

# COASTAL COMMUNICATORS

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

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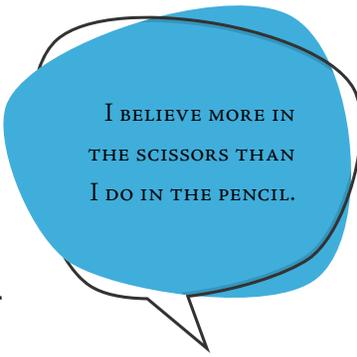
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I BELIEVE MORE IN  
THE SCISSORS THAN  
I DO IN THE PENCIL.

– Truman Capote

November 2022, Issue 48



## COMMUNICATION INSIGHTS

### TURN ON YOUR LISTENING EARS

If there's one thing I've learned about communication, it's that you can't assume anything. Don't assume people understand that acronym. Don't assume people will come if you build it. Don't assume what you deem important is the popular vote. And don't assume people want to hear what you have to say. After all, we know what they say about the word "assume," right?

Here's one way to overcome your assumptions: listen. That's right, I'm taking us all back to kindergarten, when we had to turn on our listening ears. Listening makes up half of the communication package, and if you don't do it, you are missing something critical.

Your audience may not think what you have to say is important, so you need to listen to better understand what they feel is important. There are ways you can physically listen to what your audience holds dear, such as community events, focus groups, town council meetings, and even casual conversations.

And if you can't physically listen, there are other ways to have ears on the ground. Scroll through a Twitter feed, join a blog, read a community newsletter.

Listening will help you understand what your audience cares about and really get to the root of the problem. From there you can find the angle to approach your audience, as well as connections you can help them make and products to support them. You may even find that your underlying message still works; you just have to make some adjustments to fit their needs.

For example, I was on a call not that long ago and heard someone say, "I'm finished with my oyster research and need a way to get the information out there. But people don't seem to care about oysters. Why can't people just want to conserve them because it's the right thing to do?"

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I couldn't agree more, and it can be frustrating to those of us in the scientific community who want to save the natural world.

And here's where listening comes in. What are you hearing from your community? What concerns folks? Are they struggling to feed their families or make ends meet? Worried about their coastal property? With these concerns, people might not be as concerned about what they see as an insignificant little animal, such as an oyster.

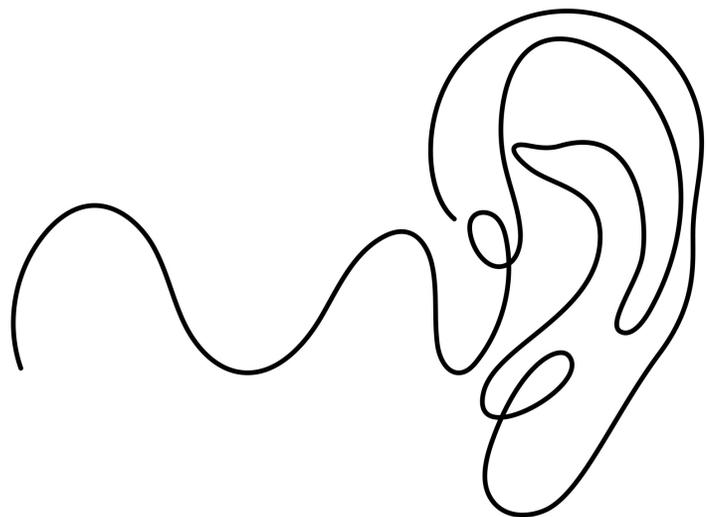
Or are they? Here's where you adjust your message to make it resonate with them. They just might care about an oyster more than they thought they did, and if you put it into terms that resonate, I bet people do care about oysters. Do they know that oysters can provide food for their families? That oysters are filter feeders, and one oyster can clean up to 50 gallons of water each day? That oyster reefs attract other fish, which also feed families? That oyster reefs can protect the shoreline from erosion? Sell the benefits received from oysters (or whatever your "oyster" is) as your main message, and let the research part be the secondary message.

Another thing I've learned in my years of working in communications is that people know they want and need help, but instead of saying, "I need help addressing XYZ," they say, "We need you to develop ABC products." This can be a little like trying to fit a square peg into a round hole. Without knowing the actual problem, we can't come up with a viable solution. Our communications team will sit down with them and ask probing questions and listen to their answers to try to understand the actual issue before we agree to develop their "solution."

Sometimes I figure out issues that need to be addressed by listening stealthily. I often attend conferences and meetings as a rather large fly on the wall just to hear about local issues communities and partners are dealing with. This helps me figure out the problem that needs addressing. Later, our communications team will discuss potential solutions. "I heard them say they are having trouble with XYZ. Why don't we try ABC?" We can then run those thoughts by the partners for input.

Now turn on your listening ears and try it out. You just might gain a new perspective.

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# COMMUNICATION PRODUCT OF THE MONTH

**Featured products:** U.S. Department of Energy  
Instagram Post

**Source:** The agency's Instagram page:  
[@energy](https://www.instagram.com/energy)

**Submitted by:** Caitlyn McCrary, Lynker in support  
of NOAA's Office for Coastal Management

**What it is:** An Instagram post highlighting 13 things  
the Department of Energy has done "to invest in  
America's future."

**Why we chose it:** Many people know that Taylor Swift  
released a new album on October 21 at midnight. While  
Spotify broke and the internet stayed up late, some  
organizations took advantage of the world's seemingly  
collective focus on "T.Swift" to draw attention to their

own products. The U.S. Department of Energy  
seized that opportunity and did a great job of  
writing a relevant message, weaving in song titles  
and pointing people to something they might  
otherwise scroll right by. It's a nice example of using  
timely information and pop culture references to  
your advantage without being click-baity.

Turns out it worked very well for them: this  
particular post received over 1,200 likes, while the  
agency's two previous posts had received 474 and  
260 likes, respectively. And a follow-up post two  
days later referenced the large amount of positive  
feedback they received (which they cleverly used to  
solicit interns).

*(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 – CONNECTING WITH YOUR AUDIENCE: PLANNING YOUR NEXT INTERACTION

When it comes to communicating, isn't connecting with your audience—whether they're your readers, meeting attendees, or community leaders—what it's all about? This helpful, oh-so-handy worksheet allows you to do just that by walking you through a planned interaction's goals, format, techniques, and more, all in a logical flow. Find it here: [coast.noaa.gov/digitalcoast/training/audience.html](http://coast.noaa.gov/digitalcoast/training/audience.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

- October 31 to November 4: Report stranded marine mammals
- November 7 to 11: Symbolically adopt an animal

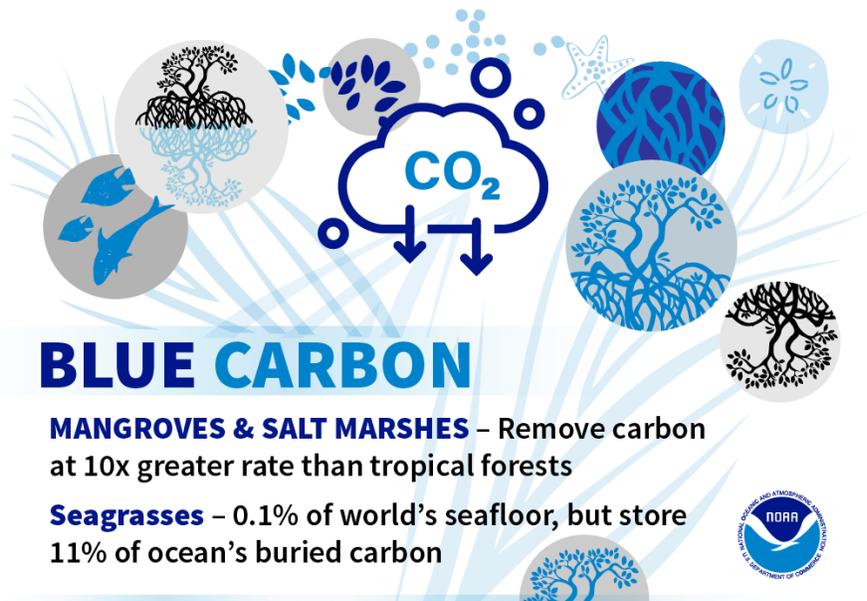
- November 14 to 18: Take the wildlife pledge
- November 21 to 25: Don't buy products made from endangered animals
- November 28 to December 2: Make decorations from natural materials

### ABOUT DIGITAL COAST

NOAA's Digital Coast provides data, tools, trainings, and information for a range of coastal professionals and partners—its uses are varied and numerous. But those who are just getting started in coastal management, or are new users of the Digital Coast, might wonder where to begin. Whether you're a total newbie or just need a refresher on how to use Digital Coast tools to better communicate your mission, these tips on top products, state reports, topics pages, and more can help anyone make the most of the website's offerings. Find the primer here: [coast.noaa.gov/digitalcoast/about](http://coast.noaa.gov/digitalcoast/about).

### FAST FACTS – BLUE CARBON

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/blue-carbon.html](http://coast.noaa.gov/states/fast-facts/blue-carbon.html). If you have an idea for a new group of fast facts or illustrations, please let us know.



## BLUE CARBON

**MANGROVES & SALT MARSHES** – Remove carbon at 10x greater rate than tropical forests

**Seagrasses** – 0.1% of world's seafloor, but store 11% of ocean's buried carbon

*The environmental and economic possibilities are endless!*

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*Improving communication skills, one newsletter at a time.*