

Communications ethos

1. Introduction

At the time of writing (summer 2019), the Dons Trust is refreshing its overarching strategy. Once this is completed, a communications strategy will be produced that is designed to support implementation of that overarching strategy.

In the meantime, this document has been produced to help shape our direction of travel. It sets out our overall communications vision and lists some interim implementation steps. Both will be further refined once the Trust's overarching strategy review is complete.

2. Vision

We will be proactive. We will be responsive.

We recognise that we need to communicate with multiple audiences (e.g. members, non-members, other stakeholders) and demographic groups (e.g. age group, gender, location), each with their own mix of channel preference.

We will therefore expand our channels of communication to the maximum, enabling us to communicate with stakeholders via the channel that is most appropriate to their individual needs.

We will be open and transparent, even with non-members. This will promote the Trust's role at the heart of the club. While non-members may be consulted with and engaged, it is the Trust's members who are the ultimate decision makers: we will promote this fact to encourage Trust membership.

Despite this, we recognise that there may be times when communication is best done on a member-to-member basis. We will therefore maintain and seek to improve member-to-member communication, for example via a forum that is only available to Trust members.

We recognise that there may be times when being open and transparent could harm the interests of the club, for example by jeopardising prospective commercial deals or by revealing information that others might seek to capitalise on. We will always be prudent with the information we share, although the assumption will be towards openness.

At every opportunity we will seek to promote our values – which include supporter ownership via our Trust and inclusivity – and promote the Trust and the club's role at the heart of our communities. We will also publicly support the wider supporters' movement and fan ownership in general.

3. Implementation

Our website (thedonstrust.org) will remain the main focus of our communications for those members who are online. Other communication channels should promote and link to the website wherever possible.

Recognising that we should communicate with stakeholders “via the channel that is most appropriate to their individual needs”, we will use a social-media dashboard to expand our social media presence and reach new audiences. Using a dashboard will make best use of volunteers’ time by allowing posts to be scheduled in advance and across multiple channels. It will allow us to pick up queries and indirect references to the Trust and respond proactively. It will allow volunteers to reply on behalf of board members, posting holding responses where necessary so that they can follow up with the relevant board member to ascertain the correct answer.

Once a month we will produce a summary email newsletter to members. This will be sent out via Mailchimp.

Wherever possible we will work with the club media team to mutually promote our shared interests (e.g. by scheduling simultaneous updates on websites and social media).

We will investigate producing a brief, quarterly, printed newsletter for postal distribution to those members who remain offline (also distributed by email to those members who have signed up for electronic communication). This will also be available for members to collect from the Dons Trust kiosk, to help reduce postage costs.

4. Volunteers

To maintain oversight and help ensure that our output reflects the stance of the Dons Trust board, the communications team will include at least one board member.

To produce content, we will engage a team of two volunteers. They will:

- attend monthly board meetings and produce a summary of discussions for uploading to the Trust website (signed off by Trust chair and club CEO)
- use a social-media dashboard to increase the Trust’s presence and engagement on social media – enhancing the existing Twitter presence, launching onto Facebook, and investigating the potential for a presence on Instagram, in the first instance – to promote the Trust’s activities and “in the flesh” events
- use Mailchimp to send a monthly email to Trust members – for GDPR reasons, they will create the newsletter as a template in personal Mailchimp accounts before ‘sharing’ with the Trust secretary for distribution
- use a shared contact@thedonstrust.org email address to respond to inbound email queries – this email address will be used as the primary contact address (e.g. as the ‘reply to’ address for Mailchimp and for notifications from any communications-related platforms that the Trust uses)

- liaise with board members to produce content to keep the Trust website lively and engaging, while promoting the Trust's core activities
- liaise with board members to produce content for the monthly email newsletter to members and the quarterly printed newsletter
- oversee the members' forum
- work with the board to investigate the possibility of producing a cost-effective quarterly printed newsletter (also sent out via email and available for collection in the Trust's matchday kiosk)
- seek out ways of making the Trust's output as engaging and varied as possible
- keep Trust board members informed of key messages that are being disseminated by the team.

We will also work on an ad hoc basis with other volunteers with media experience (e.g. in video) to produce multi-channel campaigns that promote the Trust's activities and Trust membership.

To maintain oversight and help ensure that our output reflects the stance of the Dons Trust board, the communications team will include at least one board member in addition to the two volunteers.