

WM2012 Conference Panel Report

PANEL SESSION 27: Communicating WM Issues Using Innovative Strategies in Today's Changing Landscape

Co-Chairs: Todd Nelson, *Bechtel National Inc., Waste Treatment Plant Project*
John Briest, *Weaver Boos Consultants*

Panel Reporter: Todd Nelson, *Bechtel National Inc., Waste Treatment Plant Project*

Panelists:

1. Todd Nelson, *Bechtel National Inc., Waste Treatment Plant Project*
2. Fred deSousa, *Los Alamos National Laboratory*
3. Rachael Drouhard, *ImageWorks Digital Media*
4. Jana Humphreys, *Vivid Learning Systems*

About two dozen people attended the session which focused on new methods being used to communicate waste management and other issues to important constituencies. Studies show that employees and other important stakeholders are overloaded with information, little of which is useful. The session began with each panelist providing a brief overview of themselves and the organizations they represent, along with a brief discussion of the communications issue that most keeps them awake at night. The introductory overviews were followed by questions from Co-Chair John Briest, as well as questions from the audience.

Rachael Drouhard discussed brand in terms of reputation – it's not what you think of yourself, but how others perceive you. Brand is often overused and misunderstood and many think the term refers to a company logo. Rachael focused on dispelling this misconception and sharing the process her company uses to develop, manage and protect brands for their customers. She shared the 'touch point' wheel, showing items many people focus on: website, brochure, Facebook, tradeshow booth, etc. with brand as the center hub. While these other items are very important, they can quickly become inconsistent in terms of look, feel and message if the core brand is not properly defined and managed. To differentiate yourself in an oversaturated market where few stand out, defining 'who' your company is, then being consistent in how you look, speak and behave is the key.

Fred deSousa presented specific examples of new technologies used by Los Alamos National Laboratory during the 2011 Las Conchas wild fire, the largest in New Mexico history. Tools such as Flickr photo sharing, online forums, and Twitter allowed the Laboratory to distribute its message directly to residents and stakeholders, correct misinformation and do so without editing from the news media. He stressed that because of the technical complexity and fear associated with environmental management, a great deal of communication must be based on trust earned by early notifications, consistency and timely response. Misinformation has and will continue to shut down projects.

Jana Humphreys brought a learning and communication focus to the discussion. Jana discussed how you can use short training pieces to introduce concepts and include

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reference materials so you can reach audiences that have limited time. To meet the needs of different generations, Jana suggested using multiple approaches such as more traditional formal learning programs as well as mobile learning, game based learning, and the use of social media tools such as Yammer. Jana also mentioned ways that some organizations are using QR codes to provide just-in-time training. To keep employees engaged in the content, it's important that the content is relevant to the audience and includes as much visual support or story lines as possible.

Todd Nelson said that keeping the 3,000 employees at the Hanford Waste Treatment Plant up-to-date is becoming ever more challenging. Construction has been underway for 10 years and won't be completed for at least four more years. On shorter jobs, managers and workers tend to stay through to the end. On a job of this magnitude, management and workers change out on a regular basis, interrupting the flow of information and the continuity of a safety conscious work environment. And, that can make it difficult to stay ahead of issues. Over the next year, WTP will be investigating and implementing new ways to engage employees. Nelson said that first on the list is to better equip managers and supervisors with the resources needed to communicate directly with their employees. In terms of "mass" communications, more and more employees want to receive their information electronically. He said that Bechtel will be looking at social networks.

The following is a summary published in the Conference's daily newsletter, *Insight*:

When it comes to new technologies and new social media tools, it's easy for companies to think they need to be a part of it. However, several of the panelists said that instead of rushing to adopt a new technologies or processes, look first at who you want to engage and why, then evaluate the appropriate tools to implement your strategy.

On the other hand, don't wait too long. For example, Fred deSousa, LANL, said that the lab doesn't own the name "Los Alamos National Laboratory" on Facebook; someone else does and they have no control of what's done with it.

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