Becoming part of the conversation

Increasing public works' public perception
Overview

- The role of Public Works in public safety (Communicating before, during, and after a disaster)
- Creating media interest in major infrastructure projects
- Developing online community ambassadors
- Developing your brand on social media
- Training staff on how to work with the public
- Employee injuries and crisis communications
- Public Records Act tips and tricks
Strategic communications plans

Public relations is "a strategic communication process that builds mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and their publics." - Public Relations Society of America

Public relations is "making friends with the right people so you can get things done. Over beer." - Lael Wageneck
Strategic communications plans

1. Get their attention
2. Educate them
3. Reinforce or change opinions
4. Inspire meaningful action
R.P.I.E.: The key to a solid strategic communications plan

- Research (situation analysis, research, audience)
- Planning (SMART objectives, strategies)
- Implementation (tactics, key messages, theme)
- Evaluation (assessment of objectives and outcome)

- Helps you align with your values
- Keeps you on track
- Helps you measure success
Case study: Groundwater program in Roseville

“Our homes were built for good water.”
Grounded in research

2016
- Top-of-mind concerns for water supplies above public education, economic stability, roads and streets, and new development.
- Nearly half of the respondents (48%) are less than accepting while the rest remain “accepting” or “totally accepting.”
- Research revealed that customers wanted to learn more about what we do and what we managed.

2019
- Participants generally supported the use of groundwater as a water source, but needed clarification on some of the terms used to describe the process, including dispelling the notion that a groundwater aquifer was a manmade structure or a void in the ground.
If the city were to choose to implement this as a regular water supply, a strong education effort would be needed to dispel preconceived notions of groundwater quality, help residents understand that groundwater is an excellent water supply and not less superior than surface water, calm fears about what the new emergency plan would be, and provide a clear explanation regarding distribution.”
2019 focus groups

“...Virtually no one knew what an “aquifer” was. (Many in both groups assumed it was a manmade, physical structure used to storage water underground.)”
Ongoing efforts to educate the public about Roseville’s growing groundwater program and dispelling myths associated with groundwater usage

Create public events that provide opportunities for customers to see our groundwater infrastructure, taste groundwater, educate customers on the process of replenishing and extracting groundwater resources, and answer any questions
Our outreach toolbox
Messaging platform

- Groundwater is part of Roseville’s water supply planning

- Groundwater is safe, and natural, and can provide additional water resources for our thriving community

- Use words like “future” – it tests well and is positive
Seeing is believing, tasting is reaffirming groundwater

- Multi-faceted outreach
- Storytelling
- Humanizing your organization
- Changing perceptions (blind taste test)
If a picture is worth a thousand words, then is a video worth a million
Oversaturate: Create once, publish everywhere
New wave of public opinion research shows efficacy in communication program

Focus groups

• Few mention groundwater as a water source

• When prompted: They think this system is “fantastic,” “awesome,” “wonderful,” and “really cool”. They appreciate underground storage as efficient, evaporation-proof, good use of space, and effective.

Statistically-valid web survey

• Acceptance of groundwater as a drinking water supply is now at 81 percent!

• Customers are willing to pay for more reliability in their water service
Now what? Adjust and carry on

Continued ongoing outreach

• Relaunch our water reliability paid media campaign with research insights in mind – key messages, look and feel

• Exploit opportunities where we can gain media exposure or third-party endorsements

• Launch a citizen’s water academy in quarter four of 2023 to build advocacy in the community
Case study: The Santa Barbara County ReSource Center
Santa Barbara County ReSource Center and SB1383

State methane reduction mandates (SB 1383)

SBC ReSource Center

• Recovers recyclable materials, transforms organics into landscape nutrients, and creates renewable energy.
• Largest capital project in County history - $150M

Campaigns goals

• Increase support for ReSource Center (focus of negative articles)
• Educate the public on SB 1383
• Reputation management
  • County as leader in methane reduction
Rate increase campaign

• Keep it simple
• Focus on the positive outcome
• Provide an outlet for feedback

Research

• Primary Qualitative
  • Phone and email discussions with ratepayers
  • News article and social media review
• Secondary Quantitative
  • Advertising, eblast, pageview analytics
Santa Barbara County ReSource Center and SB1383

**Planning**

- To increase attention, increase click rates and page views by 25% during summer

- Increase action towards recycling with a rate of two facility tours/week by end of winter 2021

- Increase positive earned media stories by 50% by December 21
Tactics

• Digital and print ads, enhanced website, videos, photos, monthly newsletter/e-blast (16K subscribers)
• Ads, tours, presentations inviting the public to tour
• Media tours, interviews, presentations, photos

Messaging

• Different messages for different areas
• Canned messages in coordination with other wastesheds/waste haulers

Budget: ~$8000 for a $150M project

• Print - $4K
• Digital Ads - $3K
• Mailchimp - $700
Generating media interest
Generating media interest

Exclusives
Media reporting before and after
Generating media interest

Pitching different angles
Design

- Clean design
- Plain language
- Questions
- Icons
- Limited color palette
Public ambassadors

Distrust is the default - Nearly 6 in 10 say their default tendency is to distrust something until they see evidence it is trustworthy.

50% of people see government and media as divisive forces.

People are more likely to trust you when they believe your actions align with values and principles they deem to be acceptable.

Group tours create ambassadors that spread your message with increased trust.
Crisis Communications and Emergencies

- What is the problem?
- Is the problem ongoing/has it been solved?
- What resources are being used to address the problem?
- How will the agency prevent the problem from occurring in the future?
Speaking to the media

• Focus on positives
• PREP
  • Point
  • Reason
  • Example
  • Point
• It's ok to say "I don't know" and to ask to repeat an answer.
• Be personable
Crisis Communications and Emergencies

Get their attention

Photo of flooding, fire, damaged road

Educate them

Rain is coming, roads are damaged, etc.

Reinforce/change opinions

Be prepared, know safe driving rules, etc.

Inspire meaningful action

Get sandbags, drive safe, create plan, etc.
Crisis Communications and Emergencies

Get their attention → Educate them → Reinforce/change opinions → Inspire meaningful action
Crisis Communications and Emergencies

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Emergency Beach Operations

Urban environments are a patchwork of human interaction with natural systems we serve, including floodway protection and environmental stewardship. The SW facilities to prevent minor storm problems from becoming major flood problems.

• We remove material from basins to reduce the potential for debris damage.
• We deliver suitable sediment that increases beach width and minimizes erosion.
• We follow environmental regulations to manage and protect wildlife and habitat.
Crisis Communications and Emergencies

Get their attention → Educate them → Reinforce/change opinions → Inspire meaningful action

Here are three updated pictures from Feb 13th. Notice that the beach is quite nice and sandy up-coast from the mud dumping area and a rocky wreck where it has been "nourished". (edited)
Crisis Communications and Emergencies

Get their attention

Educate them

Reinforce/change opinions

Inspire meaningful action

Tladashi (danny molina) • South of Hollister • 1.1 mi away

Pretty sure the storms eroded the beach away and they are fixing it - I don't know this as fact just making a guess based on the heavy rains and what looked like the US army corps of engineers there as well as lots of truck hauling in dirt/rocks.

3w Like Reply Share

Carol Dixon • El Camino • San Simeon • 1.3 mi away

I guess none of you have lived here long enough to remember this being done before many times. It used to be common when we actually had winters with rain. They do it because it works to restore the beach. You can't just leave it the way it was after the big storm.

3w Like Reply Share

Marc Ingrosso • South of Hollister • 1.2 mi away

Carol they want to make something out of nothing, because they ‘feel’ the debris is causing issues. For whatever reason they refuse to believe or comprehend the benefits stated by the environmental review.

3w Like Reply Share
Crisis Communications and Emergencies

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Example:

@sbcountypublicworks Water conservation is a way of life in Santa Barbara County. Even when it's wet and raining, and the lake is nearly full, we still need to protect our water supplies for when it's not. The US Bureau of Reclamation scheduled a release from Bradbury Dam today from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. to allow for incoming flows. Each of the dam's spillway gates will be raised to allow for outflow into the Santa Ynez R. Max releases will be ~4,100 cubic feet per second. Learn more about water conservation at waterwisesb.org Bureau of Reclamation @bureau_of_reclamation
Public Records Act Requests

- League of Cities Guide to the Public Records Act
- Parallels Toolbox – Duplicate Finder
- Delete emails that do not include information relevant to the conduct of the public’s business.
- Practice good communications etiquette: Remember that off-handed remarks and jokes are not exempt, and anything that can be made public can appear in the media
THANK YOU!

Questions?