Creative Communications with Te Taumata Toi-a-Iwi

Our webinar with the regional arts trust for Auckland, Te Taumata Toi-a-Iwi provided an overview of how the trust shaped its communications in the five years following the launch in 2020 of a new strategy for the trust.

The communications programme helped the trust develop relationships with key sector stakeholders that have been critical to the fulfilments of the trust's kaupapa. This has included building a strong social media presence on platforms such as Instagram and LinkedIn, and developing a web hub, Arts Action Now, to anchor key sector advocacy initiatives.

Below are some edited highlights from the presentation by Te Taumata creative catalyst, Jane Yonge, and communications specialist Jennifer Cheuk, and advisor Robin Hickman.

Explore, engage, and enable

Te Taumata Toi-a-Iwi launched a new strategic direction in 2020, just as the first pandemic lockdown started. Online communication became the primary tool for engaging arts organisations, artists and other arts, culture and creative sector stakeholders in the strategy. Managing the severe impacts of COVID-19 lockdowns on Auckland's arts and culture sector, particulary the performing arts, music and comedy, quickly became a major focus for the sector. To support the sector Te Taumata facilitated online Zoom get-togethers which became the Ngā Toi Advocacy Network. These online hui attracted mainly representatives from arts organisations. These hui provided Te Taumata with up-to-date information on impacts as they emerged, and helped shape research on sector needs, and informed Te Taumata and sector advocacy for support.

As lockdowns concluded, people's availability for time-specific online hui diminished. People in the sector tend to be time-poor. So Te Taumata pivoted.

"Post-COVID, as noted earlier, it was harder to bring people together online via Zoom. However, online platforms or hubs and social media are now becoming more relevant and important alongside the in-person stuff as well.

"We're being agile with tools such as digital, such as social media, overall, we're learning to adapt the way we communicate as the environment is constantly changing. And why do we do this? We do this to support the sector, to explore issues, to do sector engagement, and to be a conduit for the sector to have a voice in areas such as local and central government. It's sometimes hard if you're an independent artist or arts organisation to get into these spaces and be able to actually put the main issues in front of decision-makers. So we try and act as a bridge for that to happen.

Online hubs

Online hubs have proven an effective means of reaching Te Taumata stakeholders.

An online hub is a useful tool to supplement community-based in-person advocacy. A hub allows people and organisations to

> connect with Te Taumata and advocacy opportunities in their own time

> provide information to inform our advocacy, and in turn, access information for their own advocacy.

The current ArtsActionNow hub is a national resource for advocacy from the arts, culture and creative sector. The hub, built on the SquareSpace platform, is a joint initiative of Te Taumata Toi-a-Iwi and the Regional Arts Network of Aotearoa (RANA). Hub communications are complemented by other communications, such as wānanga, social media and e-newsletters.

StopTheCuts was first online hub created by Te Taumata in partnership with Arts Makers Aotearoa and other advocacy groups. It was developed to help the arts, culture and creative sector respond to Auckland Council's proposed budget in 2021 which included proposed cuts that would affect the sector. It was an essential tool in a sector advocacy campaign to C to encourage Council to reconsider the proposed cuts.

"We worked closely with Ngā Toi Advocacy Network, Artsmakers Aotearoa… and sector advocates to develop the Stop the Cuts campaign. This included a range of advocacy activity. We surveyed the sector on potential impacts which received over 1,000 responses. We created an online hub which had over 63,000 unique visits. This portal was designed to inform the sector in public of the potential impacts of the cut. It also provided access to information, key messages, submission templates and guidance. We provided one-to-one media training to leaders in the sector, growing the reach of messages and strengthening the capability of advocates to have influence."

Streamlining the ArtsActionNow web hub

The ArtsActionNow hub was created prior to the 2023 election to inform the sector about the arts and culture policies of the various political parties, and to encourage a discussion between the sector and the policy makers about the need for a national arts, culture and creativity strategy.

Following the election, the hub was refreshed by Jennifer to make it a more effective platform for future advocacy campaigns. Jennifer outlined her process for streamlining the content.

"I think it's really important when developing a website or thinking about web pages for your organisation in general to think just baseline foundational. What is this trying to do? Who is this for? When people visit this website, you know, what context do they need to know to understand these things? So that people aren't just being thrown into it and going, 'oh, my gosh, there's so much info and it's all really important and cool, but I'm not sure where to start.' There was just so much amazing information on ArtsActionNow, and it was just about stripping it down to the most necessary and important information.

"The first task I did when refreshing ArtsActionNow was this content navigation task. I took every piece of content from the original website, including buttons, navigational content, and I printed them all out onto flashcards, laid them all out on the table, and I got Robby and Jane and other people from the Te Taumata team to work together in grouping those flashcards

into categories. So not thinking about the website, but just the content itself and how they felt it naturally grouped together.

"This was actually a really good way of finding out what was necessary and unnecessary information, and it showed which information was contextual. So what needed to come first for someone else to understand it when they were first visiting the website?

"This also illuminated gaps, what was missing. It was really interesting because Jane would be saying things like, 'oh, where's this particular article? I thought it was on there.' And it just showed me that things were really important that weren't even on the website in the first place. So seeing those things was such a great foundational task to move forward with rebuilding the website."

Constructing the Amplify campaign

In late 2024, the Government released Amplify - their national creative and cultural strategy that outlined how they would support New Zealand's creative sectors to 2030. This strategy was open for sector feedback. ArtsActionNow created a campaign to help demystify the strategy and encourage the feedback submissions.

Information on the ArtsActionNow web hub was anchored around two key documents for people to read and share - a detailed and a simplified explanation of Amplify. The hub also offered further information about submissions guides and templates to make the process as simple as possible.

"I'll walk you through practically how we came up with a campaign to encourage feedback for Amplify. There were five steps. "The first step was the goal, what's the end game? What important thing do we want people to do? That was obvious - we wanted them to send their feedback.

"But in order for people to send their feedback, what's the context? What information do people need to know in order to do this important thing? So people need to be able to understand what Amplify is. They need to be able to take away the core principles to understand how to write their feedback. So we had things like templates.

Step three was the visuals, the language and tone. How do we repackage information in a way that's accessible for a wide range of people?

Step four was the user experience. How do we make the journey to do this important thing as simple as possible? So we have the goal, the context to reach that goal, the packaging of that goal and the visuals, the language and tone, and then the experience of moving through that goal.

Finally, how do we measure if this method is working? And I think that's really important as you go to see the data so that you can redevelop methods, if something's not working, , change this, put it on a different platform, those sorts of things.

"We used really bold visual icons, short, clear text. We used colour blocks and buttons that allowed very easy navigation, one web page, so you didn't need to click through a lot of things. The journey was simple. And then finally, we worked with researchers to ensure that there was a wide range of that contextual information. So we had detailed resources, but also simplified templates. And it gave a wide range of people the necessary background. So if you wanted to deep dive into Amplify, you could. And we had researchers, you know, break down every section of it. But then we also had a simplified overview that was just a two-page document. But both of those contextual backgrounds led to the action of giving feedback. And just on the data space, so from Squarespace Analytics and Sprout Social, in the six weeks that Amplify was open, we received over 7000 visitors to the website.

"There was evidence that people were actually downloading and viewing the resources. And in comparison to the previous six weeks on social media, we had a 15 percent increase in social media engagements and a huge 52 percent increase in post shares through stories, DMs and more. So it really demonstrated the ability for these digital tools. So web pages and social media to reach those vast audiences and promote accessibility and to really encourage people to take action. And it was really cool seeing people share this campaign, downloading the Instagram files that we'd made on the website and share those templates."

Social media

We use Instagram, Facebook, and LinkedIn to alert people to research, issues, opportunities, advocacy campaigns.

A key question: how to encourage different people to engage with Te Taumata research "not just people who knew where to look and knew how to understand particular research already, but people who didn't quite know that this research existed or felt that the research might be inaccessible to them… Through apps such as Instagram, we could really clarify what was going on in the community and open it up in an accessible way for people…"

Appealing visuals and simple language: "our posts use really bold visuals and quite clear, succinct writing to encourage new audiences to engage with things that they might not have ever engaged with before…."

Collaboration: "Collaboration is so important…reciprocal collaborative relationships can really be fostered online. You can share things that other organisations do…and promote things from people and uplift other communities and those connections are so important for both just us at Tito Mata, but also just general advocacy and working together with people and sharing information."

Connections not algorithms: "Algorithms are constantly changing and it's not always transparent to us as users as well as people who are using Instagram for marketing or promotion what that algorithm is. I actually don't think that paying for promotion is really necessary. I think that sometimes that organic engagement and messaging people, messaging organisations, tagging people, posting a story about someone else's event and tagging the people in that event …I think it's much more important to foster those genuine active connections.

Key publications mentioned

> The arts of Moana Oceania - a deep dive into what arts means for the Moana Oceania communities of Tāmaki Mākaurau.

> We can build a new utopia re-imagining the arts and culture sector post-COVID.

> Enter the multiverse - building a stronger sector for Asian arts practitioners

> Innovation in the arts and culture ecosystem - a deep dive into systemic enablement levers for artists.

> Other research and publications include submissions, sector surveys, and briefing documents for ministers and politicians.

> Further information on communications, such as social media engagement, is available in Te Taumata annual reports.