

sharing your conservation message

Start with an “Elevator Speech”

Think about the last time you rode an elevator in a tall building. Like most people, did you stare at the doors until it arrived at your floor? What if, instead, you could use that brief moment in time to share your story about conservation? That’s what we call an “elevator speech,” the 30 seconds you have to get someone’s interest. It’s a “quick, simple and compelling summary” about your topic, according to speech trainers Andrea Diehm and Kasandra Girard.

During the NACD Northern Plains Region Leaders Meeting in June, Diehm and Girard walked participants through a series of simple steps to develop their own elevator speech:

1. **First, give a unique statement about yourself.**
2. **Describe who you help, what you offer, and give a vivid example.**
3. **Explain your unique selling point**
4. **Finally, call for action by stating what response you want from the listener.**

Elevator speeches are a great way to start sharing your conservation message. Emails and phone calls are important, but face-to-face interaction is the key to establishing relationships with your friends, neighbors and community members.

Throughout the next few pages, you’ll have a chance to read some of the stories developed at the workshop.



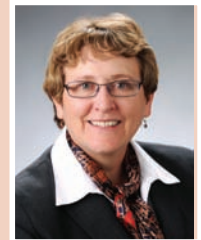
BEVIN LAW
Vice President
Kansas Association
of Conservation Districts



My name is Bevin Law. I represent the Kansas Association of Conservation Districts. I farm in north central Kansas and use no-till practices to help improve my soils and use rotational grazing with my cows to improve native grass stands in my pastures.

My family has worked the land since my great-grandparents homesteaded here 135 years ago. With that history, I am proud to say my family will not do anything that we think will harm that environment. It is with great pleasure and a sense of responsibility that I am a member of the Kansas Association of Conservation Districts board and try to help others with their efforts to improve their farming efforts.

JOYCE SWARTZENDRUBER
State Conservationist
U.S. Natural Resources
Conservation Service
Bozeman, Montana



My name is Joyce Swartzendruber. I lead the overall activities of the U.S. Natural Resources Conservation Service in Bozeman, Mont. Our 300 employees meet directly with farmers and ranchers on their land and help them figure out how to improve their resources.

For example, our engineers design erosion control structures and irrigation systems. Our agronomists help farmers with cropping systems that will make soil healthier and more resistant to erosion. We have range specialists who map out the grasses and plants on grazing lands, which can develop more efficient livestock management.

Our agency provides all of this assistance in partnership with local conservation districts made up of landowners who help us set priorities about what resources need the most attention. We have a network of professional conservationists all across the U.S. who serve at the county level and our assistance is open to anyone, including you.

boosting the signal

Sharing Your Conservation Message Online

Here at NACD, we often talk about the importance of sharing your conservation message. Our last issue of *The Resource* discussed ways to connect with your lawmakers, from district tours to lobby days to visits on Capitol Hill. And in this issue, you've read about the importance of having an "elevator speech." But a lobby day or Hill visit is only one day a year, to only a handful of listeners; and an "elevator speech" is most useful at the local level, with your neighbors, colleagues and others in your community.

While these are important and extremely valuable tools, imagine if you also had the ability to share your conservation story with thousands of people in a single day, by the mere click of a mouse. Now, more than ever, many districts, agencies and associations are turning to "social media" to do just that.

Social media, which includes online applications such as Facebook, YouTube and Twitter, is another way to make that necessary personal connection. It's a way to make sure your voice is heard, and another carrier of NACD's message: that conservation affects everyone.

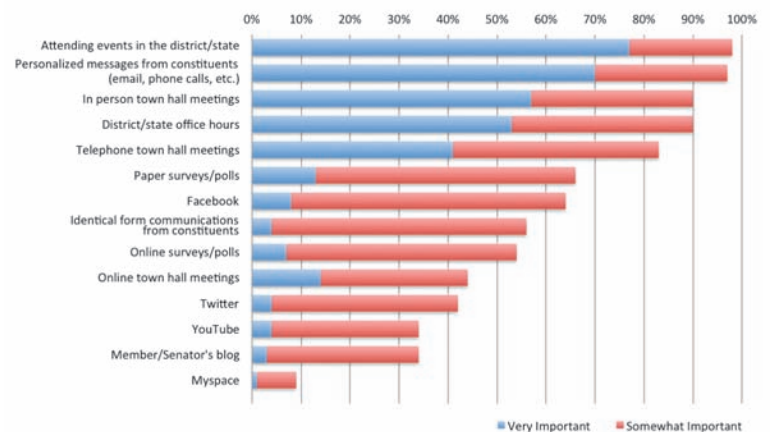
NACD's first social media venture has been the creation of a Facebook page at facebook.com/conservationdistricts. Through Facebook, we've been able to increase our association's visibility, build and maintain professional contacts, showcase the work of districts across the country, and promote brands,

products, meetings and other events that further the mission of locally-led conservation.

At this year's Summer Legislative Conference, members attended a social media workshop led by The Beekeeper Group, a Washington, D.C.-based communications consulting company specializing in grassroots advocacy. "Kicking Your Conservation Message into High Gear" taught attendees how to develop powerful messages and communications tools to effectively share the message of conservation with their local community and policymakers.

Though some might think that Facebook is only a way to reach the younger generation, Beekeeper says that the fastest-growing age demographics for the site are women ages 35-45 and 45-56. Facebook is also a great way to connect directly with lawmakers, Beekeeper Group says, as many Members of Congress read their own social media pages. According to a recent Beekeeper poll, more than 50 percent of communications staffers believe Facebook to be an important way to understand constituents' views and opinions.

In your opinion, how important are the following for understanding constituents' views and opinions?*



*Question was only asked of senior managers and communications staffers.



MARK SNEDEKER

Supervisor
Sanborn County Conservation District,
South Dakota

Hello. I'm Mark. I am a member of the South Dakota Association of Conservation Districts, a farmer, husband, father of five boys and grandfather of one boy. As a farmer, I make a living from a non-renewable resource - the soil. As a member of the local conservation district, I help others to be good stewards of the soil and our environment.

The conservation district helps landowners to protect their land, homes and livestock. By protecting their homes and livestock, everyone has a better quality of life and can be more profitable

Social media can be used for a variety of purposes, including: brand and crisis management, media relations and community-building. Your Facebook page, Twitter feed and YouTube channel can reach journalists, bloggers, customers, constituents and policymakers.

The St. Joseph County Soil & Water Conservation District of Indiana has successfully reached a broad audience through the combination of traditional media outlets, a website and a number of social media platforms, including Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. Administrative Assistant

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boosting the signal

Lisa Wynn admits while there have been a few challenges, it was nothing that couldn't be resolved with a little practice and trouble-shooting.

"I think one of the largest barriers that comes with social media is comfort," Wynn said. "In order to engage others on the internet, they must be comfortable with the medium and on the other hand, in order to use social media effectively; you must also be comfortable using it."

Wynn also describes social media usage as a "push-pull" strategy.

"One of the biggest challenges we've faced with our district is getting the word out," she said. "We've been trying to engage our users so that they're not just reading something, they're interacting with it. By keeping people interested in what we're doing, we are hoping that they'll spread the word to their friends; that way they're getting the information they want and we're getting more viewers on our page." Check out their page at: www.stjoseph.iaswcd.org.

Expanding NACD's Online Presence

Not only has NACD expanded its audience through social media, the association has also seen improved website traffic. In the last six months, nacdn.net.org has seen over 69,000 visits, with viewers in over 160 countries. Besides the home page, the most-visited pages are: Stewardship & Education (primarily the Clip Art and Poster Contest pages), NACD News and the Events Calendar.

The website averages between 8-10,000 hits per month, with the top traffic referrals (links to the NACD website) from USDA and NRCS. NACD's weekly email newsletter eNotes also accounts for a significant percentage of hits. Between 30-50 percent of all web traffic is from Google, with top keywords including: NACD, National

Association of Conservation Districts, Nacdn.net.org and Poster Contest.

How are Districts Using the Web?

This summer, nearly 200 districts participated in an NACD survey related to district websites.

"The survey provided a great deal of insight when it comes to the successes and challenges districts face in building and maintaining a website," said NACD Communications Director Bethany Shively.

About 85 percent of the districts surveyed have websites, with about half of those responding that they update their sites on a monthly basis. The 15 percent that did not have websites at the time of the survey cited reasons including high costs, lack of staffing or lack of interest.

"Based upon the survey results, it's clear that districts face a variety of obstacles in their efforts to become more actively engaged in online communications," Shively said. "But whether it's building a website or implementing a social media strategy, with the right tools and use of resources, any district can use the web effectively, no matter their budget or size."

A great example is the Worcester County Conservation District in Massachusetts (WCCD). By partnering with their state NRCS office on the creation and maintenance of a website, WCCD was able to cut costs and reduce the amount of stress placed on district staff. With its simple, easy-to-use layout, the website is proof that with a little hard work and imagination, any district can create a channel to spread their conservation message. Check it out at www.seedlingsale.org.

On the state level, the Arkansas Association of Conservation Districts

(ARACD) has implemented a new initiative to help every district develop a website of its own. Their goal is to have every district on the web by July 2012.

"Landowners are increasingly turning to the internet for information on conservation programs and practices," ARACD Program Administrator Debbie Moreland said. "In our commitment to ensuring that districts are more efficient and effective, having their own website is just one more tool."



ANGELA EHLERS

Executive Director
South Dakota Association of
Conservation Districts

My name is Angela and I facilitate a better environment for you and your family.

By working with the officials of your local conservation district, we can make a difference in keeping our water clean, our soil healthy, our air clear and our future brighter.

The area north of Sioux Falls, S.D. provides the drinking water for over 100,000 people. By bringing together natural resources experts and financial incentives to assist the local landowners and producers, we ensure that water is safe to drink - and save the city thousands of dollars by not having to expand their water treatment facilities.

Do you have a concern we could sit down and discuss?