

NEW MEDIA, COMMUNICATIONS & HUMAN RESOURCES WORKSHOP



OCTOBER 18-20, 2015
CLEVELAND, OH

A FOCUS ON THE CUSTOMER

IBTTA
TOLLING. MOVING SMARTER.

From customer relationships, to new media, to crisis communication, to the new generations storming into the work force, the Workshop focused on the profound changes that are transforming tolling agencies and the services they offer. The Workshop itself was designed to allow a lot more interaction than the average conference, opening the door for participants to share their knowledge, experience and challenges.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Change was in the air when the International Bridge, Tunnel and Turnpike Association hosted its *New Media, Communications and Human Resources Workshop* in Cleveland October 18-20.

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This report captures voices from an important discussion that is certain to echo through IBTTA member organizations for weeks and months to come.

THE BEST COMMUNICATORS BUILD COMMUNITY

“We build infrastructure. We change communities. We leave a legacy for our children and grandchildren. That’s what it’s about. The bridges we build will be here for generations. Tolling is just a means to an end, so we need to make it more obvious to people that this is important.”

—**Javier Rodriguez**, IBTTA 2015 President and Executive Director, Miami-Dade Expressway Authority

“Social media is the knowledge infrastructure that helps the tolling industry tell a compelling story about physical infrastructure. Tolling agencies work hard every day to understand and deliver on customers’ needs and expectations. Social media is a fantastic tool for listening to our communities, building relationships and shaping the conversation in favor of user-financed transportation.”

—**Patrick Jones**, Executive Director and CEO, IBTTA

Knowing your audience, messaging accordingly, messaging consistently and staying true to the brand are four of the most important guidelines for effective branding. “Ask yourself: where is the audience and what are they talking about? Find your people and meet them.”

—**Tyler Milligan**, Managing Partner, Milligan Partners

First and last, communications is about building community—with customers, employees, decision-makers, funders and a host of other stakeholders. Social media provide new pathways and techniques for telling a tolling agency’s story and engaging community opinion leaders to tell theirs. But in the end, it’s all about finding the right tools and platforms for each target audience—including people who may make little use of social media, mobile or even desktop computers.

Social media “is all about communicating, sharing and adding value to communities. And it’s about as far from traditional broadcast marketing as you can get.”

—**Jenise Fryatt**, Social Media Strategist, Smarter Shift Inc.

“One goal of the workshop was to bring communications, marketing and human resources professionals together to develop a nationwide network. As we work to provide greater mobility to our customers, it’s critical that we speak with a unified voice in our message development and delivery.”

—**Bill Cramer**, Communications Director, IBTTA

Think about the information your agency has to share across all audiences, and make that the focus of your key messages. What can people learn from you when you say this isn't their grandparents' toll road? Do you have a call to action?

—**John O'Connell**, Senior Communications Counselor, Worthwhile Communications

If your website or blog is the fulcrum of your online presence, social media platforms are the spokes on the wheel. That's where you build community and human-to-human connections who will be genuinely excited about sharing and amplifying your content when you send it out. (Then you retweet their content in turn.)

The best social media campaigns practice the 80/20 rule—80 percent of the material comes from outside sources, while 20 percent is your own original content. It's a proven way to demonstrate your own thought leadership while practicing good online etiquette.

A solid social media presence gradually builds profile and credibility with media and other influencers. A couple of years into its online campaign, IBTTA issued a blog post that was picked up by an influential Beltway publication within 24 hours.

SATISFIED CUSTOMERS DRIVE SUCCESS

"You've got to be creative. You've got to be connected. You've got to show people how we're related and the value they get from us."

—**Randy Cole**, Executive Director, Ohio Turnpike and Infrastructure Commission

Customer dissatisfaction doesn't usually happen all at once: It creeps up like a pebble in your shoe. A company might disappoint you, then disappoint you again, and you gradually start looking for options that eventually become a whole new routine that leaves the original relationship behind. For the company, regular feedback is the best way to track subtle changes in satisfaction that can shine a light on emerging problems. For toll roads operators, this is both a duty and an opportunity—a duty to listen to existing customers and an opportunity to attract new users who are repeatedly disappointed by other mobility options.

Managing customer expectations is more important than measuring customer satisfaction, since it's the expectations that determine satisfaction.

The Central Texas Regional Mobility Authority (CTRMA) used a long list of tools to keep an open line with residents around the MoPac Improvement Project. The menu included a geocoded website to deliver construction updates, a neighborhood tree giveaway program, an ice cream social, a Spotify playlist and a popular Facebook quiz. CTRMA even distributed a care bag to help neighbors endure the construction, complete with ear plugs, antacids and "a flashlight so you can find your way out to the back yard to swear at the crews." The care bag distribution generated several letters of thanks.

BUILDING A FANATICALLY COMMITTED WORKPLACE CULTURE

You always hear about the boots on the ground, the highways, the maintenance and the engineers with creative designs for bridges. You never hear about human resources, communications, or IT, but "you can't build a road or push snow without the unsung heroes."

—**Grindly Johnson**, Deputy Secretary of Transportation, Commonwealth of Virginia

It's incredibly important to celebrate achievements in the workplace by hosting open houses or other events to mark company milestones and using employee feedback sessions to tell a tolling agency's proud history. Agencies can build bonds among employees by making the work fun whenever possible.

—**Lauren Hakos**, Training and Development Manager, Ohio Turnpike and Infrastructure Commission

One of the most annoying things about Millennials is that they're so impatient. One of the gifts they bring to their organizations is that they're so impatient. By keeping all generations in the conversation, organizations can lean into challenge and get the greatest benefit from employees of all ages.

—**Jim Smith**, The Executive Happiness Coach

The dynamics arising from generational differences have always been with us. There's nothing new here except that, now, we can tweet about it.

Given a choice between higher pay and flexible work arrangements, 45 percent of Millennials will choose flexibility.

It costs an organization 1½ to three times an employee's base pay to replace them. But job tenures are getting shorter, partly because younger generations in the work force have never experienced job loyalty.

Reverse mentoring can be a powerful experience for all concerned and a great benefit for the organization. An example is a younger employee helping a more experienced colleague get up to speed on technology.

The Cleveland Cavaliers' corporate culture is enshrined in 19 statements that shape every decision and customer interaction. Every employee goes through an eight-hour training program, the format is updated quarterly—and the training is delivered by the owner.

—**Kerry Bubolz**, President of Business Operations, Cleveland Cavaliers

Effective employee benchmarking creates opportunities for good performers to become great and poor performers to become good, so that the organization as a whole does better.

Most of the research on generational differences says traditional workers will accept an organization geared to the needs of Generation X and Millennials—but those emergent workers won't tolerate organizations that rely on older business models.

External contractors are an essential part of the tolling work force, and a great many U.S. small businesses classified as Disadvantaged Business Enterprises (DBE) can bring their expertise and creativity to the industry. When you help a small business, the economy grows.

BIG DATA MEANS BIG RESULTS

"I'm not a statistician, but I do love data...It can help inform big campaigns, and business decisions as well. It saves money in the long run. There may be up-front costs, but over time you'll make that return on investment."

—**Malika Reed Wilkins**, Director of Marketing and Communications, State Road and Tollway Authority

With the right customer data, tolling agencies can allocate resources more appropriately, fine-tune their marketing priorities, offer nimble customer service and optimize operations. When data is segmented by customer sub-audience, it can be used to reinforce customer habits, or to change behavior by encouraging a shift to transponders or mitigating rush-hour volumes.

The State Road and Tollway Authority successfully differentiated between two audience segments that both consisted of younger drivers in their 20s and 30s with relatively limited incomes. The six percent of the agency's customer base in the Young Potentials group accounted for 15 percent of all trips, with more miles, more shoulder and return trips and 50 percent of their usage during peak hours. The Young Urban Dwellers were demographically similar and accounted for 18.1 percent of the customer base, but only 4.1 percent of all trips. The difference was geography: The Young Urban Dwellers were concentrated in the heart of the city, so they had limited need for highway driving. The detailed data translated into targeted incentives that successfully reduced rush-hour volume.

It's a great idea to invite senior executives to sit in on focus groups. They're often "delightfully surprised" at what they hear and walk away with a new recognition of the work that has to be done.

Benchmarking only works if surveys are conducted regularly and everyone consistently uses the same instrument. Otherwise, the results won't be comparable.

COMMUNICATING IN A CRISIS

"The greatest uninsured asset of your organization is its reputation," and "the court of public opinion is arguably the most important courtroom that you and your directors will face."

—**Bruce Hennes**, Managing Partner, Hennes Communications

In a crisis, there's a difference between expressing regret and accepting liability. The advice from lawyers that their clients say nothing in a crisis can inflame passions with people who are just looking for an acknowledgement and an apology.

When urgent news is breaking, more attention is the last thing you want. The purpose of crisis communication is to make your story better, shorter and to make your story go away.