

COASTAL COMMUNICATORS

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

In This Issue

COMMUNICATION INSIGHTS

Writing Effective Headlines

COMMUNICATION PRODUCT OF THE MONTH

Cat AI-doption


FROM US TO YOU

Outreach Tool Spotlight—Case Studies

Upcoming Social Media Campaigns

NOAA's 2024 Marine Economy Report

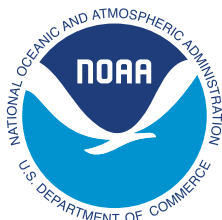
Fast Facts—Hazard Mitigation Value



YOU CAN ALWAYS EDIT
A BAD PAGE. YOU CAN'T
EDIT A BLANK PAGE.

– Jodi Picoult

October 2024, Issue 67



COMMUNICATION INSIGHTS

WRITING EFFECTIVE HEADLINES

The headline is one of the most important components of a document—one that demands the attention of the reader and the writer.

In our field, documents are often written to persuade or inform people who are not in our inner circle. That means we shouldn't think of our target audience as people sitting on the edge of their seats in eager anticipation of our prose. Instead, think about the congressional staffer, the busy homeowner, and the beleaguered public official who has a million-plus-two things coming at them nearly every day. You hope they are interested in what you have to say, but nonetheless, they will appreciate you and your cause more if you respect their time. One important way to do this is to ensure all headlines and subheadings serve the reader well. With just a quick skim of the headlines, the reader's first questions (What is this about? Is this information something I want or need to read? Is it done well?) should be easily answered. What follows are tips for writing effective headlines and subheads.

Keep them short. Titles and headlines are almost never presented in a vacuum, which means extra qualifiers and detail are not needed. The goal, once again, is to help the reader quickly answer the question, "am I in the right place?" A simple and straightforward approach serves the reader best. (And don't get me started on acronyms—just don't do it.) The same need for clarity and succinctness is often true for titles for initiatives, research projects, grant programs, webpages, etc.

Don't be cute. "Let's Get Geophysical." Headlines and subheads you see as tantalizing likely are not, particularly when the document is not a peer-to-peer product. With a less than straightforward headline you can quickly lose some of the audience you are trying to reach, as they can't be bothered to do the required digging to determine if they are interested in the topic and your text.

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

Be wary of the question approach. “Want to know more about lidar data?” Here at NOAA, we have a weekly internal newsletter for which staff often submit entries. Approximately 75 percent of these entries use the question approach for the headline. It’s not that this approach is wrong, but it is often overused.

Use subheadings. Subheads provide an excellent thought map for the reader, giving them a nice summary of the document when scanned. Subheads also make transitions easier in that you don’t necessarily have to use connecting words from one paragraph to the next—a subhead can perform this task using fewer words. Document organization is another plus, as subheads provide the structure needed to force similar information to be contained in one spot, as opposed to sprinkling these information pieces (the history of the project, for example, as well as funding information, fun facts, and partner names) throughout the document, which can be confusing for the reader and takes away from the cohesiveness of your document.

Don’t repeat the headline in the first sentence.

- ♦ **Headline:** Coastal Management Fellowship
- ♦ **Original opening sentence:** “The Coastal Management Fellowship, initiated on . . .”
- ♦ **Improved opening sentence:** “Initiated in 1997, this fellowship . . .”

There is no need to repeat the information the headline has already provided. Tighter writing makes for easier reading.

The first paragraph sets the tone for the document. Use it wisely. Concentrate on what the reader is most interested in. Work to provide the best, most concise summary you can and use the rest of the document to

support said points. (The opening paragraph for this article is one sentence long!) Also in the opening, work to lessen the name dropping, and by that I mean listing everybody and anybody associated with the project who merits a mention. (Example: in our office, this could mean the Department of Commerce, NOAA, National Ocean Service, Office for Coastal Management, Stewardship Division, Coastal Zone Management Program. See the heads spin? Instead, we would likely list only “NOAA” in the opening and use another paragraph—and subhead!—to list the organizational family tree.)

Another first paragraph tip is to stay away from the history of the project and the “how we got this done” part of the story. A high-level summary of the end result, provided in the first paragraph, will give readers what they most need. The rest of the document can be used to provide the details.

There you have it: my “Headline Writing 101” course. Should you have questions, or ideas for another communication-related story, please drop me a line. We absolutely love hearing from you.

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COMMUNICATION PRODUCT OF THE MONTH

Featured products: Best Friends Animal Society's Cat AI-doption Campaign

Source: Best Friend Animal Society's Pinterest page: pinterest.com/bfas/cat-ai-doption (and watch a video about it here: youtube.com/watch?v=NpXlhRVhUVo)

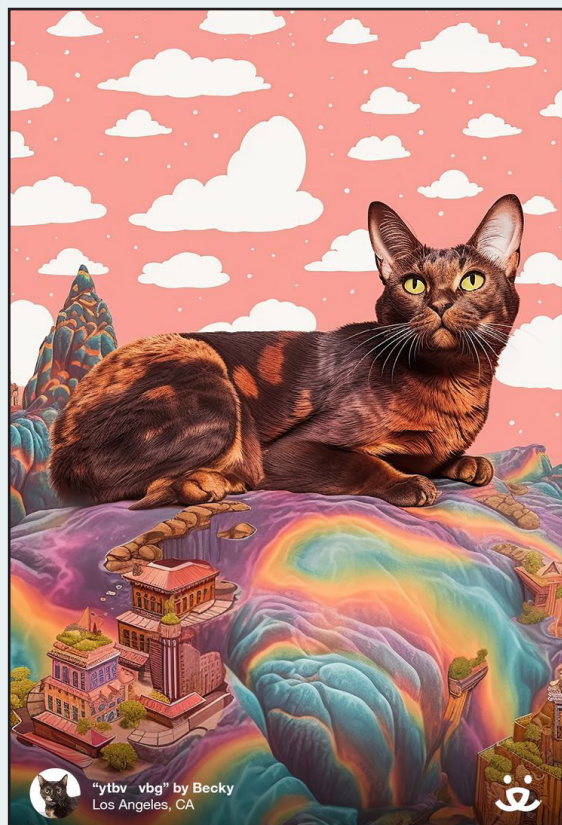
Submitted by: Pamela Jacobs, Lynker for NOAA's Office for Coastal Management

What it is: In partnership with creative studio B&T Creative, this national animal rescue organization used “the world’s first cat-generated AI art gallery” to help cats “get themselves adopted using the power of AI and their natural love of computer keyboards.” In short, the team took dozens of adoptable cats, had them walk across keyboards, and plugged the gibberish they generated into the artificial intelligence tool ChatGPT, prompting the AI tool to create images of cats using the input. Best Friends shared these masterpieces via social media, along with the cats’ names and attributes and a description of their art. For example, Becky, an “independent” two-year-old tortoiseshell, is surrounded by a kaleidoscope of clouds, colors, mountains, and monuments. The description: “Becky’s art piece, ‘ytbv vbg,’ bursts with vibrancy and color. Despite its minimalistic title, the artwork radiates a lively and playful energy. Becky’s adept use of hues and forms creates a captivating composition that immediately engages the viewer. It’s as if the feline artist has painted a vivid tapestry of emotions and experiences, inviting the audience to immerse themselves in a world of joy and wonder.”

Why I like it: If you’ve been reading this newsletter for a while, you may recall my great affection for the use of cats in communications

(see the February 2023 issue featuring the Army Corps’ cat calendar) and my admiration for creative uses of artificial intelligence (see January 2024 and April 2024). So you can imagine how enamored I am with a campaign that combines the two—adding in a hefty dose of humor and playfulness—all with the worthy goal of finding homes for shelter cats. To me, this is brilliant on so many levels, not the least of which is how well the campaign just gets cats and their quirks. Anyone who’s ever had a cat knows felines’ fondness for walking/sitting/lying on keyboards (I can’t promise mine isn’t doing that right nowwwjo098y3).

(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— CASE STUDIES

From implementing natural infrastructure projects to discovering new ways to finance them, your coastal management colleagues are continuously doing great work. Instead of trying to reinvent the wheel, you can learn from their past successes through the case studies featured on the Digital Coast. The narratives walk readers through the processes and lessons learned and discuss the communication strategies that made projects successful—one of the most difficult but most important parts. Find them here: coast.noaa.gov/digitalcoast/training (select “Case Studies” under “Product Type” in the filter).

UPCOMING SOCIAL MEDIA CAMPAIGNS

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

- September 30 to October 4: Maine

- October 7 to 11: Pennsylvania
- October 14 to 18: Ohio
- October 21 to 25: Michigan
- October 28 to November 1: Indiana

NOAA'S 2024 MARINE ECONOMY REPORT

Economic data help tell the story of a state, region, or territory—they shed light on the people and businesses that comprise all of the nation's coastal communities. The recently released “NOAA Regional and State Report on the U.S. Marine Economy” includes extensive data from 30 coastal states and, for the first time, five U.S. territories, which helps decision-makers and communicators alike understand the contributions of the people and places these numbers represent. Find it here: coast.noaa.gov/data/digitalcoast/pdf/econ-report-regional-state.pdf.

FAST FACTS—HAZARD MITIGATION VALUE

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

More Mitigation Measures, More Savings



**One dollar invested in mitigation =
13 dollars U.S. saves in future costs**



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To subscribe to this newsletter, visit coast.noaa.gov/contactform.

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

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