

COASTAL COMMUNICATORS

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

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So You Want to Develop a Newsletter

**COMMUNICATOR
OF THE MONTH**

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WHEN YOUR STORY IS READY
FOR REWRITE, CUT IT TO
THE BONE. GET RID OF EVERY
OUNCE OF EXCESS FAT.
THIS IS GOING TO HURT . . .
BUT IT MUST BE DONE

– Stephen King

December 2020, Issue 26



COMMUNICATION INSIGHTS

SO YOU WANT TO DEVELOP A NEWSLETTER

Newsletter production is much easier than it used to be. People have become accustomed to reading things online, and the software is getting easier and easier to use, making newsletter production faster and cheaper, and with an increased reach.

But just because you *can* do something doesn't mean you *should*. Audience fatigue does exist, and the wear and tear on staff can be immense. However, sometimes it is worth it. There are things you can do to be more successful; this article provides some tips.

Consideration number one. First and foremost (wait for it, wait for it): consider your audience. What do they want to know, how interested are they in what you have to say, and how do they like to receive information? Do you have a mailing list? *Spend a lot of time with these questions*, because the answers will determine the type of newsletter you produce.

Let me give you a couple of examples. Our office has an internal newsletter we produce every week. You read that right—every week. That's because the office has fast-happening news that staff want to know, and most people prefer getting this news from one source, once a week, as opposed to several emails that come throughout the week and from different channels. That means we relay a wide range of information and do so in the quickest format possible. "IT training is required by Thursday. Access the course here." Really—the entries for our *Weekly News* are often that basic. But the electronic publication is popular, and we have been producing it for over 20 years.

This newsletter, *Coastal Communicators*, is a different animal. Our target audience is composed of people who have "communications" as part of their job. Most are willing to devote a little bit of time to this topic, but not as much as someone who does communication work full time. This level of interest determines the depth of what we publish, the tone, the amount, and how often.

It is important to base your considerations on your actual audience, not who you wish your audience might be. In other words, if you know John and Joan want to read your newsletter, write for them. If you are thinking "Jessie and Josie Manager sure need this stuff; let's make it interesting for them, too," please reconsider.

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If this secondary audience picks it up and reads it, that's great, but write and produce for your target audience. You'll get other audiences, but focusing on one audience will make your publication, and pretty much all communication-related efforts, better.

Consideration number two. When you start a newsletter, it is absolutely shocking how often the deadline rolls around. Who knew? Decide on the content, develop a schedule, and line up your writers. While you are at it, get a good percentage of the content written as far in advance as possible.

For *Coastal Communicators*, we developed a year's worth of content (12 articles) before we published the first newsletter. We did this for proof-of-concept purposes and to ensure we weren't stressing every month. That doesn't mean we can't substitute something new when opportunities arise, but that good feeling you get when content is ready ahead of time will have you preparing in advance again and again.

Consideration number three. If it's an electronic newsletter, what software will you use? Is that software acceptable to your IT department? Does it meet IT security concerns? Can you afford it? How easy is the design aspect, and the newsletter subscription management? Do you have a mailing list?

Because we work for the federal government, we can't and won't endorse particular software. But call me and I'll let you know what I have used in previous jobs. What the heck, I'll give you a hint: when we *mail* it, it performs like a champ (*chimp*). But there are lots of options out there.

Additional considerations. There are so many things to decide. Hard copy versus electronic. PDF versus blog. What writing style will you use? How about the graphics? How will you measure success? How much time does it take to produce the newsletter? Is it a good return on investment? How many readers do you anticipate having? Do you want to grow your subscriptions? How will you do that? Is the newsletter providing a service to your readers and your organization? Does it contribute to your organization's goals?

All of the aforementioned are important, but covering considerations one, two, and three will give you the firm foundation you need to make the other decisions. Good luck!

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COMMUNICATOR OF THE MONTH

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Organizational Structure: The Coastal Resources Division is one of five divisions of the Georgia Department of Natural Resources. The division is charged with balancing coastal development and protection of the coast's natural assets, socio-cultural heritage, and recreational resources for the benefit of present and future generations. Accomplishing this mission takes a staff of more than 65 state employees who are branched into three sections: administration, coastal management, and marine fisheries.

Outreach Approach: Outreach is a vital component of any government entity, and the Coastal Resources Division is no exception. Being both proactive and responsive with the public, legislators, and our constituents is key to educating the public about our mission. Two people handle the bulk of outreach and educational activities: myself, as the communications specialist (or public information officer), and a marine educator, Cate Williams.

Job Duties: As the communications specialist, I am tasked with managing outreach campaigns, developing promotional materials, preparing press releases, and maintaining our website.

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COMMUNICATOR OF THE MONTH (CONTINUED)

Additionally, I shoot, edit, and produce video segments. Over the last year, I have also represented the state in a joint information center set up for the response to the capsizing of a 656-foot cargo vessel, the *Golden Ray*, right here in the St. Simons Sound—literally outside my office window. Being a one-man-band of sorts has its challenges, but I am very fortunate to have supervisors who trust my judgment and have allowed me to exercise my skill sets.

Prior to joining the Coastal Resources Division in 2018, I was a newspaper reporter for the better part of 10 years, and honed my skills in writing, graphic design, videography, and web development. I would also be remiss if I did not mention CoastFest, an annual celebration of Georgia's coastal natural resources, which I am responsible for organizing. Since 1994, the Coastal Resources Division has hosted the event, featuring live performance, live wildlife and touch tanks, and more than 75 exhibitors. Last year's CoastFest drew a record-breaking 12,500 attendees who came to learn about our mission and our partner agencies. This year, with the pandemic, we hosted CoastFest virtually, opting to livestream nine different events from September 30 to October 2. These resources are still available at CoastalGaDNR.org/CoastFest.

Social Media: I primarily handle social media, with the occasional assistance of a few other individuals. Being a regulatory agency, we don't always have the most exciting news to post online, but we have been trying to get creative to engage our followers. During the early days of the pandemic, when people were "locked down," we held a coastal photo contest through which people could submit their best images of Georgia's coast for a chance to win prizes. In return, they consented for us to use their photos in noncommercial publications. The new library of photos proved to be an excellent resource when we updated our website and social media profiles a few months later.

Most Fun, Most Challenging: I think the best part of my job is the ability to be creative. My supervisors have been very supportive of new ideas and "thinking outside the box." One of my favorite tasks at work is designing products for print publication, such as brochures and banners. Creating an all-new product from scratch is a fun and challenging opportunity to put a puzzle together and make something that is not only aesthetically pleasing, but informative. In designing, I always remember what a colleague told me years ago: "It's not about what you can add to a design, it's about what you can remove and still get your point across." Keeping things simple is important.

I would say the most challenging part of my job has been learning about the ecology of coastal Georgia and the management of marine fisheries. My degree is in journalism, and science and math were never my strong point. I had no idea how federal fishery management even worked until I attended educational workshops about it. Thankfully, my supervisors have been supportive in allowing me the time and training that I needed to understand our mission. Two years into the job, I feel relatively confident in most aspects of our mission—and I continue to learn more.

Lesson Learned and Work Mantra: An obvious project that I've learned a lot from recently was Virtual CoastFest. Taking a 12,500-person event and converting it to a digital experience was a daunting task, but with the help of my colleagues, we were able to host a very enjoyable and informative event. There was a learning curve (think Donald Rumsfeld's quote about "unknown unknowns"), but we ended up having excellent public participation. During the livestreams, students and teachers were able to tune in, learn about our programs, and ask questions in real time to our biologists and staff.

I'm not sure I have a professional mantra, but when I took this job, my father gave me a framed cartoon showing a heron trying to swallow a frog, with the frog stubbornly refusing to be eaten and grabbing the heron's neck. The caption reads, "Never give up."

FROM US TO YOU

OUTREACH TOOL SPOTLIGHT – TRAINING VIDEOS AND WEBINARS

Need to explain the economic principles of **ecosystem services**, the concept of **living shorelines**, or the role of **estuaries as nature's water filters** to a diverse audience? You can plan and create an entire presentation, or you can use videos and webinars that have already been created—on all of these topics and more—and let your audience hear it from the Digital Coastal Academy experts. Find them all here: bit.ly/3f6f3EB.

UPCOMING SOCIAL MEDIA CAMPAIGNS

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

- ♦ All month: Use **#WishList** to share your hopes and dreams for our nation's coasts.

COASTAL IMPACT STORIES

Whether you're new to your coastal program or an old pro in need of a reminder, our collection of over 200 impact stories—searchable by program, topic, and location—is constantly being updated and is always a communicator's best friend. These short, fact-filled stories highlight the meaningful work being done, and are an excellent way to learn from each other's achievements, share insights with your audience, and communicate the value of coastal management in all its iterations. View the database here: coast.noaa.gov/states/stories/index.html.

FAST FACTS – WETLAND BENEFITS

Wetland Benefits
\$625 million in damages prevented.



Information provided by The Nature Conservancy

This is one of the many graphics and facts available for your use in presentations and handouts. Grab this one at coast.noaa.gov/states/fast-facts/wetland-benefits.html. If you have an idea for a new group of fast facts or illustrations, please let us know.

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Send questions or suggestions to coastal.info@noaa.gov.

View past issues at coast.noaa.gov/gallery/newsletter.html.

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Improving communication skills, one newsletter at a time.