The 2012 Gold Quill Awards

From traditional formats to new media, this year’s winners showcase communication at its best.
student award

The Sharon Berzok Student Award is the most prestigious student award given by the IABC Research Foundation. All student entries are considered for this award, which is judged on overall excellence and creativity. The winner receives US$500 for education or professional development. Sharon Berzok was a communication consultant who served IABC on several committees and as a chapter president and board member. Berzok’s family, colleagues and friends established this award in her name to recognize talent in young professionals.

This year’s Sharon Berzok Student Award went to:

● The Social Strategist Project
  John D. Trybus
  Georgetown University

As a student researcher at Georgetown University’s Center for Social Impact Communication (CSIC), John Trybus began to explore the idea of what makes a “social strategist.” His plan was to test the hypothesis that not every communication professional is a social strategist; instead, a social strategist is a member of an elite group of industry influencers—those who use, according to Trybus, “the power of communication in unique and innovative ways to help solve some of society’s biggest challenges.”

Trybus’s overall goal was to raise awareness of the “social strategy” idea and hypothesis among PR/communication students and professionals, as well as social strategists. Wanting to explore the motives and communication skills behind effective social movements, he began his project in December 2011 by interviewing cause-based communicators and presenting those interviews via a weekly podcast and blog series. By February 2012, he had profiled 16 different social strategists, logging approximately 100 hours on the project and planning an additional 15 profiles. Interviewees included Jane Goodall, renowned anthropologist and founder of the Jane Goodall Institute; Annie Griffiths, National Geographic Society photographer and executive director of Ripple Effect Images; and Jason Cone, communication director for Doctors Without Borders.

Trybus promoted his project through the university’s social media network of Facebook, Twitter and e-newsletters. The results included recognition by key influencers. Several of those profiled in turn shared the interviews with their own Facebook and Twitter followers, and one interview even resulted in a partnership between CSIC and the subject’s company.

Student response was overwhelmingly positive. The first podcast had the highest level of engagement in the history of CSIC’s online content, project page views increased each month, and the number of CSIC Facebook page fans increased by 10 percent.

The project has sparked a conversation among targeted audiences while also helping to position its sponsor, CSIC, as an educational thought leader in cause-based communication. Ultimately, Trybus plans to profile 30 to 40 social strategists before moving to phase two of the project, which will include additional research and quantitative data analysis to determine best practices, with the goal of contributing to the advancement of the communication profession.