



Engage, Outreach, Improve:
Strategies to Connect with New PATCO
Ridership

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The symbol in our logo is adapted from the official

DVRPC seal and is designed as a stylized image of the Delaware Valley. The outer ring symbolizes the region as a whole while the diagonal bar signifies the Delaware River. The two adjoining crescents represent the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and the State of New Jersey.

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Executive Summary

The Port Authority Transit Corporation (PATCO), which operates a transit line serving communities in Camden County, New Jersey, and Center City Philadelphia, asked the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission (DVRPC), through its Work Program, to investigate marketing strategies and other opportunities to increase its connections among younger (ages 18–34) and discretionary riders. PATCO expressed concern that its primary riders, commuters, are growing older and that PATCO needs to reach a new audience in order to avoid a decline in future ridership.

DVRPC conducted an online survey, facilitated a listening session with young adults, and researched other transit agencies' communication and outreach practices in order to identify successful strategies to enhance PATCO's marketing program to younger and discretionary riders. The survey and listening session provided insights into what riders liked about PATCO, what could be improved, and suggestions for better communication between PATCO and the targeted public.

The general goal is to more broadly promote PATCO as a viable option for off-peak, non-work, and leisure trips. The public needs to be made aware of the various destinations served by PATCO, how to ride, and the benefits of taking transit. In reviewing the various strategies and techniques, the following principles emerge:

- ▶ **Create** new ways to access information relevant to riders, linking PATCO and the public: e.g., easy-to-access information and trip planning tools;
- ▶ **Cultivate** new connections with the general public and other stakeholders using available and existent marketing, communication, and outreach activities; and
- ▶ **Maintain** regular communication, engagement, and outreach using a variety of media: online, in person, via the press, etc.

Recommendations based on these principles can be grouped under two categories:

Engage

PATCO should communicate the value of its service to riders and potential riders by using media already employed by the agency. These include:

- ▶ Advertise the communities and destinations that PATCO serves (e.g., Center City nightlife, Collingswood farmers' market) and the 24-hour ease and safety of taking transit;
- ▶ Provide fresh content for Facebook and Twitter feeds that highlight topics of general interest (transit issues, weather, and local events), that promote the PATCO brand, and that refer to information on the PATCO website and elsewhere;

- ▶ Update media lists, targeting university newspapers, radio, local media publications, blogs, or sites such as Patch.com that cater to the desired demographic; and
- ▶ Buy advertising in outlets directed at new patrons and promote PATCO in communities beyond the station areas.

Outreach

PATCO should actively participate in listening sessions and broaden ongoing conversations with all stakeholders:

- ▶ Initiate stronger outreach to college campuses, both in Camden County, New Jersey, and Philadelphia, including developing a Youth Advisory Council;
- ▶ Broaden the email and mailing database beyond existing riders. Consider adding a “sign up for more information” option on www.ridepatco.org; and
- ▶ Participate in at least four to five public events annually, either by exhibiting at an existing event or scheduling a listening session (at New Jersey and Pennsylvania locations).

These strategies can be implemented incrementally to respect existing time, staffing, and budget constraints of the agency. In each section, there will be information on how the strategies presented can be implemented. Case studies of selected transit agency initiatives across the country are used to highlight and illustrate success stories of increased ridership and engagement. Finally, resources are provided for additional information if PATCO chooses to undertake particular strategies.

Introduction

PATCO, which operates a transit line serving communities in Camden County, New Jersey, and Center City Philadelphia, asked DVRPC to investigate marketing strategies and other opportunities to increase and diversify its reach among new ridership, particularly among younger (ages 18–34) and discretionary riders. One of the reasons for undertaking this research is PATCO’s concern that its primary riders, commuters, will soon be reaching retirement age and will no longer be using PATCO for daily weekday trips in the near future. In order to develop an effective marketing program, demographics and land use, as well as emerging social trends, must first be investigated and evaluated to ensure PATCO’s responsiveness to its potential audience.

Population and Land Use along the PATCO Line

Commuters from New Jersey coming into Philadelphia to work make up the primary group of PATCO riders. Travel trend studies conducted by DVRPC unwaveringly show almost exclusively inbound Philadelphia trips in the morning peaks and outbound in the afternoon peaks on PATCO trains. There has been some mid-day crossing, quite possibly dominated by students attending Rutgers University-Camden, but these numbers remain small. Consequently, the service may be generally described as carrying New Jersey workers into Pennsylvania for jobs. New Jersey commuters are the primary rider base for PATCO.

The median age of individuals living in communities in Camden County served by PATCO is in their early 40s. The ridership base for PATCO, particularly in the suburbs, is growing older. The aging of the core ridership is not a positive trend for the future.

Communities like Haddonfield and Collingswood, however, do attract young adults, as well as young families. On the Pennsylvania side, PATCO serves Center City Philadelphia, which attracts a wide age demographic, an ever-increasing number of young adults, as well as tourists. There is great potential to raise the profile of PATCO to these potential riders: for intra-Philadelphia trips, and to highlight the connections between PATCO and Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority (SEPTA) service.

PATCO also serves several educational facilities in both New Jersey and Pennsylvania: in New Jersey, Rutgers University-Camden, Camden County College; in Center City Philadelphia, the University of the Arts, Thomas Jefferson University; and further afield, Temple University, Drexel University, the University of Pennsylvania, and the

Community College of Philadelphia. Students represent a potential growth market for PATCO that requires unique marketing and outreach to better serve their needs.

Trends

PATCO's primary ridership is commuters into Philadelphia. By definition this means that three other trips represent growth opportunities for increased ridership: peak-hour reverse commutes (to New Jersey in the AM and to Pennsylvania in the PM), mid-day trips in both directions, and evening trips in both directions. Thus, there is a need to promote PATCO to a wider non-commuting audience in order to increase ridership when the trains are underused. This requires identifying destinations to promote to potential riders, identifying new non-commuting riders to take trips to these destinations, and getting the word out to potential riders to make this match.

According to the recently released study "Transportation and the New Generation: Why Young People Are Driving Less and What It Means for Transportation Policy," since 2000, the average American has increasingly chosen various modes of transportation (including walking and bicycling) besides the automobile. In fact, by 2011, the average American was driving six percent fewer miles per year than in 2004.¹ This trend in driving less has been led by young people. From 2001 to 2009, the annual number of vehicle miles traveled (VMT) for 16–34-year-olds had decreased 23 percent.²

This trend in driving may have many contributing factors. For instance, many reports maintain that the weaker economy has brought more people to transit, particularly new riders, due to the recession; the rising expense of owning a car; and higher gas prices. Increasing auto insurance costs and graduated driver's license programs in many states have also brought driving down, particularly for young adults. The increased use of texting, social media, and the rise of telecommuting have also been used as an explanation for the driving decline. Young adults are also moving to and staying in urbanized areas, where transit, bicycling, and walking fulfill most transportation needs. Additional transportation options (such as PhillyCarShare and Zipcar) have contributed to the decline of automobile use. Finally, many young adults note that they purposely reduce their driving in an effort to lessen their environmental impact.

While some critics argue that people will resume their car driving ways once the economy fully rebounds, others note that the world (through increased technology use and other factors) has changed, and that this younger generation ("the Millennials"), in particular, will maintain a car-less lifestyle, as they are consciously choosing to live in urbanized areas and choosing transit or other types of alternative transportation for a variety of reasons that are not necessarily related to their present economic conditions.

¹ Phineas Baxandall, Benjamin Davis, and Tony Dutzik, "Transportation and the New Generation: Why Young People Are Driving Less and What It Means for Transportation Policy," April 2012, http://www.uspirg.org/sites/pirg/files/reports/Transportation%20%26%20the%20New%20Generation%20vU_S_0.pdf (accessed April 6, 2012).

² Ibid.

What does this mean for PATCO? The current timing to step up marketing to younger and other potential riders coincides with these external trends that may make riding transit more appealing than before. PATCO serves a variety of communities: urban, suburban, and small towns. Many of the places that PATCO serves are quite attractive to younger riders who are seeking an urban and/or more walkable community to live in. While young people may initially move to a large urban area, such as Philadelphia, they may look to relocate to more “semi-urban” suburbs as their lifestyle evolves, while also maintaining their access to transit. In addition, PATCO serves Center City Philadelphia, which already has a younger and student demographic.

The trend of younger people being more transit oriented, and viewing transit in a positive way, helps support PATCO’s goals to attract new riders. During the DVRPC Regional Student Forum listening session, many young people in attendance noted the trends described above as reasons for choosing transit. There is a market in this region to engage the public beyond promoting the “commuter only” transit rider. Building on these trends, PATCO must raise its profile in the region and be strategic in its public engagement.

Engage

Engaging new customers is one of the most important things a company or organization can do to promote its services, and the same holds true for PATCO. Riders and potential riders have a variety of transportation options, and many individuals use their cars or some other means of transportation because they are unaware of PATCO's services or unsure of what the rider experience would be like. PATCO needs to present itself as a viable transportation option for riders, and to do so in a modern and unique way in order to engage a wide audience.

Engagement includes creating a personal connection between PATCO services and riders (or potential riders). This can be accomplished by marketing techniques, such as traditional advertising, social media, and other types of promotion, in order to create a direct connection between PATCO and the public. Engagement begins with a rider feeling familiarity with transit—its services and system, as well as the agency providing the service. A transit agency must be aware of its shortcomings and be able to combat and respond to negative perceptions of riding transit and to constructive criticism. Engagement is the first step to communicating with the public, and outreach continues in developing a relationship between PATCO and its riders.

Engagement employs a mix of marketing, advertising, and communication, using both “traditional” methods, such as brochures and billboard advertising, and “new” methods which include web-based social media such as Facebook and Twitter. A full marketing strategy may include market research, in which PATCO constantly learns about its riders and non-riders; paid advertising across a targeted spectrum of media; and updated customer service and communication. All of these areas work as a whole to create an ongoing public presence for PATCO and to ensure that PATCO is learning about its audience and responding to its needs.

Case Study: Promoting Transit in Los Angeles

One of the most successful transit “rebrands” in recent years has been conducted by the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority, known as the “Metro.” Several years ago, Metro went through a rebranding process, which included a website redesign, a new logo, a smartphone application (“app”), and increased social media communication. In such a car-dependent culture as Los Angeles, Metro knew that it had to create a strong visual presence in people’s lives in order to be considered a viable option for transportation. The other primary goal was to create a sense of newness and excitement around an existing service, which was not addressed through their previous

not addressed through their previous marketing efforts. The rebranding also included improvements such as new signage, maps and brochures, billboards, and even new bus colors.

Figure 1: Los Angeles Metro Advertisement



Source: <http://thecityfix.com/blog/transit-agencies-need-to-invest-in-marketing-a-lesson-from-los-angeles/>

As evidenced by the ad in Figure 1, Metro used humor in its advertisements, which is a definite way to get the public's attention, but the overall goal of the rebrand was to present transit as not only a viable option for transportation, but also as the smartest, most economical, and most environmentally conscious choice. As a result of the rebrand, discretionary ridership of Metro rose from 22% to 29%, an increase of more than twice the national average during the same time period.³

Case Study: *I SEPTA Philly*

In Pennsylvania, SEPTA has recently unveiled the *I SEPTA Philly* advertising and marketing campaign, which highlights SEPTA's riders discussing their experiences and reasons for riding SEPTA under several topics:

- ▶ safe;
- ▶ easy;

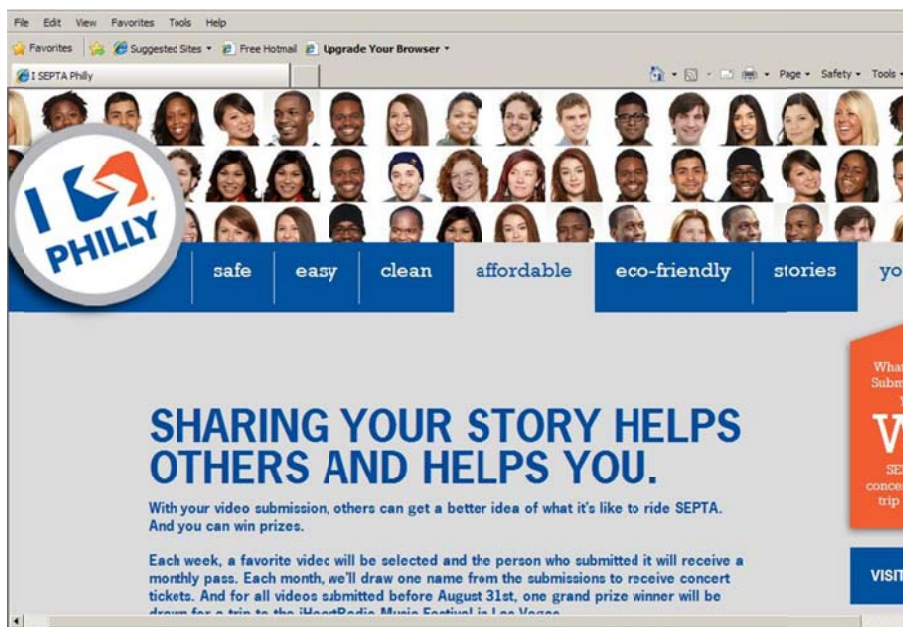
³ "2008 Rebrand 100 Winners," <http://www.rebrand.com/2008-best-metro-los-angeles> (accessed May 22, 2012).

- ▶ clean;
- ▶ affordable; and
- ▶ eco-friendly.

While the SEPTA campaign may resonate with all potential riders, it primarily focuses on younger riders, in that most of the interviews are conducted with a diverse audience of young people. The topic areas that SEPTA highlights follow the trends for how younger people perceive transit and their reasons for riding transit identified in “Transportation and the New Generation: Why Young People Are Driving Less and What It Means for Transportation Policy” as well as those noted during the Regional Student Forum listening session. The logo, design, and focus on younger riders make this campaign modern, even though some of the stories relate to traditional and universal concerns regarding transit, such as cleanliness and safety. The campaign is multi-platform, in that there is a website, television and radio commercials, and print ads in youth-oriented venues such as movie theaters.

Another interesting aspect that resonates throughout the *I SEPTA Philly* campaign is the shared experience of riding transit with other people, such as stories relating to riding the Broad Street Line to a Philadelphia Phillies game. The concept of creating a community of riders is pervasive throughout the entire campaign, in a way that riders feel a relationship to each other as well as to their transit provider (Figure 2). The idea to “share your story” becomes an opportunity to bring transit to a very personal level. This campaign also contained a contest, with prizes that included monthly transit passes, as well as a grand prize trip to Las Vegas.

Figure 2: *I SEPTA Philly* Webpage



Source: http://www.iseptaphilly.com/your_story

Strategies

What can be learned from these transit agency practices in communication and advertising? First, creative, humorous, and thought-provoking content can help change an old or “stale” image. Importantly, PATCO already engages all the methods described and may only require new content and a targeted approach to advertising in specific venues or markets to achieve their goals. Second, each of these campaigns and others like them address content for the intended audience in a targeted way. They emphasize services both old and new, as well as targeting potential ridership beyond the core commuter. The outreach and research conducted for this report raised some topics that PATCO can focus on in future communication:

- ▶ PATCO operates 24 hours a day, a unique feature shared by few other transit operators in the country. Night-owl service hours suit nightlife-oriented ridership. This type of service is attractive to younger riders and those looking to partake of nightlife in Philadelphia and elsewhere in Camden County.
- ▶ The PATCO Ambassador program, a unique feature of the PATCO system that provides face-to-face customer engagement, should be promoted extensively, particularly to new and out-of-town riders.
- ▶ PATCO provides a convenient option to travel to Center City Philadelphia and riders do not have to contend with the expense or hassle of parking in Philadelphia. PATCO should endeavor to promote the ease of travel by rail to a variety of destinations along the PATCO route, such as restaurants, shops, special events, museums, and farmers’ markets.
- ▶ Riding transit is for all ages. PATCO may cultivate lifetime ridership by promoting family ridership, connecting with students and young adults to promote PATCO as a means to independence before obtaining a driver’s license, and reaching out to older adults who may not want to drive.
- ▶ PATCO should communicate particular features and services to riders and potential riders, highlighting system connections and destinations, ease of use, ongoing improvements, 24-hour train schedules, existing way-finding features, and how to transfer to New Jersey Transit or SEPTA.

New and Social Media

The advent of social media has opened many new opportunities for engaging and communicating with large groups of people. New media, of which social media is a part, is defined by all communication that is in real time, interactive, and on demand. Social media communication is easy to use, is cost effective, and can be somewhat easily managed. PATCO currently maintains an active website; uses Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube; and has recently launched a smartphone app for its Freedom Card riders. Social media is a part of PATCO’s existing communication strategy, but it is not enough to just have a Facebook and Twitter feed that is updated. Using social media, particularly when an agency embarks on using a variety of platforms, requires a coherent strategy

and action plan so that the various platforms can function effectively together. PATCO must consider how the different forms of media are interconnected.

Social media can also lay the groundwork for a sense of connection within PATCO and the community. Transit agencies may engage their riders by responding to questions, issues, and praise posted by riders on the various social media platforms. Another main benefit to social media is that it gives a transit agency a direct line of communication to the public.⁴

Listed below are suggestions to enhance PATCO's current social media landscape:

- ▶ An integrated approach to using new and social media garners the best results by easily connecting users of one particular social media site to other options for receiving PATCO information. For instance, Twitter and Facebook posts can be linked together, as well as linked to PATCO's website. Posts should provide general information beyond service disruptions such as weather updates, reminders that PATCO runs 24 hours a day, that the seat refurbishment project is underway, or some other item that promotes PATCO service, its staff, or local events in a positive way.
- ▶ The website www.ridepatco.org should be the standard location for most information to be found, but an additional blog format of posting information may be beneficial. For some agencies, the blog has replaced the older format of a monthly newsletter published by the transit agency. Blogs can be updated easily and provide information in a more timely manner, and posts can be easily linked to an agency's other social media outlets.
- ▶ Using hashtags in social media posts is recommended (e.g., #PATCO). A hashtag is used to unite specific Twitter posts (Tweets) about particular topics and allows users to search for specific topics on Twitter. This type of targeted delivery helps quantify market research about PATCO by helping identify if anyone is Tweeting about the agency, and may allow PATCO posts to "trend" among social media users. This type of monitoring can be used as market research for PATCO to learn about its riders and potential riders.
- ▶ PATCO should consider its audience and use a market-specific approach to tailor messages for particular audiences. Discretionary and young riders may be interested in different topics and news than commuters or regular riders.
- ▶ Social media should be used broadly: weather updates, polls, interactive games, etc.
- ▶ There is an increased use of apps for smartphones by the public, which provide transit schedules, maps, or even reviews of restaurants that are located near a transit station. In addition to promoting its own existing app, PATCO may consider sharing other apps that may be of interest to PATCO riders, or even promoting an

⁴ Angela Cotey, "Transit Agencies Connect with Riders in New Ways," January 2011, http://www.progressiverailroading.com/passenger_rail/article/Social-media-Transit-agencies-connect-with-riders-in-new-ways--25447 (accessed May 29, 2012).

app design contest. The Chicago Transit Authority (CTA) has a webpage where riders can download particular apps (which are not necessarily developed by CTA) at <http://www.transitchicago.com/apps/>.

- ▶ PATCO can grow its social media audience by “liking” or “following” other New Jersey and Pennsylvania transit agencies, businesses, municipalities, non-profit groups, and schools. This raises the agency’s profile on other websites and allows those looking elsewhere to find PATCO. PATCO should consider making a goal of having 10–12 “likes” a month, and monitor which organizations are “liking” PATCO.
- ▶ Social media is two-way communication, and it is important to monitor public posts on Facebook, or to see if people are Tweeting about PATCO. The discussion should not be censored, except for profanity and defamation. It is also critically important that PATCO endeavor to respond if the public does have questions or comments about PATCO’s services.
- ▶ PATCO should seek online champions of transit in general, or for PATCO in particular, and bring these individuals and organizations into the communication circle. This can be accomplished by searching Twitter and Facebook, as well as developing a PATCO Flickr photo page, which can include photos submitted by the public.
- ▶ As with traditional visual branding and marketing, a singular “voice” in social media and other communication allows your agency brand to be easily identified. This does not necessarily mean that a single individual would be responsible for all social media tweets, but only that PATCO would maintain a standard style for posts.
- ▶ All agency social media should be brought under the PATCO banner, such as the PATCO “Wave & Pay” Facebook page. While there may be benefits for having unique Facebook pages for different programs within PATCO, this is really only a necessity when a page has lots of fans, or the program is truly unique and would not be of interest to a general PATCO rider.

Branding, Marketing, and Advertising

There is still a place for “traditional” (primarily one-way communication such as print, radio, and television) advertising and marketing; in fact, successful campaigns should be designed to bring together print, new and social media, and other types of engagement. Visual identity is critical to any brand, and PATCO should see itself as a brand, not just a public service. As with the Metro in Los Angeles, there is an importance to branding transit and creating a visual presence for the transit line. While PATCO is a fixed-route train, and Metro is a bus and rail provider, there are still opportunities for PATCO to assert itself more visually, through signage (in Center City Philadelphia and in New Jersey communities), any future station improvements, etc. Exerting a physical presence and other advertising may also be particularly important for non-riders, who may not automatically seek PATCO information through online and social media sources. Most survey respondents and listening session participants already use PATCO for non-commuting trips, so the greater need exists to engage the non-rider through traditional marketing and advertising.

Advertising and marketing is the way to alert new riders that transit service exists, and they must promote a message that is enticing enough for a potential rider to seek more information, which could be found online and, to a lesser extent, through brochures and other printed items. While maps and brochures will always be a part of advertising and marketing (especially for those who do not have internet access), these printed items are becoming less and less appealing to the general public, because of environmental factors (waste of paper) or a preference for seeking out information online.

One recommendation from the Regional Student Forum outreach session is to directly advertise via youth-oriented programs, such as advertising on the Pandora web radio service, college radio stations, in movie theaters, or other programming that has an age 18–34 viewing/listening/reading demographic. PATCO should continually enhance its partnership with organizations, small businesses, restaurants, municipalities, and attractions in its service areas, where places such as the Camden Aquarium can prominently promote PATCO service. PATCO may also consider strategic partnerships or sponsorship opportunities with community or educational organizations. Specific campaigns and brochures can be implemented on college campuses, to offer a visual reminder of the “PATCO U” program (<http://www.ridepatco.org/patcoU/>), which should also be expanded to include other colleges and universities in the area. “PATCO U” should be more heavily advertised on college campuses, either through links on university web pages or through traditional advertising in campus buildings.

Implementation

The biggest challenge for many transit agencies is staffing its communication activities. Social media may require more staff time, due to the public’s assumption that social media is two-way communication in real time. Advertising, market research, and communications can all take a considerable amount of time and funding. However, the techniques presented above can be implemented in strategic ways in order to get the most out of staff time and budget.

Market research can be conducted in an intensive way, such as paying a consultant to administer a phone survey, or can be done in a more organic way, through monitoring communications and through the techniques presented in the next chapter, “Outreach.” In fact, considerable market research can be accomplished by monitoring social media (e.g., How many items are retweeted? How many “likes” does PATCO have on Facebook?) and PATCO’s website (e.g., How many hits a month does the website reach? What are the most popular pages on the website?).

PATCO may also consider a targeted advertising campaign aimed at discretionary riders. Updating some facet of a marketing and advertising campaign (such as maps, billboard advertisements, brochures), can be quite an expensive undertaking. A more low-cost option, which may also fulfill the goal of reaching out to younger riders, is to collaborate with a local university graphic design or marketing program. This can be an opportunity to obtain free or low-cost research and design. The greater Philadelphia region is home to numerous art, design, marketing, and advertising programs that may

be interested in collaborating on a potentially high-profile project such as working with PATCO. The Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) has a local chapter that may also be helpful in offering contacts to area design firms, or how to select a consultant.

Another important aspect of maintaining a communications and marketing strategy is to constantly seek out “what’s next?” in communication. While there will always be new methods to communicate, the goals will always remain constant: to reach as many people as possible and provide useful information for riders and the public. PATCO must continually evaluate its communications to ensure that the primary goal of finding new customers is not lost.

Resources

Examples of transit agency social media

www.thetransitwire.com/social-media/social-media-links

www.progressiverailroading.com

PRSA

www.prsa.philly.org

www.prsa.nj.org

Note: The PRSA websites also contain a listing of student PRSA chapters affiliated with local colleges and universities.

Information on how to hire an advertising/marketing/communications firm

www.businessweek.com/smallbiz/content/aug2007/sb20070815_465286.htm

Beyond Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube: social media sites and resources to use social media more effectively

Blogging sites

Blogger: www.blogger.com

Wordpress: www.wordpress.com

Tracking

Hootsuite: www.hootsuite.com

TweetDeck: www.tweetdeck.com

QR Codes

A QR (Quick Response) Code is similar to a UPC (Universal Product Code) symbol in that it is a way of linking to more information. QR codes can be generated (for free) at the following sites:

qrcode.kaywa.com

quikqr.com/

Photo sharing

Flickr: www.flickr.com

Picasa: www.picasa.com

Monitoring your online presence

Set Google Alerts and Google Reader to check for mentions of PATCO throughout the internet.

www.google.com (under the “More” drop-down tab)

Outreach

Outreach strategies differ from the engagement strategies presented in that there is physical involvement and public participation in PATCO activities. While public outreach and participation may include traditional outreach methods like public meetings or exhibiting at community functions, there are also myriad opportunities to involve the public and to bring a personal face to PATCO, thereby raising the transit agency's profile in the communities it serves.

Case Study: SEPTA Youth Advisory Council

In order to effectively reach out to a significant youth audience, SEPTA began a Youth Advisory Council (YAC) in 2009, for outreach to riders between the ages of 14 and 22. The YAC operates as a subcommittee of SEPTA's Citizen Advisory Committee, which is a group of appointed citizen representatives from each of the Pennsylvania counties served by SEPTA. The YAC's primary mandate is advocating youth needs to SEPTA leadership. The YAC has a focus on educating youth about the public transportation options provided by SEPTA. Through the YAC, SEPTA receives student input and support to conduct outreach events, administer ridership surveys, and connect with young people around the region. Another primary focus of the YAC is service evaluation: listening to young riders in order to advise SEPTA on policies that would impact the youth population.

Case Study: Developing Public Participation Tools in Transit-Dependent Communities

Engaging minority, non-English-speaking, and low-income communities in transportation planning represents an enormous challenge for all public agencies. Low-income constituencies are more dependent on using transit than other population subgroups, yet they are often underrepresented in the planning process.

With funding from the Federal Transit Administration (FTA), Project for Public Spaces, a nonprofit planning organization, and its partners piloted various public participation tools in transit-dependent, minority, and low-income communities. There was a focus on the transit station, system, and network planning process—especially regarding the walking environment to and around transit stops and stations. The planning tools used were non-traditional in scope and were designed for a broad range of people, including children and young adults. Events took place in various community locations and included

various interactive activities, such as mental mapping, walking audits, visioning, and a modeling exercise (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Community Event in Brooklyn, New York



Source: <http://www.pps.org/projects/fta-ptpp/>

Besides using more hands-on activities, this type of outreach is unique to transit planning in that it was not necessarily about a specific project, operation, or change; it dealt more with how people perceive transit, how they use it, and how transit and its facilities can impact and be connected to a community.

Case Study: *Art in Transit Programs*

The FTA supports local decisions to fund quality design and art in public transportation projects. The local agency may use its discretion in how design and art are incorporated into federally funded components of a public transportation project. While PATCO has used art in its stations, other communities have used public art to outreach to the surrounding community, in addition to providing an additional amenity to make riding transit more appealing. For instance, *Art in Motion* is a non-profit organization in Lexington, Kentucky that works with the city's public transit system to facilitate public outreach events and design competitions for bus shelters, bike sheds, and other art projects and sculpture installations. Through these types of events, there is a significant

outreach component that brings together a variety of stakeholders and also increases the presence of the transit agency in the community.

There are a variety of ways to integrate art and community involvement into transit. Some transit agencies have an in-house “arts in transit” group, which facilitates the design charrettes and invites artists and community residents to act as representatives on a project committee, while other transit agencies partner with a community organization, such as in the Lexington example above. There may also be opportunities to bring in schools or community groups to design and paint murals, or to invite local music groups to perform in PATCO stations. The other benefit to this type of arts programming in transit stations is that it also has residual advertising and marketing potential, as local news and blog outlets may pick up the story.

Strategies

While the outreach conducted for this report was somewhat limited, the survey and the Regional Student Forum outreach session provided opportunities to feel the pulse of how the public feels about PATCO and gave the public an opportunity to be heard by the agency. Not every suggestion or recommendation that the public gives needs to be implemented, but knowing public opinion helps PATCO be a more well-rounded and responsive service provider. For instance, at the listening session, many participants suggested fare reduction strategies, or “free ride” days. Other participants also remarked on the connection between increasing ridership and specific land use development surrounding the New Jersey PATCO stations, such as increasing Transit Oriented Development (TOD). While these recommendations may not be pursued by PATCO at this time, the ideas that are garnered through public involvement may be a springboard into additional research into how these topics may impact ridership, and be pursued at a later date.

All of the strategies presented below should reinforce the development of an ongoing and evolving relationship with riders and potential riders, to educate the public on PATCO, and for PATCO to bring the public and other stakeholders into its planning and operations process.

Development of a Youth Advisory Council

A Youth Advisory Council would help PATCO reach out to young adults and would provide a way to develop a regular, ongoing relationship with younger riders, local educational institutions, and school districts (in order to outreach with high school riders). The relationship to local colleges and universities can be expanded beyond students to the entire institutional community. For instance, during the outreach for this report, a representative of the Rutgers-Camden Transportation Department provided a recommendation for a student fare structure. A Youth Advisory Council would reinforce a relationship that would allow stakeholders to have an open conduit for sharing ideas and information with PATCO. Council members and affiliates would be available to reach out

to the students in person and in the press, acting as ambassadors for PATCO. In order to implement a Council, PATCO must consider the following:

- ▶ What are the specific mission and goals, as well as the type of products the council would deliver to PATCO?
- ▶ Will the primary goal of the council be to reach college students, or should it be the opportunity to reach out to young people in general: those just out of school, young workers, and high school students?
- ▶ How much staff time would PATCO be able to devote to this group, particularly at the outset, when development, member selection, and scheduling may take up a considerable amount of time?
- ▶ Would the Youth Advisory Council be independent or a subset of the existing Delaware River Port Authority's (DRPA) citizen advisory group?

Whether or not PATCO institutes a Youth Advisory Council, the agency should consider other approaches to youth outreach, such as:

- ▶ Schedule student forums or rider workshops on campus and develop an ongoing relationship with specific students or university offices;
- ▶ Brainstorm specific promotions or contests that supplement forums and events;
- ▶ Create youth focus groups for upcoming PATCO marketing or advertising campaigns; and
- ▶ Recruit young reporters and bloggers to provide content they would like to see on Twitter, Facebook, student blogs or newspapers, etc.

Public Participation and Outreach

Specialized outreach to a particular rider group, such as young adults, should be part of an overall robust public outreach and participation process. For many transit agencies, public participation and outreach may only seem relevant around capital or service expansion, facility design, or significant operational changes. Ongoing outreach raises the profile of a transit agency to an audience outside the commuter group by increasing PATCO's visibility in the communities that it serves. Ongoing outreach also helps the transit agency establish the desired tone and message with the public. Public outreach can be seen as an element to or a continuation of PATCO's current customer service activities.

There are common themes that have tended to lead transit agencies to greater success in public involvement in a variety of situations:

- ▶ Public involvement needs dedicated financial resources, clear goals about what it is trying to achieve, and staff focused on accomplishing these goals.

- ▶ Openness must be maintained to build community trust and buy-in.
- ▶ Understanding, partnering with, and empowering communities can significantly benefit public involvement efforts and the agency.⁵

PATCO may also consider the following outreach techniques:

- ▶ Increasing outreach to DRPA's citizen committee should be a priority, or PATCO should consider developing a Citizens Advisory Committee that is specific to PATCO, which would work in tandem with the Youth Advisory Council.
- ▶ Low-tech "meet and greets," such as public listening sessions, would bring PATCO directly to the communities that it serves. It is perceived that the general public has little understanding of the respective roles of federal, state, and local governments and the financial mechanisms being employed to operate and maintain transportation facilities and services. A listening session would include a presentation on a facet of PATCO and allow time for questions and answers. It is not enough for riders to seek out PATCO; PATCO must be out in the community building its identity. In addition, these presentations can bring about not just customer service issues, but also educate the public on transit issues, such as funding, operations, or safety.
- ▶ PATCO should develop a Speaker's Bureau, where agency representatives are available to speak at civic meetings, schools, or other events.
- ▶ Another example of bringing PATCO to the public in a more personal way is to schedule a "Meet the _____" (General Manager, car mechanic, etc.) event. This type of outreach could also include a tour of the Lindenwold Transit Facility, or some other "behind the scenes" event.
- ▶ PATCO should reach out to specific stakeholder (transit advocacy, community and civic) groups with some regularity, in addition to educational institutions or younger riders.
- ▶ Municipalities should be considered stakeholders, and PATCO should consider a regular, ongoing municipal outreach program to learn about potential issues, as well as more actively participating in municipal events.
- ▶ Collecting information from riders and non-riders is critical to responding to their transit needs. Timely, focused data collection and surveys need to tie back to social media and outreach activities.
- ▶ "Ride Clinics" can be held at college campuses, local malls, or senior centers to help new riders navigate the PATCO system.

⁵ Scott Giering, "Public Participation Strategies for Transit," TCRP Synthesis 89, 2011, http://onlinepubs.trb.org/onlinepubs/tcrp/tcrp_syn_89.pdf (accessed May 1, 2012).

Implementation

There are many challenges surrounding public participation, including a lack of agency resources (both budget and staffing) or the primary issue of offering meetings and events that may not be well attended, no matter how much advertising and communication the agency may have undertaken. Another challenge is that there is no “one size fits all” approach to public outreach, and an agency has to constantly evaluate and assess its work in this area in case new strategies need to be employed.

One of the easiest and most cost-effective ways to increase public participation opportunities is for PATCO to build strong community partnerships and participate in already planned events. This could include manning a table at a local civic association meeting, a larger municipal charrette, or a county-wide fair. PATCO could have a table at the various farmers’ markets that are held weekly in Collingswood and other communities, and there should be an additional focus on participating in events in Philadelphia. PATCO may consider implementing a speaker’s bureau, where several staff are trained in a PATCO presentation, which is then taken “on the road.”

While one may argue that there can never be enough public participation, PATCO should set some reachable goals for participation, such as six to seven events/participation opportunities a year, and then evaluate whether participation was beneficial or if a new technique should be tried.

Resources

“Effective Use of Citizen Advisory Committees for Transit Planning and Operations”
onlinepubs.trb.org/onlinepubs/tcrp/tcrp_syn_85.pdf

SEPTA Youth Advisory Council: www.septa.org/partners/yac/

“Public Participation Strategies for Transit”
onlinepubs.trb.org/onlinepubs/tcrp/tcrp_syn_89.pdf

Youth for Public Transit: www.youthforpt.org

International Association of Public Participation: www.iap2usa.org

Summary

PATCO's goal for increasing ridership, particularly among younger riders, begins with a higher public profile of the agency, which can be achieved through communication, advertising, and public outreach. PATCO may tap into the existing social trends and the findings from survey respondents and listening session participants to develop themes for future engagement, communication, and outreach activities.

The first step in embarking on a marketing program is to develop a plan—one that is realistically built on staffing and budget constraints. In this way, the individual strategies presented come together in a sustainable way for PATCO. The plan must reflect the principles of creating, cultivating, and maintaining a public presence for PATCO, and goals and objectives should be set for ongoing evaluation. A formal plan will also reinforce the prioritization of certain strategies in the short, medium, and long term. Listed below is an example of a short-term marketing plan, broken down by topic area:

Engagement

- ▶ PATCO should create a list of 10–12 topics to be the focus of a week's worth of social media postings (Facebook and Twitter). At least three posts should link back to PATCO information on its website, whether it be schedules, car improvements, etc. The remainder of the posts can be links of interest related to transit issues or local events. In the outreach survey conducted for this study, 48.6 percent of respondents noted that they especially use PATCO for non-commuting trips around major holidays and special events, so the agency may consider posting more often around those times.
- ▶ PATCO should review its current media list and update it to include blogs and local media sites, such as Patch.com, as well as sites based in Philadelphia. The list should also include media contacts at student newspapers, such as *The Gleaner* at Rutgers-Camden, the *Temple Times*, or the *Daily Pennsylvanian* at the University of Pennsylvania. Reaching out to student media sources would be critical in August and September, in order to be covered as part of "back to school" editions. Between one and five media advisories or press releases should be sent per month.
- ▶ PATCO may consider an advertising campaign aimed primarily at younger riders particularly through media-buying opportunities at college campuses and Center City Philadelphia; area, student, or web radio stations; and Facebook. If time and budget allow, PATCO should consider using a consultant or reaching out to local art, design, or marketing college programs for a specific rebranding aimed at younger riders.

Outreach

- ▶ Initiate stronger outreach to college campuses, both in Camden County, New Jersey, and Philadelphia in order to form an ad hoc student rider task force. This group would meet one to two times a year to:
 - Schedule student forums or ride clinics on campus, and develop an ongoing relationship with specific students, staff, or university offices.
 - Brainstorm specific campus promotions or contests.
 - Act as a focus group for upcoming PATCO marketing or advertising campaigns.
- ▶ Continue building an email and mailing database to outreach to existing and potential riders. Consider adding a “sign up for more information” option on www.ridepatco.org. This database can be used to outreach for future events or to send other types of service and operations information.
- ▶ Consider participating in four to five public events a year, either by exhibiting at an existing event, or scheduling a listening session (alternating between New Jersey and Pennsylvania locations).

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Abstract: The Port Authority Transit Corporation (PATCO), which operates a transit line serving communities in Camden County, New Jersey, and Center City Philadelphia, asked the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission to investigate marketing strategies and other opportunities to increase and diversify its ridership, particularly among younger riders (ages 18–34) and discretionary riders. Recommendations presented in the report are broken into two categories: engage, which includes social media and other types of communication techniques; and outreach, which includes public involvement and participation techniques. These strategies presented are designed to enhance PATCO's future marketing and communication campaigns, build the agency's public profile, and augment the agency's customer service and engagement.

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