**ALTERNATIVE TRANSPORTATION INITIATIVE**

2015 Communications Plan

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**Abstract**

Communications for the launch of the Alternative Transportation Initiative during orientation week.

**Focus:** Alternative transportation launch during orientation week.

**Executive Summary:**

The Niagara College Sustainability Department is launching an alternative transportation initiative in September 2015 during orientation week at both the Welland and Niagara-on-the-Lake campuses. This communications plan outlines several strategies to enhance the pending launch at Niagara College and surrounding regions. The following plan will highlight methods to gain attention and registration from staff and students prior to and during orientation week.

**Situational Analysis:**

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| **Strengths**-Timing-New transportation opportunity-Fresh faces-Easily accessible to students, the use of an app-Free, there will be incentives-Eco friendly and sustainable option-Solution for transportation needs-Solves the emergency ride home | **Weaknesses**-Getting members-High turnover of students-Establishing follow through-Establish methods of communication to ensure use of system-Poor schedule timing among passengers |
| **Opportunities**-Large group of new students, getting to them as they are entering school-Partnering with the SAC and their transportation initiatives-Bad reputation of current transportation, giving a reliable option-The eco-friendly trend-Saving money-Social capacity, an initiative to meet new people during orientation, making friends- Program can help move students and employees around in the event that busses aren’t available -Push employee use 9-5 workers | **Threats**-High turnover-Poor transportation in Niagara-Niagara is widespread, program is unique in the sense there is no comparison to other areas -Being on time, making sure sources are reliable and trustworthy-Tensions between Niagara transit and Niagara College-Lack of communication -Weather, issuing alerts and cancellations |

R.A.C.E Component

**Research**-Survey made available online to students, faculty and staff
-Conduct meetings for qualitative data

-Obtain testimonials regarding transportation, personal experiences
-Look at other carpool programs already in place at smaller sized and remote colleges
-Research car share programs throughout Ontario

-Research different techniques for participants from other locations

-Research orientation week launch activities

**Analysis**
- Compiling data
- Developing key messages from research
- Determine the most effective launch event

- Determine the best form of member identification

**Communication**

- Information booths in the main lobby
- Developing a stronger presence on social media

- Issue information through blackboard
- Providing students and faculty with information sessions, word of mouth
- Developing print publications for alternative transportation events and initiatives

**Evaluation**
- At the end of September, evaluating the number of members
- At the end of October, evaluating the follow through success rate
- Determining the Alternative Transportation programs carbon footprint

**Key Messaging**

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| -#drivechange |
| -Putting sustainability in the drivers seat |
| -Drive change by joining Niagara Colleges own ride match program in September 2015. |
| -Be a part of the eco trend and sign up for the ride match program where students save and sustain  |
| -Save up to $50 a month and get on board with the Drive Change program in your Niagara College community – an easy way to meet new people |
| -Get involved in the Niagara College green culture – a sustainable commitment towards a better future |

**Target Audiences**

*Students at Niagara College*: To reach students at Niagara College who are looking to save money and become ecologically friendly by sharing rides to school, and chose alternative transportation methods.

*International Students at Niagara College:* Develop key messages simple and easy to translate so that the sustainability department is able to reach all international students.

*Staff/Faculty on at Niagara College:* To encourage faculty members to use the alternative transportation program as ambassadors for students.

**Goals**

1. Announce the Launch of the Alternative Transportation program prior to and during orientation week
2. Gain members and encourage registration for the Alternative Transportation program
3. Increase social media use and presence of NC Sustainability Department

**Objectives**

1. A. Host two events to promote the alternative transportation program during orientation week
B. Target Faculty and Staff
2. A. Place information in the orientation package sent out to students during the summer months to inform those looking for housing and planning accommodations in the city
B. Playing an active role during orientation week through introducing programs to parents and students

3. A. Develop two tweets and two Facebook posts weekly
B. Increase follows on twitter and Facebook page by 20%
C. Develop a blog for two-way communication and program updates

**Strategies and Tactics**

**Strategy One:**Introduce the alternative transportation initiative to students, faculty and staff in anticipation of pending launch.

**Tactic:** Host events providing sustainable lunches to raise awareness of “drive-change” and register attendees.

Prior to the launch of the alternative transportation initiative, NC Sustainability Department should attend staff meetings. At staff meetings NC Sustainability will introduce the alternative transportation initiative to staff members and provide a free sustainable lunch whenever possible. The initiative is applicable to staff and faculty as well as students. It is important to ensure faculty and staff support and register for the program to achieve success. New students depend on guidance from their professors and advisors. The communication through faculty and staff of the alternative transportation initiative will increase awareness. Providing a free lunch to faculty will help to deliver information about the launch as well as offer registration for the program through on-site iPads.

Use orientation week to promote student involvement and awareness of the alternative transportation initiative. Develop a social event to introduce new students to one another while learning about the sustainable practices and initiatives at Niagara College. Create a one hour “driving-theme” event to be held during the orientation week festivities. Host a “build and race” soapbox derby, creating small-scale soapbox cars out of sustainable materials in groups, and racing. During the building process provide free food and use iPads to discuss the initiative and register students. If registration is not possible gather email addresses to send information to register.

To increase awareness of the alternative transportation initiative, hold a number of 15-minute workshops throughout orientation week. Host workshops to discuss and increase the awareness of “Drive-change” in public areas with high amounts of foot traffic such as: the commons, pubs, and the cafeteria. Carry iPads to register attendees while offering information and answers to FAQ’s. Develop a brief workshop video on the alternative transportation initiative to post on the Niagara College website as well as to play during workshop sessions. Workshops in high traffic areas will provide information and registration to students as well as parents who are dropping off their kids and becoming acquainted with the college.

***Strategy Two:*** Create awareness of the alternative transportation initiative through promotional material directed towards new students and parents.

***Tactic:*** Develop key messaging to be sent out in orientation packaging prior to and during orientation week.

It is essential to begin to communicate key messages of the alternative transportation initiative through the orientation package sent out in August. This package contains *The Students Top Ten Essentials Checklist* which should contain information on the program, its’ main benefits and how- to register. Getting students involved in the Niagara College green culture and making a sustainable commitment, starts before they come to school. Placing strategic print material in this package will help make sustainability a priority in the planning that occurs in the weeks leading up to orientation week. Brochures highlighting gas savings, using the app and linking to the “Drive-Change” blog, and associated posts, will assist in promoting interest in the program. Print materials are suitable to educate parents whereas awareness through social media will further engage students.

***Strategy Three:*** Increase awareness of NC sustainability on social media platforms in order to increase followers and get the key messages of the Alternative Transportation Program out to more people using these streams.

***Tactics:*** Encourage students and faculty to communicate through social media platforms increasing engagement and delivering feedback.

Sign up for a HootSuite account and connect both the official Niagara Sustainability Facebook and Twitter pages to the service. Use HootSuite to keep a common strain of messages on both the Facebook and Twitter feeds. Tweet and post on Facebook 3-4 times a week about upcoming events, fun environmental facts, pose questions to followers, current events and news, and blog posts. Include photos in Tweets and Facebook posts. Encourage followers to interact with the page by asking questions, posting links and hosting contests.

Create a social media campaign using the hashtag #DriveChange. Use this hashtag to inform followers about the Alternative Transportation program, encourage them to sign up for the program, and tweet about their experiences.

Use the provided Social Media Framework (Appendix B) on a weekly basis to plan out tweets, Facebook posts, and blog posts for that week, and enter these into HootSuite scheduled posts. Stay consistent with key messaging and posting on social media.

Hold contests on Social Media streams, such as photo contests, random draws, and themed contests to increase engagement with followers.

Create a Facebook group or page for the Alternative Transportation program users. Give them a place to chat with other users of the programs and arrange rides if needed.

***Strategy Four:*** Create specific “Drive-change” initiative page on NC sustainability blog.

***Tactic:*** Create open discussion about qualms of carpooling.

Create a blog for the alternative transportation initiative. This will create an open discussion about carpooling. Talk about subjects such as carpool etiquette, carpool safety, top ten conversation starters on your commute, where to get good coffee while carpooling in the Niagara region or carpooling song playlists (see attached).

Host pod-casts about how-to’s and what the alternative transportation initiative has been created for. Discuss what the alternative transportation initiative is seeking to do with Niagara College and how to use the program effectively. Pod-casts should also encourage non-members to register and why they should get involved with drive-change as well as show students how to register. This could be done with the help of interns or volunteers and would be quick videos explaining the “Drive-Change” initiative.

Have a frequently asked questions sheet listed available on the blog. This will help students interested in using the program. This will include basic facts, getting started with Drive-Change, how to register, and why the alternative transportation initiative is beneficial to users.

Finally, link NC Sustainability’s social media platforms to the blog. This ensures maximum viewership on all platforms.

**Evaluation:**

The success of this campaign should be evaluated weekly beginning in August (2015) pending the official launch of the alternative transportation initiative. The weekly evaluations will help to determine the success of various tactics used to increase registrants in the drive-change program. Weekly evaluations should be utilized until December (2015) to measure how best to reach out to staff and students to encourage registration. Furthermore weekly evaluations will allow NC Sustainability to gauge the success of the program overall.

The evaluation will track several forms of media central to Niagara College campuses with an emphasis on social media. In terms of traditional media forums, the school newspaper will be monitored for coverage as well as newspapers in surrounding areas. Facebook and Twitter followers will also be monitored using Hootsuite. ‘Retweets’, ‘likes’ and ‘comments’ concerning the “Drive-Change” initiative will also be tracked using Hootsuite in order to gauge buzz surrounding the launch. The social media statistics will be monitored on a weekly basis beginning the month of August and will then be monitored on a monthly basis beginning in October.

The NC Sustainability will be monitored for ‘likes’, ‘followers’ and comments. Tracking readership of the blog will help to gain what type of audience is viewing the blog regularly and where the followers are located in Niagara. Monitoring blog posts allows for NC Sustainability to understand which type of post gains the most attention. Whether posts are in the form of pod-casts, lists or Q&A, knowing which type of blog post receives the most attention will encourage NC Sustainability to continue posts in this form. This also applies to pod-casts.

Attendance at staff meetings and gatherings with staff and students will be recorded. It will also be recorded which department they came from and where they commute from each morning. This will make it possible to measure the effect of carbon footprint reduction. Attendance will be recorded and it will then be analyzed whether or not attendance continues to increase at such events. Workshop attendance will be measured as well as a means of evaluating student acceptance and support of the alternative transportation initiative.

During orientation week, NC sustainability will host a booth in a high-traffic area of the school. Traffic will be measured to determine visitors to the booth and students who register for the program while at the booth will also be recorded to determine success of signing students up one-on-one.

Program registration will also be tracked and evaluated as a means of measuring the success of the launch. When registration peaks, how staff and students are best reached and the way students prefer to be contacted will be measured. Depending on the measured success of the launch, changes will be made accordingly and then re-evaluated the following week.

The NC Sustainability website and associated blog will be monitored for ‘likes’, ‘followers’ and comments. Tracking readership of the blog will help to gain what type of audience is viewing the blog regularly and where the followers are located in Niagara. Monitoring blog posts allows for NC Sustainability to understand which type of post gains the most attention. Whether posts are in the form of pod-casts, lists or Q&A, knowing which type of blog post receives the most attention will encourage NC Sustainability to continue posts in this form. This also applies to pod-casts.