

Think you know what a PR agency can do?

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Use of social media has been greatly enhanced at your organization. What was the impetus for that decision?

The change in how people consume news has made it possible for us to become a leading voice in transportation.

We conducted a survey of our customers in November 2010. While we received high marks for our policy reports, daily and weekly newsletters, online television channel, and news releases, we did not do well connecting our content in ways that resonated with them.

Social media tools help us with that. We link together video, pictures, and stories in multiple places, making it easier for people to find exactly what they are looking for and, ultimately, creating a more compelling story.

What has been the consumers' response to that effort?

It's been great. Our audiences have grown on Twitter and Facebook, and we are seeing higher levels of engagement with those audiences – actual conversations about transportation issues that matter to them. That's important. In addition, we have seen the audiences grow for our newsletters and online TV segments.

Has the way you reach out to policymakers also changed?

I tell anyone who will listen that author and media pundit Marshall McLuhan's “the media is the message” has evolved. Today, I suggest, “We are the media.”

Our organization has become an information-content provider and we are cultivating an active audience that wants to know what's happening in the transportation sector. We actually communicate beyond policymakers and watch the information loop back around as it is reprinted or repurposed by others.

For instance, we use Transportation TV to tell America's transportation story, giving our association and its member state transportation departments the ability to communicate directly with the public and the news media, in addition to decision-makers on Capitol Hill and across the nation.

The video segments tell transportation stories from different – and often more accessible – perspectives than policy reports or news releases. We typically post new TV segments on our website, but then it also streams through our new iPhone app and on our YouTube channel. It also gets linked to our Facebook page and shared via our Twitter feed.

What key policy issue in the transportation sector will you focus communications efforts around in the next few months?

Our work this summer is focused on encouraging Congress to enact a new transportation authorization bill. It will not be easy. Transportation interests almost universally agree on the need for continued investment in the transportation system, but questions remain about how to fund a new bill.

We need a multi-year transportation bill passed this year that includes the flexibility to enable states to get the most value for each dollar; changes in law so we can deliver projects faster, and the financial tools that will work as a supplement to our dollars.