



Communications Audit Report Executive Summary

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TRIPEPI SMITH

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Executive Summary

The Orange County Sanitation District engaged Tripepi Smith to objectively review OCSD's internal and external Communications tactics prior to forming the Public Affairs Strategic Plan for FY 2020-2022. Tripepi Smith made these determinations through a combination of methods, such as: interviewing key stakeholders, weighing OCSD's practices against local government communication best practices, and quantitative data analysis of message Reach and Engagement.

Compared to other California public agencies Tripepi Smith has assessed, the Orange County Sanitation District has one of the most centralized and organized Communications processes. A single team, with defined roles, produces and/or approves all internal and external communication content. OCSD also has clear policies that outline expectations for staff when it comes to producing communication content and interacting with both internal and external audiences. The OCSD Brand/Style Guide is a particularly advanced best practice.

Tripepi Smith's recommendations generally center on:

- Technical optimizations for the District's website and social media sites;
- Expanding the reach of external communications and targeting public agency audience;
- Producing more engaging content for external audiences;
- Consistently measuring content reach and engagement to inform future strategy.

Overall, OCSD's internal communication efforts are solid in terms of quantity, quality and readership. A key question for OCSD's leadership to consider now is: how much do you want to 'publicize' the District's services and programs through external communication efforts? There appears to be tension between wanting to remain 'out of sight, out of mind' and producing more modern, innovative content that will engage various stakeholders in OCSD's service area.

Communications Observations

General

- OCSD splits its communications efforts between its internal audiences (employees, Board of Directors, executive management team) and external audiences (ratepayers, elected officials, community leaders, etc.).
- Several Public Affairs Office (PAO) staff centrally control execution of all internal and external communications. Anecdotally speaking, staff feels they allocate equal time to internal and external communications.
- Staff does not archive all external or internal communications in a single, central location, though the MyOCSD SharePoint intranet houses many internal pieces.
- Tripepi Smith perceived a gap in effective communications from Plant No. 1 to Plant No. 2. Some Plant No. 2 employees expressed they do not feel they receive the same communication level as employees at Plant No. 1. Part of the difference is due to Plant 2 employees' ability to check their work computers as often as office-based employees at Plant 1.
 - OCSD is constructing a new headquarters across the street from the current Administration Building. This could exacerbate the perceived issue of lack of communication between operations and management staff.
- In the world of social media, public agencies have to compete for attention with the world's largest brands. The PAO would like to focus on producing more content (especially video) that is fun and inventive to capture external audiences better.

Strategy & Policy

- OCSD had an established Public Affairs Strategic Plan from July 2016 to June 2018 but did not produce a plan for 2018-2020. Staff intends to develop the next Strategic Plan for July 2020 to June 2022.
- OCSD directs the majority of external communications toward elected officials and specific neighborhood groups that are close to CIP projects. As of this writing, there is no emphasis or strategy on how to consistently reach all 2.6 million residents in OCSD's service area.
 - As a result, OCSD does not advertise on any social media platforms, regularly write Press Releases, or pitch stories to local media.
- OCSD has three communications-related policies: the OCSD Policies and Procedures Unified Communications Policy, the OCSD Social Media Policy, and the OCSD Personnel Policies Wireless/Electronic Communications (WEC) Policy.
- OCSD has a Brand/Style Guide, which is a best practice for public agencies. The PAO ensures all branding is consistent on all OCSD collateral.

Website (ocsd.com)

- OCSD has an external-facing website at ocsd.com. Granicus hosts the website, which operates on the Vision Content Management System.

- OCSD does not have an established Website Governance Policy that dictates who is responsible for what content and technical features of the site. However, all staff who have Editing privileges understand that the PAO must approve all content.
- The website has an SSL certificate, which is a best practice. It does not have an American with Disabilities Act (ADA) Notice.
- The IT Department has installed Google Analytics on the site, but staff does not regularly view these analytics for reporting or strategic planning purposes.

Social Media

- Public Affairs Specialist Kelly Newell is OCSD's primary social media manager.
- Graphics Designer Gregg Deterding and OCSD interns assist with developing photo and video content for social media.
- OCSD's LinkedIn Page has the largest audience of all OCSD social media platforms (2,578 Followers), but the Page is not active.
- Staff provides a brief social media report to the Legislative & Public Affairs Committee every month. Data includes number of posts, reach and impressions for each platform.
- Anecdotally speaking, few OCSD employees like/follow or engage with OCSD on social media. There is an untapped opportunity for staff to share content with their friends and family that highlights OCSD's mission, vision and values.

Media/Press

- OCSD's Unified Communications Policy spells out that all media inquiries should flow to/through the Public Affairs Office; employees know and follow this directive.
- OCSD does not regularly write Press Releases or pitch stories to local media.
- OCSD has a media list with contact information for several media outlets including radio, television, print and Vietnamese/Spanish outlets. Interns maintain and update this list, though the frequency is unclear.
- OCSD uses Meltwater to monitor media mentions. Administration Manager Jennifer Cabral receives all reports.

Direct Communications

- OCSD uses Constant Contact for email marketing (Five Minutes Per Month, and a Biosolids Newsletter). As of this writing, there are 2,139 subscribers for Five Minutes Per Month while the Biosolids Newsletter purposely has under 500 subscribers.
- OCSD does not email all internal publications directly to employees. 3 Things to Know is currently the only publication PAO delivers to all employee inboxes. Others may route through supervisors/managers or be on display at OCSD facilities.
- OCSD prints many internal communication pieces onsite, such as Digester, SafetyGrams, Safe Bulletins, and Pipeline.
- Employees receive emergency notifications via email, office phones and OCSD-issued mobile phones through the Send Word Now system.

Summarized Recommendations

NOTE: Tripepi Smith offers specific Action Items for each of these Recommendations in the full version of the Communications Audit Report.

1 – Establish Relationships with Public Information Officers in Orange County

City and county public information officers (PIOs) are responsible for providing information to a city's and/or county's constituents. PIOs typically have established processes for effectively communicating with their constituents. Considering OCSD's external audience includes approximately 2.6 million Orange County residents, OCSD would benefit substantially from forming relationships with PIOs in Orange County who could assist in disseminating OCSD information to their shared audience.

2 - Leverage Additional Communications Platforms

OCSD's LinkedIn Page has the largest audience (2,578 Followers) of all OCSD-managed social media accounts, but the Page is not currently active. Additionally, 659 LinkedIn Users list OCSD as their employer. OCSD should consider leveraging LinkedIn in their social media strategy. Additionally, OCSD should take advantage of digital screens/signage throughout the OCSD facilities to reach staff and visitors to campus.

3 – Consistently Analyze Available Metrics

OCSD should consider regularly analyzing and reporting on available website and social media data. Staff currently provides a social media metrics report to the Legislative & Public Affairs Committee but could expand this report. By consistently analyzing OCSD's website and social media data, OCSD staff can gather insights to use in improving its communications efforts.

4 – Increase Video Content

Across all digital platforms, video tends to be the most engaging content. OCSD should consider increasing production of video content that resonates with its audiences and helps disseminate information in an eye-catching way.

5 – Improve the ocsd.com Website

Search engine optimization on ocsd.com can help OCSD better reach its audience through the ocsd.com website. There are also multiple Vision Content Management System features to enable to improve website administration and user experience. OCSD should consider completing the steps below to improve the website.

6 – Optimize Internal Communications

The Public Affairs Office creates several internal communications pieces to keep employees updated. OCSD should consider combining, rescheduling and updating content on certain communications to ensure they reach employees effectively and efficiently.

7 – Improve Communications with Field Level Employees

The Public Affairs Office’s internal communications pieces may not always reach field level employees as consistently as they reach office staff.

8 – Optimize External Communications

The Public Affairs Office has several opportunities to enhance its external communications strategy. However, these recommendations operate under the assumption that OCSD is comfortable with drawing more attention to itself, its services, its infrastructure, and its staff.

9 – Take Inventory of Communications Collateral

Old communications collateral may spread outdated information about OCSD. The Public Affairs Office should consider taking inventory of all internal and external collateral to ensure all communications are up to date.

Conclusion

Compared to other California public agencies Tripepi Smith has assessed, the Orange County Sanitation District has one of the most centralized and organized Communications processes. A single team, with defined roles, produces and/or approves all internal and external communication content. OCSD also has clear policies that outline expectations for staff when it comes to producing communication content and interacting with both internal and external audiences. The OCSD Brand/Style Guide is a particularly advanced best practice.

Overall, OCSD’s internal communication efforts are solid in terms of quantity, quality and readership. A key question for OCSD’s leadership to consider now is: how much do you want to ‘publicize’ the District’s services and programs through external communication efforts? There appears to be tension between wanting to remain ‘out of sight, out of mind’ and producing more modern, innovative content that will engage various stakeholders in OCSD’s service area.

Thank you again for this opportunity to provide the Orange County Sanitation District with an objective third-party assessment of its communication efforts. Should you wish to further engage Tripepi Smith to execute on recommendations in this report, we are ready to assist.