Marketing and Communications Support for the Institutes of Technology Network

From April 2023

Summary

This paper provides an update on Gatsby's plans to support the Institutes of Technology Network from April 2023, through marketing and communications activity, and includes information on:

1. Advertising
2. Marketing grants
3. IoT Network website developments
4. IoT employer event
5. IoT Content Hub

Gatsby will continue to work closely with the Department for Education (DfE) to ensure that DfE-led communications are supported, amplified, and aligned with Gatsby activity where possible. Our aim is to support and complement what is being led by IoTs themselves, but particularly where it comes to building a strong, single brand for IoTs, and increasing awareness and interest among potential learners and employer partners.

IoT Marketing and Communication support activities

1. Advertising

In the last year, we tested a central comms approach, developing materials on behalf of the Network to encourage all IoTs to come together for four shared comms moments targeting learners and employers.

We have since been exploring a new approach that will 1) reduce our reliance on IoT Marketing and Communications Leads and their teams, 2) focus on activity where Gatsby can really add value, and 3) allow us to measure impact more accurately.

In summer 2022, we piloted regionally targeted direct marketing activities with UCAS to reach young people considering their post-18 options. With an email open rate of 32% and social reach over 285k young people, we think this approach merits further work and has greater potential for additional impact than our previous shared communication moments approach.

With the budget we have, we cannot effectively target all three target audience groups (young people, adults, and employers) and believe that working with an established body like UCAS and focusing our attention on young people to pilot a new approach will help to deliver more value for money in the longer term.

Rather than continuing to create toolkits for each IoT to use, we would like to develop a pilot communications approach, working with UCAS to explore the impact that advertising has on their audiences' engagement with IoTs. We'd like to test the hypothesis that advertising increases young people's engagement with UCAS messages compared to those that are not exposed to advertising.

This would involve us running direct marketing activity with UCAS at a national level and running geographically targeted advertising, like digital radio, simultaneously, but only in a few select regions where two or three (test) IoTs are based.

The results will help us to generate useful intelligence for developing a central communications approach to generate local interest at a national level in a more budget-efficient way.

For this to work effectively, we would need robust evaluation data from IoTs to measure potential impact, with a more formal level of agreement from IoTs in the selected test regions (where paid advertising runs). It would also require a dedicated landing page to direct learners to. IoTs that are unable to fulfil both criteria cannot be considered as a test subject for the regional advertising but can still be represented in the UCAS national direct marketing activity.

> We welcome thoughts, feedback and questions on this new approach and initial thoughts on whether you would like your IoT to be considered as one of the regional advertising test regions. Please note that the final test areas will need to be geographically dispersed to minimise the risk of radio overhear so Gatsby will make the final decision based on interest received.

2. Marketing grants

From April 2023, we are pleased to offer up to £30,000 to each IoT over two years (up to £15k each in 2023/2024 and 2024/2025) to support local IoT marketing and promotional activities, as well as activities that help to build awareness of the IoT Network.

The grant will carry conditions and we will clearly set out activities that it can be used for, such as developing (or refreshing) a high-quality website, asset creation, participation in UCAS Fairs, social media promotion and advertising. N.B There is a selection of assets and guidance materials that have been developed for use by the Network to help with the creation and delivery of marketing activity (see IoT Content Hub section below), so the grant can be put towards using these, or it can be used to create and promote your own marketing materials. We also welcome suggestions on how individual allocations of funding can be combined across more than one IoT to deliver higher-value, more innovative marketing solutions in collaboration.

The grant will be awarded to activities that showcase the national brand, building on agreed messaging, and will be subject to providing evaluation criteria that can be shared with the Network. This is a one-off contribution to bolster your IoT communications activity and to help leverage matched funding and resource commitment from your partnership.

> Further details on the application process and grant conditions will be shared in early March. Each individual bid should be submitted following consultation with your IoT Marketing and Communications Lead and partners to ensure the funding most effectively supports the collective objectives of your partnership over the next two years.

3. IoT Network website developments

In August 2021, Gatsby launched the national IoT Network website to showcase the combined scale and scope of the Network and to act as gateway for prospective learners and employers to

connect with their local IoT. At that time the information on the gov.uk website was very minimal and was not being regularly updated.

The website is currently under development to simplify and improve the user journey, and to reflect the expanding Network. Updates include: improving the functionality of the IoT Network map so that all IoT partners are represented (not just the lead partner); improving the search functionality around location and specialism; simplified contact information for different users; and refreshed navigation and content.

One feature of the website it to 'spotlight' good news stories from across the Network to help illustrate the range of exciting and innovative projects that are happening. We rely on IoT colleagues to identify and share stories that we can feature, but we have struggled to access these stories on a regular basis.

> How can we tap into examples of ongoing success stories that we can feature on the website? Is there a way we can tap into existing processes adopted by individual IoTs to capitalise on success stories shared locally?

4. IoT employer event

We are working towards confirming a new date and location for the Institutes of Technology Conference and reception in early July.

As expressed within the postponement email, we are very grateful to the many education and industry representatives who had agreed to speak and facilitate sessions and particularly to those who have confirmed their commitment to a future event. Gatsby and the Department for Education remain enthusiastic about the conference, and we look forward to working with IoT Leads to ensure the success of the future event. The conference objectives and conference programme will, as far as possible, remain the same – focusing on the provider/employer relationships within IoTs.

Although we have endeavoured to consider all feedback regarding a new date for the event, it won't be possible to find an alternative date suitable for everyone.

> We will require continued commitment from IoT Leads to identify speakers and panellists once a new date has been confirmed – and ensure that engagement from their representatives remains strong.

5. IoT Content Hub

In November 2021, we appointed a communications agency to produce a suite of collateral as part of the development of the communications campaign. The IoT Content Hub was created as an accessible hub to house all these materials and it contains a range of assets that can be used in the planning and delivery of local IoT marketing activity. This includes IoT brand guidelines, messaging recommendations for social and website copy – for young people, adults and employers – a bank of images, social media assets (ready to use and editable files), website best practice guidance, a PowerPoint template, a print-ready file for an event banner and more. We
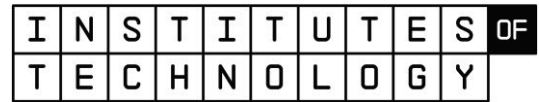
are also in the process of finalising an employer brochure and two promotional films, targeting learners and employers, that will be uploaded to the Hub in due course.

All the assets have been developed in collaboration and consultation with IoT representatives and are the result of insight and learnings garnered from immersion sessions conducted with the first wave of 12 IoTs, and using lessons learnt from the communications activity.

We encourage all IoTs to continue to use the materials on the IoT Content Hub as part of their marketing and communications activity and to consider how you might use the marketing grant to make the most of these materials. We welcome feedback on what is most useful on the Hub so we can ensure it remains relevant for the whole Network. We particularly encourage Wave 2 IoTs to engage with the content and use it across all their communications platforms and channels in continued, shared support for building the IoT national profile.