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Case Study Feature

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Heritage Canada Foundation: Preserving the Future of Built Heritage.

Introduction

In the last 30 years, 20 per cent of Canada's pre-1920 historic buildings have been demolishedⁱ. As a young nation, it is difficult for some to understand the importance of preserving our heritage albeit it recent.

The Heritage Canada Foundation (HCF) understands the importance of preservation and has been working toward maintaining Canada's built heritage since its founding in 1973ⁱⁱ by communicating these key messages:

- Maintaining existing historical sites can have greater benefits than new construction; demolition contributes to Canada's annual 10 million tonnes of waste.

- Encouraging heritage building rehabilitation will preserve Canada's built history, stimulate the economy, optimize existing infrastructure and reduce emissions and energy consumption.
- Rehabilitation tax incentives have a proven history in the US and can be implemented quickly in Canada. They are endorsed by key stakeholders such as heritage committees and Canadian communities.

These messages are targeted primarily toward members of the organization, government officials, the Canadian heritage sector, cultural organizations, environmental organizations, architects and developers. The Foundation's secondary target is the public at large.

Communications Objectives

The Foundation's communication objectivesⁱⁱⁱ are to raise awareness about the importance of conserving built heritage to all Canadians. The Foundation also has more specific communication objectives which vary based on the preservation of particular sites and the particular decision makers involved with preventing a demolition.

Though most of its objectives aim to create a culture of conservation in Canada, HCF also has an objective^{iv} to clarify its identity. "We are constantly being mixed up with the Department of Canadian Heritage," said Carolynn Quinn, Director of Communications for HCF. The Department of Canadian Heritage is responsible for national policies and programs regarding heritage and cultural matters^v. Although HCF tries to create some clarification by insisting the media refer to the Foundation as HCF, this remains a prevalent communication challenge.

Communications Activities and Vehicles

Special Releases: HCF releases an annual list of the Top Ten Endangered Places and Worst Losses of the year^{vi}. The list aims to draw attention to threatened or lost pieces of Canada's built history, and receives some slight media attention, particularly online^{vii}. This promotes the Foundation's objective to raise awareness of the devastating effect of demolishing built history.

Events^{viii}: HCF created Heritage Day, a way for communities to celebrate their own and Canada's architectural history. Along with Doors Open Canada, an event designed to encourage enjoyment of heritage sites; it promotes the organization and supports its programs. As this event differentiates between communities it provides ample opportunity for media coverage from local news outlets.

HCF holds an annual conference to discuss heritage preservation^{ix}. Targeted to decision makers such as government officials, heritage committees, community leaders, and anyone with a passion for heritage, the conference is made up of a variety of presentations and workshops that aim to educate attendees on preservation. This is a great opportunity for HCF to reach out to communities and recruit new members or volunteers.

The Foundation also holds an annual awards ceremony to celebrate excellence in heritage conservation which draws some promotion through only posts from post-secondary institutions.

All of the Foundation's events provide great potential for media coverage as they are relevant to community affairs.

Print Materials: HCF sends out a magazine containing articles and updates about designated, demolished or at-risk sites to all its members as one of the added benefits of membership. This is also sent to MPP's, along with brochures and the Foundation's annual report^x. The magazine is linked to online; however, it cannot be accessed as the link is broken. The annual report is informative and accessible online, making it a valuable communication tool.

Website: The website aims to provide a large amount of information about the Foundation, but falls short in that it is improperly laid out, confusing and outdated. For example, it lists the Foundations news releases but none are posted in 2010, despite the Foundation holding one of their largest annual events, Heritage Day, in February. The layout of the site is disorganized and outdated, with key pieces of information missing. In addition to this, many of the links provided are broken or have been removed.

Media coverage

Coverage for the Foundation is minimal. According to Quinn, it receives coverage on both municipal and national levels, particularly for its events, but upon searching through databases and national media outlets, nothing was found. Although there is some minimal coverage for the annual conference and awards, the foundation can rarely be found in any major press outlets. Despite its size and relevance to community affairs, stories of its successes are not making headlines. Although HFC used to pay for a media clipping service, it no longer has the resources to do so, and at present its only communication measurement is done by monitoring hits to the website and what links are used.

Analysis and Recommendations:

Based on the lack of media coverage, it is apparent that the Heritage Canada Foundation's key messages are not being picked up. Although its events have great potential for media coverage, it is being limited by its weaknesses: a sub-par website, social media absence and limited resources.

Strategy 1: To improve its reach HCF must establish a greater presence with the public at large by increasing its profile both on and offline. It should develop a new, more organized website that will allow it to participate in social media. The site should include active links to events, media contacts, press releases and coverage, the top ten worst losses list, membership and corporate information as well as a history of the Foundation.

Strategy 2: To become more transparent, HCF should also set up a Facebook page and Twitter account in cohesion with a blog to draw more visitors and media to its website and events.

Strategy 3: To differentiate itself from other heritage-based organizations, HCF should consider changing its name, for example, to Historical Landmarks Canada. This will allow it to establish a clear identity that cannot be confused with the multitude of other heritage organizations in Canada.

Conclusion

The Heritage Canada Foundation has great potential for in-depth media coverage as its programs and events relate to all Canadians. By changing its name, creating a new website and embracing social media, HCF will be able to maintain a clear identity. In order to receive more attention for its programs, the Foundation must actively pursue the media. This will ultimately result in the fulfillment of its objectives and increased awareness of heritage conservation.

End Notes

ⁱ Received from the Heritage Canada Foundation: www.heritagecanada.org

ⁱⁱ Received from the Heritage Canada Foundation: www.heritagecanada.org

ⁱⁱⁱ Received from Telephone interview conducted with Carolyn Quinn, Director of Communications, Heritage Canada Foundation, March 25th 2010

^{iv} Received from Telephone interview conducted with Carolyn Quinn, Director of Communications, Heritage Canada Foundation, March 25th 2010

^v Received from Department of Canadian Heritage: www.pch.gc.ca

^{vi} Received from the Heritage Canada Foundation: www.heritagecanada.org

^{vii} See article: Heritage Canada Foundation releases 2009 Top Ten Endangered Places and Worst Losses lists (2009): <http://www.canadianarchitect.com/issues/story.aspx?aid=1000333926>

^{viii} All event information received from the Heritage Canada Foundation: www.heritagecanada.org

^{ix} Received from the Heritage Canada Foundation: www.heritagecanada.org

^x Received from Telephone interview conducted with Carolyn Quinn, Director of Communications, Heritage Canada Foundation, March 25th 2010

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Heritage Canada Foundation releases 2009 Top Ten Endangered Places and Worst Losses lists (2009): <http://www.canadianarchitect.com/issues/story.aspx?aid=1000333926>

Call for Papers: Heritage Canada Foundation's Annual Conference (2009):

<http://uwopublichistorynewsandresources.blogspot.com/2009/03/call-for-papers-heritage-canada.html>