To Tweet or Not to Tweet: Role of Social Media in Public Outreach

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Northern Kentucky
Goddess of Sewers

- Roman Empire
  - Sewers important enough to Romans to have a goddess of sewers
  - Patron of the city’s overall sewer system

- What was the name of Goddess?
Cloacina
Greatest Medical Advance

- British Medical Journal asked experts/doctors:
  - Most important medical advance since 1840?
And the Oscar Goes to...

Sanitation

- It beat
  - Antibiotics
  - Anesthesia
  - Vaccines
- Valued by experts/scientists
  - What does the average person think about sanitation?
Why Aren’t We Worshipped?

- Unpleasant issue
- Lack of understanding of service provided
- Do not value service provided – not considered vital
- Entitlement rather than a privilege
- Rate Increases
- Recession
Public Opinion of SD1 in Northern Kentucky

- Elected Officials/Community Leaders
- Average customer
Change to Monthly Billing: Efforts Taken to Educate Public

- Put article in county newsletters
- Sent pamphlet to all customers

GOOD NEWS

ABOUT YOUR SANITARY SEWER BILL!
Monthly vs. Quarterly Billing

Call Volume Increased from Average Monthly Volume ~ 8,000

- July – 11,085
- August – 10,867
- September – 12,767

Telephone Call Activity 2009
E-mail Volume

- Feb. 1 to May 31 - 350
- June 1 to September 30 - 953
I just received my bill and couldn’t believe how stupid you people are.

To say that changing the billing from every three months to every month is better in any way is the dumbest thing you could do.

I guess you all didn’t do to [sic] good in math class when you went to school.
Blog Postings

- Extreme negativity
- Positive articles/friendly blog postings
- Until recently, no official response from SD1
- Recent posting:
  - Antitax: Why are some citizens forced to pay the storm water tax even though they don't have sanitary or storm sewers?
SD1 Response

- It is important to us that all of our customers understand who we are, what we do and what their money pays for.

- If you would like information about the storm water program, the storm water fee, storm water related projects, or SD1 in general, please feel free to contact us at info@sd1.org.

- We would be more than happy to send you some educational information and answer any questions that you may have.
Why do we care?

- Monopoly
- Lack of public support for Consent Decree efforts
- Proposed legislation
  - Public Service Commission Oversight
  - Unanimous Fiscal Court Approval of Rates
- Budget/rate adjustment approvals
What can we do better?

- Do more, with less
- How much effort should we focus on our vocal critics?
- Role of social media
- Interactive Website
Interactive Website

- Create videos that share specific educational messages
- Virtual Tours of facilities
- Interactive Maps
- Create social media pages that people can link to from our website (i.e. Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn)
Will you reach customers using social media?

- Social networks and blogs
  - 4th most popular online activities
- 10% of all time spent on internet
- ~64% of marketers are using social media for 5 hours or more each week during campaigns
Blogs

- 900,000 blog posts are created within a single 24-hour period
- 77% of all active internet users regularly read blogs
Twitter
Twitter

- Breaking news
- Companies monitor
  - Avert PR disasters
Serve over 75 billion video streams to around 375 million visitors this year.

Terrifying - Inspection of Sewer Reveals New Life Form

What is it? Alien creatures? Invasion of the body snatchers? Mad Mutant Mold?
Social Networks: Facebook

- Half a million new users each day

- 35-54 year old demographic fastest growing
  - 276.4% growth rate in 6-month period
Your Customers Are Using Social Media

- If not part of the conversation
  - others will answer questions and provide information
- Can you afford to devote staff time to social media?
- Can you afford not to?
The Price Is Right

- YouTube, Twitter, Blogger – it’s all free
- Do not have to hire a marketing consultant
How is Social Media Different than Other Outreach Efforts?

- Authentic conversation rather than one-sided talking “at” people
- Casual talk
  - same questions/conversations that a customer would have with a friend or neighbor
- Building relationships through conversations without objectives
- Perceived as more honest and meaningful
- Humanize your story; create loyalty and earn customer understanding and respect
Getting Started: Stop, Look & Listen

- Observation:
  - Where are conversations taking place
  - Who’s participating
  - What’s being said
  - Tone of the discussions
  - Specific information being sought
  - Impressions and misconceptions

- Identify your customers and where they go for information

- Search for keywords related to utility
So Many Options, So Little Time

- Social Media Options – overwhelming
- Assess available tools based on our objectives and the conversations that are taking place
  - Soft rollout - don’t do more than can be handled
  - If your customers aren’t using a site, move on
  - Don’t use tool because it’s shiny, new or popular
- Create a social map by searching for keywords in each of the social media communities
  - Develop a detailed blueprint for engagement
If you build it, they will come - Wrong

- Create profiles on Facebook, accounts on Twitter, upload videos to YouTube
- Sit back and wait for interaction to come?
How to get started - Facebook

- Go to Facebook and search for the name of your utility
- If there is information related to your utility or a group formed, read what is being written
- Will existing group work for your needs?
- If not, create a new group
LinkedIn

- LinkedIn - company groups
- Same process as Facebook
- LinkedIn runs a section called "Answers"
  - can pose a question to the crowd
Twitter

- Set up an account
- [www.search.twitter.com](http://www.search.twitter.com)
  - search the name of your utility
  - See if people are tweeting about it
  - Use "Follow" button to subscribe to Twitter feeds
    - Each account gets an e-mail informing them that you're tuning in
Discussion Forums

- **Monitor:**
  - online conversations on blogs
  - comments in online newspaper articles
  - local news broadcasts on the web

- **Read at least 20 recent posts**
  - learn blogger’s personality & interests
  - bloggers are not journalists

- **Answer questions, provide context, explain and defend utility actions**

- **Presence can defuse negative discussions**
Traditional Outreach Methods

- Use social media in addition to traditional outreach methods
E-Mail

- Write a personal, customized reply to almost every e-mail received
- No form letters
- In certain cases, will begin referring customers to social media links
Effective Internal Communication

- Employees – key to successful communication
- Need to know what’s happening
- Well informed and appreciated employees vs. uninformed employees
- Must equip them with the necessary information
Create Sewer Ambassadors

- Major matters that should be communicated:
  - Personnel changes
  - Rate increases
  - Raise freeze
  - Major Litigation
  - Major Construction and Improvements
  - Awards
Peer-to-Peer Program

- Reached all 250+ employees
- Conducted a survey
  - learned and retained information
  - there are different needs for different work groups
  - employees want more of this type of communication
  - Small group, face-to-face communication is preferred method
  - peer leaders positively accepted
- Identification of communication gaps
Community Involvement

- FY09 - ~6,500 hours of community service
- actively involved with approximately 50 different community groups/initiatives
- 2001 - Zapper Program provides all staff the opportunity of 8-10 hours of paid time to participate in a community service project
- Certifying Organization for the President's Volunteer Service Award
Teach Your Children Well

- Environmental unit
  - 60 schools
  - 4,000-5,000 students
  - KY Core Content for grades 4 and 5
- "Journey of a Drop of Water" field trip
  - ~30 schools (2,000-3,000 students)
Public Education

Middle/High School

- Host "WaterIfic" annually for 6th grade students
- Presentations and job shadow opportunities available upon request

Post-secondary

- Partnered with local university to create a storm water focused college course
Have a Good Mascot
Questions?

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