Conservation Outreach: An Innovative Approach for Water Departments to Assist Environmental Advocacy Groups

Eric Hooper, P.E. Town of Sharon Superintendent of Public Works
The Usual State of Affairs:
Water Use, Conservation and Data Collection

Municipal Water Supplier (good guys) vs Environmentalists (ineffective? guys)

Marketing Water Use
Conservation

Expanding the Message

Traditional Media Outlets vs Social Media
Perception Problems
Public Water Supplier = Pump the Planet Dry
Start the discussion with what’s best for the Water Department

- One World
- One People
- One Irrigated Lawn
Perception Problems

Watershed Advocacy = Save the Planet

Start the discussion with what’s best for the environment and at no cost to our organization

- The Sky is Falling!
- One World, One People and One Shower or One Composting Toilet, not both
Early Data Collection and Conservation Efforts

Data Collection
• Manual meter read at infrequent intervals

Outreach
• Rebate Programs for low flow toilets and clothes washers
• Education Outreach: Science First
• Fliers/Bill Stuffers

Technical
• Mandatory Outdoor Water Restrictions:
  • Two hours per day, two days per week.
• Outsourced leak detection twice per year
• Meters – Updated master meters, radio read residential meters
• $1 million/year water main replacement program
• Plumbing Code changes
Lessons Learned

- Manual meter read essentially useless
- Conservation message get stale quickly.
- General messages are not effective.
- Traditional message outlets and approaches do not allow for the message to be refreshed easily or timely.
- Water Department as “messenger” may not be best.
Innovative Outreach and Data Collection Efforts

- The Messenger
- Social Media
- Information: Transition to AMR/AMI meters
- Targeted Messaging
Gaining Information

Town of Sharon Department of Public Works

**Accounts**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SFR</td>
<td>5,583</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commercial</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Municipal</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irrigation-Only</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Data status**

- Uploaded: Feb 12, 2016
- Most recent complete period: 2016-1
- Dec 27 - Mar 26, 2016

**Analytics**

**Consumption**

- 82.5 MG in Period 2016-1
- Compared to previous period: ▼ 39%
- Compared to one year ago: ▼ 5.0%

**Leaks**

- Detected in Period 2016-1: 3
- Detected since Jan 1, 2015: 38

**Tier Consumption**

- 8.6% of SFR accounts within Tier 1 in Period 2016-1
- Compared to previous period: ▲ 29%
- Compared to one year ago: ▲ 9.9%

**Ernie Hooper**

Town of Sharon Department of Public Works
Tracking System Wide Data

History

ACCOUNT TYPE

SFR

Tier 1  Tier 2  Tier 3  Tier 4

AF Used

200

0

Period

Tracking System Wide Data

History

ACCOUNT TYPE
SFR

 Tier 1  Tier 2  Tier 3  Tier 4

% of Accounts

Period

Money Talks: Getting Buy-in

- Contests: Toilet Mascot Naming
  Easy, low cost, fun, prize

- Bill abatements and fee waivers
  Easy, relatively low cost, significant information return
Tracking Personal Data
Social Media: A presence on the Web

- YouTube
- Facebook
- Web Sites
Expanding the Message: Conservation can’t be the only purpose or use.

- House Age + Winter Water Use = Candidate for Toilet Replacement Rebate
- House Age + Building Permit Record = Potential Water Quality Issues
Targeting the Message: Delivering the right message at the right time to each customer
Group Messenger Module

Targeted
- Segment recipients

Fast
- Send personalized messages to select recipients via preloaded or newly created message templates

Integrated
- Customer interactions recorded centrally
Lessons Reinforced

- Message get stale quickly – People are getting tired of hearing about ultra-low flow toilets.

- Traditional message outlets and approaches do not allow for the message to be refreshed easily or timely. Social media may be better.

- Targeted messaging – don’t send ultra-low flow toilet rebate information to someone who has already replaced their toilets.

- Water Department as “messenger” may not be best unless the Department has someone versed in Public Outreach.

- Money talks: contests, bill abatements, incentives to “sign up”.

- Expanding the message: assisting Environmental Advocacy groups in Conservation outreach is not and should not be the core mission of any Water Department.
Questions?

Eric R. Hooper, P.E.
Superintendent of Public Works
Town of Sharon
Department of Public Works
ehooper@townofsharon.org
781-784-1525 ext. 2311