

CIPR PRide Awards 2014

Category: **14. Best External Publication**

Entrant: **Southern Water**

Entry: **Friendly annual reporting**



Brief and objectives

Take four different Southern Water annual reports and turn them into one. In doing so, create a single annual report that is open, engaging and visual - and which responds to our economic regulator Ofwat's expectation that information about the performance of water companies should be accessible to customers and stakeholders alike.

As a regulated business, we are required to publicly report our performance every year. This ranges from our financial and operational results to our corporate and social responsibility work and even the recreational facilities we provide, such as our unique tours of the Victorian sewers in Brighton.

Previously, this had been done through four separate reports, each with different drivers but with overlapping content in places:

- Statutory and Regulatory Accounts - legal and regulator (Ofwat) requirement
- Regulatory Compliance Report - regulator requirement
- Stakeholder Report - environmental/ISO 14001 reporting commitment
- Conservation, Access and Recreation Report (a separate section of the Stakeholder Report) - environmental/ISO 14001 reporting commitment.

The brief and objective were simple and clear: Consolidate all four reports into a single offering that would be an open, engaging and accessible one-stop shop for information about the company for all of our stakeholders - from customers to regulators. The success of this approach would be measured by an increase in visitors/downloads compared with the previous four reports.

Strategy and tactics (including innovation and creativity)

As an environmental business, our website is our main publishing vehicle. This helps our carbon footprint by saving on paper, ink, print and distribution. All four annual reports were already published online - three as simple pdfs and the fourth as its own website.

The strategy was to design and build a dedicated interactive website with a strong and enticing visual theme to help achieve the aim of producing a single, engaging annual report that customers could easily find and be more inclined to browse - and read.

The new Annual Report and Accounts 2012-13 took the creative theme 'Connecting with our customers'. It featured colourful and fun illustrations of the Southern Water landscape, including customers, staff, homes and operational sites.

Graphics of pipes were used, connecting pumping stations and treatment works to homes and businesses, to convey the creative theme in a year when we were engaged in the most extensive customer research in our history as we

prepared our Business Plan for 2015-20. More than 27,000 customers helped us to shape our plans. We were truly 'Connecting with our customers'.

The new report used animated illustrations on the home page, colour-themed sections, films, photography and bold graphics to enhance presentation. A downloadable pdf version was created for those who preferred a more traditional approach and a small number of commercially-printed copies were also produced.

We were one of only two UK water companies to present a true online annual report supported by a downloadable pdf - and we were the only water company to do so using a visual theme.

Demonstration of engagement of target readers (stating circulation figures)

The target readers were customers, stakeholders, regulators, employees, the media and any other interested party, such as the Business In The Community (BITC) charity, which benchmarks companies on their corporate and social responsibility work.

The new report was promoted externally via the website and through an e-newsletter to more than 3,500 key stakeholders across our region. Internally, the intranet and the staff newsletter were used, while copies of the printed version were snapped up to become well-thumbed reference documents.

The website analytics (see below) demonstrate a substantial increase in target reader engagement, most notably a 1,275 per cent increase in the number of pages viewed.

Research, planning, measurement and evaluation

We looked at not only what our peers were doing in the annual reporting space, but also the approach of big companies, such as Sainsbury's. Other water companies took a mixed approach - with some producing little more than basic Word documents and others designed pdfs.

We wanted to be different - and better - in line with our aim to produce an open, engaging and accessible report. The decision was taken to create and promote an interactive website which developed and extended the look and feel of our newly-redesigned corporate site. We worked with the same delivery partners to ensure consistency - branding and design company MultiAdaptor and web developers Boxharry.

The report was launched online on July 12, 2013 to meet the statutory deadline for publication. Between then and the nine months to the end of the 2013-14 financial year, it received 5,872 visits, 24,861 page views and the pdf version was downloaded 2,326 times. This compares with 1,336 visits and 1,808 page views of the last stakeholder report (an online-only report) and a total of 1,306 pdf downloads of the statutory accounts and regulatory

compliance report in the previous year.

This adds up to user increases of 339 per cent, 1,275 per cent and 78 per cent respectively.

Furthermore, with a new and greatly enhanced section on corporate governance and dedicated sections on the environment, community, workplace and marketplace (suppliers and customers), the report helped us to achieve an increased rating in the BITC 2014 Corporate Responsibility Index. We beat the utility sector average in the leading national benchmark, scoring 90 per cent and achieving three stars out of five.

Cost-effectiveness

Three separate public-facing versions of the report were produced:

- A 93-page interactive website
- A 183-page pdf
- A 182-page commercially printed version (100 copies).

A fourth Word document version was also produced for submission to Companies House.

The production of a single report resulted in significant savings in terms of the duplication of time and effort spent in producing four separate reports. Further cost efficiencies were delivered by populating the web pages in-house to templates built by our web development company.