

Marketing Strategies for the Fish and Wildlife Professional

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Abstract: Biologists and administrators have been marketing hunting and fishing opportunities ever since the first person asked “How is the fishing?” or “Where can I hunt?” In today’s technological world we tend to lose sight of the fact that anglers and hunters are our critical customers and they depend upon us to manage and market these opportunities. During recent discussions about Federal Aid to Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration outreach, the concept of marketing recreational hunting and fishing has been raised to a new level. Does that mean that we are going to do more marketing than in the past? Probably not. It means biologists and administrators will be participating more in the marketing process. If we are to succeed in the future we have to refocus on customer service and what most of our customers want is information.

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I am going to do my best to get personal. I have found the only way many people pay attention is to make it relevant. The previous presentation suggested you need to market sport fishing. Perhaps you were sitting on your hands, going over your slide show, or maybe watching, saying and thinking, “this is pretty neat but our agency is never going to do it.” But, this is the future ladies and gentlemen. This is the future in sport fishing. If we do not begin to market recreational sport fishing—we in this room—it will not happen. I have news for you concerning those future customers everyone talks about and will continue to talk about: they are going to find someone who will market to their interests if we do not.

I am going to make it personal, so pay attention.

Someone mentioned earlier about the traditional customers being 40- to 45-year-old white Anglo-Saxon males with \$20,000 bass boats. I see a lot of 40-year-old white Anglo-Saxon males in this room and I suggest we are starting at a disadvantage. We can’t get out of the box. We can’t think beyond our own points of view.

When did we go to school? Who taught us? What have we learned over the years? These all influence the way we think today. The amount of data that must enter our brains before it changes our opinion is astronomical. What do they say in the education community? By the time a kid is 10 years of age, that’s it baby, you got

what you got for the rest of their life unless they have a major psychological shock to their system such as the death of a family member, the death of a president, or a bombing in Oklahoma City. Then it makes a difference. Otherwise, it doesn't matter, they are not going to change.

If you are going to be a progressive fisheries manager or administrator and have people looking to you for leadership, you have to think outside of that box. You have to start thinking, not only listening to these comments, but thinking, "How can I use this?" You have to make it personal by asking "How can I use this? How can I help my people use this information?"

Arizona is not unique; we have problems similar to those you heard here today, across the board. I thought I was going to fall over when Mark Duda was discussing the reasons people are not fishing. "Haven't got the time, populations are dynamic, they move." We are moving into an era where we have to understand the customer and make it personal. He described Arizona and other western states to a 'T'.

Your customers want it personal. You know that. I'm not telling you anything you don't already know. You have to make the realization and then put it into practice every day. You have to work at customer satisfaction.

Get off your hands! How many people in here think we have been talking about the fisheries resources as the customers? Come on, be honest. Based on this survey, your lack of response is very unique. When I talk to my fisheries team in Arizona or any of these other gentlemen talk to the people they represent, it is almost unanimous in that our biologists think fish are the customers. They believe that! They believe it because that is what they have been taught and what their associates believe.

We have done a good job for the resources by maintaining fish populations and fisheries across the country. We must realize we are not doing it for the fish—the fish don't care—people care. If you get that concept, you will make it to the 21st century. If you don't, you are going to lose it in the 21st century.

What can you do about marketing right now? The easiest way to summarize what you have heard is to deal with the splash and not the fish. As state agencies we have the responsibility to look out for the fisheries resources for the sake of future generations and not for the sake of the fish. It is the image.

To get this point across, we must change our image. We must change the way the "general public" thinks even though I'm told they don't exist. We must get into their heads to understand what they want and where they want it. Create an image.

Thirty-two to 40% of the general public does not know about that game and fish agency. Maybe we have been more aggressive in Arizona because about 62% know us. This is good and it gives us something to work with but it does not mean we do not have a problem. We still have 32% to 40% who do not know our responsibilities.

One realization we made during our internal education process was that we needed to better understand the customer and once we understand, determine what that means to the organization. This was thinking outside the box. Soon, we came to a whole new level of operation. Some employees are being dragged along, some are ahead of the game and have to be pulled back. Some employees work at another level of fisheries management, issues and image, but it all gets back to the concept of the

customer. Customers are voters who go to the ballot box to decide some issues and 51% will dictate your future. And if you can put that into perspective and be proactive, you can get out in front of the curve and lead the way.

The question was asked earlier if we can influence change? Yes, if you want to. If you don't want to it's going to influence you. From the look of this audience it looks like most people here have been in fisheries for a while. Most of us are in either fisheries management or fisheries administration. The point being that it is your responsibility to influence that change, or get your people to realize that they can influence change. Influencing change will likely come through program promotion or outreach. It depends on to whom you are talking. Depending on how your agency views outreach, you will probably do some marketing. To make it, you need to do both. But we have a real problem of "blowing our own whistle," so it will not be easy.

We became involved in fish and wildlife to deal with animals. Now we are being told we did it wrong. I did it wrong for 25 years. I now realize things have changed, society has changed, and I am changing. The kicker is, do you want to be up front and in control? Do you want to be out in front guiding things to happen or do you want to follow along and hope for the best? It is your choice and it is personal but you must make that choice. In the military they say "Either get up front and lead or get out of the way." It happens in the private sector, it happens in state government, it happens everywhere. You must stand up and participate in the process of change! Well from a state standpoint, let's implement change. Let's make a difference. It is a different thought process, and to make it we need get outside the box.

While I titled my talk "Marketing Strategies for the Fish and Wildlife Professional," the strategies are not black and white or as numerous as Florida's marketing outreach. Florida first went through a process to make these realizations. They included people in-house, the internal customers, well as their external customers. You must realize there are 2 sets of customers and they both are important. They both need to be listened to, and both have value. If you do not listen to both customer groups, you are doomed for replacement. Many agencies have experienced internal turmoil over the years because they didn't listen to their customers. I have tried to provide you with ideas and not strategies. Rather than learned strategies, I wanted you to think out of the box and to be creative.

Two years ago Arizona moved forward in its fisheries' program. Because of modification to Sport Fish Restoration funding for outreach we are working at internal education for our people to get them thinking outside the box. To make it personal, to get them to think about fisheries management and the other side of that coin, they needed to be concerned about the customer who uses that resource.

We have lost quite a few anglers since 1986. That year was our top, our pinnacle, and angler numbers have not been there since. I am not confident I know how to get them back. Because of drought cycles, we go through unique opportunities or lack of opportunities. This puts unique parameters on what we can do, where we can market, but understanding the customers is what will make it work.

Strategies can be varied and strategies can be personal. Again, you must make it personal. Many of us don't like to do that because it is not the thing we were trained to

do, but we need to do it. We need to do it on the local level, not only with local anglers, but also with our biologists. We need to do it locally and regionally with the rest of our partners. Our partners these days are more varied now than ever as we heard this morning. So don't forget the customer, that other piece of the puzzle, because it's critical to include them.

So I will leave you with this personal note. I plan on being at conferences like this for the next 8 years. I plan on talking to anybody who will listen about outreach and marketing. Remember, the fish don't care!! People care!!