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Keeping Pace With Culture Through Communications

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Staying relevant in a constantly evolving environment is a daily, sometimes hourly, challenge.

No matter how successful or effective current communication strategies are, the ways people consume content are constantly evolving. The results are changing how we connect with our audiences, build trust in our organizations, cultivate our sphere of influence and stake our claim on contributions to society. So far, the year 2020 has proven that you cannot hide from this fact. Staying relevant is a daily, sometimes hourly, challenge, but staying at the forefront of communication strategies can be a great way to engage and empower communities especially in a time when meeting face to face is no longer the most trusted means.

So, how do you know which approaches will stick and which to forget? Here are five strategies to be aware of when developing a water communications plan.

1. PROACTIVE TRANSPARENCY

Transparency should be a core value every day, not just a step in the communication process when problems arise or after a major milestone. The question we need to be asking ourselves is, "How do we educate and engage our communities on an average day or between major initiatives and milestones?" People need to know how we arrive at our decisions, and we need to be empathetic and proactive in including them. Creativity and innovation help tell the real stories of what people do day to day.

For example, our Strategic Communications team is crafting a 3D digital tour of a water treatment facility that allows behind-the-scenes access to the equipment and technology that keep our water supply safe, clean and reliable. What an opportunity for education! People can better appreciate this vital resource when they understand the process behind it and see the real people who helped deliver it. The days of working behind closed doors and informing our audience about final decisions are over.

2. AUTHENTIC STORYTELLING

It's no wonder that an average millennial's attention span is 12 seconds and Generation Z's is eight. The amount of information



clutter we have to sift through on a daily, even hourly, basis is growing rapidly. Authentic and meaningful stories are becoming the most important method for cutting through that clutter and capture people's attention. Storytelling is how you make personal connections, gain followers, grow a community, heighten interest, spread your message and, most importantly, build trust. In our current culture we are craving meaningful connections more than ever. Without a story to connect people to you and your brand, your message is invisible.

3. LIVE VIDEO

Live video has become mainstream in the marketplace with Facebook and Instagram well positioned, and LinkedIn not far behind. According to [Visual Capitalist](#), "Global Web Index found that over 80% of people in the U.S. and U.K. say they consume more content since the COVID-19 outbreak, with broadcast TV and online videos (YouTube, TikTok) being the primary mediums across all generations and genders." As companies continue to invest heavily in video production, audiences will begin to grow skeptical of highly polished corporate videos. While these videos will always serve a place in building engagement and communicating complex ideas and processes, authenticity is key to building trust, and live video serves as one of the best platforms for authentic storytelling. Through live interviews, project updates, tutorials, moments behind the scenes, or any other creative use, making connections on a human-to-human level will elevate the customer experience.

4. PODCASTS

Podcasts are the blogs of 10 years ago. In our culture of "always on the go", our audiences want their information instantaneously, when it's convenient for them. The simple idea of streaming radio-style content to any device fulfills that need. Successful podcasts hit the sweet spot between branded content and entertainment. This is one of the most effective ways to deliver a message; Edison Research has shown that 85 percent of people finish the podcasts they start listening to. That success rate, combined with the fact

that podcasts are cheaper to produce than video, make this a great method for telling a story in an authentic voice, literally.

5. FOCUS ON PERSONAL BRANDS WITHIN THE BRAND

We live in an era where individuals are far more trusted than their institutions. This presents another opportunity for authenticity. Real people involved in day-to-day operations have more power to gain trust and influence, as opposed to a message from an organization as a whole. In this era of great distrust with media outlets, government and large corporations, don't expect this trend to disappear anytime soon.

In the quest for relevance in a rapidly changing culture, it is imperative to understand how to harness the right approach and tools. If we have learned anything through this pandemic it is that flexibility is key to success when developing a communication plan. Consider always leaving room in budgets for strategies you and your organization have never tried before. The fusion of branding principles, authenticity, creativity and a sound communications strategy can help ensure meaningful connections and experiences with our audiences through any cultural challenges we face.

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