

STUDENTS CREATE MARKETING COMMUNICATION AND RELATIONSHIP STRATEGIES FOR SUPERVALU'S AUTISM FRIENDLY INITIATIVE



BACKGROUND

There are over 50,000 families in Ireland living with autism. Those affected face barriers to inclusion due to the attitudes of people who may not have first-hand experience of autism. SuperValu's ambition is to build more inclusive communities across Ireland. Their work with AsIAM – Ireland's National Autism Charity and Advocacy organisation, has allowed them to use their unique position at the heart of Irish towns to make positive changes across the entire community. SuperValu's Autism-Friendly journey began in 2015 when Scally's SuperValu in Clonakilty became the first retailer in Ireland to implement changes in its stores. These changes enabled members of the Autism Community to enjoy a better shopping experience. Since then over 100 stores have become autism-friendly.

THE NEED

Musgrave partnered with CIT students to formulate a communication strategy to tackle the expansion of the initiative, as SuperValu must learn how they can effectively communicate their message. A survey conducted by AsIAM showed that presently, the autism community does not find society accessible, understanding or inclusive - but that simple steps could be taken to help change this. SuperValu and AsIAM have opened up the programme to invite other towns to go on the same journey to become Autism-Friendly. The towns include Clane, Bray, Greystones, Wicklow Town, New Ross, Skerries, Lucan, Castlebar, Mallow, Listowel and Tralee. The SuperValu retailer will begin learning more about what Autism-Friendly is, and how they can use their position in the heart of the community to engage key organisations including the GAA, TidyTowns, Chamber of Commerce and local Autism groups. A Relationship Management Strategy is fundamental to this.

THE SOLUTION

Students from the MSc Marketing Practice class created reports detailing a relationship management strategy and a communication strategy to support it. These strategies were aimed at the local Autism-Friendly Committees and the local SuperValu retailers setting out how they should engage key organisations (businesses, sports clubs, public bodies, leisure organisations, schools, healthcare providers etc.), and raise awareness of the initiative amongst the general public, to take part in their Autism-Friendly Town initiative. The research was conducted using interviews and surveys to establish retailers' opinions and prior knowledge of the initiative and each team focused on a different town. The teams then presented their strategies to Julie Dorel, Corporate Communications Manager at Musgrave and CIT lecturers. The winning team as selected by Julie Dorel of Musgrave was presented with a prize for their commitment to the project.



BENEFITS OF THE ENGAGEMENT

This engagement proved successful for Musgrave while providing students with the opportunity to put the theory they had learnt during the semester to practice. Sustainability and social purpose were at the core of this project, further developing students learning in the related module. It's much more beneficial for students to devise these strategies for real-life cases with the potential to see their ideas being implemented in business in the future. Partner companies like Musgrave who collaborate with CIT gain a fresh perspective, and acquire additional ideas and information thanks to students research and knowledge.

"I WILL BE TAKING YOUR THOUGHTS, IDEAS AND CHALLENGES BACK TO OUR TEAM AND OUR PARTNERS."
- Julie Dorel, Musgrave- name

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