



How do you organise an Olympics?

More specifically, how do you help 3,000 people to work together to plan and deliver the world's largest sporting event?

It was one year to go until the London 2012 Olympic Games. I was leading the internal communications function at the Organising Committee where our thoughts were turning from finalising plans to making physical preparations onsite.

What needed doing?

The operational plans were increasingly detailed and complex. From technology, transport and security protocols to 'ingress' and 'egress' routes, signage and branding, media setup, staff facilities and athlete hospitality – it was huge. Some employees were knee deep in the detailed plans as a core part of their role, while others were spared the detail for the sake of getting their job done.

The result was a very mixed sense across the organisation of what needed doing urgently; how important things were and how everything fit together. This would become an issue as we got closer to the Games, when we would need everybody pulling in the same direction.

Creating a level playing field

There was a need for everyone – regardless of role – to grasp what stage we were at and what the priority was. This would not only help people adjust what they were doing, but it also gave context to decisions that were being made which affected them.

I worked closely with the operational leadership team to agree a way forward: to balance the need for operational clarity alongside the varying degrees of knowledge that people really needed for us to be ready for the Games.

I proposed a themed, monthly countdown campaign. This was in keeping with the countdown mentality that already existed and allowed us to use an engaging story each month to catch people's attention and clarify the situation.

For example, the 'Team up' month used sports team imagery to emphasise the need for people to start getting to know the colleagues they'd be working with during the Games (most employees changed roles for the event) and in some instances to co-locate with them.

Sitting behind the main theme was a detailed action plan. Anybody with an assigned action would be able to see how it was contributing to the overall priority that month and those without a specific action could see how things in their role might need to change to support it.

Less is more

This approach was simple and proactive. It avoided a potentially unmanageable situation where the communications team would have had to field an increasing number of ad hoc requests from the operational teams as we approached the Games, wanting to raise awareness and build engagement around their plans.

The campaign also brought some of the operational language, stories, examples and concerns into mainstream communication channels at just the time people needed to switch to 'Games-time mode'.



Showtime

A few weeks from the Games, the theme was all about putting 'Pens down'.

Suddenly, all we had were the years of work that had gone before; the planning and preparation, combined with the knowledge, experience and hard work of the incredible colleagues around us; to enable us to deliver what ended up being one of the greatest Olympic and Paralympic Games in history.

Background – Jamity Communications

I led the Internal Communications function for the London 2012 Organising Committee for three years. When it came to the Games I led a team of paid staff and volunteers to manage and update the main London 2012 website, social media channels, printed programme and other channels.

Now, I help organisations to adopt new communication techniques that improve their overall effectiveness, allowing them to engage and influence the audiences that matter most.

If you don't have the in-house communications expertise you need, please email jo@jamity.co.uk.