



The AWE Best practice guide for communication with female entrepreneurs

DECEMBER 2021

Introduction

The AWE programme was a collaborative partnership between a range of organisations providing training and business support to disadvantaged women in the UK and in France. Near the end of the programme, the partners organised a Final Conference which took place online over four days with attendance open to all which looked at key aspects of the activity which had taken place.

One of the sessions at this event focused on the key learnings from partners on topics ranging from training delivery, the impact of COVID-19, diversity and multi-cultural delivery of support and best practice in communications with this target group. This document specifically focuses on the communications activities of the programme and what works best for reaching and influencing disadvantaged women.

The AWE programme was successful in the following outcomes:

- 35 hours of new learning content to help female entrepreneurs start a business
- training 700 women entrepreneurs using the resources in this toolkit, with over 120 starting a business
- recruiting and training more than 160 mentors, using the mentor programme documentation in this toolkit

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1. AWE High Level Marketing Objectives

The objectives of the AWE communication strategy were:

- To ensure that the AWE programme is communicated as widely as possible to its target groups and that those communications are effective in their calls to action.
- To outline and define the key target groups for the programme and the communications objective for each group
- Provide the tone of voice and key messages that all project partners could adopt in all communications for the different target groups and to outline how those messages change and adapt over the lifetime of the programme.
- Outline key activities and channels to ensure that programme partners work together effectively to ensure consistency of messaging and reducing duplication of effort.
- To deliver success for the AWE programme and ensure that its objective to increase the skills of the most socially and economically disadvantaged women in the Interreg region is met.

2. Communication Challenges

The women for which the AWE programme was designed rarely have the ability to pay for support services and the most disadvantaged are normally drawing some kind of benefit. The AWE programme was intended to help with the transition from benefit dependency to earned income and it was essential to recognise and address some of the key issues for disadvantaged women within the associated communications activity.

Some of the challenges for the women in terms of communications were found to include:

- Lack of access to internet or Wi-Fi services or reliance on mobile phone access which was costly
- Physical location – many disadvantaged women live in areas where traditional communications activities are less visible
- Homelessness
- All activity being required to be in French and English to make it accessible
- Time pressure – many women have responsibilities such as childcare & parental care
- Lack of suitable learning space
- Lack of purchasing ability for some traditional communications channels such as newspapers or magazines
- Lack of skills and low education levels
- Impetus to focus on paid employment to avoid the risk of being self employed
- For women living in rural areas, access to transport services – this is particularly relevant in South West of England and parts of Northern France
- Potential health issues and disabilities
- Lack of confidence and low aspirations
- Lack of awareness of support available in their area

From the programme point of view, it was key that we had wide reach for our promotional activity, targeted the right audience and made it easy for the women to access the services provided. Digital was key to this but there was also a reliance on outreach activity such as engaging with stakeholders, partners and organisations working with the target audience as a physical presence in locations frequented by the women who might benefit from the support offered.

3. Branding

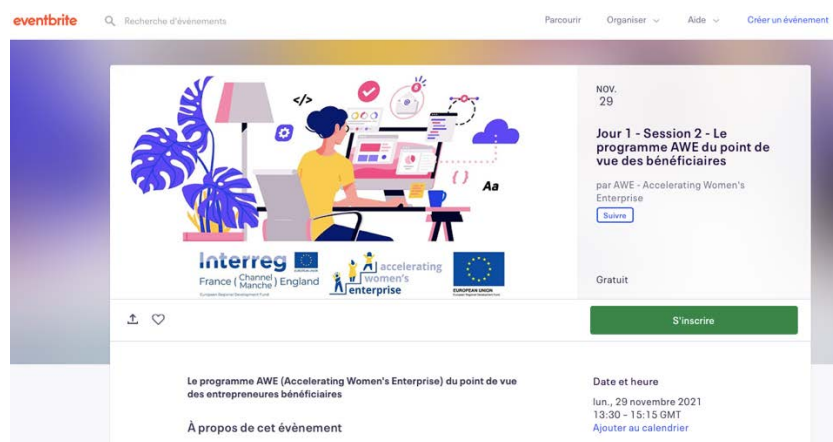
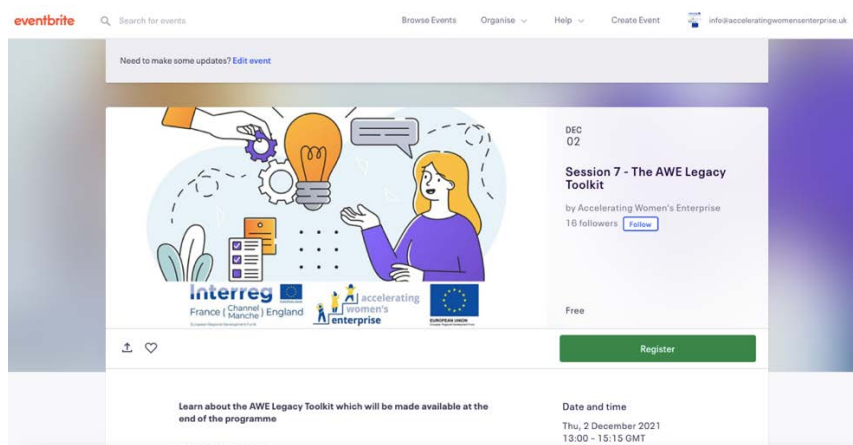
3.1 Logo design and use

The AWE programme used a brand identity created specifically for it using the EU colour palette and it was designed to appeal to the target audience with a fresh, attractive and eye-catching look. The use of illustrated characters added a sense of fun and these characters were used throughout communications activity during the programme including the Final Conference event and on events/workshops.

Main AWE logo



Final Conference Imagery



Event/Workshop Imagery

Building an Enterprising Mindset and Skillset

Looking to develop your confidence and entrepreneurial skills?

Our three part course designed by women, for women can help.



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France (Channel Manche) England
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2 jours d'ateliers inspirants et collaboratifs pour booster votre activité

Boostcamp pour entrepreneurEs bretonnes



 21 & 22 juin 2021

 Brest

 Ateliers, partage, réseau et quelques surprises...



3.2 Requirements of Funder

Part of the requirements for the funding provision for the programme was the adherence to the branding guidelines provided by Interreg which did dictate the placement of the logo. Several versions of the logo were created in order to make it appropriate to use on different collateral, big and small.

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3.3 Balancing the needs of each partner

Each programme partner was required to have their own AWE webpages and social channels as well as supporting the communications activity through the AWE channels. This allowed them to capitalise on existing channels and followings to the benefit of the programme.

3.4 Language

All activity was required to be made available in French and English which did have implications in terms of time and cost for the production of materials. We used DeepL for translation on a regular basis as well as partners or external translation agencies providing translation as required for marketing collateral.

4. Communications Channels

The following provides a summary of the various communications channels adopted for the project:

- The **AWE website** was created with a French and English version. And acted as a repository for information about the programme and partners, case studies, events & workshops, research reports and also provided the access to an e-learning platform for women.
- **Email newsletters** - utilised by the AWE and individual partners to communicate with women and stakeholders
- **Eventbrite** – utilised as an easy booking system for bootcamps, events and workshops which was easily accessible online
- **Social media** – The AWE programme had its own Facebook and Twitter account in UK and in France which used the handles @AWE_women and @AWE_femme which were regularly updated with details of events, case studies, news and information relevant to the target audience. Partners also had their own social channels where they shared their own content, carried out campaigns and shared posts from the AWE pages.
- **Attendance at meetings, events and drop-in sessions** at local cafes, community centres and other locations where disadvantaged women visit or use regularly
- **Leafleting and posters** at key locations such as doctor's surgeries, schools, health centres, shopping centres etc
- **Liaison with organisations** providing support to disadvantaged women in the target areas
- **Presentations to stakeholder organisations** and female focused groups or networks and meeting with local groups to provide information about the programme
- **Training workshops** located at easy to access locations or online at times suitable for women with caring responsibilities
- **Engagement with stakeholder organisations** to disseminate the communications activity via their established channels in the local area
- **PR activity** which promoted the programme through the use of case studies, press releases and other programme content. For French partners this included regional newspapers such as Ouest France and more local press such as Les Infos du pays Redon
- **Partnership promotion** with other female focused organisations such as [Back Her Business](#) with NatWest

These are discussed in more detail in the following sections:

4.1 AWE Website

For the duration of the programme, the English and French AWE website acted as a repository for information as well as being the key location for driving traffic from communication campaign activity.

The site was available in English and in French and included content on the programme, partners, events/workshops, case studies, research materials and the e-learning modules for women. It would have been beneficial to update the site content and visuals more regularly from an SEO perspective and to keep the look fresh and appealing to different women based on the learning of the partners through the programme.

Technical capability around driving traffic to the AWE website was an issue as some partners felt that the URL was too long to use effectively – the use of shortened links would help with this.

AWE Website Home Page





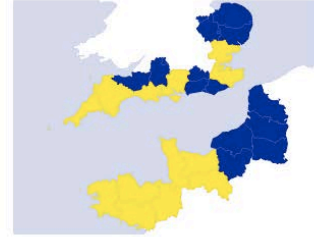
Mentoring

Mentoring is a valuable form of support for those starting a businesses.



Our Programme

Find out more about the aims and objectives of our project.



Our Partners

We deliver our project either side of the Channel, find a Partner location near you

I think the course was brilliant. It definitely helped me understand what I need to do regardless of how much is required.

Great point of contact – very personal and friendly. It was good to meet other women in a supportive network environment.



Home About Training Mentoring News and Events

E-learning Log In

Search ...



Events

All (16) | [Dartington SSE \(0\)](#) | [Outset CIC \(15\)](#) | [University of Portsmouth \(1\)](#) | [EAFB \(0\)](#) | [Le Club Normandie Pionnières \(0\)](#)

Strategic Marketing

Want to know what strategic marketing is and how you can put a marketing plan together?

[Book now](#)

Thursday, 11 November 2021
10:00 am – 12 noon

Online



Events

See our full list of [events](#) to find if there is a course near you, alternatively visit our [Partners page](#)

Success stories



Siobainn Chaplin

[Read more ...](#)



Emily Cockle – Emily Consultancy Ltd



Vanessa Miles

[Read more ...](#)

4.2 Partner Websites

Each partner also built pages about the programme as part of their existing websites to take advantage of the current followers and to push traffic towards the AWE website. They also helped to mobilise existing communities around the programme.

4.3 eNewsletters

Women and stakeholders were encouraged to sign up to receive the AWE newsletter via the AWE website with a simple form. Digital newsletters were distributed each quarter to the subscriber lists to highlight workshops, bootcamps, events, case studies and updates from the partners. These were trackable so that we could adapt the content to what interested the audience most.

See Appendix 1 and 2 for examples of AWE newsletters

4.4 Eventbrite

To make booking for workshops, events and bootcamps easy for women, partners were encouraged to promote them on Eventbrite which is well known as a great booking tool. From an administrative point of view Eventbrite allowed us to manage bookings, collect booking data, provide joining details for events and provide evidence of bookings for claims.

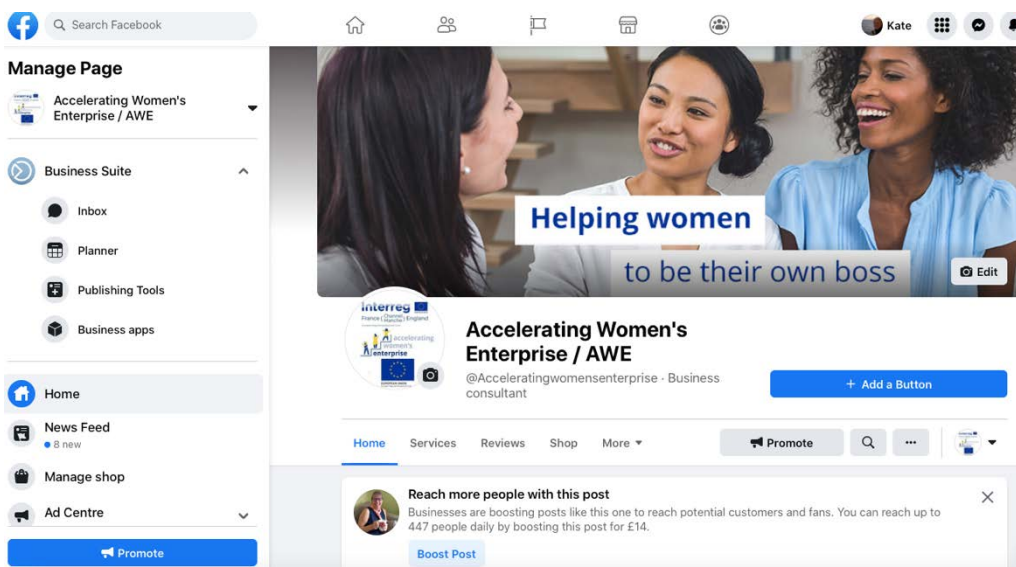
These events feed through to the AWE website so that women could easily find out about the range of training on offer, which was particularly useful during COVID_19 when all training went online via Zoom.

4.5 Social Channels

Partners used their own social channels to share posts and to link to digital communications activity as well as the programme communications team using the main AWE Facebook, Twitter and Instagram pages. These channels were selected as the best for reaching the target audience and were used for posts, boosted posts and social advertising. Some partners used LinkedIn particularly for the sharing of experiences and business start-up stories from the participants. Those with target audiences of women in their forties particularly found Facebook to be effective.

However, partners did have differing levels of success with social channels particularly in relation to building a following in the relatively short lifetime of the programme.

AWE Facebook page



AWE Twitter page



Blank social assets were created for the partners to use, and partners were also encouraged to utilise services such as Canva to create their own assets in keeping with the branding guidelines

Examples of social posts by partners

Introduction to self-employment for women



A free online workshop designed for female entrepreneurs who want to start their own business - Search Accelerating Womens Enterprise on Eventbrite



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"I have thoroughly enjoyed all the 4 sessions of the AWE series, I feel more confident about the topics and have great tools to improve my time management, business plan, marketing and financial planning."

ELISA RIUTTA
SOUTH COAST MINDFULNESS



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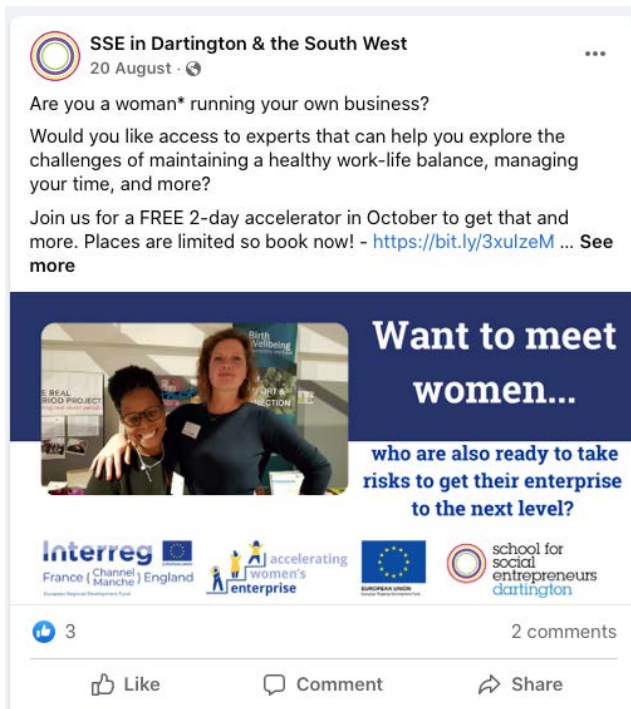
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4.6 Printed Material

The imagery and language of all digital and printed material was appealing, bright and relevant to the target audience. There were compliance requirements around the logo placement and use of the ERDF and EU flag particularly in relation to sizing which sometimes impacted on the design of materials. This sometimes became an issue for partners particularly on smaller items but were an official requirement of the programme funding, so a solution had to be found in how the logos were used.

See Appendix 3 and 4 for examples of printed materials

4.7 Project Imagery

The choice of imagery used on marketing collateral as well as the e-learning modules was significant in that it was key to represent a wide range of women in the photos and a variety of settings to which the target audience could relate. In order to inspire women to join the programme, we utilised images of real women in our case studies and avoided the use of glossy, stock images which the target audience would find off putting.



Imagery Examples

The screenshot shows an e-learning interface. On the left is a navigation menu for 'Building your brand and value' with a list of topics. The main content area is titled 'How to define perceived value' and includes a video of a woman in a wheelchair using a smartphone. Below the video is a definition of perceived value and a list of factors customers consider when purchasing.

Building your brand and value

- Creating a brand and why it is so important (4 Topics)
- Understanding customer value (3 Topics)
 - The impact of perceived value on customers
 - How to define perceived value
 - The Impact of Perceived Value on customers - Recap and Reflect
- An Introduction to USPs (4 Topics)
- Brand Positioning: keys to a powerful position (4 Topics)
- Creating a core brand message or value proposition for your company (3 Topics)
- Next steps in building your brand (4 Topics)
- Summary & Reflection

How to define perceived value

Building your brand and value < Understanding customer value < How to define perceived value... **COMPLETED**

Perceived value can be defined as the customers evaluation of the difference between all the benefits and all of the costs of your products/services relative to those of your competitors.

We explore the evaluation process that customers go through and what they might consider in making a decision to purchase from a company.

Things that customers might consider when making a purchasing:

The screenshot shows the website header with logos for Interreg, Channel Islands, and Enterprise. Below the header is a banner image of a woman painting, with the text 'Supporting you to do what you love' overlaid.

Interreg France | Channel Islands | England | accelerating women's enterprise

Home About Training Mentoring News and Events

E-learning Log In Search ...

Supporting you to do what you love

4.8 Collaboration

As well as the partners working together to promote the services of the AWE programme, one example of collaboration was for International Women’s Day 2021 where Outset CIC joined with other programmes within the wider organisation of the lead partner YTKO to create a series of taster events, led by participants of the AWE programme and promoted on Eventbrite to increase awareness of the programme and its aims.

Example of an IWD taster session



4.9 Messaging

Thought needed to be given to the cultural interpretations as well as literal interpretations of messaging in UK and in France for some partners. The language choice also needed to be relevant to women alongside the imagery without using clichés so that it sounded natural and appealing to the target audience.

4.10 Case studies

The partners all contributed case studies based on their participants which were added to the website regularly as new content, used on social posts and in newsletters. They were useful to inspire other women to join the programme as well as to give the individual businesses a promotional boost which was attractive to them as new business owners. The case studies were a very effective tool to spread the word about the programme wider.

See Appendix 5 and 6 for examples of case studies

5. The Impact of COVID-19 on Communications Activity

The global pandemic not only impacted on the delivery of support to participants but also affected the communications activity primarily in a total shift to digital campaigns rather than the use the traditional and printed materials

COVID-19 restrictions meant that it was not possible to maintain continuous and regular communication throughout the lockdown periods. This had a negative impact on the partners' ability to mobilise and recruit women to the programme as well as the visibility of the programme in a space where the virus dominated news around the world.

COVID-19 also meant that face-to-face meetings were not possible which made it more difficult for networking and the dissemination of information about the programme. In France the popularity of online training was less than in England and so training activities ceased for a longer period than in the UK.

6. Summary of Key Communications Learnings

The AWE programme was challenging in terms of communication even before the global pandemic and resulting lockdowns in the UK and in France. The programme's communications strategy was built upon a triple braid approach focusing on:

- Outreach campaign activity based in the locations frequented by the target disadvantaged women
- Engagement of stakeholders to disseminate communications and encouragement of clients and networks to participate in the programme
- Digital communications campaign

The primary impact of COVID-19 upon the communications campaign activity was to force the delivery partners to move to online delivery of training and support as well as the utilisation activity with wide reach which could be targeted to the target audience of digital as the primary channel.

In terms of communication, for the disadvantaged women who were the target audience for the programme, the move to digital did present issues in terms of access, reliability and the ability for the programme messaging to be heard in a very crowded marketplace. This impacted on the programme's ability to reach as many of the target audience as required by the initial targets, which ultimately had to be reviewed.

In terms of key learnings for the programme from a communications perspective, the following points were what the delivery partners found to be the best ways to work for the programme:

1. The AWE was a unique programme targeted at disadvantaged women who came with a range of challenges in terms of communications. The messaging needed to be relevant to and resonate with the target audience in both the imagery and words used.
2. The fact that the programme was being delivered in both the UK and France meant that cultural differences needed to be taken into account, as well as the translation required.
3. The communications campaign activity needed to reach out to disadvantaged women to make them aware of the support available to them using the most effective channels which during COVID-19 was restricted to digital. The delivery partners had to make sure that contact was maintained through telephone and email support during the lockdown and to return to face-to-face delivery as soon as possible after the lockdown were lifted.
4. Word of mouth communication was key to the success of the programme for delivery partners - be this through established networks in the community, collaborative

partnerships with other organisations and regular contact with the participants throughout the whole period of support provided.

5. Trust was a very important part of the relationship between the participants and the delivery partners, which could only be created over a period of time. It was important that the programme delivered what it said it was offering in terms of helping women to start a business and that the members of the delivery team made time prior to the training and support commencing in meeting the women, or during COVID-19 making contact to establish the relationship.
6. The unique nature of the programme was that it was designed for women specifically and provided a safe space for women to come together to discuss their ideas and work through any challenges that they may be facing. Feedback from the participants echoed this point repeatedly and the communications needed to reflect this in the messaging.
7. Some teams reported that the use of the word 'entrepreneur' was off-putting to some participants and that instead wording such as "Have a project or business idea and want to make a difference? Sign up to the free AWE programme today!" were more successful in recruitment to the programme.
8. For some women, it was important to be able to identify potential barriers to starting their own business rather than assumptions be made through our marketing material. Women can be reluctant to disclose the challenges they face particularly at the outset due to sensitivities. In order to reduce any difficulties around this, it was made clear that any barriers would be taken into account during the assessment process and by offering support via a telephone call if required.
9. For French partners, they found that the most effective way to reach participants was to use networks focused on women and entrepreneurship. It was important in terms of communication that the programme complemented existing support services in the area and that there was collaboration between these groups.
10. The name of the training and support was important in terms of communication as the programme name did not immediately make it clear what it represented. By changing the name of some of the support, it meant that it could be made clearer and simpler to understand by the women who may not have been familiar with some of the language used by organisations working in this field
11. The design and language used in the promotion of the training offer needed to be relevant to the local audience which it was targeting – focusing on a particular sector such as

creative women helped to attract women who were looking to develop connections in the local area.

12. The sharing of participants stories through case studies and testimonials helped to express the human side of what was on offer and the fact that it had the capability to help change lives, build confidence and reduce feelings of inadequacy.
13. One point that should be borne in mind for future delivery is the design and content of the website to accommodate the different styles which appealed to the audience in the UK and in France. On reflection, a greater input in the creation of the website from all partners, as there was in the training provision development, may have helped to make the website appeal more strongly to the audience either side of the Channel.
14. The target audience needed to be recognised as not being one homogenous group which meant that they required tailored messaging in the communications to have the best impact.
15. The age of the target audience was a relevant factor in the communications as initially the decision was taken for the main programme social channels to be Facebook and Twitter, but it soon became clear that younger audiences responded better to Instagram which had a different style of communications which was softer than the others and had greater appeal to this age group.
16. Newsletters were a key communications tool and the programme split the audience into women and stakeholders. This enabled the messaging to be adapted to encourage the stakeholders to share and promote the AWE programme through their own networks which was a fundamental part of the success of the communications.

There have been many learnings in terms of communications for AWE which have evolved through the lifetime of the programme which were implemented, and we hope that our learnings will be relevant and useful to future programmes working with disadvantaged women.

If there was to be one overriding lesson, it would be to ensure that right combination of channels used to reach the target audience and to ensure that the messaging, in all its forms, was relevant to disadvantaged women who face a range of challenges which needed to be borne in mind when planning campaign activity.