

IABC Heritage Region Members Report on Essential Skills

[Results](#) from an informal online survey of IABC Heritage Region members show that the level of business savvy among respondents leaves a lot to be desired. The survey asked respondents about five areas that are generally considered to be essential skills for a competent business communicator. The five questions covered:

- ◆ Essential skills in your daily work
- ◆ Business savvy
- ◆ Change management
- ◆ Documenting and measuring communication projects
- ◆ Information overload

Nearly three out of four respondents listed “listening” as one of three essential skills in their daily work.

Essential Skills and Creativity Presenters at IABC Heritage Region Conference2007 October 14-16, 2007 Greater Cincinnati/Northern Kentucky

Marc Cooper and Chris Palumbo, Capital One Services,
*“Capital One’s Milestones Approach: Internal
Communications Driver of Business Results”*

Greg DeBlasio, Ph.D., Northern Kentucky University,
*“Getting What You’re Worth: The Possibilities and
Promises of Value-based Billing”*

Pamela Gilchrist, PR-Link Public Relations, LLC,
*“Independent Contractor Shop Talk: How to Run Your
Business More Smoothly”*

James Greathouse, The Starbucks Coffee Company,
Luncheon Session on *“Avoiding Communications
Overload – The Employee Perspective”*

Angela Jeffrey, VMS and Institute for PR Commission
on PR Measurement and Evaluation, & **David Kistle**,
ABC, Padilla Speer Beardsley *“Correlations, ROI and
other Strategic Stuff!”*

Deb Rieselman, University of Cincinnati, *“Winning Isn’t
Everything: Advice on Entering, Winning and Not
Winning Quill Awards”*

Kathryn Yates, Watson Wyatt Worldwide, *“Managing
Change: Critical Lessons for Communication
Professionals”*

Wilma Mathews, ABC, Arizona State University, *“Why
Writing Still Matters”*

Complete conference registration information at:

www.iabcheritageregion.com/conference2007

“The one that struck me the most ... is that communicators list “writing” as the second most essential skill they use,” observed Wilma Mathews, ABC, director, Constituent Relations, Arizona State University.

She continued, “I applaud all respondents for listing “listening” first as it’s hard to write if you haven’t heard what you’re writing about!”

She plans to pick up on where the survey left off when she presents *“Why Writing Still Matters”* in a breakout session at the Heritage Region Conference2007.

Respondents reported more business savvy in selecting business models and knowing how to write a business plan, than in creating a financial plan. Nearly 58 percent expressed either high or adequate business savvy for the business model question, while nearly 52 percent felt they had either high or adequate business savvy in writing a business plan.

The negative responses shot up when questioned about business savvy related to financing and pricing. Almost 70 percent reported less than adequate or no business savvy in creating a financial plan and 64 percent had the same response when asked about pricing models.

“...There isn’t a strong showing for business savviness in any category,” noted David Kistle, ABC, senior vice president, Padilla Speer Beardsley. “But they’re definitely ready to tackle a change management initiative –mostly without business savvy.”

More than 83 percent said they would welcome an opportunity to work on a change management plan.

Kistle, who will co-present at the research and measurement breakout session on *“Correlations, ROI, and other Strategic Stuff!”* also commented on the question concerning documenting and measuring communication projects.

“Two things struck me,” remarked Kistle. “The contradiction between the low need for measuring/evaluation skills and a high score for demonstrating an ROI to clients; and a second contradiction between a lack of accounting for measurement/evaluation criteria at the beginning of a project (20.5 percent), but a much higher score for using evaluation/results to demonstrate outcomes to management (51.3 percent). How would one interpret these differences?”

As for how their organizations deal with internal electronic “information overload,” nearly 55 percent reported the organization used a “What’s New” section on the organization’s intranet home page.

Survey Results

1. Business communicators use a number of skills in their daily activities. Of the following skills, which are the TOP THREE skills you find most essential in your daily work: (Check THREE RESPONSES Only)

Skill	Percentage of Respondents
Listening	73.4
Writing	68.8
Speaking	16.8
Counseling	20.2
Facilitating	17.9
Coaching	8.1
Negotiating	8.1
Measuring/Evaluating	7.5
Interpreting business/financial trends and issues	11.6
Layout/Graphics (print and/or electronic)	5.8
Selecting Key Messages	39.3
Selecting Appropriate Communication Channels/Vehicles/Products	23.1

2. IABC membership statistics show that five percent of our members are self-employed/independent consultants. With career research showing that most people will have at least three to four job changes during their careers, you may find yourself contemplating running your own business. How do you rate your business savvy for the following:

	Percentage High Business Savvy	Percentage Adequate Business Savvy	Percentage Less Than Adequate Business Savvy	Percentage No Business Savvy
I can select the best business model for the type of company I intend to create/currently operate.	16.4	41.5	32.1	10.1
I know how to write a business plan.	17.0	34.6	38.4	10.1
I can create a financial plan.	6.4	23.7	46.8	23.1
I can structure my pricing model to reflect my business/financial goals.	9.4	26.4	43.4	20.8
I know how to select the best clients/projects for long-term financial success AND personal/professional satisfaction.	13.2	39.0	37.7	10.1
I can effectively serve current clients while building new business/new client relationships.	23.3	40.9	29.6	6.3
I know how to "fire" a client while retaining a positive business relationship.	13.2	34.6	37.1	15.1
I know how to add value to my services.	32.1	49.1	14.5	4.4
I can demonstrate a ROI to my clients for my services.	17.7	46.2	29.7	6.3
I know when and how to outsource.	28.9	37.7	27.7	5.7

3. Your organization's CEO has asked you to take the communications lead on a change management project that will affect business units on a global level. What is your response to this assignment? (Check ONE response only)

Your Response to this Assignment	Percentage of Respondents
Bring it on! -- I understand the external and internal factors/considerations in this decision, I know the players, and I have the skills/experience to help drive the change and achieve expected outcomes.	35.2
What an opportunity! -- I get to use my communication experience to make an impact on the organization while developing business skills to further my career.	48.4
Okay. Maybe I can do this -- with a lot of help from others. Let me check my contact list!	13.2
Help! -- I'm not even ready for change in my own life, much less leading change communication for the organization.	3.1

4. How does your organization cope with INTERNAL electronic "information overload"? (Check ALL that apply)

Organization's Response	Percentage of Respondents
Strict control on use of e-mail distribution lists	38.3
What an opportunity! -- I get to use my communication experience to make an impact on the organization while developing business skills to further my career. All e-mails to multiple addresses outside of the business unit/department but within the organization must go through a designated coordinator at the organizational level.	29.7
Discourages attachments to e-mails sent to all employees.	31.3
Regularly scheduled (i.e., daily, weekly) electronic updates that consolidate information that previously would have been sent via separate e-mails.	41.4
"What's New" section on intranet's home page.	54.7
Digest of daily postings on organization's intranet.	21.1

5. Awards competitions -- local, Silver Quill, Gold Quill and other competitions -- offer more than just a way to add another trophy or certificate to your collection. Whether or not you enter award competitions, how often do you:

Your Actions	Percentage Every Single Time – Without Fail	Percentage Routine/SOP	Percentage Occasionally	Percentage Never
Document your communication projects throughout the year following the steps/criteria in a typical Call for Entries "Work Plan"?	3.2	16.7	35.3	44.9
In undertaking a new project, you structure the project's evaluation process so that you can report results in the competition entry?	2.6	17.9	29.5	50.0
Use your communication projects' evaluations/results to demonstrate outcomes to management?	12.2	39.1	31.4	17.3
Use an entry's evaluation feedback when you undertake a similar project in the future?	8.5	27.5	26.8	37.3

Note: The survey was conducted online from September 18 through September 21, 2007. The survey was sent to 2,814 valid e-mails and generated responses from 6.2% of those contacted via e-mail.