26 February 2021

10:00-11:00 The CommsFest Un-Conference: Tenant engagement – how we can give people a genuine voice in how our organisations are run

Conversation to be led by Iain Lindley – Communications Manager at Rochdale Boroughwide Housing

Grab a brew and a cake and join our un-conference session for a chance to chat with people across social housing's comms community about the challenges you are facing.

In this session Iain will offer up a unique perspective from the UK's first tenant and employee co-owned mutual housing society and explore what that's meant for tenant engagement.