Public engagement, customer focus, and facing common communication challenges

John C. Gonzalez Communications Manager
At a glance

• Our work
• Challenges and solutions
• What works for customers
• Staying prepared
Who we are

- Political subdivision of Ohio
- Created in 1972 by Court Order
- 62 member communities including City of Cleveland
- One million residents
3 treatment plants, 90 billion gallons per year
Our work: What we do

- $3 billion, 25 years
- Combined sewer overflow control
- Sewer fees

- $41 million annually
- Flooding & erosion
- Impervious surface fee
Challenges:

Utility identity
Consent decree
Affordability
Rebuilding trust
Changing media landscape
Introducing a Regional Stormwater Management Program
Solutions:

Strategic communication plan

- Identified key stakeholders
- Aligned engagement strategy with organization’s mission, vision
Solutions:

Strategic communication plan

- Set corresponding goals
  - Media and social media
  - Partnerships
  - Outreach and Education
  - Internal communication
Customer Service, External & Internal Communications

Strategic Plan
2017-2019

Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District
Solutions:

Customer surveys

Customer awareness and satisfaction surveys

• *Four since 2010*
Customer surveys

Key learnings:

- Customers value Lake Erie
- Willing to pay more
- Lack understanding of our work
- TV, radio, social media work
Solutions:

Varied strategies

Outreach and education take many forms to engage customers
Inviting in
Open House 2017
Inviting in
Open House 2017
Reaching out

Rates Roadshows
Creativity

Camp Clean Water
Solutions:

Be stakeholder-specific

Use methods and resources designed especially for your audience's needs
Community benefit

Good Neighbor Program
A news alert for the elected officials in our member communities highlighting key water infrastructure legislative issues and events for which NEO-RSD is advocating on behalf of your constituents and our customers.

SUMMER 2017

Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District
GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS BULLETIN

INFRASTRUCTURE WEEK

The Sewer District was pleased to provide programming in observance of Infrastructure Week 2017. Infrastructure Week is a nationwide effort utilizing high profile events, public education, focused advocacy, television, and print and social media to tell the story of America's infrastructure and the impact it has on our communities, economy, and quality of life. This year, the theme of Infrastructure Week was "It's #TimeToBuild."

The week kicked off on May 15th in Washington, D.C. with an event featuring Transportation Secretary Elaine Chao who discussed the new technologies, projects and

Elected official outreach

#OWEAGovtAffairs @neorsd
Public education
AN IMPORTANT REMINDER FOR OUR CUSTOMERS

Our records indicate that you may be eligible for special savings on your sewer charges! Participating in the Sewer District's Homestead Program may reduce your bill.

A reduced sewer rate is available to customers 65 and older, or anyone under 65 who is totally disabled.

Homestead Program application forms are available from our Customer Service department:

(216) 881-8247

You can apply to the program at any time. Renewal forms are mailed out each year. The renewal deadline is March 31.

There is an annual household income limit that changes each year. Also, to qualify, you must own the property on which you live.

MAY 2017

Affordability

Targeted outreach
Solutions:

Trending and social media

A timely means of engaging and educating customers
NEWS: In honor of the @indians, today, our sewer crews will be performing #sewewwwwwwwwwwwwwwwer inspections. #RallyTogether

@Indians 22-game win streak
WEIRD: We recently finished dredging Green Lake in Shaker Heights to improve stormwater management. Besides removing 11,000 TONS of sediment, we also dredged FIVE 55-GALLON DRUMS WORTH OF GOLF BALLS OUT OF THE LAKE.

Shaker Heights

1:47 PM - 1 Mar 2018

63 Retweets 131 Likes
NE Ohio Regional Sewer
@neorsd

Wastewater/stormwater management for 1+ million in NEO. For 24/7 Customer Svc 216 881-8247 / “Wonderful mix of poop jokes and information,” says @RedInHigherEd

Your Tweet activity
Your Tweets earned 1,985 impressions over the last 24 hours

Who to follow
Refresh View all

CLE Econ Dev @CLE_Econ... Follow
Matt Timberlake @NoDig... Follow
Kerry McCormack @Kerry... Follow

Cleveland trends
Change
Solutions:

Media strategy

- Educate the press
- Engage the press
- Promptly respond to misinformation
What works and what matters?
Messages matter: What doesn’t work?

Reality of water challenges around the world
Messages matter: What doesn’t work?

- Reality of water challenges around the world
- Comparing bills to the cost of other monthly “essentials”
Messages matter: What doesn’t work?

- Reality of water challenges around the world
- Comparing bills to the cost of other monthly “essentials”
- Bill stuffers

#OWEAGovtAffairs @neorsd
Messages matter: What works?

“Where Does it Go?”
WHERE DOES IT GO?

Understanding the urban water cycle and the clean-water work of the
NORTHEAST OHIO REGIONAL SEWER DISTRICT

INSIDE:
- HOW DIRTY WATER GETS CLEAN
- HOW PROJECT CLEAN LAKE
- GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE
- ... AND MORE!

Your Sewer District... Keeping our Great Lake great.

TAKE A TOUR!
The NORTHEAST OHIO REGIONAL SEWER DISTRICT provides opportunities for group tours at its wastewater treatment plants for an overview of the treatment process, and at the ENVIRONMENTAL & MAINTENANCE SERVICES CENTER (EMSC) for a laboratory overview. The tours include outdoor walking and demonstrations, and are offered between March and October. To schedule a tour, call 216.981.5600.

EMPLOYMENT AT NEORD
With a workforce of more than 600, different jobs, the Sewer District is hiring for employment in technical, maintenance, engineering, environmental, and wastewater plant operation, administration, finance, communication, and more! Visit neord.com/careers.

GUEST SPEAKERS
Have you ever wondered what the District does? How dirty water gets to our environment? Call us for an invite to a guest speaker! The District has a diverse team of engineers, scientists, and more!

OPEN HOUSE
Each year, the District holds an Open House, a day of public tours at one of its treatment plants. Visit neord.org for information about this year's event.

BUSINESS OPPORTUNITY PROGRAM
Our BUSINESS OPPORTUNITY PROGRAM provides opportunities to minority-owned, women-owned, and small businesses, contributing to the economic vitality of the region.

COST-SAVING STRATEGIES
Rate increases are saving money for the Sewer District. The District has saved money by reducing water usage.

STUDENT PROGRAMS
Our student programs enhance, subsidize, and facilitate the education of students in greater Cleveland. We hope to encourage interest in technical disciplines and career possibilities at NEORS, and we consider our involvement to be an investment in the future prosperity of our region.
Messages matter: What works?

“Where Does it Go?”

The value of a clean Lake Erie
Messages matter: What works?

- “Where Does it Go?”
- The value of a clean Lake Erie
- Humor, media, and trending topics
Rate study survey 2016-2017

Find out which messages...

• Engage
• Increase support
• Encourage participation
Rate study survey 2016-2017

Identified 5 customer groups:

- Advocates ......................... 19%
- Skeptical supporters ............ 32%
- Non-supporters .................... 25%
- No-$ advocates .................... 16%
- Unconcerned ....................... 9%

1,500 completed surveys
Rate study survey 2016-2017

What we learned:

• 97% have high concern for water quality
• Maintaining clean water as a drinking water source is a primary reason

#OWEAGovtAffairs @neorsd
Rate study survey 2016-2017

Messaging priorities:

• Build trust
• Link clean water and our work
• Increase interest in clean-water investments
• Target messages based on audience
In summary: 5 things to remember

1. Have a plan.
In summary: 5 things to remember

2. Know your audiences.
In summary: 5 things to remember

3. Don’t wait to engage.
4. Don’t rely on one method alone.
In summary: 5 things to remember

5. Be creative.
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<th>URL/Handle</th>
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