

Entrant

Category entered

Publication

UKAR and scarlettabbott

20. Internal Newspaper or Magazine

U Magazine

1. The brief

Help two become one

UK Asset Resolution Limited (UKAR Limited) is the holding company established in October 2010 to bring together the Government-owned businesses of Bradford & Bingley plc (B&B) and Northern Rock (Asset Management) plc (NRAM).

Together, our combined organisation supports around 900,000 customers with £90 billion of loans and employs approximately 2,500 colleagues at three sites in West Yorkshire and the North East.

The brief to our internal communication agency scarlettabbott was to create a magazine that would help to embed our new identity and employee proposition. We were integrating two proud heritage brands across three locations. Our people were experiencing high volumes of change and we quickly needed to signal that times were a-changing... and for the better.

2. Objectives

Now for something completely different

Historically, both B&B and NRAM had their own internal communication channels, including a printed colleague magazine in each business. However, as a new organisation, we had an opportunity to start afresh and establish a strong employer identity through a new suite of channels. We were keen to convey important messages in a 'by the people, for the people' tone of voice.

The objectives of our colleague magazine are:

- Reinforce our values and behaviours by telling stories of UKAR people; weaving a clear line of sight between employee action and achieving our vision
- Clearly articulate the steps of our integration journey, addressing tough business issues head on
- Celebrate our diversity and make all parts of the UKAR business feel represented. In doing so, encourage cross-collaboration, share best practice stories and reinforce a sense of unity
- Take relevant external news issues and report on them with an internal lens
- Highlight the positive contribution we make to our local communities.

3. Strategy and tactics

Strategic aim: The magazine reflects our vision and values

Tactical implementation: U's design and content reflects our vision: 'creating success together'. This vision is at the heart of what we do and how we behave, and we reinforce it through the stories we tell in U. We showcase real examples of colleagues making a difference.

Strategic aim: It's not all work, work, work

Tactical implementation: Many of our customer-facing colleagues have limited 'off phone time', so a large proportion of our audience reads U magazine in coffee breaks - so the editorial is carefully balanced to mix 'need to know' information and the human interest, people

stories that show we care. Our regular CSR pages, 'my other life', and 'what's on' sit shoulder to shoulder with our business features, such as 'ask an expert' and 'team spotlight'.

Strategic aim: Expert and fun

Tactical implementation: We've made U a light, bite-size read, but that doesn't mean it's dumbed down. We talk on an informal level with our audience - we don't need jargon to make ourselves sound smart. And we're all for having a bit of fun. The use of quirky photography and illustration compliments the writing style – and it's a marriage made in heaven.

Strategic aim: All onboard

Tactical implementation: We've asked the senior management team to take a back seat, as we focus instead on grass root level colleagues' working and personal lives and experiences. In the first edition, we invited colleagues to join us on the editorial board, either as 'news hounds' (our ears to the ground) or 'snappers' (local photographers). We had a great response, and now have 15 colleagues from across the company who are heavily involved in the production of the magazine.

Outputs

We're into our fifth edition of this highly popular magazine and interest isn't waning. We upped the print run after the first over-subscribed issue and we continue to see the newsstand cleared every time it hits the street. Here are some of the outputs and benefits that accompany our magazine:

Teaser poster campaign

Preceding every edition, we run a teaser poster campaign at our three sites. Our posters include an email address for future editions and we generate dozens of content ideas before we've even sat down with the editorial board on the next issue.

Good to be green...

U is distributed via branded newsstands in all of our major sites. We print U on FSC (Forest Stewardship Council accredited) stock, and encourage colleagues to read and recycle their copy for others to pick up.

Outcomes and measurements

This year, U magazine has:

- Been a key driver in Internal Communications achieving a 75% IC effectiveness score in our engagement survey, an 11% improvement on our 2010 score of 64%
- Generated a superb 1,007 contribution emails and calls
- Showcased the talents and contribution of over 200 employees
- Helped to promote and raise over £111,887 for good causes in 2011
- Given a total of 20 employees great personal development plan opportunities through roles on the editorial board
- Inspired over 160 colleagues to email the magazine with positive feedback.

The response to our first five editions has been fantastic: all our newsstands are empty within 24 hours, so we've increased our print run from 2,500 to 3,000.

We have an overwhelming response to our competitions and we typically receive in the region of 400 competition entries per issue - almost a quarter of our total readership.

After the first edition, we asked 200 colleagues what they thought: 4 out of 5 cited U as 'excellent'.

Our leader said:

"It's great to see the level of colleague engagement involved in the production of U - it really is a colleague-led publication. I'd say it's one of the best internal publications I've seen in my career as Head of Internal Communications."

Sarah Gardiner, Head of Internal Communications

Our leader said:

"We've had fantastic comments from within our senior leadership team; U is fast becoming a channel they want their business areas to deliver their key messages through. It's a great way of telling the unique and challenging story of UKAR, and delivering key strategic messages in a really accessible way."

Andy Wiggans, Commercial Director

Our reader said:

"I really liked it – good mixture of business and pleasure, and really easy to digest. Nice size too."

Our reader said:

"Great, like the chatty style. Colourful and interesting. Good mix of business and fun news. Very much like the same graphics theme running through the whole mag."

Our reader said:

"Awesome layout and structure. Great content!"

Budget

Our mission is to 'give tax payers value for money' so each edition of U comes in at a value-packed maximum budget of £10k.