2015 AASHTO TRANSCOMM SKILLS CONTEST

Division:  8) Graphic Design
Category:  8f) Interactive Presentation

Entry title: VDOT’s Electronic Bulletin Boards
Organization: Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT)
ENTRY PROFILE

1) Situation, goals and objectives of public relations activity

The Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) has more than 3,000 workers – out of a total of about 7,500 – with no email or access to the agency’s internal website. These are VDOT’s frontline employees who are in the field every day, maintaining Virginia’s roads and other transportation assets.

Getting vital agency information to this key workforce audience had stymied VDOT leadership for years. VDOT had a popular monthly internal newsletter – part of its 2008 AASHTO NTPAW Excel-winning internal communications campaign, in fact – that was mailed to employees’ homes. The publication, however, succumbed to cost cutting in the recession.

The loss of the monthly newsletter, which shared consistent agency messages with all employees, put VDOT leadership back at square one in terms of reaching the field workers. Information was inconsistent or incomplete as it filtered through various supervisors, via what the supervisors themselves received, or through handouts or announcements tacked to a bulletin board.

It was this last tool that provided VDOT the inspiration – with the help of technology – to build a better informed, more engaged employee base. By rethinking this low-tech communications tool – the bulletin board – VDOT began deploying interactive electronic bulletin boards (EBBs) in its field offices in 2014.

VDOT had developed 10 essential business goals in 2012, one of which included strengthening internal communications. One objective was to create information stations at each field facility – district offices, residencies, area headquarters – to provide messages in a brief, visual format to reduce communications barriers with those employees who have no email access.

The team that developed the electronic bulletin boards included staff from VDOT’s Communications, Human Resources and Information Technology divisions plus the Salem District office, location of the pilot EBB installation.

The first step? Meet with affected employees to gauge their level of internal communications engagement, identify and alleviate user issues, and create a user-friendly tool. Communications and IT worked with the software provider to produce a branded screen template plus user capabilities not previously used at VDOT for internal communications.

Using feedback from pilot participants, the project transformed from a static screen to an interactive touch screen. The screens provide daily updates of important internal information as well as access to online tools – such as local weather, VDOT’s 511 traffic cameras, the external VDOT website, training and benefits updates, HR contacts, and safety and training videos.

VDOT’s traffic cameras and the local weather provide situational awareness critical for emergency response, a huge bonus in alerting field staff to current and pending conditions. The EBBs also can air brief videos, including prerecorded messages from VDOT leadership.

The IT team reviewed each site that would receive the EBB, working with districts to add or upgrade connections and to install each unit. Deployment was completed ahead of schedule and under budget. Since statewide implementation began in 2014, VDOT has installed more than 250 EBB units statewide. VDOT Communications and Human Resources create and oversee much of the EBB content.
2) Target audience
VDOT’s employees who have no email access at work. EBBs also have been placed in many VDOT administrative offices.

3) Measureable results
During the project’s pilot phase in VDOT’s Salem District, nearly 80 employees participated in “before” and “after” surveys about internal communications.

A sample of questions and “before” and “after” answers:
• I am kept well informed of district-wide plans and progress. YES: before: 38.8 percent; after: 46.1 percent
• I am provided safety information that is timely and appropriate to my daily work. YES: before: 85.5 percent; after: 92.3 percent
• I feel we are kept up to date on activities and special events happening throughout the residency and district. YES: before: 60.2 percent; after: 72.4 percent
• I am satisfied with the access we have to information in our facility. YES: before, 67.9 percent; after, 72.7 percent

The second “after” survey included additional questions; 65 of the original 78 participants answered these questions:
• 53 respondents said the EBBs are a good way to keep employees informed.
• 52 respondents said they watch the EBBs on a regular basis.

These are some comments from supervisors and staff about the EBBs:
• “The EBBs have been great for our crews. They look up job openings and are able to see all the information from Human Resources for themselves.”
• “It’s easy to use. Crew members unfamiliar with computers are able to navigate the EBBs quickly after they watched a demonstration.”
• “511 is used a great deal during bad weather. We pull up traffic cameras near emergency calls to get a better idea of what equipment we need to take when responding to traffic incidents or cleanup.”
• “The EBBs have led to a boost in morale. They have helped fill the gap left behind when HR and business staff were removed from area headquarters and residencies several years ago.”

VDOT also determined it could save at least $900,000 per year in travel costs for training as some courses can now be delivered via the electronic bulletin boards. Training via EBB also eliminates the time and expense associated with creating hard copies of related materials and other administrative costs.

The most important benefit the electronic bulletin boards have provided is how they have improved the quality of communication between VDOT leadership and field personnel. The EBBs allow VDOT to provide a better focus to the content of its announcements and to feature morale-building employee accomplishments. This unique internal communications resource has been unmatched for reaching VDOT’s under-communicated audience.

The electronic bulletin boards also have sparked interest from both the public and private sectors, including Norfolk Southern Corp., which sent a team to VDOT’s Salem District office to view the EBBs firsthand.

In May 2015, the electronic bulletin boards also received two important awards: a VDOT Commissioner’s Award for outstanding customer service, and an award of merit for internal communications from the Richmond chapter of the Public Relations Society of America as part of its Virginia Public Relations Awards.
VDOT’s Electronic Bulletin Boards

Main Screen

The main screen of the electronic bulletin board includes announcements and benefits information, video messages, weather and sub-content buttons. The sub-content buttons include:

- Employee Information – job postings (Virginia Jobs), pay calendar, important contacts
- VDOT website – access to external site
- Training videos – approximately 50 training and safety videos are available on demand on the electronic bulletin boards
- Weather – Meridian (contract weather vendor), local weather stations and NOAA information
- Traffic cameras – access to www.511Virginia.org site and the media portal
VDOT’s Electronic Bulletin Boards

Employee information—Virginia Jobs screen

Training videos
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Virginia Roads screen

511Virginia screen with camera view
VDOT's Electronic Bulletin Boards

Meridian weather screen

Sample of employee recognition slide
VDOT EBB on Display

A VDOT electronic bulletin board was displayed during the Four Winds Interactive Super User Conference in Miami in May 2014.

Pictured are conference participants interacting and photographing the VDOT screen.

Outreach to EBB content providers

A sample of the email newsletter that goes to EBB content providers throughout VDOT (primarily Communications and Human Resources staff)