

Senior Leadership campaign of the year

Introduction

North Yorkshire is England's largest County covering 3,103 square miles with a population of just over 600,000. North Yorkshire County Council (NYCC) directly delivers a wide range of services to its communities across the County.

In early 2017 our current Director for Children's Services (DCS) announced his intention to retire in summer 2017. This critical and impactful role therefore needed to be advertised in order to find a key successor who could continue to lead our highly regarded service that has a growing reputation with successful Ofsted outcomes and award winning innovation programmes. As a result, the LA is one of the DfE "Partner in Practice" authorities and a national SEND Pathfinder, implemented under the Children and Families Bill in 2014.

The role is very high profile and therefore never before has there been a need to appoint a successor who has the experience and ambition to deliver, develop and exceed expectations for the service. This area of the public sector has a high profile nationally and can gain negative publicity, as such it is a high risk role. Furthermore we were aware of three local authorities in our region also recruiting to the same role at the same time with higher salaries than our post.

Approach

In January 2017 it was necessary to quickly plan and implement a large scale, impactful campaign that cast a wide net, using a variety of marketing methods. Last time we needed to appoint to this role it took two attempts to successfully fill.

A dedicated web campaign site was developed in-house to provide a professional, dedicated resource to showcase the vacancy;

http://www.northyorks.gov.uk/recruitment/director_cyps/index.html

All information about the role is available in one place, making the process easy for potential applicants to access everything they need. To emphasise our successes and credibility with external professionals the site included 3 videos which included;

1. An information discussion between the current post holder and the Chief Executive who will be the line manager. This demonstrated key information not covered by an advert and gave job seekers an insight into the dynamics of this working relationship which is hugely important in supporting them to make their decision about the role and their 'fit'. One applicant commented that it was genuinely the best post-holder/CEX video they has seen due to its informality and authenticity.
2. A video of Isabelle Trowler, Chief Social Worker for Children and Families, who praises NYCC's Children's Services very highly. This is important to showcase how we are valued by others externally and how working for NYCC with influence an individual's future prospects.

3. This video highlights the achievements of NYCC in the words of the children and families we serve. Job seekers were enthused about the involvement of service users, and the humour and reality of the piece.

The campaign site images display children and young people who are at the heart of our service, but the dynamic choice of image and related strapline aims to illustrate our approach as an innovative authority that is reaching out to individuals who relate to our forward thinking approach.

To promote the web campaign site we utilised external advertising in The Guardian, The MJ and Care Jobs online, these are all advertising media that are specific to senior professionals in the relevant sectors. We didn't rely on an advert being the only method to yield results; to ensure our campaign reached passive job seekers we also made direct contact with over 300 leaders in children's services, directing them to the campaign sites which were also promoted through social media platforms. Social media enabled candidates to share details of the roles across their wider networks. The current postholder and Principal Resourcing Adviser also made direct contact with key targets providing a targeted, personal and high profile approach.

The combined advertising costs totalled £4485.00, which for a role with a salary of circa £130k is a relatively small proportion. We could have utilised executive search agents which would have cost approximately £25,000, demonstrating the cost effectiveness of our approach.

During the time that the vacancy was being advertised we publically provided contact details for potential applicants for NYCC's Chief Executive, the current post-holder of DCS and a Resourcing Lead related to the recruitment process. We actively encouraged candidates to speak to these individuals to get a real sense for the role, both to formulate their interest and help with their application. Candidates have fed back that they have appreciated this informal, and personal approach and the opportunity to speak in confidence to a Resourcing Lead to ask questions that they would not ask a future manager.

Whilst many organisations do not openly provide such senior contacts at the advertising stage, we felt that this was important to demonstrate our commitment to potential applicants and show our approachable and collaborative ethos.

We were aware that we were targeting existing senior leaders who would have busy diaries and workloads, potentially with limited time to spend on a lengthy and time consuming job application process. NYCC's standard method of application is through an online application form which can be quite lengthy, however for this vacancy we chose to have the method of submission by a CV to make the candidate experience quicker and easier for them. We knew that many senior professionals working at this level would be likely to have an existing CV so this reduced the amount of time they would have to spend preparing their application.

Outcome

The campaign generated significant interest including a high number of views of the web campaign sites and a healthy number of high quality applications for the posts.

Overall there was a combined total of 355 views of the web campaign site.

We have attracted what we confidently believe to be one of the strongest fields of applicants for a DCS position; we received 26 applications, 10 of which were from either serving directors or those that had director level experience.

The vacancy closed on 19th February 2017 with interviews due to be held on 20th and 21st March 2017. Although we have not appointed prior to the submission date for these Awards we are confident that a successful appointment will be made based on the quality of applications received.

As we contacted job seekers directly, much of which was out of hours on an evening or weekend to aid convenience and confidentiality, we took the opportunity to gain feedback;

“One of the best campaigns I have seen, I appreciate the amount of information available and how it is structured enabling me to read as little or as much as I wish.”

“The video including children and young people was pure genius, engaging, funny and from the voice of those that really matter – you have your priorities right and that is important.”

Candidates have provide feedback unprompted. The campaign has attracted attention from others LA’s contacting for advice as they grapple with hard to fill leader roles, and has also attracted attention from politicians who are delighted by the way in which the campaign showcases our services.