



**TO:** Board of Directors, Truckee Meadows Water Authority

**THRU:** Mark Foree, General Manager, Truckee Meadows Water Authority

**FROM:** Marlene Olsen, Olsen & Associates  
Kim Mazeres, Truckee Meadows Water Authority

**DATE:** April 11, 2011

**SUBJECT: Update on Communications Activities for FY2011 and request for Board input regarding the Customer Communications and Community Outreach Plan FY2012**

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The attached three documents cover customer communications and community outreach efforts for 2010 and communications plan for 2011:

- Attachment A: 2010 Communications Activities and Results***—Year in Review  
This document outlines the completed activities and Customer Satisfaction results of projects for 2010.
- Attachment B: FY 2011-2012 Customer Communications and Community Outreach Plan***-- This document highlights the goals, objectives and planned activities, along with and the key messages.
- Attachment C: 2010 Earned Media Report:*** This is a report that summarizes message analysis and value of news coverage from interviews and press releases distributed the past year.



## **Truckee Meadows Water Authority 2010 Communications Activities and Results**

### **Introduction:**

The following is a report of 2010 communications activities by the Water Communications Team, which is made up of Truckee Meadows Water Authority (TMWA) and Olsen & Associates' GoodStanding division. An Earned Media Report is also included.

This report will reflect Communications Plan activities completed for Calendar Year 2010. Customer Satisfaction results are listed for Fiscal Year 2010 (ending June 2010) and also YTD July 1-Dec, 30, 2010.

**Budget and Financial Considerations:** We are always looking for ways to decrease costs. Since 2008, we have identified multiple ways to save. They include replacing select printed pieces with digital versions, scaling down programs and transitioning appropriate activities to TMWA staff. Some of those activities are website maintenance, Water-Efficient Landscape Awards, Poster Art Contest, speakers bureau and agenda research.

We ended fiscal year 2010 at 64 percent of budget.

### **Overall Communications Goal Achievement:**

*Goal:* To have well-informed customers, staff and community by stressing open communication and improving the understanding of the value and quality that TMWA delivers to its customers

*Results:* *From the Customer Satisfaction Survey (on a 10-point scale, with 10 being excellent):*

Keeping people informed about water quality – remained stable from 8.0 in 2009 to 8.1 in 2010. The national benchmark is 6.3. FYTD-8.4.

Providing affordable, reasonably priced water – remained stable from 7.5 in 2009 to 7.4 in 2010. The national benchmark is 7.5. FYTD-7.3. (2010 saw a rate increase, effective June 1)

### **Customer Satisfaction Survey Details Connected to Communication Initiatives (on a 10-point scale with 10 being excellent):**

- **Overall customer satisfaction** remained statistically stable from 87% favorable ratings in FY 2009 at 85% favorable in FY 2010, FYTD-92%
- **Increasing the awareness of using public input in making decisions** remained stable from 7.1 in 2009 to 7.0 in 2010. The national benchmark is 6.2. FYTD-7.3.



- In **awareness of value**, about 70% of customers indicated that they received either an excellent or good value for the price of their water bill, similar to 67% in 2009. FYTD-61%. (June, 2010 was in the implementation date of our rate increase.)
- In **increasing the awareness of water quality**, 85% of respondents rated water quality as excellent or good, improved from 82% in 2009. FYTD-80%
- Seven out of ten respondents (72%) read **the water bill insert** at least occasionally and over half (64%) read the message printed on the front page of their bill. Both of these figures are up by several points over 2009.
- More respondents reported **getting information about the quality and safety** of the drinking water directly from TMWA (72%) than from local news/media (62%). Both of these figures trended upwards. (This question has been revised beginning this year, so there are no comparable results.)
- About seven out of ten respondents (71%) indicated they were **aware they could view their TMWA account information online**, stable from last year. Of those who were aware, 16% had accessed their account online. FYTD-72%
- Almost all respondents (96%) were aware of **assigned-day watering**, similar to 95% for last two years. FYTD-95%. This was important as we launched the three-day watering schedule last year.

### **2010 Customer Communications – Report on Projects Completed:**

***Increase the understanding of the value and water quality TMWA delivers to customers and the community by providing consistent and meaningful information:*** Quality and value messaging was used in all forms of customer communication: bill inserts, social media, Water Quality Report, Web site and press releases. As required by EPA, we produce a Water Quality Report as our April bill insert. Effectiveness of the message is reflected in the positive Customer Satisfaction results. This is also a stand-alone piece that is distributed in new customer packets, at events and in the front lobby. We continue to connect all tactics, actions and activities to key messages and to the “Quality. Delivered.” Tagline. We also continue to deal with a national water quality issue brought on by the Environmental Working Group (EWG). We use this as an opportunity to communicate TMWA’s high drinking water quality through scheduled interviews and a formal press conference to discuss the discrepancies of TMWA’s ranking. We continue to work on this issue to get TMWA’s data corrected.

***Test social media for effectiveness by interacting in at least one social media outlet and monitoring engagement:*** This initiative was encouraged by the Board of Directors at last year’s presentation. We worked to integrate TMWA’s messages and emergency communication into social media and engage “followers,” “friends,” etc. in conversation. We use each tool (Facebook, Twitter, Flickr) in conjunction with the others and our website and cross-



market between them. The effort has been effective both in cost and customer engagement. Every component of the social media strategy feeds into the overall messages of TMWA.

Social media provides an opportunity for direct contact. We are measuring Likes/Followers, engagement including @ replies, retweets and link hits. As expected, engagement increases around seasonal items Responsible Watering Tips and big news items such as the Environmental Working Group.

***Develop trust in TMWA as an entity through communication and interactions with its employees at work and within the community. Promote the expertise and accessibility of TMWA staff.*** We continue our efforts to position TMWA staff as the authorities on drinking water. We always focus on TMWA spokespersons for all media interviews and releases, relying on the subject matter experts, instead of relying on one Public Information Officer. General Manager Mark Foree not only responds to important media inquiries, but has presented a new PowerPoint before many civic groups. TMWA's expert staff was also interviewed, quoted and consulted throughout the year on many regional and national news pieces including water source and supply, quality, snowpack and responsible water use.

TMWA's e-newsletter, under Mark Foree's signature, focuses on TMWA news and water issues and is sent community leaders, state officials and interested customers. We produce an issue every three to four months. The feedback has been very encouraging, always producing several positive unsolicited responses and/or productive questions.

But, seeing a TMWA staff person on TV is not the same as interacting with them in person. To support TMWA's community outreach goals, staff participates in the community year round in the form of our Speakers Bureau, events and tours.

***Speakers Bureau:*** The schedule of appearances made by TMWA staff included numerous schools, organizations and businesses, including: Builders Association of Northern Nevada, Central Rotary Club, WETLAB, Brownie Troop 1028, J.C. Penney Associates, Reno Citizen's Institute, South Reno Lion's Club, East Washoe Valley Citizens Advisory Board, Reno Parks Sierra Kids Day Camp (several), Girl Scout Troop, High Desert Montessori School, Downtown Rotary Club, Institute of the Environment-University of Phoenix, Green Up Group, U.S. Green Building Council, Nevada Water Law Conference, Northern Nevada COO Forum, Nevada Industry Excellence, Southwest Citizens Advisory Committee, UNR World Water Forum, Reno High School, UNR Student Association of International Water Issues and UNR Cooperative Extension.

***Facility tours given by TMWA staff included:*** WETLAB, TMCC Renewable Energy Class, TMCC Environmental Science Class, TMCC Natural Resource Class, World of Wonder (home schoolers), Truckee Meadows Water Systems, Carson Truckee Water Conservation District, UNR Engineering Class, Assoc. of Civil Engineers (UNR) UNR Renewable Energy Class (Dr. Marchand). Reno Citizen's Institute, TMWA's Standing Advisory Committee and Truckee River Fund Advisors.

The lieu of the customer Water System Tours, we offered Chalk Bluff plant tours, open to the public in September. This cut down the cost of the buses, lunch and staff time. 111 customers attended the tours.



**Events where TMWA either participated or had information booths included:**

Kid's Free Fishing Day, Reno River Fest, Earth Day, Intuit Earth Day, Washoe County Parks, Spring Home and Garden Show, Nevada Landscape Assoc. Trade Show and Conference,

Many topics were covered at the above venues, including conservation/responsible water use, our water system, water issues, system improvements and rehabilitation, water quality, meter conversion, consolidation and leak detection in the home.

**Community Organizations:** TMWA staff continues to be active in community organizations including: Reno-Sparks Chamber of Commerce, Sparks Chamber of Commerce, Economic Development Authority of Western Nevada (EDAWN), Builder's Association of Northern Nevada (BANN), Association of General Contractors (AGC), Reno's Downtown Improvement Association, Rotary Club of Reno, Truckee Meadows Tomorrow, various United Way committees, and the Join Together Northern Nevada Board.

**Build awareness and foster compliance to the changes in the Assigned-Day watering program:** Customer Satisfaction results did not waiver and trended slightly upward. In 2010 we launched the All New Assigned-Day schedule, Easy as 1-2-3, which introduced residents to a revised watering day schedule and added one watering day. A direct mail piece with a magnet indicating the revised watering schedule kicked off the campaign and was followed by weather segment sponsorships and commercial radio spots. We partnered with two local radio groups to bring responsible water use tips to their listeners through sponsorships and interviews in addition to our commercial radio spots. This was more than \$15,000 in added value at no additional cost. We also produced a *Reno Gazette-Journal* "Your Turn" column "Your Water, Our Expertise" authored by Mark Foree. These efforts supported an easy transition in the community from a two-day watering schedule to three days.

**Focus on environmental stewardship:** We pitched and conducted media and community leader tours that resulted in substantial and sustained media coverage for the Glendale Water Supply Improvement Project (diversion re-construction) with a main message of environmental improvements and fiscal responsibility through low-interest funding. We also released statistics on our recharge program, receiving good local placement, as well as a feature on our hydro power production. In addition to traditional media coverage, our achievements in this area were also publicized on TMWA's Web site, in customer communications, and in our e-newsletter to community leaders and interested customers.

**Reinforce TMWA's vision and organizational goals, with focus on fiscal responsibility and infrastructure investments:** We issued releases on TMWA's financial reporting: *Water Authority awarded highest achievement for seventh consecutive year*, and had ample opportunity to discuss TMWA's financial efforts to reduce costs during the rate adjustment. The Glendale Water Supply Improvement Project, hydro electric power savings and power saving due to the Mogul Bypass were also important messages published in various news articles over the year.

**Conservation Projects:**

**Community Forestry Coalition:** The Truckee Meadows Community Forestry Coalition's (CFC) goal is to bring together residents, local agencies and organizations to aid the



community in preserving our region's private trees through public education. In 2010 we launched created Ask an Arborist, which is accessed through our website and we held our second annual Backyard Tree Care Workshop as resources for the public. Through media relations and social media we continue to raise awareness of the coalition.

**Water-Efficient Landscape Awards:** We received 17 entries – 8 in *Design by Homeowner* and 9 in *Design by Professional*. Media value for the Landscape Awards reached more than \$21,000. We received \$18,000 in donations, including prizes and advertising, from eight community sponsors – again, more than ever before.

In 2010, we held a kick-off tour, featuring previous Landscape Awards winners. Past winners were excited to share what made their yard beautiful and water-efficient, and participants were gearing up for their own landscaping, and looking forward to entering the awards.

In addition to the obvious conservation benefits of a water-efficient landscape, there are auxiliary benefits to this awards program, such as community outreach and promotion, case study information, testimonials, and photos of water-efficient landscaping for the website. Actual examples from local homeowners also encourages other customers to install water-efficient landscaping in the future.

**Landscape Guide:** The Interactive Online Landscape Guide continues to be one of the highest traffic generators on our Web site during the spring and summer months. We have suspended printing the hard copy version, another cost saving measure.

**Workshops:** TMWA and Washoe County Department of Water Resources jointly sponsored the following CommonSense Gardening Series workshops at Rancho San Rafael Park: Spring Sprinklers, Turn-on and Tune-up, Northern Nevada Native Plants and Winterizing Your Sprinkler System. The TMWA staff also conducted presentations on Irrigation Start-up and Shut-down, Water Conservation and Water Quality.

**Poster Art Contest:** To involve youth in our community, the sixth annual responsible water use poster art contest was conducted in May, netting nearly 700 entries. Winning entries were publicized and the art was used on our websites, social media and for various promotions. In addition, bookmarks were produced with the winning images. The bookmarks are used for the promotion of the TMWA Academy website.

#### **Media Management:**

**Clippings:** All local news coverage related to TMWA, water topics and utility news is emailed to management staff daily. We also collect national water trends. This information is then compiled into a news archive. If you would like to be copied on the daily email, please let us know. We met a goal of reducing this budget item by 40 percent.

**Press Releases:** We capture all newsworthy opportunities including staff accomplishments, responsible water use, seasonal water tips, water supply, Web features, public meetings and new projects. Please see the Annual Earned Media Report for information about each release and total earned media for the year.



***Editorial Board and Desk Side Meetings:*** Two editorial board meetings were conducted, as well as many desk side meetings, to keep the local media updated regarding general foundational information on TMWA and conservation.

***Issues Management:*** 2010 marked another very busy year for TMWA's media management. Some of the issues handled this year included the Glendale Diversion Construction, the EWG issue, water main breaks including the large sinkhole in downtown Reno, Mogul Bypass construction, the EWG utility ranking, freezing temperatures and burst pipes, rate adjustment, the Alexander fire and meter conversion. We work with staff to craft appropriate messages in advance of the need, so that the communications team can stay consistent. We continue producing and updating Topic Papers, using them for media, customers and anyone interested in these recurring subjects.

#### **Customer Communication:**

***Bill Inserts and Messages:*** Our topics included public meetings, responsible water use, Assigned-Day watering, winterization, landscaping and Landscape Awards, account information, payment options, Truckee River Fund, infrastructure projects, website (*do we use Web site or website? We need to follow the grammar guide and be consistent*) promotion and financial achievements. The percentage of customers who read our inserts and messages continues to be very high, proving to be a worthwhile communication tools. We attribute the positive results to the quality of the content.

In addition, we coordinate and traffic inserts for other governmental agencies (Reno, Sparks and Washoe County), as one per month is allowed, with printing costs paid by the respective entity. Other pieces involving our billing include: bill messages, envelope backs and RapidPay promotion (electronic funds transfer).

***Topic Papers:*** This series has become a very useful tool for many purposes, including media follow up. Topics prepared/updated this year include: how TMWA's water rates are computed, TMWA's public input process, our responsible water use programs, a TMWA Fact Sheet and Assigned-Day watering. These documents are available at events, in our lobby, at Chalk Bluff, sent out when there is an inquiry in the call center, used for reporters, etc. There is also a Topic Paper section on the website. This year, we added the following papers: Western Regional Water Commission and Truckee River Fund.

***Water System Tours:*** Customer tours of the entire water system were suspended last year due to budgetary reasons.

***Web Site:*** Mentioned earlier, this function was completely transferred to TMWA staff including development and maintenance. The statistics and results were reported to the Board at the strategic planning workshop in October.

#### **Employee Communication:**

***From the Source*** was developed in late 2010 and focuses on internal communication. TMWA's mission and vision are the foundation of From the Source. This resource has included topics such as TMWA's financial status and education, consolidation and water use.

-End of 2010 results-



## **Customer Communications and Community Outreach Plan FY 2011/2012**

### **Executive Summary**

Truckee Meadows Water Authority (TMWA) is dedicated to communicating with customers and the community that it serves.

**The purpose** of this document is to provide the goals, objectives, strategies and tactics for a coordinated communications plan, divided into three key sections or audiences: customer communications, community outreach and TMWA employee outreach.

**The overall communications strategy** is to effectively and consistently communicate with all of TMWA's audiences in order to continue to position TMWA as the region's water expert.

**The goals** in this plan stress open communication and improving the understanding of the value and quality of water that TMWA delivers to its customers.

**The objectives and strategies** carry out the goals in three sections: customer communications, community outreach and TMWA employee outreach.

**The tactics** listed are planned to accomplish overall goals, objectives and strategies will be measured whenever possible against industry norms. In light of the continued economic situation and continued need to reduce or maintain operational expenses, our rates will continue at 2009 levels.

## **Goals, Objectives, Strategies and Tactics**

### **Overall Goals:**

- Position TMWA leadership as the water expert both to internal and external audiences
- Continue fostering public understanding of the value and quality of water that TMWA delivers to the community
- To become the recognized leader in open communications and public access among utilities and public agencies in northern Nevada
- Reinforce TWMA's vision and organizational goals
- Strengthen trust among internal and external audiences
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### **Customer Communications Objectives:**

- Pitch two feature stories per fiscal year regarding TMWA leadership
- Pitch two stories per fiscal year regarding the value and quality of water that TMWA delivers
- Pitch at least two media stories per fiscal year that highlight TMWA's willingness and dedication to working with the community i.e. helping customers who are struggling to pay their bills, fixing main breaks while keeping people in water, etc
- Maintain awareness of ADW and benchmark awareness of three day per week at 50 percent
- Through social media, continue to engage customers and with daily messages via twitter and Facebook
- Twenty five percent of social media messages positioning TMWA as the water experts as the largest water purveyor
- Twenty five percent of social media messages regarding the value and quality of the water that TMWA provides
- Twenty five percent of social media messages that demonstrates public access and open communication
- Twenty five percent regarding TMWA employees as members of the community and water experts

### **Customer Communications Strategies:**

- Through consistent media relations with local media outlets, position TMWA as the water experts in our region
- Through messages that are consistent with all of TMWA's community communications, engage the community in a discussion about TMWA's high-quality water, and the importance of responsible water use

- Reinforce TMWA’s communication messages through social media outlets, keeping the community apprised of important, water-related topics that affect them through social media
- Position TMWA as transparent and approachable to customers.

**Customer Communication Tactics:**

***Printed Materials:***

Assigned-Day Watering materials	Rate Schedules
Bill Envelopes	
Bill Inserts (TMWA)/Owner Agency Inserts	River Recreation Maps
Bill Payment Options Brochure	Topic Papers
Bill Statements	Water Quality Report
Door hangers	Water Waste Notices
E-newsletters	
Lawn Care Guide	

***Customer Events and Interaction:***

- Landscape Awards and tours
- Media interviews
- Neighborhood Watch Program
- Overall Customer Satisfaction Survey
- Public Meetings/questions and answer sessions
- Review of call center and customer complaints (BOO’s)
- River Recreation Map and promotion
- Board Meetings, Workshops, etc.
- Speakers Bureau
- Standing Advisory Committee
- Transactional Satisfaction Survey
- Water System Tours
- Web site: Contact Us, Tell the Board, homepage, etc.
- Workshops when appropriate

***Supplemental Plans and Communications:***

- Construction Projects
- Drought
- Emergencies/Main Breaks
- Incident or crisis management
- Meter Conversion
- Planned construction and outages
- Rate Increase
- Rule Change
- Water Resource Plan

***Responsible Water Use Programs:***

Assigned-Day Watering Public Outreach and Advertising Campaigns  
CommonSense Gardening Workshops  
Drought Awareness Campaign, when needed  
Fall Cool Down (when Glendale can be shut off and save on operational costs)  
Educational materials for Conservation Consultants  
Poster Art Contest support  
Facebook, Twitter and/or TMWA Blog  
Truckee Meadows Community Forestry Coalition outreach and events  
Water-Efficient Landscape Awards and tour  
[www.tmwalandscapguide.com](http://www.tmwalandscapguide.com)  
[www.howdoyousave.com](http://www.howdoyousave.com)  
[www.tmwastorage.com](http://www.tmwastorage.com) (water system and supply graphic)

**Community Outreach Objectives:**

- Reinforce TMWA's communication messages through media and social media outlets, keeping the community apprised of important, water-related topics that affect them.

**Community Outreach Strategies:**

- Through messages that are consistent with all of TMWA's community communications, engage the community in a discussion about TMWA's high-quality water, and the importance of responsible water use.
- Create opportunities for public engagement with community members and TMWA.

**Community Outreach Tactics:**

***Public Involvement:***

CommonSense Gardening Workshops  
Community event participation, booths and hand-out materials  
E-newsletter from the General Manager  
Public Meetings  
Public Workshops on various topics  
Speakers Bureau  
Topic Papers  
Water System Tours  
Water-Efficient Landscape Awards and tour  
Facebook, Twitter and/or TMWA Blog

***School Programs:***

Book Covers and book marks  
Handout materials, coloring books, etc.  
Plant Tours  
Poster Art Contest

## TMWA Academy

### ***Web site:***

- Current news updates
- Current content
- Proactive issues management
- Regular review of content for relevancy

### ***Media Relations:***

- Bi-annual editorial meetings with the Reno Gazette Journal
- Annual deskside meetings with local media
- Deskside meetings with key media regarding important issues, new programs or projects
- Pitching industry publications
- Issues management/message development
- Media training for management team (twice per year or during emerging issues)
- Notification of all public meetings
- Media contacts on Web site
- Media room on Web site
- Proactive media opportunities
- Regular publicity and news coverage management
- Topic Papers

### **TMWA Employee Outreach Objectives:**

- Update TMWA employees at least quarterly regarding the company's financial situation through From the Source communication
- Update TMWA employees at least twice a fiscal year regarding consolidation progress through From the Source communication
- Create two interactive employee activities per fiscal that enable cross department interaction.

### **TMWA Employee Outreach Strategies:**

- Position TMWA as a transparent employer through consistent, truthful and easy to understand communication.
- Encourage employee engagement among different departments.
- Foster opportunities for leadership to interact with employees in non-formal settings.

### **TMWA Employee Outreach Tactics**

- From the Source communications
- Employee activities that enable engagement opportunities
- Leadership rounds

## **Key Messages for 2011-2012**

TMWA will use the following messages in various communications mediums and for various audiences.

### *Water Quality:*

- TMWA has a staff of highly trained professionals, who go to great lengths to ensure your water is safe, clean and reliable.
- TMWA works closely with other health and protection agencies including both federal and local to ensure that we are the leaders when it comes to water quality trends and issues.
- TMWA consistently monitors our water quality and is transparent regarding findings.
- TMWA stands behind the product it delivers and consistently meets and exceeds all drinking water standards.

### *Ownership and Oversight:*

- TMWA is community owned and operated locally water utility.
- TMWA offers many opportunities and welcomes public input from the community.
- TMWA believes in the product it delivers to the community, water. We are customers also.

### *Environmental Stewardship:*

- TMWA is a steward of the Truckee River and works with other organizations in the area to protect this important natural resource.
- We protect and enhance water quality and water resources.
- TMWA is constantly planning for long-range resource planning in order to ensure a reliable water supply to meet customer demands.
- We always encourage our customers to use water responsibly through various programs.
- TMWA is not only a steward of the Truckee River, but also a leader in green energy production. TMWA utilizes both hydroelectric and solar energy sources in order to produce green energy.

### *TMWA Operations:*

- We are financially stable and efficient in all areas of operation.
- We continue to make the appropriate investment in aging infrastructure to ensure reliability to our customers, while in a down economy.
- Since the recession began, TMWA has continually adjusted all operations in order to reduce operating expenses. However, TMWA has not and will not make cuts that would compromise the public health and safety of our customers.

- TMWA is continuing to look for ways to reduce operating costs, without compromising public health, and currently expenses are trending less than fiscal year 2007 expenses.
- TMWA is always strategic about hiring practices and capital improvement projects. TMWA did not staff up during the economic boom and has been able to take advantage of lower construction costs in order to complete important projects that will benefit customers for years to come.
- Through a Voluntary Workforce Reduction Program, TMWA will reduce staff between 8 – 12 percent mid 2011.

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## Truckee Meadows Water Authority

2010

### Earned Media Summary

*The Truckee Meadows Water Authority (TMWA) earned media report covers all press releases and resulting news coverage for 2010. The coverage included in this report is based solely on the efforts of GoodStanding pitches or press releases on behalf of TMWA. A detailed summary for each month is available which includes specific press release titles, media analysis score on each release and each published article's size in column inches.*

Total Releases Issued:	26
Total Releases Picked Up:	22
Total Clips:	186
Total Earned Media Value*:	\$502,517.98
Total Column Inches:	2,036
Percentage of Goal:	93%

\*includes print, television, radio media

In order to determine the message analysis score for each news story, we looked at specific message points that include:

- Story slant
- Percentage of message points included
- Specific message point inclusion
- Targeted media
- Story position
- Prominence of mention
- Target audience

The percentage was then calculated from a total score of 21 for each news story.

To determine the media value of each news story we calculated the number of column inches of the individual news story by the open rate of the featured publication. We also added extra value based on the news story's position and if a visual was included.