

NUCFAC and COMMUNITYTREES.ORG
Phase I
CLOSEOUT REPORT

Most people appreciate the importance of the environmental benefits of trees. They provide oxygen production, a cooler environment, pollution reduction, reduction of soil erosion, natural beauty and shade. Moreover, research on the value of urban trees indicates that most people actually like them. Yet, people don't always plant urban trees because they're not aware of the other advantages of trees, such as their economic and social benefits.

On October 12, 2000 in Lexington, Ky., a "Plant Trees" communication plan was presented by the USDA Forest Service's Washington Office of Communication to the National Urban and Community Forestry Advisory Group and approved. The plan was intended to persuade urban-dwelling citizens, through individual efforts and the efforts of urban-based community tree organizations, to invest in planting and maintaining urban forests

That plan had several macro-objectives: to increase awareness of the social, environmental, and economic benefits of community trees and enhanced green infrastructure; to be informational and motivational in scope, encouraging tree planting; to be a source for local, urban, Plant Trees campaigns; to be based in research; to serve as a platform for a multi-year campaign; and not exceed \$380,000.

All of those objectives were met; however as this report will show, there is more work to do.

RESEARCH

Research was perhaps the most important aspect of Phase I of the communitytrees.org campaign. Prior existing research was used. A research report by The International Society of Arboriculture, "A National Research Agenda for Urban Forestry in the 1990's," was examined to determine basic need areas for an urban tree campaign. According to the ISA report, information dissemination needs were key. Among its findings, the report listed as top priorities for information dissemination: environmental benefits of the urban forest, impact of the urban forest on energy conservation, economic benefits of the urban forest, sociological benefits of the urban forest, and compatibility of trees and urban environments. In short, the ISA report outlined the focal areas of the Plant Trees campaign: to communicate the environmental, economic and social benefits of urban trees to encourage more tree planting in urban areas.

Research conducted by J. Moore Methods Research, Sacramento, Calif., in 1994, also was examined to determine people's preexisting attitudes toward trees and to gauge the level of knowledge people have about the benefits of trees in their communities. According to that research, 40-50 percent of survey respondents believed that saving money on energy bills and improving property values were major benefits of trees. Of survey respondents, 61 percent reported believing that trees enhance community well being, while 80 percent of respondents reported believing that the environmental benefits of trees were most important.

The research also showed that people like trees. While reporting some negative aspects such as bird noise and mess, and the cost of tree maintenance, fully 97 percent of respondents said the positive benefits outweigh the negative effects of trees. However, these survey results led to a conclusion that while most people like trees and are aware of their environmental benefits, by and large people are not fully aware of the economic and social benefits of urban trees. This conclusion was key to the direction of the Plant Trees campaign.

Finally, NUCFAC and the Forest Service accomplished a national mall-intercept survey in January 2000. The research survey was designed to test and determine an appropriate slogan and logo to use with the CommunityTrees.org campaign. The preferred slogan and logo were to be motivational in scope, drawing attention to the campaign, and encouraging urban dwellers to take an interest in planting trees. Three slogans and three logos were presented to mall shoppers in Atlanta, Ga., Baltimore, Md., Denver, Co., and Sacramento, Calif.

The three slogans were "Bring life to your community: plant trees," "Leave a shady legacy: plant trees," and "Only you can bring back the green: plant trees." By a margin of 47 percent to 29 percent and 24 percent respectively, respondents favored "Bring life to your community: plant trees."

Three logos also were presented. The logos were identified as the "color logo," the "four tree logo," and the "one tree logo." By a margin of 56 percent to 25 percent and 19 percent respectively, respondents favored the color logo.

These slogan and logo results led to the creation of a color logo with the slogan, "Bring life to your community: plant trees."

In addition, the mall-intercept survey was used to determine what things, if any, could be used to further motivate involvement in urban tree planting. Research showed that people largely are not self-motivated to plant trees (7 percent said they would never plant trees), but 27 percent said that involvement would occur if others asked, organized and/or offered incentives. Of respondents, 3 percent said they were already involved in urban tree planting. A sizable number, 34 percent, believed that planting more community trees was a good idea.

PLANNING

Campaign Objectives: The Forest Service's Office of Communication formulated a strategic plan that delineated an urban forestry campaign that would encourage local tree planting and tree planting campaigns by attracting attention, providing community-based urban forestry programs kick-start campaign tools and motivating urban dwellers to get involved. That campaign had four micro-objectives:

- That 80 percent of urban forestry programs responding to the campaign share website address with others to generate more knowledge about trees' benefits during Phase I.
- That more than 50 percent of urban dwellers responding to the campaign through ads become involved by seeking more information about urban trees during Phase I.
- To encourage nationwide local use and dissemination of kick-start campaign materials by 30 percent of community-based urban forestry programs responding during Phase I.
- That more than 25 percent of community-based urban forestry programs responding to the campaign during phase I report increased tree planting and membership.

Target Audience: Because it was desired that people invest time and energy in planting and maintaining urban forests, it was necessary for the campaign to appeal to individuals, regardless of demographic group, that had the ability and the means to accomplish the goal. Target audiences needed some combination of decision-making authority, organizational skills, disposable income, ability to influence others, volunteer-able time, and at least a minimal interest in the environment. Because the campaign was national in scope and urban-dwellers in every demographic group possess some needed element, this plan targeted all private citizens who live in urban areas.

Campaign Strategy: The core campaign strategy was based on the J. Moore Methods Research survey that showed that people have favorable opinions of trees. Therefore the strategy took the position that audiences would be friendly toward messages about the environmental, social and economic benefits of trees. Moreover, the strategy used the following communication techniques that research has shown to be particularly effective in persuading friendly audiences:

- Used strong, overt emotional appeals.
- Provided an underpinning of reasonable arguments to increase the chances that the presentation will have long-term effects.
- Stressed trustworthiness.
- Once the audience's conviction was adequately strengthened, made direct, concrete appeals for action.

More specifically, the plan proposed the use of the cognitive consistency theory of persuasion. According to the theory, motivation for behavior occurs when different internal thoughts conflict and create tension. The tension creates the motivation for behaviors to ease the tension and thus bring the subject back to a peaceful state.

According to the theory, when there is psychological inconsistency, or disagreement between two pieces of information, people are motivated to change behaviors and act consistently with their beliefs, values, and perceptions. This theory was chosen for its potential, when properly executed, to break through the large amount of persuasive appeals in today's marketplace and make a positive impression.

Based on this, a series of ads were created to advertise the communitytrees.org website using the above guidance. The ads contained three messages -- one message for each of the three identified benefits of urban forests, an environmental message, a social message, and an economic message.

Messages essentially followed this formulation, which was used in an ad to present the social benefits of community trees:

You've known it since childhood -- trees are the prescription for better health. Trees make us happy and stir our youthful energies for play. They positively affect our moods. And as we grow older, trees help reduce our stresses and aid in patient recovery.
From the time we're born, trees help all of us lead healthier and more satisfying lives.
Shouldn't you plant trees for your children?
To find out how, visit Communitytrees.org.

Because the campaign was to be national in scope, it was determined that national media should be used to expose target audiences to urban forestry messages. Consultation with media experts led to message delivery strategies using the following:

- National radio
- National newspaper
- National magazine

FINANCES

Budget: \$380,000.

EXECUTION

Website: The communitytrees.org website, as the focal point of the campaign strategy, was designed as a pass-through site for interested persons and organizations. Advertisements directed people to log on to the site for more information. Interested parties were able to get information about local groups in all 50 states involved in urban forestry. In addition, it was designed to provide individuals information about how they, on their own, could plant and care for trees.

Kick-Start Campaigns: The website also was designed to provide local urban forestry organizations in every region of the nation materials to advertise their groups and organizational events. Kick-start campaign tools on the website included downloads for T-shirts, brochures, ad copy, flyers, billboards, etc. Urban forestry programs used the kick-start campaign materials, expanding the reach of the Plant Trees campaign.

Radio Advertisements: A 10 second radio spot was created to air nationally on National Public Radio. Twelve spots aired on the All Things Considered Radio Program during the weeks of April 16th, April 23rd, April 30th, and May 8th. Twenty spots aired on the Morning Edition Radio Program during the weeks of April 16th, April 23rd, April 30th, and May 8th. Seven spots aired on the Car Talk Radio Program during April 21st, April 28th, May 5th, May 5th, May 12th, May 19th, and May 26th.

Newspaper Advertisements: Four, 4.25" x 7", black and white ads ran nationally in the New York Times newspaper. Placement occurred in the main section of the paper's April 15th and 22nd Sunday editions, and in the House and Home section of the paper's April 19th and 26th Thursday editions.

Magazine Ads: One, 4-5/8" x 4-5/8", 2 color ad ran nationally in Time Magazine's April 23rd issue, which was on sale April 16th.

EVALUATION

Evaluation of phase I of the CommunityTrees.org campaign was principally accomplished through the use of the website's feedback form and anecdotal evidence from campaign participants. A follow on survey of urban forestry programs will be sent at a later date to provide more insight into campaign results. Since the start of the campaign on April 14, 2001, there have been nearly 7000 hits on the website. Certainly more was expected, however the input gained gives valuable insight into the campaign's success. The following results have been documented:

Objective 1

That 80 percent of urban forestry programs responding to the campaign share website address with others to generate more knowledge about trees' benefits during Phase I.

Result

So far only anecdotal evidence has been received to evaluate this objective. Several Urban Forestry organizations have said they shared the website address. A follow on survey of urban forestry programs will be sent at a later date.

Objective 2

That more than 50 percent of private citizens responding to the campaign through ads become involved by seeking more information about urban trees during Phase I.

Result

From April-December 2001, 55 percent of website feedback respondents asked for more information about tree planting. Three campaign ads were created and posted on the website. The ads were: "Some Places Are Made In the Shade" (Economic), "Plant Two Trees And Call Me In The Morning" (Social), and "What's Good For Them Is Great For You" (Environmental). The latter ad was placed in the New York Times newspaper and in Time Magazine. A radio ad ran on NRP. Of respondents, 74 percent found the web site through radio and newspaper ads; 68 percent through radio ads, 10 percent through newspaper and magazine ads. Evidence taken from the website's feedback form also shows that from April 14 to May 22, 23 percent of the 132 feedback respondents expressed a desire for more information on community trees and how they can improve lives. Anecdotal evidence shows a number of respondents specifically asking for information about how to plant trees on individual neighborhood blocks.

Objective 3

To encourage nationwide local use and dissemination of kick-start campaign materials by 30 percent of community-based urban forestry programs responding during Phase I.

Result

So far, use of the kick-start campaign has been recorded in the City of Bellevue, Washington; The Twin Cities Green Guide, Minneapolis, Minn.; and the Georgia Forestry Commission. A follow on survey of urban forestry programs will be sent at a later date to determine additional use of the kick-start campaign materials.

Objective 4

That more than 25 percent of community-based urban forestry programs responding to the campaign during phase I report increased tree planting and membership.

Results

At best, any conclusion relative to this objective would be highly speculative at this point. A follow on survey of urban forestry programs will be sent at a later date to determine results from kick-start campaign use.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the Forest Service's analysis of Phase I results and an examination of the narrative feedback from the communitytrees.org website, the following recommendations are offered:

Phase II Ad Campaign

- Hold strongly to the cognitive consistency theory of persuasive communication outlined in the communication strategy
 - As NUCFAC continues to define its brand -- that living entity that exists in the minds of the target audience as a personality, complete with values, character, and other emotional attributes -- it will be necessary to do so with long-term repetition of messages and style. This will be crucial to imparting a specific sentiment, or emotion, that helps to determine how the target audience feels about the products/messages represented by the slogan, "Bring Life to Your Community: Plant Trees."
- Invest in another series of radio commercials and newspaper ads; more repeats of newspaper ads
 - During the first three reporting periods of the campaign, 108 feedback comments were received. Respondents were largely driven to the website by radio advertisements. During the first three reporting periods, respondent totals were 26, 35 and 47 respectively. During the next two reporting periods, there were a total of 24 feedback comments. As advertising decreased, so did website hits and comments. More advertising is needed to drive target audience members to the website.
- Consider green magazines that are gaining new readership in response to changing Washington politics
 - According to sources with environmental magazines, changing Washington politics are dramatically increasing subscription rates. New magazine subscribers and readers can represent a substantial block of the identified target audience, while not being a full-fledged choir audience.
- Investigate partnership with treesaregood.org to further increase the visibility of communitytrees.org
 - Created by the Coalition of United Green Partners, the "trees are good" campaign is slated to run during the Olympic Winter Games of 2002, which are being held in Salt Lake City, Utah. Their campaign calls for a variety of methods to produce publicity, including television commercials, which potentially could reach tens of millions of people. A small nod such as linking Internet site to Internet site might be appropriate.

- Use already created ads for the campaign's next phase
 - So far, only the “What’s Good For Them Is Great For You (Environmental)” ad has been used in national advertisements. Two other ads, “Some Places Are Made In the Shade” (Economic) and “Plant Two Trees And Call Me In The Morning” (Social), are ready to be used.
- Consider stationary ads in targeted urban areas
 - Although stationary ads are not overwhelmingly popular because in some instances they can add to environmental noise and clutter, they can be useful in some targeted circumstances.
- Adapt advertisements to location
 - Specific areas of the country may find certain messages more appealing than others. For example, the NUCFAC and Forest Service mall-intercept survey found the acceptability of the “Bring Life To Your Community” slogan dip below 50 percent acceptability at two survey sites, Atlanta and Denver. As a result, it may be helpful to emphasize messages other than “community” in those areas.
- Create or use environmental events to increase visibility i.e. Arbor Day Tree Planting Challenge
 - Campaign momentum can be gained and free publicity received by creating associated environmental events. The Arbor Day Tree Planting Challenge proposal found in the NUCFAC communication plan, or a similar event, or events, has the potential to generate large amounts of interest in urban forestry.

Phase II Website

- Put complete site index on front page
 - In addition to the Individuals, Organizations and Feedback links that are currently on the front page, it is recommended that the Other Links, Resources and Downloads links be added to the front page to make site navigation easier.
 - Repeat visitors, who are looking for specific information, wish to retrieve information quickly. Much of the sought-after information pertains to local and state resources. It is recommended that a one-click link to the local and state resources page be added to the front page.
 - Add a free trees link to the front page that links to a list of organizations that offer free trees.
 - Add a link for tree planting grants that links to organizations that offer financial grants to plant trees

- Add better, short descriptions to index options

- As currently constructed, the index options on both the Individuals page and the Organizations page only have descriptions for the “Learn More” and “Get Involved” links. It is recommended that descriptions be added to the “Other Links,” “Resources” and “Downloadables” links.
- Reorganize “Other Links” alphabetically and add short, one-sentence descriptions of each
 - This recommendation will help site users find information more quickly and easily. It may also serve to create additional categories for the listings to further increase the site’s ease of use.
- Include research that proves the benefits of trees
 - Many respondents to the website’s feedback form said they were interested in the site for its ability to provide useful information on items such as best locations for planting various types of trees, the case studies that verify the claims made in the benefits section of the site, information on how to protect mature trees from invasive vines and root impaction, the types of trees that are good for street tree planting, etc. Recommend that an updated version of the website include this kind of information.
- Develop and include ad strategies that outline how to get city governments and others interested in investing in trees
 - Based on website feedback, organizations and groups that would like to use the information on the communitytrees.org website need more information and ideas about how to interest city governments and others interested in investing in trees. Some example campaigns, ad strategies, sample letters, campaign ideas, etc. would serve to meet this identified need and add value to the site.
 - Examples of success stories and/or campaign models from groups that successfully have used the communitytrees.org campaign also would be extremely useful to those wishing to put the communitytrees.org campaign materials to work. Recommend that these kind of success stories be made part of the website.

Phase II Evaluation

- A follow-on survey to the J. Moore Methods Research survey of Urban Forestry in the State of California
 - A follow-on survey would be beneficial to determine the effectiveness of objective 4. Using the state of California as sample population, the level of awareness, understanding and support for urban forestry can be extrapolated nationwide. The J. Moore Methods Research survey of Urban Forestry in the State of California would serve as a campaign pre-test. A follow-on survey would serve as a post-test to evaluate the campaign’s effectiveness.

- Develop and conduct a purposive pre-test and post-test survey of organizations to determine levels of investment in community trees.
 - A pre-test/post-test survey type is needed to fully measure the effectiveness of objective 2 -- which has as its centerpiece developing an informed population of individuals and organizations who are motivated to invest their time and energy in planting and maintaining urban forests. A purposive survey would identify specific organizations for survey and measure their levels of investment. A pre-test would determine current levels of investment and a post-test would determine levels of investment during subsequent phases of implementation of the communitytrees.org campaign.