STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION PLAN

EFFECTIVE MAY 2017

VISION

*Purpose, Strategy, Guiding Principles.*

Biotown operates a community biology laboratory located in downtown Ottawa. It’s a space where you have the tools you need to come up with clever ways to create, experiment, and learn. Get tutoring to learn the basics, come to workshops to learn techniques, or combine science, technology, and art in lots of different ways: novel or well-tread, high school or Ph.D., microscopic or big picture. Biotown promotes openness, creativity, curiosity, and collaboration. These are the values and qualities that constitute our biohackerspace.

MISSION STATEMENT

*Catchy, aspirational. A slogan.*

Biotown’s dream is to help someone with no scientific background produce something they care about, whether that’s cool art, a neat gadget, or groundbreaking research.

BACKGROUND STATEMENT

*Context for the communication plan.*

Several months ago, Biotown recognized the need for a person with some communications experience to maintain a regular presence on various social media sites. This need was later identified to extend to broader communication areas, including a vision and mission statement, organizational objectives, strategic communications, and a crowdfunding support plan.

SITUATIONAL AUDIT

*Past performance. Economic, social, technological, demographic forces. Significant stakeholders. Organizational Resources.*

Biotown is a nonprofit incorporated in May 2016. Since then, they have taken several steps toward their goal of providing a biotechnology lab available to the public. They have a laboratory space located in the Arts Court, close to downtown Ottawa. The space is lent to them by ArtEngine, a media arts production and presentation center. ArtEngine is a well-established organization, having existed since 1999 in a digital capacity and since 2005 in a physical space. Much of ArtEngine’s funding comes from Heritage Canada, the Ontario Arts Council, and the Canadian Council for the Arts. Since May, Biotown has held several workshops for interested individuals, established a tutoring program, started a newsletter, set up a website, and participated in several of the Museum of Nature’s *Nature Nocturne* events.

Biotown’s lab is close to fully-furnished for their current needs. Most of their equipment has been sourced pre-owned from University of Ottawa laboratories. Their informal association with Dr. Andrew Pelling, TED Fellow and co-founder of recently-launched idea incubator pHacktory, has been particularly helpful for achieving this goal. They have also used their acquaintance with Dr. Pelling for contacts and reputation.

Biotown hopes to launch a crowdfunding campaign in the coming months to raise funds to increase capacity and improve community outreach and membership sign-up. They seem to have the necessary foundation in place to take advantage of the profits from their campaign. Some amount of donation is expected from associates, but they hope to leverage this support to achieve wider public appeal. Additionally, their association with the DIYbio network, an international network founded by an organization of the same name, will likely yield some donations due to a culture of mutual support. However, these donations will likely be nominal.

ORGANIZATIONAL OBJECTIVES

*Primary areas of interest for the foreseeable future. Roadmap. Periodically revisit. Add/delete, rewrite when obsolete. If straying too far from these points, either reimagine Biotown or revisit decisions to come back to the agreed path.*

1. Outfit a laboratory space to provide access to equipment and materials for experiments
2. Attract members with a desire to use the biohackerspace.
3. Conduct research of scientific value.
4. Develop open-source tools and technology.
5. Obtain funding to improve lab capacity for more sophisticated experiments and research, and support community outreach.

EXTERNAL ENVIRONMENT

*Like the situational audit, but current and future strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOTs).*

Biotown is located near the University of Ottawa, and started by (mainly) uOttawa graduates, which provides a significant pool of potential members through those social networks. Additionally, their full-time work and acquaintances, which may allow access to uOttawa services and facilities, offers opportunities for additional material, expertise, contacts, and temporary use of equipment. One example is working with Zoom Productions, funded by the University of Ottawa’s student union.

Biotown must be careful to distance themselves from the uOttawa campus and its student body to avoid being perceived as a student club with official status. They can do so by continuing to appear at social events unaffiliated with the university, reaching out to other demographics, and forming professional partnerships. Biotown must build their social capital over time. It will be important, in the future, to create a lasting professional and personal bond with other DIYbio groups nearby, because joint scientific and marketing endeavours will be extremely valuable. These include: Brio.bio (Montreal), Bosslab (Boston), Genspace (Brooklyn), Harlembiospace (New York City), and Biohackers (New York City).

Other than their closeness to the University of Ottawa, Biotown’s location in Ottawa provides other opportunities. There is a possibility of collaboration with federal departments, although the extent and nature of these potential partnerships are yet unknown. Municipal events are also promising for outreach and publicity. Being the federal capital, Ottawa is the central location for chaptered civic organizations with pre-existing membership networks. Being able to meet with the directors and managers of these organizations is invaluable for fundraising. In general, Ottawa has a strong culture of community involvement, including many youth organizations whose members’ parents may be interested in signing up their children. Civic organizations can be identified on the City of Ottawa website.

WINDOWS OF OPPORTUNITY

*Opportunities to publicize good news.*

* Nature Nocturne (regular, well-attended, membership sign-up and name recognition); also Science by Night, by the Museum of Nature
* Newsletter (large amount of room for growth)
* Directors are each moving forward on distinct careers — can showcase professional and academic achievements and lend credence, meet potential associates/partners
* Successful establishment of Biotown’s website, lab, workshops
* Successful implementation of projects (water testing, fish tissue aging problem, crowdfunding campaign)
* Nuit blanche
* pHacktory
* Maker Fair

COMMUNICATION OBJECTIVES

*Reflect attempts to inform audiences, persuade audiences, and/or change audience behaviour. Linked directly to ORGANIZATIONAL OBJECTIVES.*

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| --- | --- |
| Matching Organiza-tional Objective | Communication Objective |
| A., B. | Build partnerships with science-, art-, and technology-oriented organizations around Ottawa. |
| B., E. | Identify members interested in attending tutoring sessions. |
| B. | Improve Biotown’s recognition among the public. |
| A., C., D. | Create connections with organizations involved in the DIYbio network. |
| B., E. | Translate social media connections to attendance at events and workshops to memberships. |

KEY MARKETING NOTES

*Recurring ideas and phrases to be repeated on communication products. Respond to needs and opportunities in the internal and external environment.*

* “Biotown” not “BioTown”
* Refer to members in the lab as:
  + Biocitizens
  + Citizens
* Themes:
  + Innovation
  + Creativity
  + Professional/Personal development
  + Community outreach, involvement
  + Safety
  + Interdisciplinary collaboration
  + Scientific breakthroughs
  + Art, design
  + Building the DIYbio movement
  + Interface of community and science
  + Learning and education
* Search Engine Optimization & Tags
  + Establish in support plans for large events
  + DIYbio, Bioart, Biotechnology, Biohacking, Biohackerspace
  + <https://moz.com/blog/seo-back-to-basics> (Site structure, keywords, backlinks, crawlability)
* Messages:
  + Make scienceI
  + mprove Ottawa’s biotech expertise
  + Learn, experiment with science, build tech and tools
  + Leverage science and technology to solve problems
  + Bring your friends
  + Meet visionaries and hobbyists with similar interests
  + Bring your ideas into the world
  + PhD’s who want to create; Entrepreneurs who want to meet; Hobbyists who want to collaborate; Graduates who want to do science; Anyone who wants to experiment
  + Casual, not corporate or boring or overly sanitized

COMMUNICATION PRIORITIES

*Concrete plans to actualize COMMUNICATION OBJECTIVES.*

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| --- | --- |
| *B.* | Identify public community outreach events where it makes sense for Biotown to have a presence. |
| *B.* | Set up pages on all major social media sites with messaging matching the information contained in this document. Link all pages together. |
| *B.* | Maintain a social media presence on these sites, curating content for the style preferred by each site. Reduce current engagement sphere to identify/facilitate a tight circle of interaction and build out from there. Create a social media personality through these close interactions that can later be leveraged for credibility. |
| *B.* | Measure impression and engagement metrics and try to improve social media reach. |
| *B., C., D.* | Evaluate what new attendees members hope they can get out of Biotown, identify those interested in membership and tutoring. If workable, translate those hopes to actual activities offered. |
| *C., D.* | Install a suggestion box in the lab for new programming, community outreach, and workshop ideas. |
| *A., B., C., D.* | Reach out to organizations in the DIYbio network that are geographically close or those that are trying to orient their organization the same way. |
| *B., E.* | Draft a crowdfunding campaign support plan. |
| *A.* | Develop a communication calendar to schedule regular social media updates and establish the newsletter writing process. Set a maximum amount of time before updating a particular page, different for each platform. |
| *A., B.* | Establish Biotown in the DIYbio and other related spheres of influence. Contribute to relevant discussions over social media. |
| *B., C.* | Share content that educates readers on developments in biology, chemistry, technology, biotechnology, their community, and their regulation. |

STRATEGIC CONSIDERATIONS

*Cautions in proceeding with communication activities. The level of desired visibility for the activities. Target audiences to be reached. How the organization would like to be positioned in the public view. Opportunities for “piggybacking” some activities on others. Implications in the general level of support expected from constituencies.*

* Cautions have yet to be discovered due to lack of experience with communicating for a community-focused biotechnology non-profit.
* Do not align Biotown with Pelling’s Lab/pHacktory in an official capacity.
* Do not align Biotown too strongly with DIYbio.org. It does not help us to mix our distinct messages and audiences. Most of this difficulty has been avoided so far. However, do try to connect with other *examples* of DIYbio labs/makerspaces/biotech garages/etc. Ask for communications and outreach advice from the most successful historically.
* Do not align Biotown too strongly with ArtEngine while emphasizing the relationship.
* Heavily advertise workshops and ask those interested to bring their friends. Due to the nature of Biotown, attendance at events will likely increase through strong ties with friends. However, I believe we will get more committed members through weak ties and fostering weak ties at community events.
* Leverage publicity of Nature Nocturne events to connect “Biotown” with the exhibitors at the event who handed out cool glowing pendants and offered EKG screenings. High visibility. Advertise workshop events during Nature Nocturne and other such community outreach.
* Target audiences:
  + Armchair scientists/hobbyists.
  + DIYbio supporters in Ottawa. Techies.
  + Avant garde artists.
  + Parents of aspiring students.
  + uOttawa and Carleton U students.
  + Professional scientists, in academia or bureaucracy, who want to do things outside of their field/focus and/or with other people.
  + Entrepreneurs.
  + Professors who want to encourage students to engage with a non-profit, community-based biology lab.
* Talk about future/potential projects on crowdfunding page.
* Have a workshop ready to go should we get luckily and for some reason our publicity and reach jumps for a day or two. Set up the stage to move on the opportunity quickly. For example: Missed out on the opportunity of the floods in Ottawa and Gatineau in May, which could have been used to publicize our water testing project.