Interview with Shannon Crownover, VP for Marketing, Ocean Conservancy

Tuesday, August 15, 2013

OC has two groups of "volunteers"

1. Virtual Volunteers--petition signers and facebook likers. We did not discuss these.  
2. Actual Volunteers--a loosely coordinated group of people who pick up trash on beaches once a year.   
  
OC staff work with over 50 partners worldwide, who in turn recruit hundreds of volunteer coordinators who then manage thousands of day-of volunteers.

The Communications staff creates a communications plan for the trash day, including a social media plan with suggested posts and tweets.

They attempt to keep these folks engaged through the year with their new iPhone app, Rippl. Rippl gives users weekly tips on how they can create a greener environment.

I asked about the development of Rippl. They hired app developers for this--Shannon says they wanted to invest their $$ wisely to give the best ROI.

The OC staff's first idea was for app users to record the trash they picked up year around. When they did a marketing study, however, users shot that idea down. Users don't like to pick up trash year around--they like to pick it up once a year (alas). Also, the users thought it would be a pain to record their trash pickups on the phone. What users wanted was an app that would push tips to them--they wanted to be passive rather than active users.

I noted to Shannon that most of the OC site appears to function this way--to push content to users rather than vice versa, and asked if that is what OC wants--if they are happy with this situation (which would kill our idea).  
  
She said no, in fact, they really want to figure out how to engage their community. She specifically said they want to figure out how to create **more "user-generated content" [possible strong keyword]**.

In fact, she is restructuring the communications staff to focus on this. She just hired a new Director of Digital Strategy, Marie Michaelson, who was with Green Media Toolshed and is a master of engagement, and moved one of her staff to focus 100% on advocacy via social.

I asked if they would be willing to pay a vendor or consultant to help facilitate this new focus, and she said yes. She said that the biggest chunk of expenses in her budget is dedicated to digital, and that she is very **interested in looking for "partners" [keyword]** to help develop this aspect of their outreach. I think "partners" is the NGO word for vendors in this context.

I did not ask about specific dollar amounts as it seemed premature and also since she is restructuring I thought the $$ might change, but I am talking with the OC volunteer coordinator tomorrow, and could ask her if you thought I should.

I am pretty optimistic after this call!