You’re Going to Build What?!

Communicating with the Public About All Types of Road Work
Introduction

• Emily Kizer
  – Washtenaw County Road Commission
  – Communications manager
  – Started in October 2017
  – Member of CRA – PR Committee
I. Why communicate?
II. WCRC’s journey
III. Current practices
IV. Lessons learned
WHY COMMUNICATE?
Why Communicate?

This is why roadwork takes forever to complete.
Why Communicate?

- The public is angry and looking for targets
- We are asking for more $$
- The public doesn’t understand us
I’ll have an ounce of prevention
WCRC’S JOURNEY
Who are we?

- **Washtenaw County**
  - 344,000 citizens

- **WCRC**
  - 1,653 miles, 580 miles for MDOT
  - $31 million MTF
  - $22 million Federal/State Aid Projects
  - 130 staff
History

• Pre 2015
  – Handled mostly by board secretary
    • Press releases
    • Ribbon cuttings
  – Website
  – Paper service requests
History

• In 2015…
  – Hired communications manager
    • Aligned with local politics and major initiatives
  – Launched Facebook page
  – Started website refresh
History

• In 2016…
  – Voters approved county-wide roads millage
  – Launched WCRC Fix It
  – Launched new website
  – Conducted public roundabout survey
History

• In 2018…
  – Push back from projects involving tree removals
  – Developed project communications procedure
• Track 1, 2, 3 projects
  – Different level of communications depending on project scope
• Collaborative effort between Engineering, Operations and Communications
CURRENT PRACTICES
Staffing

• Comms Staff
  – Communications manager
  – Customer service representative

At WCRC, communications is part of everyone’s job!
Communication Areas

- Customer service
- General education
- Project communications
- Internal communications
Our Philosophies

1. Under promise, over deliver
2. If we know we will be there, let’s tell
3. We say “no” a lot, let’s explain why
4. This is an art and a science
Communication Channels

- Website
- Emails
- Social media
- Newsletters
- WCRC Fix It
- Community events
- Mail
- Traditional media
A DEEPER LOOK

Emails, Social Media, WCRC Fix It, Community Events

A DEEPER LOOK
Emails

• Mailchimp
  – Road advisories
  – Project updates
  – Weekly road work schedules
  – Newsletters
In 2019, we sent 340 external email campaigns
  – 154 road advisories
  – 143 project updates
  – 35 weekly road work schedules

Average open rate: 42.4%
Sample Project Update

Zeeb Road Update #4
June 18, 2019

We're off to another great week on the Zeeb Road project in Lodi Township. Our contractor installed curb last week in preparation for paving. We are hoping to start paving the first layer of asphalt later this week (as long as it doesn't rain). If you live or work within the project area, you will be provided access to your property but there may be some delays.

The road remains closed to all other traffic, including the intersections. We noticed a lot of cut-through traffic last week and have asked the Washtenaw County Sheriff to assist in enforcing the road closure. Please follow the posted detour or seek an alternate route.

If you have questions about the project, please contact James Hui, project manager, (734) 327-6660, huij@wcroads.org.
Emails

Advantages
• Free or low cost
• Easy to use
• Easy to measure success
• Can reach wide audiences

Challenges
• Internet-based
• Might create a monster
SOCIAL MEDIA
We use...
- Facebook
- Twitter
- LinkedIn
Facebook

- Total followers: 5,946
- Average monthly reach: 48,800
- Total annual reach: 586,160
Facebook = Family Dinner

Cool shot of the completed Saline-Milan Road bridge in York Township. This was a tricky one for sure!

Our contractors will be back in the spring to do final clean-up, plant grass seed and place permanent pavement markings.

City of Saline Government
Twitter

• Total followers: 1,505
• Average monthly impressions: 32,500
• Total annual impressions: 390,500

Washtenaw Roads @washtenawroads · Jan 27
We started our first construction project of the year today on Marion Rd in Saline Twp. We have a HUGE construction season planned, check out the project map so far: ow.ly/47n50y5K5k
What We Post

Twitter = Bar

Washtenaw Roads 🌐 @washtenawroads · Jul 22
Reminder: Hogback Rd in Ann Arbor Township is closed to through traffic for road resurfacing. It will be closed for approximately 10 days. Read more:
ow.ly/npxZ50v7Js5

Road Closure Advisory
• 236 followers
What We Post

LinkedIn = Professional Conference

Thanks to SEMCOG for featuring our own Adam Lape in their new video series about the awesome career path of public works (and other public jobs). Trevor Layton and Jon visited last week for an interview and tour of our main yard...see more
Social Media

Advantages
• Free or low cost
• Easy to measure success
• Can reach wide audiences
• Get your message out without a filter

Challenges
• Internet-based
• Might create a monster
• Opens agency to public negative comments
WCRC FIX IT
WCRC Fix IT

• 5 year partnership with SeeClickFix
  – Website and app
  – Launched in 2016

5,939 requests were opened in 2019
Advantages

• Easy to measure success
• Helps educate audiences
• Show progress

Challenges

• Internet-based
• Might create a monster
• Opens agency to public negative comments
• Not free
Community Events

• In 2019, staff participated in:
  – 23 Township Official Meetings
  – 22 Public Meetings
  – 18 Presentations
  – 11 Big Truck Events
  – 8 Painted Plows
  – 7 Parades
  – 3 Blood Drives
  – 1 PSA Competition
Special Events

• Roundabout education
Special Events

• Paint-a-Plow Program
Special Events

- PSA Competition at local HS
WE’RE STILL LEARNING
Lessons We’re Learning

- You can’t reach everyone
- Get the facts right the first time
- Keep it manageable
- Follow and copy peers
- Defend but don’t argue
- Kill ‘em with kindness
Challenges

• Input v. notification
Takeaway’s

- It is a marathon
- Keep it simple
- Show progress
Questions?

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