

CHICAGO DEPARTMENT OF WATER

Overview

The Chicago Water System consists of two water purification plants (which are the world's largest and second largest of their kind,) twelve pumping stations, two active cribs, 65 miles of water supply tunnels and 4,200 miles of water mains. The system supplies more than one-billion gallons of water per/day, derived from Lake Michigan to more than 5-million people.

Challenge

CDOW was plagued by negative stories in the media and a generally poor reputation. RPM's primary objective was to educate customers regarding the important role the department plays in the lives of all. The department needed residents to understand the importance of water as a finite resource as well as to understand that the pure, safe drinking water supplied by the Chicago Water System exceeds existing and proposed water quality standards by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and that the treatment process is paid for entirely by revenues from the sale of water.

Solution

We first revitalized the CDOW logo by standardizing and applying it to all collateral materials. We set out to build awareness by launching community-centered education programs and a full tour program that included the design and development of museum-quality displays in the facility detailing the history and value of the department. A virtual tour of the facility was created for the Website. A "new face" was given to the employee newsletter that included changing its name, a process that employees participated in. Liaisons from each department within CDOW were recruited to contribute the "news" that would go into each newsletter and a feature spotlighting an employee & his division was developed. This served to help unify the department which had

previously, because of its size and diversity of operations (biology and chemistry laboratories, engineers, plumbers, truck drivers, office personal, pipe layers, ditch diggers, meter readers, electricians, etc.) functioned more like many separate departments.

An annual Consumer Water Quality Report was mandated by EPA legislation. This was utilized as an opportunity to develop the, first ever, Consumer Annual Report for the utility.

Over a four-year span, a number of successful public relations initiatives and education programs were developed and rolled out by the department that served to elevate the public profile, empower and educate consumers. These resulted, not only in changed perception of the department, but an increase in revenue because people began paying their water bills and the need for collection efforts was reduced!

