

Category: Innovation

Organisation: Nationwide Building Society

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EFA overview

The Age Regulations provided the perfect opportunity to promote age diversity within Nationwide, reinforcing the overall diversity strategy of the group. The company opted to develop a diversity DVD, to include age, which focussed on 'inclusion'. They wanted to message "we're all part of team Nationwide, it's just that some people happen to be older or younger".

The aim was to get people to think about valuing everyone and the contribution they make to the business, rather than making assumptions based on someone's appearance, age or disability. Research showed that 63% of employees thought diversity would improve as a result of the DVD.

Initiative

Creating 'Valuing Everyone', a diversity awareness DVD with supporting awareness information and initiatives to increase general awareness around discrimination and diversity.

Aims and purpose

The aim of the DVD was to encourage employees to:

- Choose to behave differently towards colleagues and customers, ensuring they are all treated fairly and equally.
- Accept that people have different views and a right to have those views.
- Look for instances where people are not treated fairly and do something about it
- Improve inclusion by talking openly about how diversity affects them as individuals and as a team.

Business drivers

In addition to diversity objectives:

- Raising the profile of diversity across the business.
- Encouraging people to think about their own pre-conceived ideas and perceptions.

Nationwide also wanted to make its employees feel:

- Valued - Nationwide cares passionately about its individuals and is doing something about it.
- Reassured - Confident and safe enough to talk about issues.
- Included – all employees are equal and all are needed to make the business a success.

Approach taken

The concept of an awareness month was discussed and agreed at by the company's Diversity and Equality of Opportunity Committee (DEOC) as part of a 2006 awareness campaign on diversity and inclusion DEOC; and a working group was formed to develop ideas and awareness initiatives. The group included managers with responsibility for diversity measures, representatives from across the business, Union representatives, members of the communications team and HR.

Once the idea for the DVD was agreed, a plan was developed by the communications team representatives and signed off by the chairman of the DEOC. The focus was on spreading the message of 'inclusion' and how valuing everyone can improve the working environment and business performance. The aim was that employees should understand the value of a diverse workforce, rather than perceiving diversity as purely anti-discrimination activities or imposing political correctness.

To avoid repetition in format and style, the video used 3D animation. Nationwide felt that filming an older person might mean people get the point straight away but that since diversity isn't always visible, using animation would encourage people to think about the issue of inclusion, rather than focusing on any obvious differences. The DVD's aim was to get people to think about valuing everyone and the contribution they make to the business, rather than making assumptions based on someone's appearance, age or disability.

Content was based on interviews with employees who were asked to talk about aspects of diversity in the workplace as they saw it. It was unscripted to ensure the frankness of their views and feelings were maintained. Volunteers for the DVD were recruited from union advisory committees on age, ethnicity, disability and sexual orientation.

The DVD was jointly produced by Nationwide's Internal Communications department and an external partner (Happy Hour Productions). Previous live action videos left audiences unable to discuss the difficult subject of diversity and animation was therefore chosen because it:

- provided a way around the audience's embarrassment.
- could create an engaging and entertaining experience from simple employee interviews.
- hid our stars' identities and demographics, making it harder for people to prejudge them.
- gave us the option to reveal the participants true identities and facts about them, potentially dispelling any assumptions viewers did make about them.

The DVD was produced and distributed in September 2006 and was viewed by all employees. It is now part of the induction programme for all new starters.

The DVD formed part of a larger awareness campaign including diversity awareness days at head office in Swindon and the administration centre in Northampton, a poster campaign, a Diversity Review information booklet, diversity training workbooks for managers and a diversity conference.

As part of the diversity awareness days at the two main locations, many activities involved partners focused on age diversity:

- Applied Ergonomics department at Loughborough University: employees had the opportunity to try the University's Third Age suit that simulates the effects of age on the body
- Reach Inclusive Arts: young people with learning disabilities demonstrated making plasticine models which they then filmed for an animated film
- The Laundry Yard Scrub Big Band: groups of older musicians performed during the lunchtime period
- Pre-school nursery children: keep fit demonstrations
- Tai-chi: employees joined an older tai chi expert
- Back on Track: Bollywood dancers of varying ages gave demonstrations and invited employees to join in
- Whizz-Kidz: disabled youngsters demonstrated their mobility in customised wheelchairs; employees were given the opportunity to take part in a wheelchair obstacle course
- Market area: Farmers market and traders of all ages sold a wide variety of goods

Barriers

Shortly before the DVD was due to launch a number of difficulties were experienced with getting people from the business to support the awareness campaign and take part in activities. At the time many people across the business were working on the announcement for the proposed merger with Portman Building Society. Unfortunately, as the benefits of diversity are not as tangible as other business activities, it was more difficult to get senior support. Having the Deputy Chief Executive signed up to the project, plus the diversity measure owners, who were all Heads of Departments, helped to secure the resources required.

Impact

The DVD and supporting efforts played a part in achieving the overall diversity strategy and policy of Nationwide Building Society namely in:

- getting employees across the business talking about diversity/inclusion
- raising the profile of the DEOC, union advisory committees and other diversity activities
- drawing employees' attention to the company's diversity and equality of opportunities policy

Employees' perception of Nationwide's approach to diversity improved as a direct result of the DVD:

- 63% of employees thought diversity would improve as a result of the video.
- 94% of branch staff and 89% of administrative staff think the society is truly behind diversity.

In addition to employee perception, actual employee demographics have continued to improve. Analysis since the DVD release has shown that;

- The number of employees between the ages of 40-49 has increased most notably from 23.4% to 23.9%.
- The number of employees aged 60+ has also increased for the first time since March 2006 from 1.3% to 1.5%. The total number of employees over 50 is 13.2%.

Feedback received from employees included in the survey was;

"I thought the idea was really clever. The use of cartoon animals to disguise the person's appearance and make you concentrate on what they had to say rather than what they looked like was very powerful. When the identities were revealed I realised that I had met two of the participants."

"It was thought provoking, and by use of animated characters, it prevented pre-judging the person."

"It reminded me that I shouldn't judge people at face value as it has nothing to do with their skills and abilities within the job."

"It has made me more aware of what it is like from the other person's perspective."

"I'm less likely to jump to conclusions."

Monitoring

The DVD's success was measured through formal audience feedback, supplemented by ad hoc feedback.

In addition, Nationwide regularly monitor diversity statistics. Statistics include:

- Age, gender & ethnicity of new recruits
- Number of male and females in job levels
- Number of ethnic minorities in the branch network
- Age range comparison for employees and customers
- Gender comparison for employees and customers
- Age profiles between our two main administration centres (Swindon & Northampton)
- Number of disabled members registered and the alternative formats that are requested (i.e. Braille, etc.)

Nationwide's employee satisfaction survey (Viewpoint) is also analysed with results split by various employee groups (e.g. by age groups, gender, part time v full time). Similar analysis by group is also conducted for annual performance ratings.

Some of the diversity statistics that were revealed in 2006 were:

- Up to June 2006, the average retirement age was 57 years and 9 months compared to 56 years in 2002.
- As at April 2006, 24.75% of Senior Management positions were taken up by women, compared to 24.4% in 2005 and 22.5% in 2004.

EFA Case Study

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