

COASTAL COMMUNICATORS

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

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COMMUNICATOR OF THE MONTH

Scott Richardson
Wells National Estuarine Research Reserve, Maine

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MOST OF THE SUCCESSFUL PEOPLE I'VE KNOWN ARE THE ONES WHO DO MORE LISTENING THAN TALKING.

– Mark Haddon



COMMUNICATION INSIGHTS

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 means 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 for that 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 will provide basic tips for those who don't have a professional communicator on staff and yet desire to put their communication house in order.

STEP ONE

Pull together your baseline promotional materials. There's basic stuff you'll want to have: signage, handouts, website, an exhibit, maybe a general brochure. Think about the materials you are often asked to provide, and make sure they are updated and that you have enough. 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 your 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 pay a freelancer to get a professional job done and get this task off your back.

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There's some foundational information that 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 and spend the time to write it down and share with staff. This will keep you 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 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 the amount of text that needs updating. Large amounts of text make it harder—not easier—to get a message across, and make 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 are sending 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 is a good idea to have that designated person involved to ensure consistency and that lessons learned regarding media relations are used and built upon.

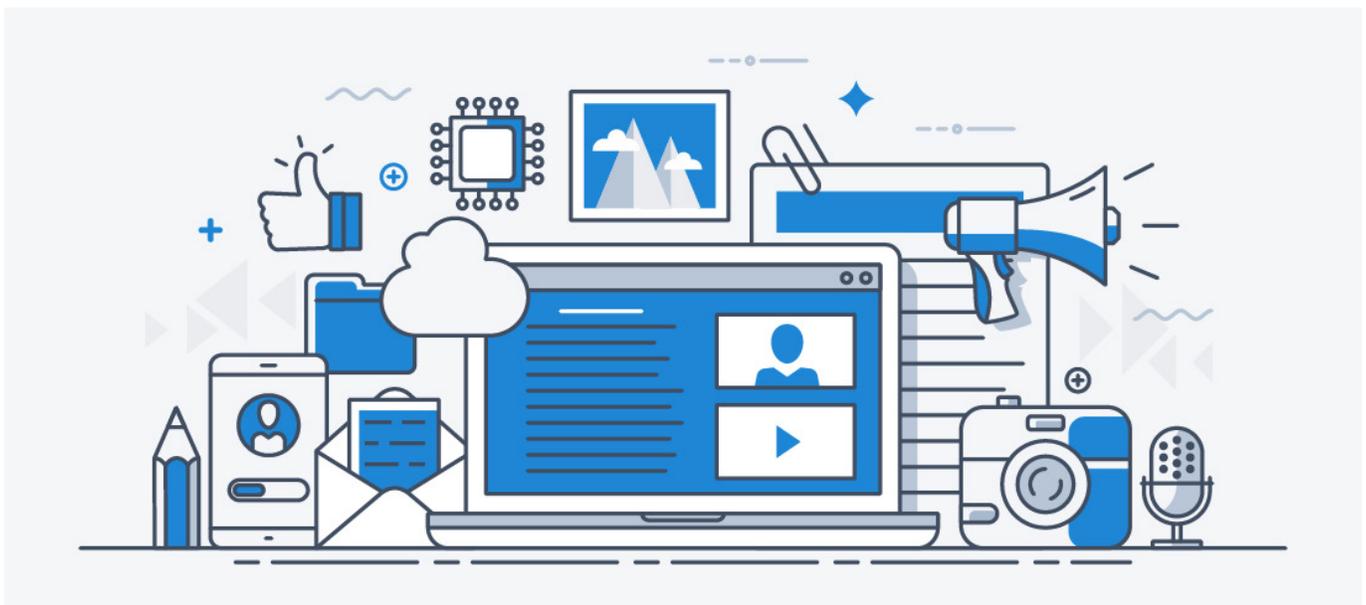
STEP THREE

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 last month's 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 most everything else.

Good luck!

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COMMUNICATOR OF THE MONTH

Name: Scott Richardson
Title: Communications Director
Organization: Wells National Estuarine Research Reserve, Maine

Organizational Structure

Wells is unique among the research reserves in that it has a nonprofit as its lead partner. My position bridges the marketing needs of a fundraising organization, Laudholm Trust, with the communications needs of the mission-focused Wells Reserve. The reserve and trust share a campus, so we're mostly self-contained and unencumbered. That makes our communications and marketing program quite nimble, with a lot of opportunity for sharing ideas and content.

Outreach Approach

I handle most of our communications and marketing tasks with some help from an assistant and a lot of ad hoc participation from Nik Charov, Paul Dest, and many other members of the staff.

Job Duties

My duties include writing, editing, photography, media relations, graphic design, website management, email marketing, and social media coordination. I also assist with projects like educational exhibits and signage. Right now, I'm concentrating on promoting our largest fundraising event of the year, the Laudholm Nature Crafts Festival, and preparing the education program's autumn calendar.

Social Media

Our Facebook posts are shared between Nik Charov and me. That's our main channel on the social web. Nik does most of the YouTube videos and I handle what little we do on Twitter. Instagram is split between Brianne Fagan and me. That covers our regular outlets, and I tend to pick up the loose ends. We haven't hit many bumps on the social media road, but we also haven't figured out how best to measure our success. Likes and shares and thumbs-ups are encouraging, but we're looking for something more.

Most Fun, Most Challenging

I first visited the Wells reserve in 1991, and still enjoy and appreciate being on the site. I'm incredibly fortunate to have a job in a beautiful place with smart people doing good work with passion. I like putting words and images together—whether they're mine or someone else's—to elicit a positive response. This job offers ample opportunity to do just that. But anyone working creatively finds flaws even in their finest work, so every day is a challenge to do better.



Work Mantra

Maybe I'm a glass-half-empty sort, but successes seem short-lived and achieving universal awareness of the Wells Reserve is a never-ending quest. We're always amazed to hear from people who are just discovering this place and its work for the first time, even though they've lived or summered nearby for many years. So we keep doing what we can to leave a good impression through all of our outlets and interactions, anticipating the effort will continue to build our audience and base of support, either directly or through word of mouth.

Wish for the Future

We're aiming at greater integration among channels and narrower targeting of messages. We can be more efficient and more effective by using all the tools and analytics we have at our disposal, delivering desired information to attuned audiences. That will mean digging into data and crafting even more pieces. The way that digital has altered everyday communications and marketing has been startling. Less than 20 years ago, we launched our first minimalist website. Less than a decade back, we dipped a toe into Facebook's pool. How soon before we explore marketing with augmented reality and communicating through virtual assistants? Our efforts won't be all digital, though. Printed products will remain essential into the foreseeable future. I like that tie with tradition, especially for an estuarine reserve headquartered at a historic site.

FROM US TO YOU

OUTREACH TOOL SPOTLIGHT – COASTAL FLOOD EXPOSURE MAPPER

Use this online tool to visualize how coastal flooding and rising seas are projected to impact your community. The downloadable maps represent a particularly helpful communication tool. Dates and information are currently available for the following regions: the East Coast, Gulf of Mexico, and islands in the Pacific and Caribbean. Find it here: coast.noaa.gov/digitalcoast/tools/flood-exposure.html.

UPCOMING SOCIAL MEDIA CAMPAIGNS

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

- February 1 to 28: Use #EstuaryLove to share the importance of estuaries.
- February 1 to 28: Use #EcosystemServices to highlight the invaluable services ecosystems provide.

ONLINE STORY DATABASE

If you have a report to write or a speech to give, hopefully you have visited NOAA's impact story database and found a condensed story ready to go. The ability to search by program (CZM, reserves, coral program, Digital Coast), state, or topic makes the database pretty easy to use. For instance, if you are looking for an economics-related story on Wisconsin's CZM program, you can filter your results accordingly. Start your (search) engines here: coast.noaa.gov/states/stories/index.html.

NEW YEAR, NEW YOU?

Input needed: what are your goals for your program or role for 2019? Any changes you hope to make, or technologies you plan to adopt? We'd love to hear! Information may be featured in an upcoming newsletter. coastal.info@noaa.gov

FAST FACTS: WEATHER DISASTERS



Source: NOAA National Centers for Environmental Information

Weather Disasters (1980-2016)

Drought	24
Flooding	26
Freeze	7
Severe Storm	83
Tropical Cyclone	35
Wildfire	14
Winter Storm	14

Average Cost (billions)

Drought	\$9.3
Flooding	\$4.3
Freeze	\$3.6
Severe Storm	\$2.2
Tropical Cyclone	\$16
Wildfire	\$2.4
Winter Storm	\$3

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

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