

HALIFAX
CONVENTION
CENTRE

Where it all comes together.

ICCA Best Marketing Award Entry 2015

'Imagine' your event here

Integrated, direct-to-customer campaign to bring our new Centre to life for our clients.



Introduction

We're building something ground-breaking in Halifax, Nova Scotia—Canada's East Coast. With the new Halifax Convention Centre opening in 2017, we need to help planners *'imagine'* their event in a space that they can't

yet see, visit or touch. So we developed a unique brand and marketing campaign that's been engaging our planners in shaping our new facility, from the ground up.

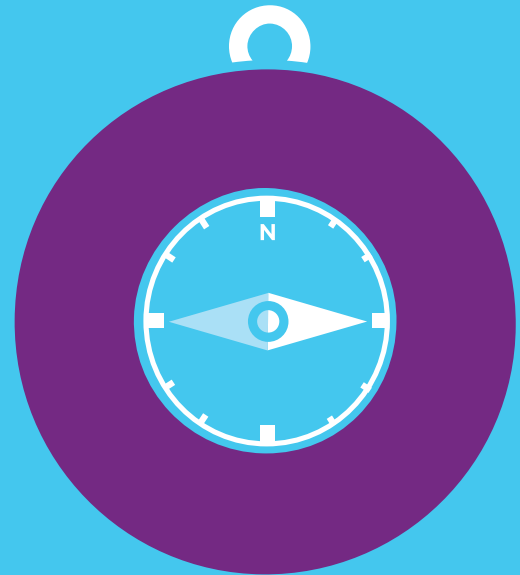
Context

With an aging facility, Halifax was unable to compete for significant national and international conferences for several years.

In 2013, a private developer announced the Nova Centre project, a one-million square-foot, mixed-used development to include a new convention centre, hotel, financial tower and retail space.

In 2014, we launched Nova Scotia's new Halifax Convention Centre with a new, innovative brand. We began reconnecting with national and international clients to let them know that we're getting ready to host the world and invite them to #MeetEast.

But how do you build anticipation, excitement and instill confidence to help event planners select our new Centre as the venue of choice for their event in 2017 and beyond?



Marketing Challenges

- New facility is still under construction making it difficult for planners to commit to a facility they can't see.
- No final floor plans or renderings when brand was launched and sales activity began.
- Factors beyond our control, like construction delays, lack of confirmed hotel partner, and some client skepticism due to new convention centre developments.
- Breaking into under-developed markets—have to build international reputation, from the ground up, in a crowded and competitive marketplace.

Our Strengths

When it comes to events, meetings and conferences, Halifax enjoys many distinct advantages that make us an attractive destination:



State-of-the-art facility and distinctive brand



Direct air access to major cities throughout out North America and Europe



World-class reputation for hospitality and service, award-winning culinary team



Compact downtown precinct makes it easy to experience local culture



Hub of research and innovation including 13 colleges and 10 universities

Understanding our environment

We spent months conducting research to better understand the competitive landscape and our target demographics, including a full environmental scan to understand the market and the opportunities.

Our team took to tradeshow, conducted focus groups and surveys with national and international industry experts, conducted a competitive review of what other facilities are doing, executed brand testing, and gathered feedback from staff.

During this initial research stage, we asked clients to give an example of a convention centre whose marketing efforts stood out. We were surprised to hear that, for the most part, competition in the industry is quite, well, conventional. There was a major gap to fill, and we were eager for the exciting opportunity to try something new and surprise our audience with our innovative approach.

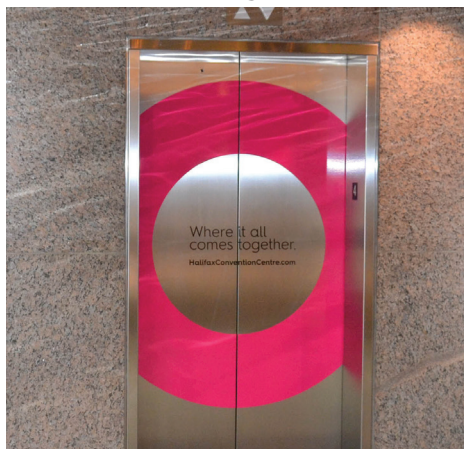
The Opportunity

- Build confidence and excitement among customers about the new Halifax Convention Centre and convey that we're ready to host them in 2017 and beyond.
- Differentiate ourselves from our major Canadian competitors through our unique brand personality.
- Highlight the Centre's convenient location - in the heart of downtown, less than 100 steps away from the ocean, and an easy direct flight away from many major cities in North America and Europe.
- Help our clients *'imagine'* our facility and be a part of building it from the ground up—a play to our audience's detail-oriented nature and appreciation of exclusive, targeted engagement opportunities.
- Enable Halifax to compete internationally for business, and establish itself as a premier conference hosting destination with a world-class facility.

A facility that's changing Halifax



- We branded our current facility in our *Look Who's Coming* campaign creative to build local awareness and excitement throughout the construction period.



Bold. Simple. Fun.

A brand as versatile as our space

Our logo and visual identity are designed to be bold, modern, vibrant and flexible, much like the facility and services we offer. The versatility of the “O” of our logo is a testament to our innovation and dynamism. It’s unique, can become something new, or be filled with anything, just like our space.

Our brand and the team behind it are the inspiration through which event planners can draw creativity and generate enthusiasm for their future event.

Our tagline

People, events and ideas come together at the Halifax Convention Centre. It’s a natural place to gather. On the East Coast of North America and in the centre of it all, we make meeting easy.

Where it all comes together.



PMS 2985
CMYK 60.0.3.0
RGB 73.199.237



PMS 3965
CMYK 70.10.0.0
RGB 245.235.0



PMS 032
CMYK 0.93.76.0
RGB 246.50.62



PMS 2603
CMYK 72.99.0.3
RGB 104.43.141



PMS 368
CMYK 65.0.10.0
RGB 98.187.70



PMS 7579
CMYK 0.74.10.0
RGB 242.103.33



PMS 213
CMYK 0.92.18.0
RGB 237.55.128

The Strategy

With a modest budget of \$500k, we had to develop and launch our new brand, and execute our campaign strategy—one where we'd have to break ground in a larger marketplace than we've been used to. Competition was high, but we were up for the challenge.



Reaching Event Planners:

How:

- Speak directly to customers.
- Engage customers by providing an exclusive opportunity to be a part of building the Centre.
- Establish general industry awareness.
- Leverage momentum as grand opening approaches.



Our primary objective:

- Build confidence and interest in booking.



Single minded message:

- We're ready to host your event.

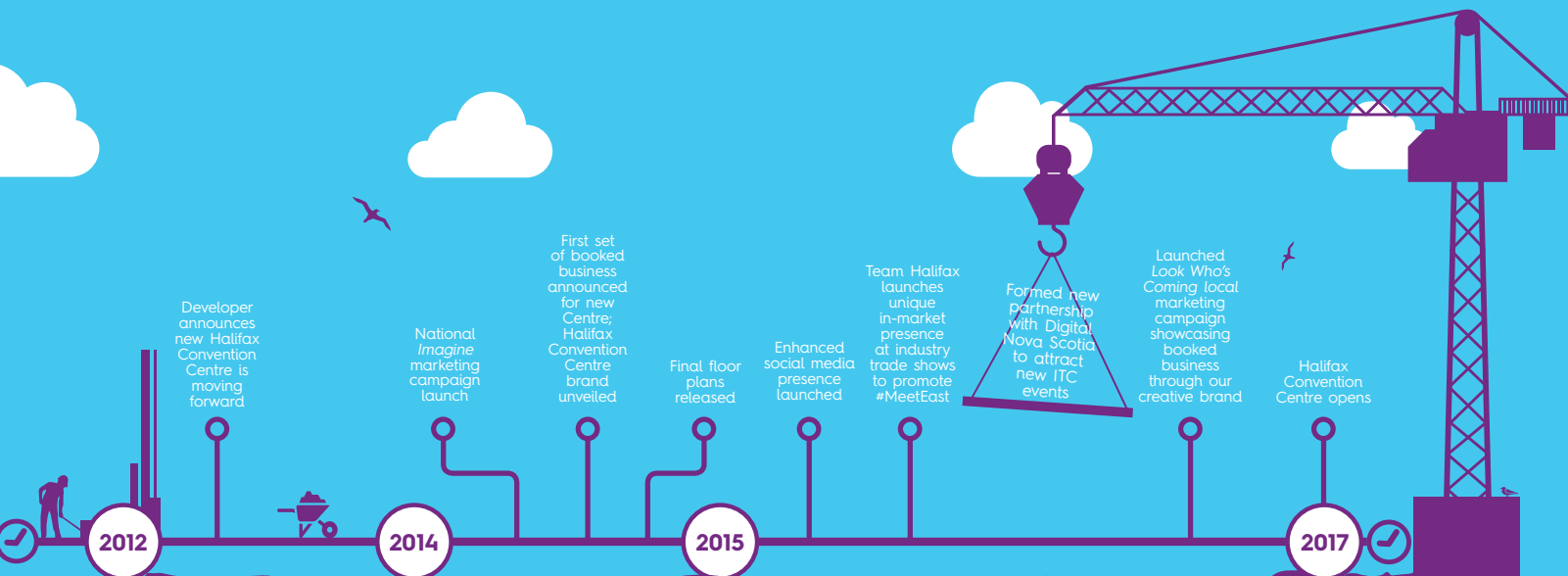


Tone /impression:

- Bold. Simple. Fun.



Focus energy and investment on those most likely to purchase.



Executional Approach

We didn't just sit back and expect interest in our new Centre would come automatically—we recognized that it takes a lot to be on the radar and get people thinking about us.

'Imagine' you're an event planner; that's what we did. We thought about what's important to them—the details. What do the forks look like? What does the carpet feel like? What will the hand soap in the bathrooms smell like? The 'Imagine' campaign was born.

Integrated digital and social experience

We wanted to make our new Halifax Convention Centre real. Using our brand, we developed an integrated marketing campaign that focuses on the little things that can make or break a convention experience for planners and their clients.

All of our efforts are complemented by engaging social content that drives traffic online. Regular, up-to-date content on HalifaxConventionCentre.com reinforces progress on our new Centre.

Our 'Imagine' campaign centres on personalized direct mail executions that integrate with measurable online tactics like landing pages, email and social media outreach to extend the experience. Clients signing up for our "Insider's Club" e-newsletter participate in polls, with opportunities to vote on their favourite carpet samples, soap or other key elements of the event experience. This way they're engaged and are helping to shape our Centre, from the ground up. We reinforce campaign creative and messaging with an inspiring Tumblr blog highlighting content that we leverage across multiple digital media outlets.

Unconventional, direct-to-customer approach to stand out and be unique



Our unique and targeted approach allows us to speak directly to our customers. They've been receiving updates right to their mailbox, and we're keeping our insiders engaged by providing an exclusive opportunity to be a part of building our Centre.

By tracking actions through our direct mail executions, our click through rates on our e-newsletter, and gathering web and social analytics, we've been able to better understand what our clients are interested in, the little details that matter. It also allows us to better personalize our tactics and campaigns to truly reflect just how much we care about them.



Connecting with our clients

We don't just set up trade show booths. We bundle up and hand out hot chocolate and cookies to connect with the right people and make a great first impression.

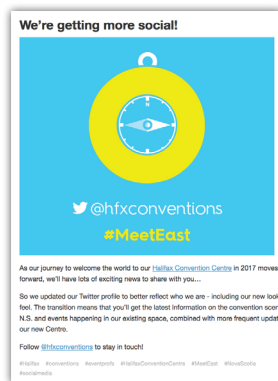


Keeping the conversations going

Web: Regular, up-to-date and engaging content on HalifaxConventionCentre.com reinforces Centre's progress.



Social: Create engaging social content to drive traffic online, demonstrate progress and showcase our expertise.



Keeping partners and clients engaged

Brand in action for
2 years



100's of partners working together



Average newsletter click rate
44%
(industry average 17.3%)

Up to **87%** engagement rates on campaigns



33 events booked to date



26,450 delegates coming to Nova Scotia

Results

Our brand personality and marketing efforts differentiate us from our major Canadian competitors. The new brand helps establish the Halifax Convention Centre as a place where extraordinary connections are made with our people, city and province.

Online conversions & social response

We know we're making it easy for clients to *'imagine'* their next event here. Our conversion rates are well above industry standard.

Anecdotal evidence and online analytics have demonstrated that people are intrigued by, and responding, to the marketing efforts currently in place. Online conversions, social response and word-of-mouth feedback are all growing.

- Our email campaigns have average open rates of almost **44%**. Our direct mail campaigns have had conversion rates of **up to 87%**. We've got a growing list of Insiders (**194**) and Stakeholders (**488**). We have a growing social following that can support conversions (**1,350+ Twitter followers**; Tumblr page fourth most visited page on site). Most importantly, business is booking well into 2017.
- Booked business: To date, **33 events** secured totaling an estimated **26,450 delegates**.

Greater industry presence and international recognition

Since entering the market, our brand identity and design have been receiving regional and international recognition.

Recently, we received the Members' Choice Award out of 14 finalists at the 2015 International Association of Convention Centres Innovation Award.

In October, we'll be recognized by the International Economic Development Council with the Excellence in Economic Development Silver Award for innovation in our *'Imagine'* Direct Mail Campaign – General Purpose Print Promotion, Population Greater than 500,000.

Regionally, our identity and design were recognized with two Gold wins at the 2014 ICE Awards.

Momentum is building

Since implementing our brand, we've been using it to showcase Nova Scotia's very best in research, industry and hospitality to the world. This has helped us to attract conferences like Knowledge Discovery and Data Mining, STEMfest, and International Conference on Marine Mammalogy. We're emphasizing that our Centre is a place where extraordinary connections are made, and that we're ready to host the world in 2017 and beyond. By pushing the boundaries of conventional marketing tactics and embracing our brand organization wide, we've been able to secure numerous major and international conferences.

Here's what people are saying

Our brand is resonating with clients, partners, stakeholders and industry professionals the way we had hoped. This is evident through a growing list of booked business and the significant increase in online engagement with event planners and industry professionals (average of 100 new Twitter followers per month). Additionally, we've been receiving positive feedback among industry members indicating that our brand is intriguing and engaging our target audience.

Halifax to Host 50th Annual Canadian Employee Benefit Conference

"The new convention centre's additional space makes the Foundation's return possible after too long an absence, and we look forward to seeing an even larger gathering as we celebrate our exciting milestone."

- Michael Wilson, CEO of the International Foundation of Employee Benefit Plans

Leveraging Nova Scotia's strengths – alignment and integration with strategic partners

We've also been working with our local partners in business and academia to highlight our strengths in key sectors like ocean technology and big data, and working to attract conferences in those areas.

Digital Nova Scotia and Halifax Convention Centre Form New Partnership to Attract ICT Events

"It is within our mission and mandate as an industry association to encourage the growth of Nova Scotia's digital economy. We believe this partnership will result in greater global business opportunities and a broader eco-system of support for our members and stakeholders."

- Ulrike Bahr-Gedalia, President & CEO, Digital Nova Scotia

Media Coverage

Brand Launch January 23, 2014



8 local media articles



3 industry publications covered announcement



121 social media mentions

Booked Business Update June 25, 2015



Halifax Convention Centre books 30 events, international clients

Trade Centre Limited says Nova Centre will open its doors officially in 2017



11 local print/TV/radio media mentions



43 social media mentions



38,000+ reach on social media

AIPC Award Announcement July 8, 2015



9 media mentions



3 industry publications
(national & international)



38 social media mentions



48,000+ reach on social media



Here's what we've learned

- Our brand personality and marketing efforts differentiate us from our major Canadian competitors.
- Our targeted and personalized approach is working. We're reaching the right people and building the right connections.
- Planners are busy. If you want their attention, you have to create content that's worth their time.
- Don't be afraid to go off plan. Be nimble and ready to create on-the-fly, interesting content as it is available.
- Celebrate milestones and showcase progress to build confidence among planners.
- Focus on milestones we can control. Working with a private developer and different levels of government, there are just some things out of our control. We focused on a content-first approach that allows us to create fresh, engaging content for event planners.
- Internal integration is key. We're successful because we ensure that our brand is not only used for marketing, but that it is part of our culture and identity organization-wide, from sales and marketing to culinary and event management. Our creative approach has provided us with new opportunities to follow-up and engage with our clients in an interesting way. Now, our team approaches client relationships with our bold, simple, fun brand.

Conclusion

Our brand is innovative in the true sense of the word, considering our bold, simple, fun approach to daily business interactions is brand new to the convention industry. Our booked business, growing social following and above industry average open and click through rates for our e-newsletters and campaigns, and positive feedback from the experts themselves are all indicators that our brand is working.