



Leading with Creativity: How Storytelling Builds Trust When the Message is Tough

Western Municipal Water District
3CMA Conference



Introductions



Strategy, Leadership,
& Planning

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SUPPLYING WATER TO RIVERSIDE COUNTY

1M+

PEOPLE

25B

GALLONS
DELIVERED PER YEAR

\$1.2B

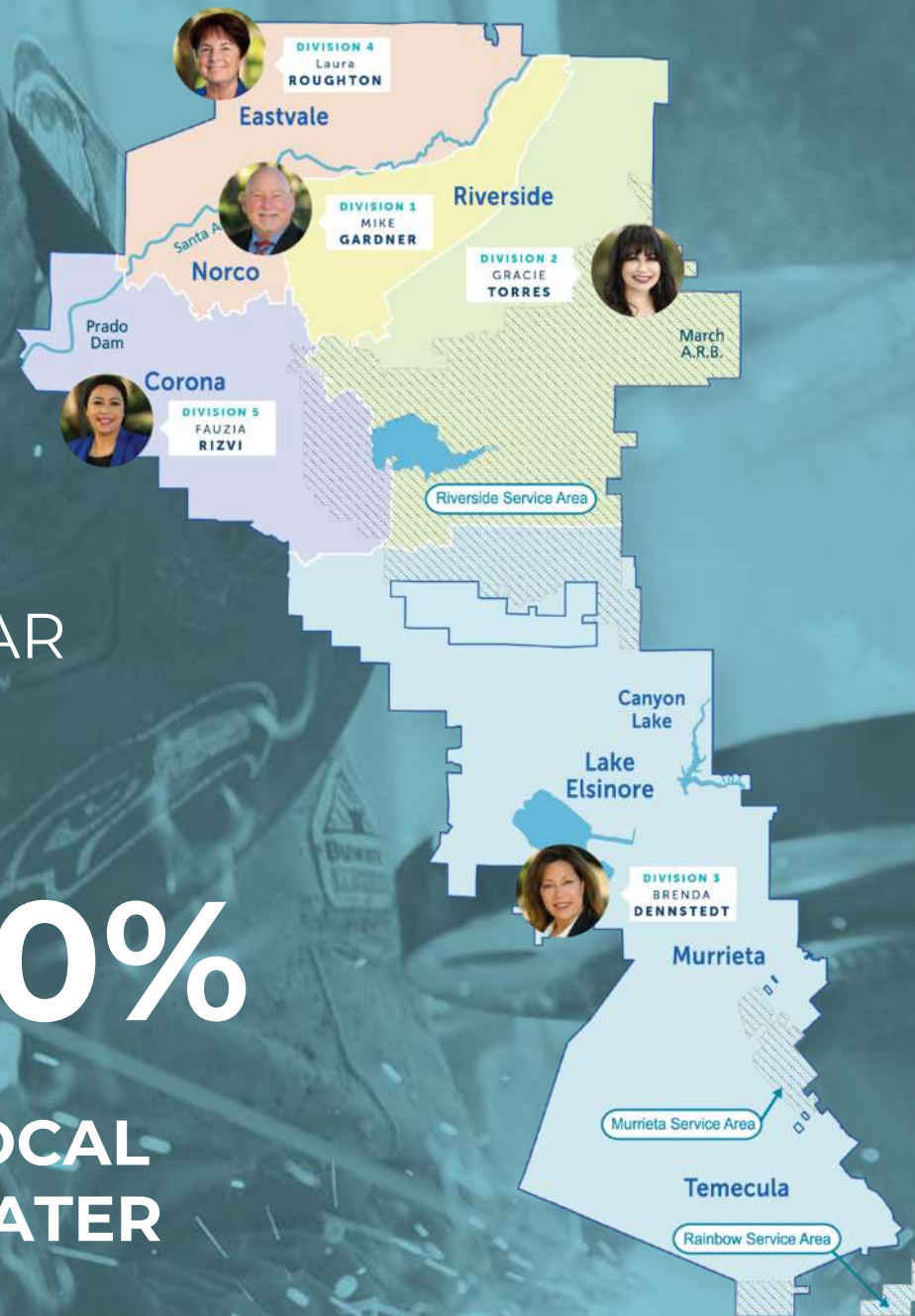
INFRASTRUCTURE

60%

IMPORTED
WATER

40%

LOCAL
WATER



COMMUNICATION PRINCIPLES BEHIND THE CAMPAIGN

How do you make
THE INVISIBLE VISIBLE? 

When customers see the bill
but not everything behind it.

Start with the customer's
experience.

STARTING IN THE WRONG PLACE

WESTERN WATER  **OUR AUDIENCE**

- Here's what we need.
- Here's why we need it.
- Here's what we need you to know.
- Why should I care?
- Why does this matter?
- What does this mean?

ENSURING WATER FOR EVERY MOMENT

- We created context before talking about rates.
- We showed the work instead of just explaining it.
- And we built a story, not just a video.





ONE STORY DIFFERENT EXPRESSIONS



VIDEO

Create connection



SOCIAL

Simplify



DIGITAL

Go deeper



PRINT

Inform



IN PERSON

Listen + engage



Social Media



WHERE SOCIAL MEDIA FITS

Social media:

- Is the first-place questions show up
- Builds transparency in real time
- Supports leadership visibility
- Helps clarify complex topics faster
- Shows customers we are listening

Agencies stay quiet on social media to avoid negative comments, but it keeps them invisible when they need to be understood.



HOW WE USED SOCIAL MEDIA DIFFERENTLY



TYPICAL USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

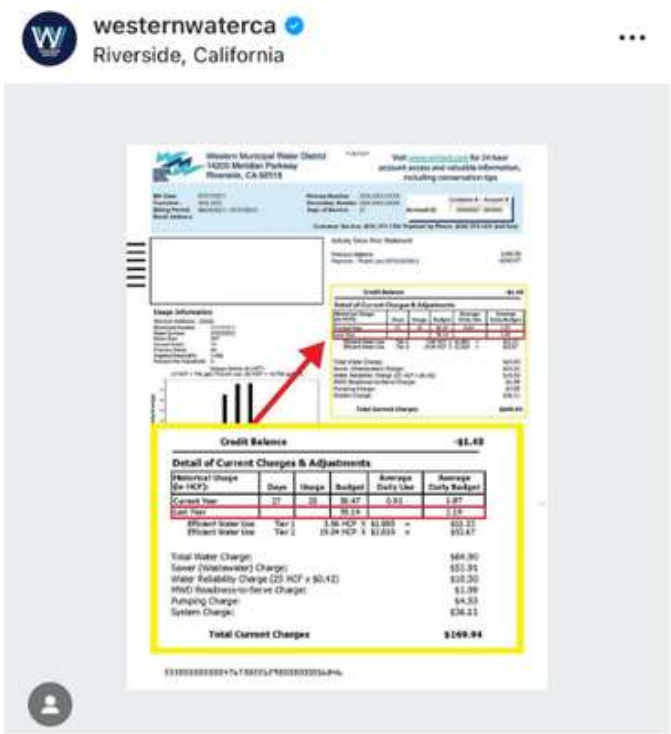
-  Announce information
-  Post event dates & links
-  Share press releases
-  Drop holiday/feel-good graphics
-  “Fly under the radar”



SOCIAL MEDIA WORKS BEST WHEN

-  Educates first
-  Shows the work behind the scenes
-  Uses real voices
-  Listens + adapts
-  Stays consistent

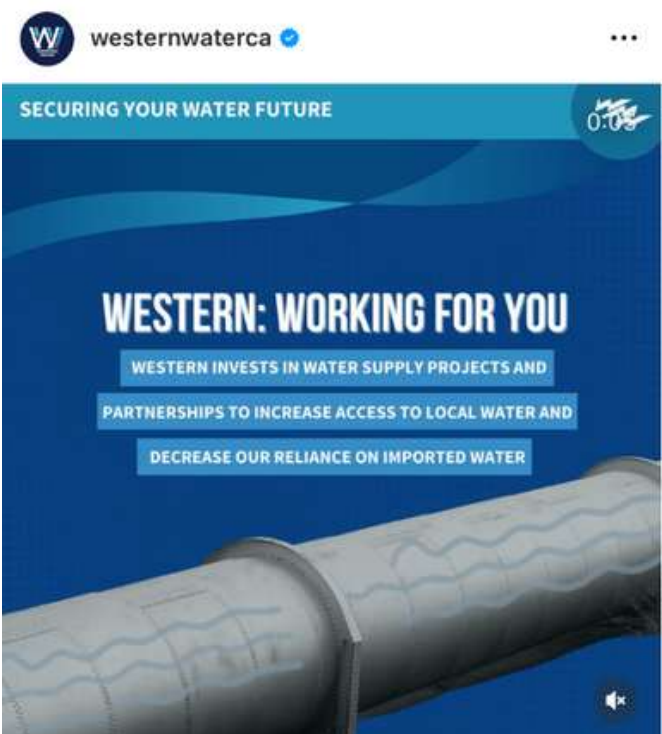
THE OLD WAY



TEXT-HEAVY
GRAPHICS



GIFS



STATIC POSTS

THE NEW WAY



Rates 35w

What questions do you have?

Why are costs still rising if we have more water now than in years?

Water supply is just one part of the cost. Expenses are mainly driven by energy costs, material prices, aging infrastructure repairs, stricter state and federal regulations, and the cost to secure water for future droughts.

Q & A



BEHIND THE SCENES



WATER FALLS FROM THE SKY, WHY SHOULD I PAY FOR IT?

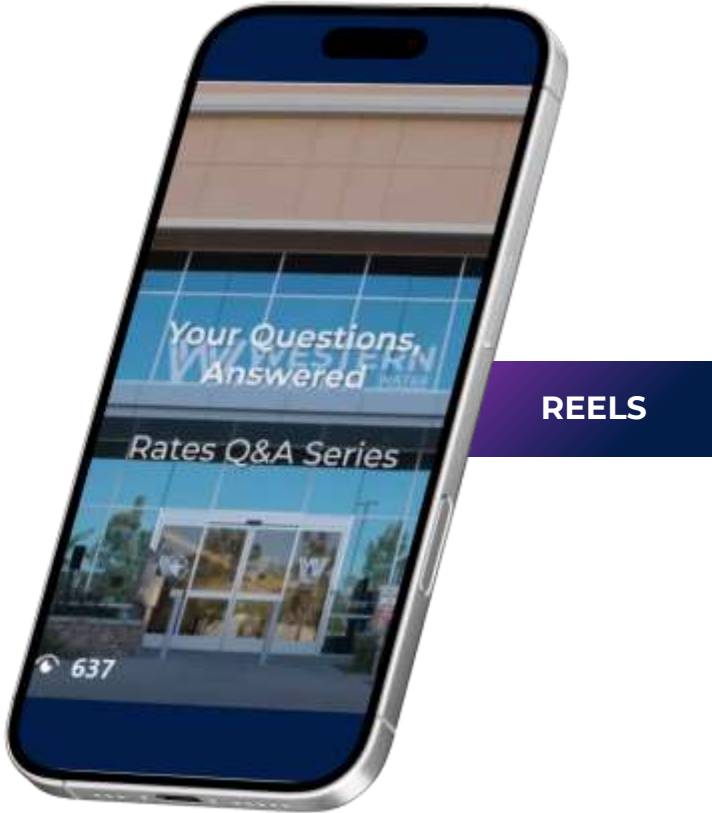
MYTH

WATER FALLS FROM THE SKY, IT'S FREE AND READY TO DRINK.

FACT

RAIN MAY BE FREE, BUT SAFE, RELIABLE WATER SERVICE ISN'T. WE TREAT, TEST AND DELIVER CLEAN WATER TO YOUR TAP 24/7. YOUR BILL SUPPORTS THE PEOPLE, PIPES, AND PROCESS THAT MAKE IT DRINKABLE.

CAROUSELS



Your Questions, Answered

Rates Q&A Series

REELS

SHOWING THE WORK BUILDS UNDERSTANDING



SOCIAL MEDIA AS A LISTENING TOOL

WHAT WE HEARD SHAPED WHAT WE SHARED NEXT.

Community members shared comments
and **questions** with the themes of:

Any help for
low-income customers?

How much of my bill is for
water vs. delivery?

Where do our dollars go?



Why are costs rising?

How are reserves
being used?

How much are
employees paid?

Community Engagement



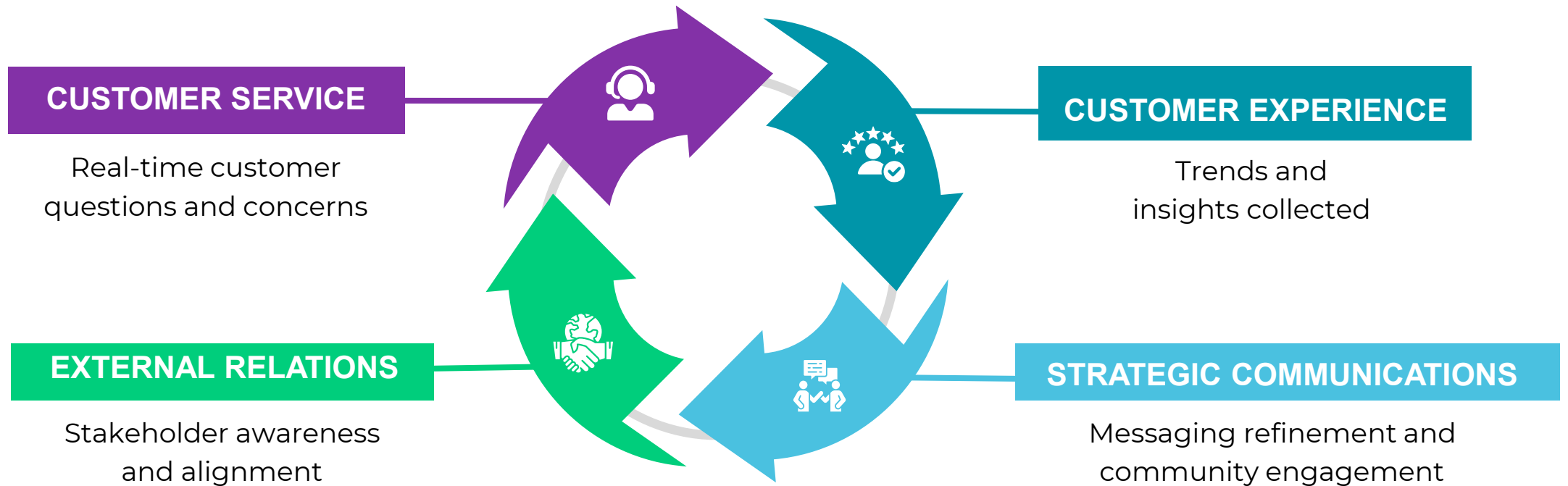
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

A COMMUNICATIONS-DRIVEN, CROSS-FUNCTIONAL APPROACH



THE FEEDBACK LOOP BEHIND PUBLIC TRUST

A living, responsive communication system



ADJUSTING MESSAGING IN REAL TIME



Treated communication as a living process, not a one-time release



Ability to refine, tone, and order when concerns arise



Maintain credibility by responding and not reacting



ADJUSTING
MESSAGING IN
REAL TIME



RESPONSIVE
COMMUNICATION
THAT FEELS HUMAN

REFRAMING THE COMMUNICATIONS ROLE

STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS



MEETING THE COMMUNITY WHERE THEY WERE



**COMMUNITY
MEETINGS**



TOWN HALLS



OPEN HOUSE



**VIRTUAL &
IN-PERSON
INFO SESSIONS**



**COMMUNITY
EVENTS**

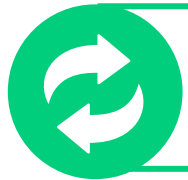
LESSONS LEARNED



Start with experiences



Show the work



Be willing to adjust



Connect with us on LinkedIn



GRACE CARDENAS



NYDIA DOOLITTLE



MELISSA BUSTAMONTE



Thank You

PRESENTED BY:

Western Water

Strategic Communications Team

