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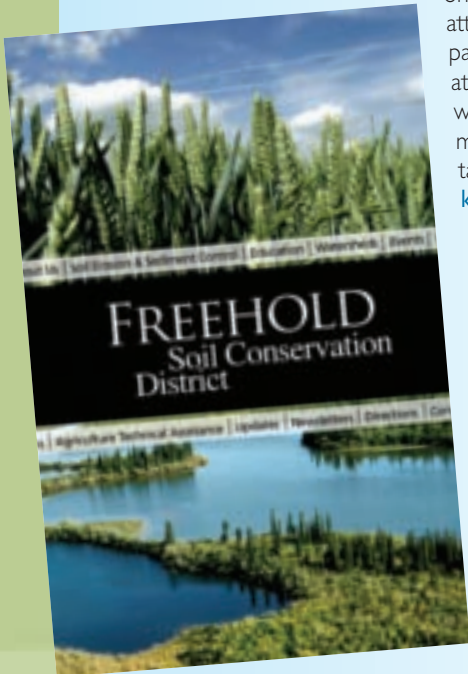
REACHING OUT THROUGH THE WEB

Freehold Soil Conservation District, NJ

After the Freehold Soil Conservation District in New Jersey celebrated their 70th anniversary, they realized that, even though the district had been a part of the community for 70 years, the majority of residents in its two-county area had no idea who the district was or what they did. The district decided they needed to make a change and market themselves to a broader audience.

The change came in the form of a redesign of the district's website. The district felt its website was the communication tool with the most potential to reach the largest possible audience. Freehold SCD also acknowledged that an online presence is important to public outreach and that their 10-year-old site was stagnant and had a dated design. The district hired a web designer and built a new easily-navigable site that had a more polished and professional look and feel and up-to-date, relevant information, including an electronic copy of the district newsletter.

The new site, <http://www.freeholdscd.org/> was launched in early 2008. Since its launch, the district has noticed increased communications from within their two county-range as well as on the state level. They attribute it in a large part to their new attractive and usable website design. For more information, contact Karen Rowe at krowe@freeholdscd.org.



Selective Exposure

*Those that are
Exposed
to the material*



Selective Attention

*Those that
Notice
the material*



Communicating the availability of, need for and successes of conservation districts is one of the most important things a conservation district is tasked with. It determines community awareness, affects funding, builds or tears down image and credibility, impacts customer base and much more. While many aspects of communication seem simple and straightforward, a successful outreach plan can be challenging to implement.

Put on your marketing hat for a moment and think about what it takes to connect with customers. In essence, every member of your community is your customer. In the marketing world, it is understood that only a small portion of the population will be exposed to your materials. Of that portion, only some will pay attention. Only a subset of that smaller group will understand what they see, and even fewer will retain it.

The following checklist highlights some of the most important steps to achieving success in outreach efforts, whether in a one time promotion or an overall communication plan.

Know your audience Just as a one-size-fits-all approach would be a miserable failure in the retail world, trying to reach all members of the population with the same message is not effective. Outreach efforts need to target specific audiences and the message must be tailored to fit that group. Your audience subsets will likely vary on many levels, including the way they prefer to receive information, the information they are interested in and the time they have to absorb information.

Improving your understanding of your audience and adapting your materials will allow more of your audience to reach the retention stage.

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Have a plan Strategic communication plans are a critical first step to improving your outreach efforts. Below are a few things that a complete communications plan should include:

- ✓ **Context:** What has happened before? Is there history?
- ✓ **Environmental Scan:** What are others saying and doing?
- ✓ **Stakeholder Analysis:** Who are your stakeholders and how will they react?
- ✓ **Objectives:** What do you want to achieve?
- ✓ **Strategy:** Where are you going and why?
- ✓ **Audiences:** Who are the key audiences?
- ✓ **Messages:** What are you saying?
- ✓ **Tactics:** How will you implement your strategy?
- ✓ **Issues:** What problems may you have to overcome?
- ✓ **Budget:** What will it cost?
- ✓ **Evaluation:** How will you know if you've been successful?

For more information on communication plans, a simple online search will help you locate sample plans and additional questions to answer in each of the above elements.

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SEEKING NON-TRADITIONAL AUDIENCES

Clackamas County Soil and Water Conservation District, OR

Clackamas County Soil and Water Conservation District in Oregon is a great example of how seeking out and targeting new, untraditional audiences can create new opportunities for districts. Over the last several years, the district noticed a higher percentage of the population of their largely rural county were high-income, urban homeowners. Most of these high-income homeowners were more interested in golf-course-green lawns and manicured landscaping than nature-scaping with native plants and backyard conservation. The Clackamas County SWCD recognized that in order to appeal to these non-traditional customers, they had to switch gears and adjust their message.

In the fall of 2006, the district began a campaign to appeal to this new audience. One of its major efforts was to get involved and advertise with the Home Builder

Association's annual "Street of Dreams" event, which draws in thousands of homeowners, home builders, related companies and media.

This involvement resulted in increased media coverage, requests for workshops, new partnerships and new funding opportunities. The district created a half-page ad targeted at urban homeowners, published in the "Street of Dreams"

magazine. The ad's message, "Conservation has curb appeal," was intended to appeal to homeowners who wanted golf-course-green lawns rather than nature-scape landscaping. For more information, contact Rick Gruen at Rick.Gruen@or.nacdnet.net.



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Develop the message

Effective messages are:

...**clear** - Ask yourself "Who cares?" when preparing your message. Interested parties should be able to read or listen to the information and easily understand the point, and why it is relevant to them.

...**concise** - Providing too much or too little information is confusing, and can cause your customer to lose interest in your materials.

...**consistent** - A consistent message is critical to credibility. Would your conservation district's employees say the same thing as your board members if asked the same question? Ensuring that everyone in your organization is on message will help keep your communication consistent.

...**current** - In the information age, we have come to expect real-time updates. Electronic communication forms such as websites are an effective way to provide up-to-date information that anyone can access.

In addition to being clear, concise and consistent and current, messages must be repeated. Customers cannot retain a message if they miss the exposure stage. Often people need to be exposed to information multiple times before they retain it, so after you tell them, tell them again!

IT'S ALL IN THE BRAND

South Dakota Association of Conservation Districts, SD

South Dakota's conservation districts take seriously the axiom, "You get just one chance to make a first impression." Over the years, the South Dakota Association of Conservation Districts had consistently heard one major grievance from its member districts: no one knows who or what we are. So, in an effort to increase name recognition and consumer buy-in of the conservation districts' message, the South Dakota Association has taken steps to implement a coordinated marketing program with an easily identifiable brand.

The Association hired Insight Marketing of Sioux Falls to assist them in developing a relevant logo and outreach materials. The first materials created focused on daily outreach—letterhead, envelopes, business cards, stick-on labels and informational brochures. Since then, the Association has branded standard items like caps, shirts, jackets, name badges and their website, as well as more unique items such as cable TV public service announcements, vehicles, business card-sized mints/toothpicks, lapel pins and rain gauges.

During this process, the Association not only learned a lot about marketing, but learned the importance of taking every positive opportunity they can to put their brand in front of South Dakotans. People support that which they know, according to South Dakota Executive Director Angela Ehlers, and in this day of

information overload, it is crucial to

find creative ways to get people to notice you and understand your message. For more information, contact Angela Ehlers

at sdacd.mail@sdconservation.org

The South Dakota Association of Conservation Districts makes a concerted effort to ensure their name, logo and image is easily recognized. Above is a sampling of the branded products and materials the association and its districts utilize.



Maintain a consistent image

A brand is a name, logo, slogan or design that is associated with a product or service. Branding is critical to get customers to recognize materials as belonging to something they know and are interested in.

NACD encourages conservation districts to use a similar recognizable logo and has artwork available <http://www.nacdnet.org/resources/logos/> for individual districts to use.

Branding can be used in everything you print, record or produce. Suggested places you can include your logo and a common design feel are stationary, envelopes, websites, name badges, apparel, business cards, vehicles, handouts and more.

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Connection Count

Be creative

We are exposed to massive amounts of information each day. Consumers use selective exposure to seek out or avoid information. What if the same methods and messages conservation districts used 15 years ago have lost their edge? Take a critical look at the tools you are using and determine whether or not they will truly capture the attention of your intended audience.

Pursue new audiences

Many of conservation districts' traditional outreach sources are still critical to accomplishing a district's mission. It's imperative to communicate with producers, local media, legislators, community leaders, schools and others. But taking time to pursue unique partnerships in your community could have great payoff. If you live in a college town, form a relationship with the professors in your areas of work or begin a college internship program. Connect with special interest groups or outdoor clubs in your area.

Remember the value of a walking advertisement

Often a "two-legged advertisement" or a person who speaks highly of your conservation district or organization can carry far more weight than a full-blown marketing plan. As you seek to communicate the need for and value of your work within your community, working with community leaders, members of the media and partnering organizations can be a positive and cost-effective way to spread your message.

Establish relationships with lawmakers, provide regular press releases to members of your local media, seek opportunities for joint projects and events with other like-minded organizations. Relationship building is a low-cost addition to your communication efforts that can have a very high payoff.

FOSTERING MEDIA RELATIONS

Muskingum Soil and Water Conservation District, OH

Muskingum Soil and Water Conservation District, winner of NACD's 2008 Communications Award, knows the important role relationships with the media play in getting the district's message out. The district's goal in its media relations is to let the public know what soil and water conservation is all about and who to call with questions about natural resource concerns.

In order to increase the district's presence within the community, Muskingum SWCD has dedicated a lot of time and effort into building and maintaining relationships with their local print, radio and broadcast media outlets. The district actively submits articles for publication in the local paper, sends public services announcements to radio stations and cable providers. The district even has a 10 to 15 minute television interview with the local news channel, aired twice a month. Topics covered include district events and natural resource concerns that affect many of the county residents on a personal level.

The district feels its media outreach efforts have yielded great results. Their public events are always well-attended, and their district office regularly fields questions from local residents who have seen, heard or read about district events or programs. "Muskingum SWCD has a great relationship with local

media outlets and strives to promote conservation district events, activities and important environmental issues," says Muskingum SWCD staff member Denise Liggett. For more information, contact Denise Liggett at denise.liggett@muskingumswcd.org.



Ohio's Muskingum SWCD invests time and effort into maintaining strong relationships with media. In the photo on the left, district staff member Denise Liggett wraps an interview with Brian Wagner of WHIZ TV.



Smithsonian Soils Exhibit Opens for Visitors

Participants at the NACD Legislative Conference were some of the first to see the newly-opened "DIG IT! The Secret of Soil" exhibit at the Smithsonian Natural History Museum. The state soil monoliths featured in the display were like celebrities waiting to have their pictures taken with conservation district supervisors and others. The exhibit's design appeals to all ages. In the exhibit you will be able to help solve a soil crime scene mystery, learn the difference between silt, sand and clay as well as understand the importance of soils across the globe. Education materials designed in partnership with NACD, Smithsonian and the Soil Science Society of America will soon be available at the NACD marketplace and the Museum store. Learn more at www.nacdnet.org.

NACD IN ACTION

DISTRICTS AT WORK...Adapting to Emerging Needs

Marion County Soil & Water Conservation District, Indianapolis, IN



Marion District Supervisor Dennis Slaughter eagerly awaits visitors to the District's Earth Day booth so he can discuss backyard conservation at a downtown Indianapolis Earth Day event.

The Marion County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) is working to meet the emerging urban/suburban natural resource needs in Indianapolis, Indiana. Major land use changes have shifted workload priorities to homeowner and development erosion and sediment control, water quality and drainage issues, green space protection and enhancement, and invasive species control. Even with the increased urban/suburban workload, the SWCD still assists its remaining farmers on their 24,000 acres, including the home farm of U.S. Senator Richard Lugar.

The District is using the skills of their staff to meet the more traditional natural resource challenges. They are also finding that with new clients, they need to do a better job of creating awareness about practices like bio-swales and rain gardens. This means the SWCD has had to broaden their technical abilities and focus more on their communication/outreach efforts. Carrying out new outreach activities for new clientele has particularly been a problem, as federal support has lessened, and local and state funding have

remained level for over five years. To reach more people with less resources and funding requires new efforts and skills.

The SWCD Board has vigorously pursued grants, sought new partners, and asked various groups to become affiliate members to help fund their efforts. Staff members have expanded their skills in marketing, website development and print media efforts. A new logo was developed to indicate the increased urban/suburban roles. The SWCD integrates their printed material (quarterly newsletter, letterhead stationary, business cards, fact sheets, etc.) with a similar look, or "branding", so clientele can recognize their identity on all information items. Mark Kautz, District Chair, says, "We're not totally there yet, but we are working on it."

The SWCD improved their website, making it more user-friendly. They also support multiple watershed efforts, helping these groups with their websites. The District developed an annual two-page activities report, with charts, finding a shorter document has more chances of being reviewed by government and community leaders. They produce a short weekly news release that is shared with more than 25 news print media outlets, and electronically sent to more than 250 community and agency leaders. They found it helps to keep the SWCD name in front of the public as often as possible. The District sponsors adult education workshops such as Pond Pro Management, Green Site Planning and Stormwater Management Training.

Due to the District's outreach efforts, supervisors and staff have been recruited to assist a variety of organizational efforts such as the Mayor's Green Print Natural Resources Committee, the Marion County Tree Board, Health by Design, and various working committees of the Hoosier Heartland Resource and Conservation Development Council. They participate in booths at Earth Day in Downtown Indianapolis, the Annual Flower and Patio Show, Arbor Day at State Museum, National Science Fair Day at Convention Center, and even helped host an American Society of Agronomy National Land Use Tour.

Examples of programs and activities, including conservation fact sheets, are available on the District website at www.marionswcd.org. For more information, contact the District at ron-lauster@iaswcd.org.

