

TUALATIN VALLEY WATER DISTRICT STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

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Tualatin Valley Water District



Delivering the Best Water 💧 Service 💧 Value

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INTRODUCTION

“The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place.”

~ George Bernard Shaw, Playwright

This statement can be especially true for water utilities. The challenge for water providers is that they are often invisible to the public until something goes wrong. Customers expect clean, safe water to routinely come out of the tap without a moment's thought, so it is easy for them to take their water provider for granted. Additionally, water utilities historically have been reluctant to actively market themselves (the “silent service”). This under-promotion has far-reaching consequences today. Many people cannot accurately name their water provider. They may have no idea how their water is treated, how much they really use or where their water comes from. This is a tremendous challenge for water utilities, especially when customer rates are increased to fund costly infrastructure improvements. It is a tall order to ask customers to pay more for a service that they may take for granted and know little about. People need additional impressions of their water provider beyond a routine bill statement.

Communicating the need to raise rates to cover the increasing costs of providing water is further challenged in a crowded and evolving media market. The public is constantly bombarded with news from their phones, TVs, computers and tablets. Traditional print media has been declining for a number of years and at the same time digital media is exploding. Where people get their news is changing also. A majority of Millennials (the generation born in the 1980s until about 2000) use Facebook as their primary news source. Millennials are America's largest generational group – this will be the population that bears the brunt of paying for today's capital infrastructure investments. Water utilities must overcome the challenge of being “relatable” to their customers and this is accomplished by communicating more often and more effectively using a wider array of communications channels. Utilities cannot afford to stay mostly silent, offering the illusion of communications with their customers. The stakes are quite simply too high.

Historically, and typical for the industry, Tualatin Valley Water District (TVWD) has maintained a modest public profile. However, TVWD's position is growing as a regional water provider in the Portland metropolitan area. The District's stake in the Willamette Water Supply Program is a game changer for the regional water supply. Customer rates will increase significantly to fund this legacy investment. To sustain positive customer relations over time in the face of increasing rates, TVWD must elevate its brand awareness through targeted and strategic outreach and communications. This Strategic Communications Plan serves as a blueprint to accomplish this important goal.

COMMUNICATION PRINCIPLES, PURPOSE, GOAL & OBJECTIVES

“The two words ‘Information’ and ‘Communication’ are often used interchangeably but they signify quite different things. ‘Information’ is getting out; ‘Communication’ is getting through.”

~ Sydney J. Harris, Journalist

The mission of the TVWD Communications Office is to elevate public support and confidence in TVWD by raising awareness and understanding of the District’s activities and priorities. We facilitate and deliver clear, transparent and engaging communication among the District Board of Commissioners, staff, customers and community.

TVWD’s communications philosophy is to provide audiences with easy-to-understand information using a writing tone that is friendly, approachable and at times conversational. It is important to communicate clearly without jargon or overly technical terminology. The Communications Office should be the final arbiter and “gatekeeper” for the written word and visual look of all District communications.

This plan is based on the following well-regarded Seven Communications Principles (the “Seven Cs”):

1. **Completeness** – Messages contain all of the facts necessary to convey the intent of the communication.
2. **Conciseness** – Messages are complete, yet brief enough that they save time for the sender and receiver.
3. **Consideration** – Messages put the recipient in mind and answer questions from their point of view.
4. **Concreteness** – Messages are specific, definite and vivid, not vague and general.
5. **Clarity** – Messages convey the same intent and meaning that the sender intended.
6. **Correctness** – Messages are accurate, use appropriate tone for the situation, are grammatically correct and choose nondiscriminatory expressions.
7. **Courtesy** – Messages are sincerely tactful, thoughtful and appreciative.

This Strategic Communications Plan serves as the guiding framework for all TVWD communications efforts. It establishes a baseline understanding for how TVWD will provide information to customers, partners and employees; enhance the District’s image; and market our services to customers in a manner that supports TVWD’s vision, mission and values:

Vision – “Deliver the Best – Water, Service, Value”

Mission – “Provide Our Community Quality Water and Customer Service”

Values – “Reliability, Integrity, Stewardship, Excellence and Safety”

For the purposes of this plan, the word “communications” is defined broadly to include information, advocacy, marketing, engagement, government affairs and marketing research.

The overarching goal of this Strategic Communications Plan is to communicate the value of TVWD’s services, and the value of water more broadly, to all District audiences.

The plan's main objectives are to:

- Inform consistent, credible and coordinated messages.
- Support the development of key messages that are grounded in TVWD's vision, mission, values, operational goals and strategic direction.
- Enhance the image of TVWD.
- Effectively promote our services that provide value to the customer experience.
- Identify the key themes, initiatives or projects that are likely to be the focus of most communications and marketing efforts through the current and next biennium (2016 – 2019).

Additionally, this plan provides a framework for consistency and synergy between TVWD communications and the Willamette Water Supply Program (WWSP) communications. As the WWSP transitions from system design into a series of large construction projects, TVWD will become more proactive in communicating these efforts through our ongoing and new communications channels.

TVWD'S AUDIENCES

"Never treat your audience as customers, always as partners."

~ Jimmy Stewart, Actor

For the purposes of targeting messaging and communications, District audiences can be divided into four distinct segments. This is in addition to the general public. Communications may be directed to one or several audiences according to the purpose and desired outcomes of the messaging.

Our Customers – As a special district providing drinking water to a growing population, TVWD's customers are at the heart of most of our communications efforts. However, it is important to keep in mind that "Customers" isn't a singular block, but a diverse array of interests, including:

- Ratepayers (homeowners and businesses)
- Multifamily property owners, renters and managers
- Industrial and commercial users
- Development community
- Institutional users (schools, parks, hospitals, emergency services)
- Facilities and operations managers

Key Influencers – Key influencers refers to TVWD audiences who maintain a measure of influence over District perceptions, reputation, operations and policy. This includes:

- Media
- Informed businesses
- Informed community leaders
- Elected officials in member jurisdictions (Washington County, cities of Beaverton, Hillsboro, Tigard)
- Legislators
- Special interest groups
- Industry and agency leaders and staff

Partners – Partners can also be key influencers. This category refers to interests with whom TVWD regularly coordinates joint activities and/or operations requiring oversight, permitting or regulation. This includes:

- Local, regional, state and federal regulatory agencies
- Technical staff in member jurisdictions
- Local and regional water providers and trade associations

Ourselves – In addition to outreach, it is important to consider "in-reach" with regard to District communications. An informed and engaging Board of Commissioners and staff serve as extensions of District communications activities. By providing everyone with access to District messaging, tools and outreach activities, we can all be ambassadors for TVWD in the community.

CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES

“Opportunity is missed by most people because it is dressed in overalls and looks like work.”

~ Thomas A. Edison, Inventor

Through traditional communications vehicles such as newsletters, bill inserts, consumer confidence reports and media releases, TVWD has been “getting the word out” about its operations and programs for many years. But has the organization been “getting through” to its customers? To a degree, yes, based on the District’s most recent Customer Survey (DHM Research, 2014). The following key themes are apparent from the survey results:

- TVWD is starting from a strong foundation – customers know TVWD, have a positive impression and are generally satisfied with their water service.
- Reliability continues to be the primary issue for customers. TVWD can leverage this through the following reliability messages:
 - Adequate supply to maintain good tasting water
 - Maintain good quality of life
 - Protect community health
 - Adequate supply for fire protection and emergencies
- Messaging around water for job creation has weakened. Instead, TVWD should focus on reliability, seismic resiliency and quality of life.
- Customers are less concerned about owning the source of water. Messages around this will require more in-depth explanation and understanding.

This survey was conducted two years ago, well before the lead in drinking water concerns were raised locally and nationally. It is a safe bet that a current survey would reflect higher concerns about health and safety of drinking water. This assumption can be tested in the 2016 customer survey to be conducted later this year.

Challenges

Little understanding of TVWD’s water sources

Few TVWD customers fully understand where their water comes from –The Joint Water Commission and/or Bull Run, supplemented by aquifer storage in summer months. The implications of being a wholesale customer to the City of Portland are not well understood either. This makes messaging around turning to the Willamette River more complicated, especially when some people mistakenly believe that the Mid-Willamette is a poor water source.

Customer understanding about the need to raise rates

Few people want to pay more for an existing service when there is no perceived change. As noted earlier, it is a hard sell asking customers to contribute toward solving a problem that they don’t even know they have. Many District customers are unaware of TVWD’s role in the WWSP or what it means for customer rates over the next several years. Communicating rate messages is further complicated by

issues outside of TVWD's control (e.g., increases in companion sewer, storm and surface water charges or the rights-of-way fees being charged by cities).

Linking customer rates with benefits

Water and wastewater are the "invisible" utilities. Much of the infrastructure to support the delivery of clean, safe water is out of sight or underground. While a transportation improvement is typically immediately apparent and experienced by the public, upgraded water infrastructure is usually not so obvious to the consumer. The District must continually communicate the importance of investments in system improvements and how they benefit the community.

Getting the word out

Traditional communications (media releases, bill inserts, newsletters) are necessary but typically have low impact. For example, industry focus groups and customer surveys have shown repeatedly that bill inserts frequently are not read by customers. Advertising is expensive. In-person outreach is time consuming, but is the best way to meaningfully connect with customers. Additionally, TVWD has refrained from using social media in District communications in the past. To reach our audiences, the District must deliver messages frequently and broadly in a manner that is compelling and easily-digestible. More in-person customer outreach is also needed to develop and sustain customer relationships over time.

Opportunities

Water is vital

Water is among the few physical requirements for human survival. It is no surprise that drinking water quality is the number one environmental concern for Oregonians (DHM Research, 2014 Values and Beliefs Survey). Unlike other services that could be deemed optional, TVWD is a purveyor of an essential requirement for life and this should continue to be part of our messaging.

TVWD is starting from a good place

The District's customer satisfaction surveys routinely reveal very high level of service satisfaction from our customers (95% in 2014). This provides an easier starting point for framing communications and having the messages heard by customers. However, it may be difficult to sustain such strong satisfaction levels in the face of repeated rate increases and other issues (payment card industry compliance, etc.). The best defense is a good offense when it comes to maintaining customer satisfaction.

Social media + visual communications = raised awareness

Utilizing new media channels will enhance TVWD's community profile. Social media and visual communications will be explored at greater length in this document. Actively working social media channels will support District messaging while reaching new audiences. Visual communications such as online videos and infographics will bring to life District activities that may be otherwise invisible to our audiences.

Enhanced customer outreach + engagement = raised awareness

Meeting with and speaking with customers directly is the best way to establish a meaningful connection. Focused customer relationship building through additional face-to-face targeted customer outreach will

educate customers, foster understanding and awareness, and help establish a base of goodwill. In-person customer engagement can happen through TVWD-staffed community events, customer meetings, community involvement in capital projects, enhanced key customer outreach and other in-person meeting opportunities.

Leveraging regional partnerships

“Go it alone” is rarely the best strategy. Eighty-six percent of the District’s customers want TVWD to develop partnerships with local communities to share costs and expenses (DHM Research, 2014). Partnership is the reason behind the District’s participation in the WWSP, which is one of several collaborative efforts being undertaken by TVWD. The District maintains a longstanding partnership with Clean Water Services that could be further leveraged for other strategic initiatives. New partnerships include the emerging Washington County lead hazard reduction program and the recently established Water Communicators Network subcommittee through the Regional Water Providers Consortium.

Willamette Water Supply Program cross promotion

The WWSP is TVWD’s largest single initiative and will be for the foreseeable future. Program communications include branding, a website, visual communications and targeted outreach. As the WWSP moves from design and into construction, there will be ample opportunities for TVWD to cross-promote program outreach activities and project updates in coordination with WWSP staff, especially in the areas of online information and social media outreach. Cross-promoting will help demonstrate the link for District customers between water rates and their new regional water supply system.

TVWD BRAND

“A brand is no longer what we tell the consumer it is, it is what consumers tell each other it is.”

~ Scott Cook, Intuit CEO

TVWD was formed in 1991 with the merger of the Wolf Creek Highway Water District and the Metzger Water District. Neither district maintained a strong visual identity or what could be considered a logo prior to the merger. The first visual identity, a variation of the current TVWD logo, was developed in 1991 with the “wave” graphic on top of the organizational name in Garamond font. This was slightly altered in 2004 with the same “wave” positioned below the name and the font changed to Times New Roman. The District’s vision statement “Delivering the Best Water, Service, Value” was incorporated into the logo in 2013.

TVWD has maintained essentially the same corporate brand for 25 years. Except for quintessential, universally-recognized brands such as Ford and Coca-Cola, organizations and brands typically refresh their corporate identities every decade or so. This often involves restyling logos, color palettes, visual language and the photographic style. Recognizing when it is time to re-brand may seem difficult, but several situations can necessitate an identity makeover including:

1. Mergers/acquisitions (as noted above)
2. Name changes (as noted above)
3. Repositioning within the industry
4. Overcoming a difficult reputation
5. Desire to reach new audiences
6. Modernization
7. Internationalization
8. Changing marketsj
9. New leadership



It can be argued that items 3, 5 and 6 above are applicable to TVWD concerning our brand today. The WWSP is certainly *repositioning* TVWD within the regional water supply system, elevating the District’s role and reputation. In order to successfully complete the Willamette Water Supply System, the District must raise rates, which requires *reaching new audiences* to develop and maintain customer understanding and acceptance. Finally, the District’s brand requires *modernization*. The current brand was developed during the first Bush administration when the Dow Jones industrial average topped 3,000 for the first time. A lot has changed. Times New Roman with its serif lettering is rarely seen in contemporary corporate branding; the font is usually limited to long blocks of body copy. And what does the “wave” really say about the District and its values?

This Strategic Communications Plan proposes a re-brand of TVWD. A refreshed organizational image is overdue and will be more compatible with the implementation of the new visual communications strategy. Re-branding is a specialized process that requires broad organizational commitment, time, funding and the support of professional brand consultants. The Communications Office recommends discussing this subject with the Board of Commissioners and, if approved, budgeting for this activity as a first priority of implementation.

CORE STRATEGIES

“Of all our inventions of communication, pictures still speak the most universally understood language.”

~ Walt Disney, Animator

Whether for a District-wide communications campaign or a targeted outreach initiative, TVWD shall take an *integrated* approach with the recognition that no single way of communicating effectively reaches all segments of the intended audience. Some people read bill inserts; many do not. It is difficult to gauge the effectiveness of bill statements. Electronic and printed newsletters are dependent on having comprehensive and up-to-date mailing lists to be useful. Most customers go directly to the TVWD website for information, which is a good thing, yet presents its own set of challenges for us currently. Very little of what the District communicates to customers is presented in a visual format. These are among the communications issues that must be addressed by TVWD moving forward.

TVWD’s research shows that customers support the District and have a positive overall impression of their water provider. However, nearly half of customers do not know TVWD’s water sources and about one third believe their water rates (as of 2014) are unreasonable. There is also a lack of overall awareness of the move to the Mid-Willamette River as a new regional water source. Therefore, materials and messaging should be informative, visually compelling and frequent enough to raise the overall level of awareness of the District’s programs and services. Greater customer understanding will benefit the District when ratepayer acceptance is needed, as it will be easier to gain informed consent when people understand the issues and tradeoffs between their rates and maintaining reliable, safe drinking water.

Communications tactics will:

- Keep it simple, explaining the basics
- Connect the dots between rates and programs, demonstrating value
- Expand community and customer education, with a focus on developing relationships
- Collect feedback, providing two-way communication opportunities
- Show, not just tell, making things visual

The last point is important and a major change to TVWD’s past communications practices. We are *all* visual learners; pictures remain in our minds for a lot longer than abstract concepts and words. Memory retention after a week goes from 10% to 65% when pictures are used (John Medina, *Brain Rules* 2009). TVWD must seek to balance written material with engaging visuals that show District programs and activities in addition to our people and facilities. Highlighting our customers’ experiences with their water provider will further demonstrate TVWD’s vital role in our community.

As the public moves to more visual communications, successful mediums include:

- New and updated images that reflect the District’s work, values and personality.
- Infographics and other visuals that showcase water treatment and distribution for use in ratepayer and stakeholder communications.
- Videos and animation on the website and District YouTube channel, electronic newsletters, in social media and partner communications.

TOOLS & TACTICS

Ongoing: External

“There are no traffic jams along the extra mile.”

~ Roger Staubach, Football Player

The District has a variety of ongoing communications tools and outreach efforts which have served the organization well throughout the years. This Strategic Communications Plan does not propose to eliminate any of them, but it does take a critical look at their perceived effectiveness with an eye toward improvement.

WWW.TVWD.ORG: TVWD’s website is the primary communications outlet for the District. Almost all District messages, information and public documents are stored on the site. Seventy-eight percent of District customers indicated it is their go-to location for receiving TVWD information (DHM Research, 2014). Most businesses, organizations, agencies and groups use their websites as the ultimate destination for all of their communications mediums, and TVWD is no exception.

TVWD’s website was originally created in the late 1990s and was maintained by the Engineering Department. When dedicated communications staff were hired in 2002, the former Office of Communications and Intergovernmental Relations took over the site. It was last re-designed in 2008, and it shows. The District’s homepage is based on the open source Umbraco content management system (CMS). While the platform is free to use, it can be cumbersome to update. More importantly, TVWD does not have a web designer on staff, which limits the full functionality of a freeware program like Umbraco.

A visit to the TVWD website is a journey through excessive text and hyperlinks with a distinct lack of logical organization or visuals. It can be difficult to know where to look to find needed information. For example, not counting the menu bar, there are 35 hyperlinks on the current homepage alone. WWW.TVWD.ORG has the distinct look and feel of a 1990s-era website that has been updated in an ad hoc manner over the years without an overall master plan guiding functionality and content management.

This Strategic Communications Plan proposes development of an entirely new TVWD website built on a new, cloud-based content management system that is more user-friendly and capable of supporting modern visual and social media communications tools. It also should be smart phone- and tablet-friendly. **The success of the new visual communications strategy is dependent upon a new website capable of supporting it.** The District’s utility billing system is obviously an important component of any CMS upgrade.

As with re-branding, this is a specialized process that requires broad organizational commitment, time (particularly from District IT staff), funding, staff training and the support of professional consultants. The Communications Office recommends discussing this subject with the Board of Commissioners and, if approved, budgeting for this activity in the next biennium.

B.I.G Newsletter: “B.I.G.” stands for Business, Industry, Government. The first BIG Newsletter was distributed in February 2008. The goal was to disseminate specialized messages through an occasional

newsletter to the District’s non-residential customers. Production is intended to be quarterly but a couple times a year has been more typical. Much of the messaging to BIG customers is equally applicable to residential customers also. Past issues have tended to focus on WWSP updates and conservation messages. The format of the newsletter has not changed and the publication is due for a re-design.

This Strategic Communications Plan proposes re-naming the B.I.G. Newsletter to something more appropriate to all TVWD audiences. To solicit Board and staff input, a “Name the Newsletter” contest could be held. The new format newsletter will be produced quarterly and delivered in print to an updated BIG customer mailing list as well as made available electronically by e-subscription through the TVWD website. The publication needs an updated format and fresh design with a companion editorial calendar to schedule stories in advance that are relevant to District initiatives, industry news and WWSP updates. The revised newsletter will be our primary District newsletter outside of bill inserts.

Water Words: TVWD distributes Water Words and a Beaverton version of Water Words in the bi-monthly bill statements. Since 1995, Water Words has been shared with Clean Water Services, and each agency rotates front page news placement every other billing cycle. Beaverton Water Words goes to customers who aren’t billed directly from Clean Water Services, so TVWD information is on both sides. No changes are proposed beyond editorial calendaring and closer content coordination with Clean Water Services communications staff.

Annual Report: TVWD’s Annual Report contains information about the District and its accomplishments over the previous fiscal year. The annual report has had many different looks and has ranged from 2-12 pages. It usually contains information concerning finances, water provided, major capital projects, water quality and unique events or situations that staff want to share. It is available electronically, and a limited number of hard copies are printed. Apart from an updated format with refreshed design for the next and future issues, no significant changes are recommended.

Consumer Confidence Report (CCR, Water Quality Report): Every water system is required to publish a water quality report that includes a list of contaminants found in the water. The Oregon Health Authority requires TVWD to notify customers about the availability of the report by July 1 every year. The CCR used to be mailed to every customer with water bills or as a standalone document for those who don’t receive a water bill directly from TVWD. However, beginning in 2013 TVWD began mailing postcards and directing those interested in the report to the website. TVWD staff will internally print and mail copies to customers who request a hard copy. In 2016, the CCR postcard also included an invitation to the District’s Lead and Water Quality Community Forum. Future notices and CCR reports offer a similar opportunity to combine District messages.

Brochures: TVWD produces a variety of subject-specific brochures to distribute depending on the situation (for example, yard irrigation or fixing leaks). Brochures include both those produced by TVWD and the Regional Water Providers Consortium. Re-formatting any of our routine informational brochures is probably best to leave following a re-brand of the organization.

Direct Outreach: The District occasionally conducts in-person outreach to customers and stakeholders at District-sponsored meetings and community events. This activity builds stronger relationships than those afforded by passive communications and should be prioritized. Among the direct outreach approaches that TVWD can conduct include:

- Inviting stakeholders and community leaders to meet at the TVWD boardroom for more District sponsored meetings.
- Continue to pursue staff and Board member speaking opportunities at conferences, community events and at other leadership opportunities, when appropriate.
- Schedule more staff participation at community events, farmers markets, fairs, etc.
- Schedule at least one annual TVWD presentation to CPOs within the District service area. This can be coordinated jointly with the WWSP.
- Conduct additional key customer outreach and engagement.
- Seek out opportunities for direct outreach in partnership with WWSP community activities.
- Seek out opportunities to provide education and outreach about careers in the water industry.
- Leverage these appearances by promoting them (in video, photos or event website links) on the TVWD website and in social media channels, where appropriate.

Youth Education: TVWD maintains a longstanding and robust youth education and outreach program that directly reaches and engages thousands of area grade school students annually (K – 6). Classroom instruction modules include:

- **Source to the Home** - Focusing on the nuts and bolts of getting water to taps, this presentation talks about why water districts are important, where TVWD's water comes from and how water is treated. At the end, students put together a miniature water system.
- **Peat Pot Planting** - After talking about what's needed for gardening and the components of a plant, students learn about water efficient gardening techniques while planting sunflowers they get to take home.
- **Incredible Journey** - Using beads representing different types of water drops, students roll dice representing Mother Nature to travel through the water cycle.
- **Tasting, Tasting, 1, 2, 3** - Students do a blind tasting of tap, distilled and bottled water and discuss what makes water taste different. They also discuss the costs of the different types of water.
- **What's the Matter in the Water Industry** - An interactive presentation that discusses how solids, liquids and gasses are used in the water industry.
- **Where's the Water, Watson (Assembly)** - The mad scientist and Watson the flea take students on a journey to see different uses of water.
- **What Do You Know about H2O?** - A highly interactive show focusing on the science of indoor water conservation.

TVWD staff members also conduct youth outreach and education through an annual Kid's Calendar contest, science fair demonstrations/judging and tours of TVWD's Water Efficient Demonstration Garden. All of this activity directly reaches the District's youngest customers (tomorrow's ratepayers). Recommendations for changes/additions to the youth education program include the following:

- Stronger connections between the students being served and their parents at home who may be unaware of TVWD's school outreach. This could include inexpensive giveaway items that can be taken home or incentives/activities requiring parental signature to be returned to TVWD.
- New, updated classroom modules could include Water Jeopardy, Force/Motion, Filters, Build a Better Water Main or a Home Water Audit.

- Clean Water Services also conducts youth education throughout the area. TVWD could partner with CWS for joint classroom education that describes the complete water journey – into and out of the home.
- More sponsored field trips/buses could include the Joint Water Commission (JWC) treatment plant, capital projects – such as Ridgewood Pump station, or job shadowing such as group water quality sampling.
- Increased emphasis on STEM education (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) and outreach to youth about careers in the water industry.

Customer Emergency Assistance Program: TVWD maintains a customer emergency assistance program to provide temporary financial assistance for customers unable to pay their water bills. The program is administered through Care to Share, a Beaverton-based non-profit organization. The program has been included in the District’s outreach efforts, but more could be done to highlight the program and its results in the community.

The District’s Rate Advisory Committee (RAC) is evaluating TVWD’s rate affordability and will be making policy recommendations to the Board. This may affect how Care to Share is organized and administered. This Strategic Communications Plan recommends waiting until after the RAC process is complete in early 2017 to make any substantive changes to how this important program is marketed.

TOOLS & TACTICS

Ongoing: Internal

*“Everyone talks about building a relationship with your customer.
I think you build one with your employees first.”*

~ Angela Ahrendts, Apple Vice President

TVWD’s closest, most informed stakeholders are the internal ones – District Board members and staff who conduct the business of the organization every day. TVWD employees and Board members can be utilized as ambassadors of the District’s brand. Many employees serve on the front lines and are the first point of contact with the community. They should be provided with key messages and communications tools, where appropriate, to further the District’s relationship-building with customers. Their feedback also can be important in shaping District messages and tactics. Additionally, TVWD employees and Board members can provide a foundation upon which to build the social media strategy since many personally utilize social media applications.

Ideas for expanded internal strategic communications include:

- A staff brown bag or all-employee meeting presentation of this document.
- Soliciting employee contributions (incentives?) to publications such as Paycheck News and the Thursday Memo. Converting the documents themselves from PDFs to e-newsletters.
- More employee communications training such as the 2016 media training.
- Actively include employee and Board involvement in the social media applications rollout.
- Communications Office staff presentations to each department staff meeting at least annually.
- Job shadowing with field operations and water quality staff to capture video/photo imagery and for social media content.
- Closer Communications Office coordination with Engineering on community outreach associated with capital improvement projects.
- Annual/ongoing Communications Office update at Board work sessions.

NEW TOOLS

“Social media replaces nothing but complements everything.”

~ Neal Schaffer, Social Media Consultant

Social media and digital communications don't eliminate anything previously mentioned in this Strategic Communications Plan. Rather, online engagement will complement the messaging and customer outreach associated with all of the District's traditional communications approaches. Repurposing key messages and public information in new ways online is a cost-effective way to reach TVWD's customers more strategically and more frequently. The District's audience is changing with the times, so it's a smart move that we change along with them.

Social media offers enormous potential for TVWD. In essence, it's a new way of reaching and communicating with the District's customers and stakeholders.

- **Reaches audiences where they already are.** Seventy-eight percent of the American public have at least one social media account, with Facebook and Twitter the most popular (Statista, 2016). Leveraging social media within the District's communications strategy is simply accessing channels of information already favored by a large segment of the population.
- **TVWD can communicate every day.** This is a huge benefit over other media, as print advertising, newsletters, mailers, bill statements, etc. go out much less frequently, making it more difficult to get our messages out at the right time.
- **People who respond extend TVWD's reach.** The added benefit is that the people who react to TVWD's social media messages share this with their friends and in essence start communicating and advertising for the District. This can be powerful because it increases the reach of our message, and TVWD's followers become advocates of our message. Added to that, their friends may start reacting and thus increasing the power of TVWD's message exponentially.
- **Content sharing becomes much easier.** Sharing District news, photos, videos, etc. becomes much easier and, in turn, offers TVWD more reasons to develop such content in the first place.
- **Enhances constituent services.** Publicizing seasonal conservation messages or lesser-known District programs such as toilet rebates or Care to Share becomes much easier with more frequent, short messaging afforded by social media.

As TVWD embarks on a social media/digital engagement strategy, we must develop policies to mitigate against potential risks. Some things to consider:

- Issues associated with protection of privacy, quality of information and public perception.
- Make sure social media programs are directed toward producing tangible benefits.
- Consider how social media integrates with the District's core mission.
- Develop social media guidelines for staff, including for personal use.
- Consider how social media will factor into official record keeping, open meetings and public records requests.
- Use available Facebook tools such as news feed, algorithms, instant articles, security settings, comment policy and profanity filter.

- Maintain involvement in the SocialGov community and #GSMCON (annual social media communications conference specific to public agencies) to remain up-to-date on the latest social media applications, best practices, lessons learned and policy implications for the public sector.

This Strategic Communications Plan recommends the following social media additions to TVWD communications:

Facebook

Facebook is currently the most popular social media application. At a glance (Facebook, 2016):

- 198 million monthly active users in the U.S.
- 179 million monthly active on mobile
- 1 out of every 5 mobile minutes are spent on Facebook
- 100 million hours of video watched every day on Facebook
- TVWD partner organizations already using Facebook include Portland Water Bureau, Clean Water Services, Eugene Water and Electric Board, Washington County, and the cities of Beaverton, Hillsboro and Tigard.

TVWD currently has a Facebook account under the name “TVWD” that has no followers and is inactive. A Facebook use policy will be prepared, the account will be activated and an online following initiated with District customers, partners, media and employees.

Twitter

Twitter is currently the second most popular social media application. At a glance (Twitter, 2016):

- 65 million monthly active users in the U.S. (330 million worldwide)
- 80% of users are mobile
- 1 billion tweets every day
- Video growth on Twitter has increased 220% in the past year

TVWD currently has a Twitter account with “@twwaterdistrict” as the Twitter handle. The account has only 49 followers, has never issued a tweet and is essentially inactive. This plan recommends closing that account and establishing a new District Twitter account using the more easily identifiable handle “@TVWDNews”. A Twitter use policy will be prepared, the account will be activated and an online following initiated with the prior followers as well as District customers, partners, media and employees.

Nextdoor

Nextdoor is a social media application designed for neighborhood communications. It is a private social network but the developers maintain a platform specifically for free government agency use. At a glance (Nextdoor, 2016):

- 56% of all U.S. neighborhoods have launched Nextdoor
- All members are verified members of your community; nothing is anonymous
- Messages can be sent to one or many neighborhoods, service areas or the entire District
- Many public agencies are using Nextdoor for community engagement, emergency preparedness, public health and crime prevention

Nextdoor creates a trusted online environment where neighbors feel safe openly discussing issues of concern or interest in their community. Because joining, whether as a resident or public agency, requires verification, nothing can be anonymous. The application is designed to connect neighbors, not friends, therefore it offers perhaps the most grassroots outreach approach to available TVWD beyond door-to-door canvassing. Nextdoor can create a free online account for TVWD using the exact District boundaries simply from shape files provided to them. In fact, Nextdoor can create targeted, defined notification areas and as many as an agency wants. For example, TVWD could create a separate notification area for each pressure zone in addition to one for the entire District.

TVWD presently does not have an account with Nextdoor. This plan recommends contacting Nextdoor in coordination with District IT staff to determine the information needs to develop a customized TVWD account. A Nextdoor use policy will be prepared, an account will be activated and Nextdoor will be incorporated in the District social media outreach implementation.

Online Video and YouTube

Online video content is exploding. It is estimated that two-thirds of world mobile data traffic will be video by 2017. The District already has a YouTube channel, which is primarily used to post Tualatin Valley Community Television videos of Board meetings. It is easy to promote YouTube through the website, Facebook, Twitter and Nextdoor.

As mentioned previously, video brings to life the hidden assets and untold stories of TVWD. Some videos may need to be professionally produced (the District recently secured the services of three professional videography firms under on-call master service agreements). However much can be done with a point and shoot camera and simple online editing applications. An iPhone 6 with an up-to-date operating system contains all the tools needed to shoot, edit, caption and upload simple yet compelling short videos to the District website and YouTube channel. The Communications Office recently purchased a digital camera that is capable of producing the next generation of digital 4K resolution. All that is needed is to invest a modest amount in some additional equipment and software and the District will have all the necessary tools to launch a credible visual communications program.

Suggestions for incorporating video into TVWD outreach and communications include:

- Creating videos about complicated subjects, capital projects and service upgrades
- Telling the stories of District staff using testimonials and “day in the life of” employee profiles; also to aid HR recruiting
- Cross-promoting WWSP outreach activities
- Demonstrating useful tips, conservation/water-saving activities and how to flush for lead in water
- Shedding additional light on hard to learn topics such as the District’s budget process or visually demonstrating how to use the new online payment system
- Promoting the District’s youth education program
- Preparing video news releases in addition to printed media releases
- Providing general b-roll for use by the television media
- Showcasing unique, interesting or fun stories associated with TVWD

MEASURING THE EFFORTS

“We all need people who will give us feedback. It’s how we improve.”

~ Bill Gates, Microsoft Founder

Customer and stakeholder feedback is invaluable in informing the District’s messaging and shaping the overall approach to outreach and communications. TVWD’s primary formal feedback mechanism is a bi-annual, statistically-valid customer survey performed by DHM Research. The survey includes benchmarking questions on topics such as overall impressions of TVWD, satisfaction with rates, support for fluoridation and billing preferences. The next customer survey will be conducted in fall 2016.

Informal customer feedback is routinely collected from customer comments submitted through the website, phone calls, public comments at Board meetings and general impressions of customer concerns and issues provided by the District’s customer service team and field operations and maintenance crews.

Strategies for enhancing TVWD’s research and customer feedback include:

- Using algorithms such as Google analytics to collect data on the District’s website use and social media applications.
- Incorporating more focus group activity into District initiatives such as the upcoming rate study or 2017-2019 biennial budget process.
- Consider joining the Westside Voices online panel maintained by Clean Water Services and Washington County.
- Consider adopting the Eugene Water and Electric Board’s “Customer Research Panel” model which is a focus-group-like quarterly meeting of influential customers that provides feedback and advice on a variety of issues and initiatives, including their annual financials. This could be part of an enhanced Key Customer program.
- Better promote and expand participation in TVWD’s annual Key Customer Breakfast.
- Institute more frequent and comprehensive internal employee surveys.
- Promote survey findings to internal and external audiences; explain how the research is being incorporated into District programs.
- Remain involved in shaping and understanding the research activities conducted by the WWSP, RWPC and other industry partner organizations.