CCR DO'S AND DONT'S

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If you're a water utility, you know about the Consumer Confidence Report (CCR). Maybe your community calls it the Annual Drinking Water Quality Report. Tomato, tomata. It's the one publication every community water system is required to provide to its customers, no matter what you call it. It's the key element of the Safe Drinking Water Act's public right-to-know provisions.

Your friends and family may claim they've never seen it before. You know the truth though. They've seen it, assumed it was junk mail and recycled it, or worse tossed it in the trash.

This is often a missed opportunity to engage with the consumer. Consumers, regardless of which sector they work in, want to be engaged. Direct mail has its applications, but it can't be your only strategy. The speed at which consumers get information, whether accurate or not, is faster than lightning. Water utilities need to keep the pace.

This quick-paced, data consuming world, expects much more from both the private and public sectors. This requires more context than what has historically been offered. Customers need to know your staff, your system and the industry in order to expand their frame of reference. They need to build a trust with you. Why? Water systems hold the public health of their community within their pipes. Your community holds the direct line to the gatekeepers you need as your advocates. These gatekeepers help you fund, manage, and grow your organization. The CCR is a tool to create advocates and reduce skepticism and mistrust among your stakeholders. It is also an opportunity to educate them about your meter program and any upcoming meter projects coming down the pipeline.

CCR DO'S AND DONT'S

Master Meter, Inc. interviewed experts from the field to create this guide of Do's and Don'ts to help water utilities create more effective consumer confidence reports.

DO'S

- **Develop a creative team.** Pick people across your department and even from outside your department. You may be surprised how creative your team is once you give them the opportunity. Think outside the box, and beyond the black and white report. Remember who the end product is for.

- **Brainstorm better.** Let go of the expectation that you'll walk away with a plan after the first meeting. Have shorter, more frequent brainstorm sessions. Reconvene and discuss this deluge of ideas. Keep a notebook handy between brainstorms. The best ideas always seem to strike in the shower.

- **Partner with your communications and marketing division.** They can help you hone in on an idea and help with the visual design. No graphics designer on staff? Outsource! Freelancers and even local college students can be a low-cost resource.

- **Tell your story.** Use your story as a medium to convey facts and figures. According to Stanford Graduate Business School, stories are 22 times more memorable than facts and figures alone. Stories also help you humanize your organization and employees.

DONT'S

- **Don't forget who the audience is.** This document isn't meant to be for internal use. It also isn't for your council or management team. Your audience is your customers. Write with them in mind. Make the content relevant to what impacts them most.

- **Don't turn them off with content that is difficult to read.** Readability is key. This doesn't mean "dumbing it down." It means using a writing style that is easier and more enjoyable for the reader. Turn on the readability function in Microsoft Word or find a free readability calculator on Google. The higher the number the better. Time Magazine shoots for a readability score of 52.

- **Don't stop at your printed product.** Make a communication campaign that supports the report. Repurpose the content in social media posts, blog posts, and newsletters. Remind people to be looking for it in the mail. Explain what it is, the information that can be found in the report, and why it's important to read.

The consumer confidence report is distributed to every customer. Create a document that turns an average trip to the mailbox into an opportunity for engagement.

This report is also required. Use this requirement as leverage to justify investing more resources towards making it a staple of your communication strategy.

Creativity doesn't come during the brainstorm. It comes when participants leave the session and engage with the world. This is when the brain begins making connections and the ideas begin to flow.