

COASTAL COMMUNICATORS

A newsletter for the nation's coastal management and research reserve programs.

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IMAGINATION IS EVERYTHING. IT IS THE PREVIEW OF LIFE'S COMING ATTRACTIONS.

—Albert Einstein

April 2026, Issue 80



COMMUNICATION INSIGHTS

We started this newsletter almost eight years ago, wanting to offer guidance to those in the coastal management community who perform communications duties but don't necessarily have a communications background. We had some ideas and advice, so we figured we'd write a handful of articles that we hoped would prove useful. And now, here we are—our eightieth issue!

To celebrate this milestone, we're taking it back to the beginning and reprinting one of our first articles, written by Donna McCaskill, our office's former communications director who retired in April 2025. She wrote this to answer one of the most commonly asked questions, and we think it's just as relevant today.

Thank you all for being a part of our 80-issue journey!

MAKING DO WITHOUT AN OUTREACH COORDINATOR

Because it's the right thing to do, we should all have a professional communicator on staff. After all, our programs are out to change the world, right? People need to hear our messages!

But let's come back to reality. Limited resources mean hard staffing choices are necessary. Most programs have to be creative and focused to get the job done.

Our state coastal zone management, corals, and research reserve programs do an excellent job in this arena, regardless of their staffing situation. They might not have an abundance of slick handouts or a proactive plan for media relations, but they compensate with the professionalism, expertise, and dedicated nature of their staff. They get the job done.

That said, many program leads say the communications process intimidates them. This article provides basic tips for those without a professional communicator on staff who desire to put their communication house in order.

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Step One

Pull together your baseline promotional materials. There's basic stuff you'll want to have: signage, handouts, a website, an exhibit, and maybe a general brochure. Think about the materials you are often asked to provide, and make sure they are updated and you have enough in stock. Also think about the times you felt silly because people kept asking for some type of information material and you had to say, "No, we don't have that." Put this list in priority order; it represents the foundational information that you want to have on hand, and in good condition, at all times. If you have a lot to create, it's probably best to hire a freelancer to get a professional job done and get this task off your back.

There's some foundational information you should have that is for internal use only. I like to call this the "back pocket" information you need on a regular basis. This includes plain-speak descriptions about your programs, the impacts, and the issues your coast is facing. Figure out what you need, spend time writing it down, and share it with staff. This will keep everyone on the same page and will make report writing, TV interviews, and other calls for information easier to answer. Remember to use the plain-speak rules: No jargon! No acronyms! Just the right amount of detail! Focus on impacts!

One extra tip regarding websites: Keep it simple. I don't care what the website developer tells you—keeping a site up-to-date is a challenge and can be a resource black hole. Limit the depth of your website where you can, and limit the amount of text that needs updating. Large amounts of text make it harder—not easier—to get a message across, and it makes it difficult for customers to find what they are looking for. Simplicity is effective and efficient.

Step Two

Determine your media relations approach. It's generally best to let one person be the spokesperson for the organization—the first contact each and every time. This doesn't mean that others can't also speak, but having all media requests go through one person will lessen the possibility of an "uh-oh" mistake. When you send unsolicited information to the media (an announcement about a new program, for instance), the same is true. Even if someone else writes the first draft and researches the right reporters to send the announcement to, it's a good idea to involve that designated person to ensure consistency and that lessons learned regarding media relations are used and built upon.

Step Three

Determine your public relations goals.

Complete the tasks mentioned above to build a good communication foundation. But after that, you'll want to grow and start targeted marketing campaigns (see the [December 2018] issue covering the simplest approach to developing an outreach plan). This is where the real focusing begins, because your program can't do it all. Sure, you'll likely want to continue exhibiting at various events to be a good community partner, but being increasingly more specific, and strategic, will pay off. Decide specifically what you want to accomplish and let your time, money, and talent follow accordingly. That means saying "yes" to those things most likely to get you closer to your goals and saying "no" to almost everything else.

Good luck!

COMMUNICATION PRODUCT OF THE MONTH

Featured product: Miss Excel

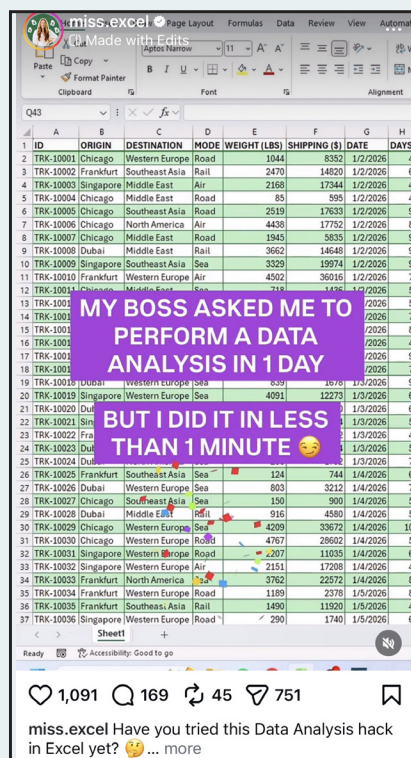
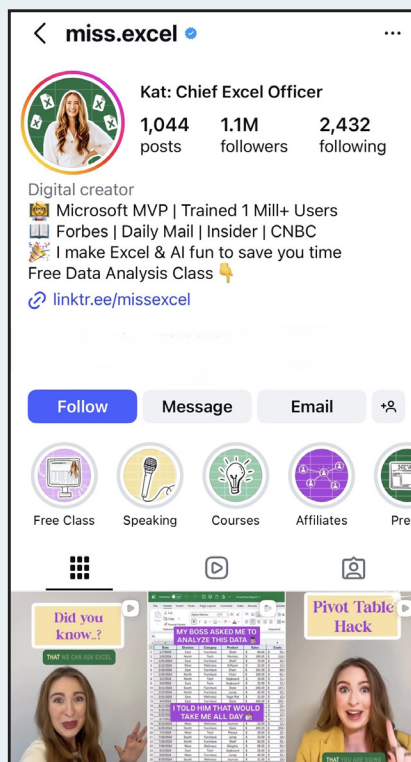
Source: @Miss.Excel on Instagram

Submitted by: Pamela Jacobs, Lynker for NOAA's Office for Coastal Management

What it is: Run by tech-wiz and content creator Kat Norton, this high-energy, on-trend, yet extremely useful Instagram account transforms the dull world of spreadsheets into viral tutorials and takes the guesswork and mystery out of AI. Filled with easy-to-follow tutorials and relatable, comical memes, the Miss Excel account is equal parts educational and enjoyable.

Why I like it: This account is a perfect example of how the human element can elevate even the most rigid or “boring” technology tools. Miss Excel shows that while software provides the structure and data, it’s human creativity and voice that actually make the information move. By pairing complex tips with her vibrant personality and expertise, Kat has turned technical office tools, along with the ever-changing AI landscape, into an engaging, accessible resource for over a million followers.

(Please note: This is not an endorsement of the designers, websites, or any proprietary tools but simply this writer’s opinion on a good communication product.)



FROM US TO YOU

OUTREACH TOOL SPOTLIGHT— RESEARCH RESERVE HANDOUTS

So many things make the National Estuarine Research Reserves the special places they are, which is why we created a handout for every reserve. Each handout includes information on the reserve's location, size, year of designation, unique features, and more, along with photos. These are great resources for sharing everything you love about our nation's research reserves, all in one place. Visit the menu section of the [Office for Coastal Management's reserves webpage](#), click on any reserve on the map or in the drop-down menu, and then select "Reserve Handout" under "Important Links" on the individual reserve's page. (View the [Lake Superior Reserve's page](#) as an example.)

UPCOMING SOCIAL MEDIA CAMPAIGNS

Follow us on Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram, and tag along with these themes:

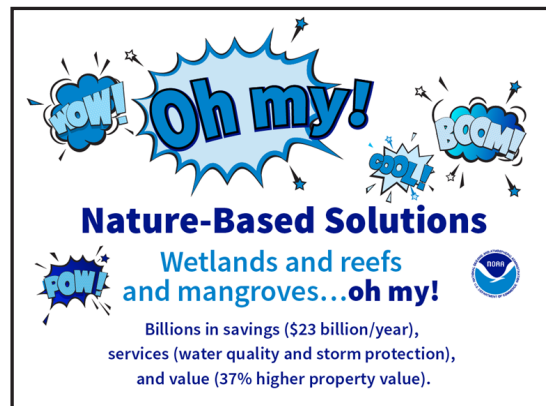
- April 1 to 30: Coastal Management Photo Contest
- April 1 to 30: Citizen Science Month
- April 22: Earth Day

COASTAL MANAGEMENT PHOTO CONTEST

Coastal management means different things to different people—to those who work in the field and those who live near or visit the coast. Now in its tenth year, our "Coastal Management in Action" photo contest encourages everyone to capture what it means to them, whether that's commercial boats docked at a local waterfront, restored reefs making communities safer, tiny turtles making their first journey into the sea, or a peaceful morning sunrise over a marsh. Celebrate the coast *and* the contest's tenth anniversary by submitting your photos to the [Coastal Management photo contest](#).

FAST FACTS—NATURE-BASED SOLUTIONS

This is one of the many graphics and facts available for your use in presentations and handouts. Grab the "Nature-Based Solutions" Fast Fact graphic, and if you have an idea for a new group of fast facts or illustrations, please let us know.



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