



Case Study: Corporate Communications & Transformation **Criterion Partnership supports largest expansion of Boots brand in its history**

Glen Savage, Internal Communications Manager, Boots UK

When Alliance Boots was created from a merger of high street giant Boots and community pharmacy specialists Alliance Pharmacy, retail branding was high on the agenda. Around 1,000 stores were to be rebranded, to improve service, build brand loyalty and increase profits. The vision of being 'the world's best pharmacy-led health and beauty retailer' needed some exceptional communications interventions to engage the hearts and minds of field-based leaders and store team members – Boots chose Criterion Partnership to help.

Background

The landmark merger of Boots and Alliance Pharmacy resulted in a near doubling in store numbers. This posed a unique challenge: creating a brand that worked for both the high street Boots outlets and the community Alliance Pharmacy stores across the UK.

The heritage of, and trust in, the Boots brand is indisputable, while the younger Alliance Pharmacy stores focussed on community pharmacy. The decision was made to rebrand the 1,000 Alliance Pharmacy stores as Your Local Boots Pharmacy (YLBP).

This was to be the largest expansion of the Boots brand in its 130 year history, as well as one of the largest rebranding exercises in UK retail history.

Yet this was to be more than just a rebrand. It was a total store transformation. Your Local Boots Pharmacy would be a new format, combining the strengths and expertise of both companies to create a new customer offering that would be 'better than both' – bringing the Boots brand into the heart of local communities.

A significant budget was approved to achieve this transformation over a two year period. With the sheer scale of the programme and financial investment it was of paramount importance to ensure its success.

Communications Challenges

To rebrand 1,000 stores in just two years, while fully integrating two companies, was a mammoth activity. Communication of the changes was going to be a substantial task. The challenge was to win the hearts and minds of all stakeholders and actively engage them in the process of transformation.

All central, regional and field teams needed to be made aware of the active part they needed to play to support store teams in over 2,500 retail outlets throughout the UK. Communications needed to reach and influence teams operating from two head offices, five divisional offices, eleven regional offices and a string of large national wholesale distribution outlets.

The most crucial challenge was to engage pharmacist managers, and subsequently their store teams; a target population of around 10,000 people. Traditionally pharmacists have valued professionalism and customer care – here was a real opportunity to nurture a similar commitment to the commercial side of the business.

The Solution

In a campaign of this dimension, involving colossal transformation of processes and practices, there were, naturally, always going to be anxieties and reservations. Boots required a specialist partner to help engage its people in the transformation to Your Local Boots Pharmacy. To maximise success, promote smooth integration and easy transition for store team members, Boots chose Criterion Partnership – a company with great skill, experience and proven track record.



Steve Duncan

“They know how to reach out to the audience and stir up their motivations”

As experienced occupational psychologists, Criterion Partnership consultants are very familiar with supporting people through change at all levels in organisations. They brought their expertise to bear on a comprehensive communications programme to actively infuse enthusiasm and help team members to embrace the change.

Criterion Partnership’s capacity to frame key messages in ways that evoke enthusiasm and simultaneously address reservations led to the design of some highly effective interventions.

Criterion Partnership formulated three key components for the communications programme:

1. The Story

With such an enormous project it was essential to construct the right messages, appropriately phrased and strategically timed, to portray how the changes would impact on each stakeholder group. These messages were crafted by Criterion Partnership and then used by the business leaders to share with their teams and promote engagement.

Steve Duncan, Executive Chairman, Alliance Boots said “Criterion Partnership have great organisational skills and attention to detail. They know how to reach out to the audience and stir up their motivations – they’ve helped us to deliver messages in ways that are compelling and memorable.”



National Conference



Kirstie Hepburn

2. National Conference

Criterion Partnership helped create a national conference for Alliance Pharmacy field-based leaders and head-office support teams to launch the rebranding programme three years ago.

With the theme 'Building a healthier future', the conference provided the opportunity for business leaders to share the rebranding plan in detail with the entire field and central teams.

The messages, presentations and speeches created by Criterion Partnership for the conference had a profound impact on the audience. Delegates' feedback consistently said that this was the best conference ever held.

The 'Motivational engagement' session conducted by Richard Hunter of Criterion Partnership was described by many as inspirational. As a direct result of

this session, each delegate left with three key action points they personally created, and committed to implement to really engage teams in all our stores.

A powerful and emotional speech, penned by Richard Hunter in collaboration with regional operations manager, Kirstie Hepburn, told the story of her involvement in the successful YLBP rebrand trials. Her stirring words, to a spellbound audience, ensured the conference concluded on a huge high and resulted in many animated enthusiastic conversations about getting started immediately.

Sometime after the conference Kirstie reflected, "In working with Richard and the team from Criterion, I had an opportunity to really grow, personally and professionally. The conference was a turning point in my career and Richard helped me to shape my

"The conference was a turning point in my career"

own words into a very powerful story, which had more impact than I would have hoped for. Receiving the level of positive feedback that I did after delivering my presentation helped shape my future direction and improved my self-belief – it really was inspirational".

From the conference's dramatic opening sequence Criterion Partnership established a standard that they maintained throughout the entire two days. And, unlike many conferences, no-one rushed to leave at the end. The place was a buzz with energised conversations about actions people were planning to take and excitement about the anticipated benefits of rebrand for all.

3. Engagement Days

Criterion Partnership considered the most effective way to engage the teams operating in Alliance Pharmacy stores and recommended a series of 'engagement' days (at 12 weeks and 6 weeks before transformation) to ensure that store teams were fully informed and involved in the whole rebrand experience. Two team members attended from each store and then shared the messages over a pizza evening with other team members. Special team member self-development manuals were created to help support and convey all the key messages.

The engagement days were comprehensive and helped to prepare store teams for the rebrand by covering a wide range of topics. These included store refit timelines, store layout, look and feel, new product ranges, Boots promotions and Advantage Card as well as all the new systems and ways of working. Particular emphasis was placed on preparing other local stakeholders, the store team and informing the customers.

Maria, an Essex-based store manager who participated, said, "The engagement days were fabulous, fun, informative and allowed us to share ideas with other store leaders. We could ask questions, get answers and take essential information back to our stores to share with the rest of



Engagement days

"The engagement days were fabulous, fun, and informative...everyone felt fully informed and part of the re-brand process"

the team so everyone felt fully informed and part of the rebrand process. This ensured there were no hidden surprises when it came time for the work to actually be done."

Outcomes

The trusted Boots brand successfully progressed from city centres and high streets to the heart of 1,000 local communities.

The project completed on time and came in under budget. Given the overlap with a major recession, results were even more impressive. With competitors showing slumps in figures, 'Your Local Boots pharmacy' exceeded expectations. On average, prescription items increased by an impressive 4.5% above target and retail sales increased by a staggering 29% above target.

Pharmacist managers became convinced that introducing the Boots Advantage Card was not just for profit. In fact, it was a positive benefit for their customers.

Post rebrand surveys of team members showed they loved their new stores and team members consistently said they were delighted with rebrand communications, were very motivated and felt fully engaged in the whole process.

The synergy generated from working with Criterion Partnership helped ensure the success of the communications campaign



Fascia after



Interior after

and engage our teams so that the rebrand programme proved to be not only as successful as was predicted but exceeded expectations. The insights and interventions provided by Criterion Partnership helped us achieve remarkable results and I would happily recommend them highly to other organisations.



Glen Savage, Internal Communications Manager, Boots UK

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