

COASTAL COMMUNICATORS

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

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NEVER, EVER USE REPETITIVE
REDUNDANCIES. DON'T USE
NO DOUBLE NEGATIVES.
PROOFREAD CAREFULLY TO SEE
IF YOU ANY WORDS OUT.

– William Safire



July 2022, Issue 44

COMMUNICATION INSIGHTS

PR BASICS: THEN, NOW, FUTURE

Dear Reader,

Once upon a time I was the public relations director for South Carolina's coastal zone management program, and as such, was active in the Coastal States Organization. A former leader from that organization (Kerry Kehoe) recently found a document written nearly 30 years ago for use at their annual meeting. Thirty years!

That text is reprinted below, and I'm surprised by how little has changed. We don't put two spaces after a period anymore (you aren't doing that, are you?!), and in addition to newspapers, we have additional constituent-sharing mechanisms. But the basic communication tenets continue to resonate, don't you think?

South Carolina's List of PR Truths

By Donna McCaskill, Public Information Director (South Carolina)
Office of Ocean and Coastal Resource Management

- Your PR is only as good as your coastal zone management program. A rose is a rose and a skunk is a skunk. Might be able to make the average rose award-winning; might be able to partially deodorize a skunk; but a skunk almost never turns into a rose.
- Goal of PR is to advance the mission of the organization, not to win a popularity contest. The most important first step is to define this mission, nail down the message, and define the audience. The smaller the audience, the more definite the action you expect, the greater the chance you have for success.
- PR person (and the rest of the organization) should crystalize this mission in one short, informal phrase. (For South Carolina it is: "Our goal is to protect the environment and promote responsible development.") All projects, interviews, and actions should revolve around this statement. This is the image you are building for your organization.

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- Lawmakers will always be an important audience for you, probably your most important. There is no substitute for good, one-on-one relationships with the major players. The media can then be used as a way to give an issue an extra push. Being in the media also gives you credibility and defines you as a major player.
 - Don't be afraid of bad news. Don't flaunt it, but don't hide it, either. Use it to your advantage whenever possible. Bad news makes the front page. Good news rarely does.
 - Don't be afraid to be strong in your messaging. Go out on a limb occasionally, as long as you have a very defensible position.
 - Don't veer from the truth. Ever.
 - Remember the media draws: the biggest, smallest, first, last, and only. Milk your agency employees for information and story ideas.
 - Get your detractors and your supporters together early in the process. Keep them informed. Anticipate questions. Have an answer ready. Offense is much better than defense.
 - If at all possible, use one spokesperson. This gives your organization greater identity. Also gives you a greater opportunity to dance around issues when you have to. Also saves everyone time.
 - Require your PR person to be able to address every aspect of the agency. As long as the spokesperson knows more than the audience, you're ok. For more detailed pieces (long features, for example), get the staff professionals to participate as well. Get the big guns (the executive director) to speak only when the fire is really hot. You'll know when.
 - Get a good dog and pony show together and take it on the road. Speeches are the most effective way to establish dialogue with people you might not otherwise have access to.
 - Never speak over your allotted time (15 minutes is best). The Q&A session is probably the most important part of your speech. This is the time that you learn from your audience.
 - Never let internal PR slide. Knowledge is power; everyone in your organization can benefit from this power.
 - Subscribe to the newspapers in your area, and clip and keep the articles about environmental topics and your organization.
 - Make a brochure only when you have something you want to push (Coastweeks, dune building) or in response to frequently asked questions (How do I get a permit? Why is a permit needed?).
 - Be like Sears and occasionally show your softer side. Do a public participation project, photo contest, etc. Produce something people like to have (tide table, poster, etc.).
 - It is the PR person's responsibility to keep one foot outside of the organization for frequent reality checks. They need to make sure the message is relevant to the audience.
 - Remember how busy everyone's life is. State your case simply. Use as few words as possible. Stay away from acronyms. Stay far away from government gobbledygook. In all cases, write for the common man.
 - Understand not only your organization, but your sister agencies as well. Become a warehouse of all types of environmental and state and federal government information.
 - Be prompt. Always return calls with information as quickly as possible. Tell the reporter when you are going to return the call and do it.
 - Be reachable after hours.
 - Program managers should pay attention to the program. Decisions should be made on what is right. Let the person in the PR slot worry about public perception.
- Admittedly, some of our younger readers may not remember that "softer side of Sears" advertising campaign. But other than that, don't you recognize all of these PR basics as being relevant today? Keep your efforts simple, direct, and true, and everything will work out. I've seen these approaches work, and work well, for 30-plus years.

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COMMUNICATION PRODUCT OF THE MONTH

Featured product: South Carolina Emergency Management Division's social media

Source: Facebook – facebook.com/SCEMD;

Twitter – @SCEMD;

Instagram – @SCEMD

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

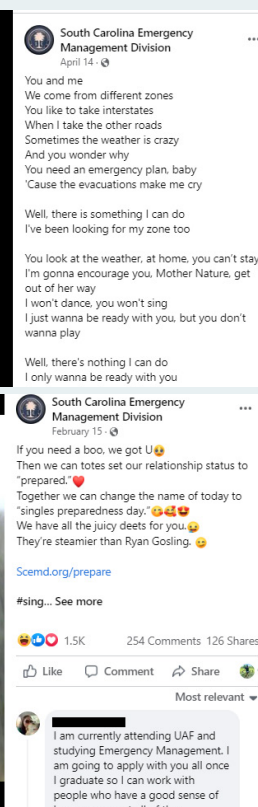
What it is: The official social media accounts for the agency responsible for management of South Carolina's emergencies and natural disasters.

Why we chose it: Here's something you don't often hear about a state's emergency management Facebook posts: I look forward to them every day. Seriously. They take the important but often overlooked task of disaster prep—specifically, reminding community members to do it—and make it engaging and humorous. Their posts include

rewritten song lyrics, ingenious memes, and very often spot-on pop culture references (way to grab the young folks' attention, #SCEMD!).

In addition to these creative daily posts, the social media manager engages with the pages' followers regularly, responding to comments and questions quickly (and often through memes, when appropriate). And their followers (169,000 on Facebook, 60,800 on Twitter, 6,830 on Instagram) have taken notice; comment threads read like fan mail, and show just how much their social media is doing exactly what's it's supposed to. I could go on about why I enjoy their posts so much, but I'll let them speak for themselves, below. It was, however, quite difficult to narrow them down to my favorites.

(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 – RISK COMMUNICATION MENTAL SHORTCUTS

Have you ever noticed that when you're communicating an important issue to people, some only focus on one aspect of the conversation, while others seem to react based on their own past experiences? It's because people often use mental shortcuts when talking about risk, which can really feel like a communication roadblock. This brief self-guided tutorial helps you recognize when and why people use mental shortcuts, and offers tips for handling them effectively. Find it here: coast.noaa.gov/digitalcoast/training/mental-shortcuts.html.

UPCOMING SOCIAL MEDIA CAMPAIGNS

Join us in celebrating the 50th anniversary of the Coastal Zone Management Act all year long. Use #OceanandCoasts50 and get social each week with the following themes:

- July 4 to July 8: Take up sport hunting or fishing

- July 11 to July 15: Anchor boats safely
- July 18 to July 22: Visit coastal-dependent businesses
- July 25 to July 29: Go on a virtual expedition

THE INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENT AND JOBS ACT

While you've likely heard lots of talk about this legislation, it's just as likely that you have plenty of questions about it. The act provides a historic investment in coastal protection and restoration that will increase resilience and improve how we manage our ocean and coastal resources. NOAA recently announced \$3 billion in funding, \$832 million of which will be administered by the Office for Coastal Management over the next five years. To provide more information, as well as links to the funding opportunities, we've created a webpage that we hope will help you better understand the act, and what it means for you. Find it here: coast.noaa.gov/funding/infrastructure.html.

FAST FACTS – MARINE DEBRIS

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/marine-debris.html. If you have an idea for a new group of fast facts or illustrations, please let us know.



Economic Benefits from Reducing Marine Debris in Orange County, California

Debris Reduction

25%

50%

75%

100%

Economic Benefit (in millions of dollars)

\$32

\$67

\$106

\$148

From a study of 31 beaches in Orange County, California, conducted by NOAA's Marine Debris Program. Projected savings is over a period of three months.



Source: NOAA's Marine Debris Program

Coastal Communicators is published by the NOAA Office for Coastal Management.

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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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