

# Water School: Marketing Your Water System to the Community

Brian Gongol  
NE-AWWA Public Information Committee  
November 4, 2010



DJ Gongol & Associates, Inc.

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# Your major audiences

Schoolchildren



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# Your major audiences

Schoolchildren  
Mass media



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# Your major audiences

Schoolchildren  
Mass media  
Ratepayers



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# Your major audiences

- Schoolchildren
- Influence their parents



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# Your major audiences

- Schoolchildren
- Influence their parents
- Need jobs later



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# Your major audiences

- Schoolchildren
  - Influence their parents
  - Need jobs later
  - Become ratepayers



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# Your major audiences

- Schoolchildren
- Mass media
- Influence public opinion



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# Your major audiences

- Schoolchildren
- Mass media
- Influence public opinion
- Reach people more often than you do



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# Your major audiences

- Schoolchildren
- Mass media
- Influence public opinion
- Reach people more often than you do
- Are always looking for new things to say



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# Your major audiences

- Schoolchildren
- Mass media
- Ratepayers
- Vote on bond referenda



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# Your major audiences

- Schoolchildren
- Mass media
- Ratepayers
- Vote on bond referenda
- Complain



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# Your major audiences

- Schoolchildren
- Mass media
- Ratepayers
- Vote on bond referenda
- Complain
- Are the reason utilities exist



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# Reaching schoolchildren

- Elementary
- Classroom talks



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# Elementary school talks

- How water and wastewater systems connect a community



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# Elementary school talks

- How water and wastewater systems connect a community
- Water scarcity and conservation



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# Elementary school talks

- How water and wastewater systems connect a community
- Water scarcity and conservation
- **Water cycle**



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# Elementary school talks

- How water and wastewater systems connect a community
- Water scarcity and conservation
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- **Water occupations**



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# Elementary school talks

- How water and wastewater systems connect a community
- Water scarcity and conservation
- Water cycle
- Water occupations
- **Water around the world**



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# Reaching schoolchildren

- Elementary
  - Classroom talks
  - Earth Day and Children's Water Festival activities



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# Reaching schoolchildren

- Elementary
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  - Plant tours



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# Reaching schoolchildren

- Elementary
  - Classroom talks
  - Earth Day and Children's Water Festival activities
  - Plant tours
  - Community tours
  - Science classrooms



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# Reaching schoolchildren

- Elementary
- Junior high
- Explain the chemistry

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# Reaching schoolchildren

- Elementary
- Junior high
- Explain the chemistry
- Explain the economics



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- Explain the chemistry
- Explain the economics
- Explain the physics



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# Reaching schoolchildren

- Elementary
- Junior high
- Explain the chemistry
- Explain the economics
- Explain the physics
- Offer job shadowing



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# Reaching schoolchildren

- Elementary
- Junior high
- Explain the chemistry
- Explain the economics
- Explain the physics
- Offer job shadowing
- Reach out to counselors



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# Reaching schoolchildren

- Elementary
- Junior high
- Explain the chemistry
- Explain the economics
- Explain the physics
- Offer job shadowing
- Reach out to counselors
- Give service clubs something to do



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- Elementary
- Junior high
- High school
- Classroom talks



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# High school talks

- From the ballot box to your tap



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# High school talks

- From the ballot box to your tap
- Dump your oil and poison a fish



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# High school talks

- From the ballot box to your tap
- Dump your oil and poison a fish
- Broadband internet through the sewer



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# High school talks

- From the ballot box to your tap
- Dump your oil and poison a fish
- Broadband internet through the sewer
- Five diseases Americans don't get anymore



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# High school talks

- From the ballot box to your tap
- Dump your oil and poison a fish
- Broadband internet through the sewer
- Five diseases Americans don't get anymore
- **Five civilizations that died of thirst**



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# High school talks

- From the ballot box to your tap
- Dump your oil and poison a fish
- Broadband internet through the sewer
- Five diseases Americans don't get anymore
- Five civilizations that died of thirst
- Before Evian and Aquafina, we exported water



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- From the ballot box to your tap
- Dump your oil and poison a fish
- Broadband internet through the sewer
- Five diseases Americans don't get anymore
- Five civilizations that died of thirst
- Before Evian and Aquafina, we exported water
- Bottled water is tap water, too

# Reaching schoolchildren

- Elementary
- Junior high
- High school
- Classroom talks
- Internships and summer jobs



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# High school internships

- Lab assistants



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# High school internships

- Lab assistants
- GIS



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# High school internships

- Lab assistants
- GIS
- Websites



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# High school internships

- Lab assistants
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- Graphic designers



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# High school internships

- Lab assistants
- GIS
- Websites
- Graphic designers
- Shop class



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# High school internships

- Lab assistants
- GIS
- Websites
- Graphic designers
- Shop class
- Institutional memory



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# Reaching schoolchildren

- Elementary
- Junior high
- High school
- Classroom talks
- Internships and summer jobs
- Service projects



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# Reaching schoolchildren

- Elementary
- Junior high
- High school
- Classroom talks
- Internships and summer jobs
- Service projects
- Facility tours



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# Facility tours

- Show people what they're paying for



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# Facility tours

- Show people what they're paying for
- Turn "capital projects" and CDBG grants into something they can see and touch



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# Facility tours

- Show people what they're paying for
- Turn "capital projects" and CDBG grants into something they can see and touch
- Is the plant a cathedral to public service?



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# Facility tours

- Show people what they're paying for
- Turn "capital projects" and CDBG grants into something they can see and touch
- Is the plant a cathedral to public service?
- Show, rather than tell, why equipment, maintenance, and security investments matter



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# Facility tours

- Show people what they're paying for
- Turn "capital projects" and CDBG grants into something they can see and touch
- Is the plant a cathedral to public service?
- Show, rather than tell, why equipment, maintenance, and security investments matter
- If security issues intervene, how about video?



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# Reaching schoolchildren

- Elementary
- Junior high
- High school
- Classroom talks
- Internships and summer jobs
- Service projects
- Facility tours
- Last chance to teach the water cycle



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# Questions?



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# Your major audiences

Schoolchildren

Mass media

Ratepayers



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# Influencing the mass media

- Emergencies



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# Influencing the mass media

- Emergencies
- Rates, fees, and regulations



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# Influencing the mass media

- Emergencies
- Rates, fees, and regulations
- Goodwill



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# Influencing the mass media

- Emergencies
- Build a list of contacts in the media



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# Influencing the mass media

- Emergencies
- Build a list of contacts in the media
- Have a clear public face



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# Influencing the mass media

- Emergencies
  - Build a list of contacts in the media
  - Have a clear public face
  - Have an emergency communications plan



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# Influencing the mass media

- Emergencies
  - Build a list of contacts in the media
  - Have a clear public face
  - Have an emergency communications plan
  - Have an online presence



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# Influencing the mass media

- Emergencies
  - Build a list of contacts in the media
  - Have a clear public face
  - Have an emergency communications plan
  - Have an online presence
  - Have online backups



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# Influencing the mass media

- Emergencies
- Ordinary times
- Create value for reporters



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# Influencing the mass media

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- Offer human-interest stories



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# Influencing the mass media

- Emergencies
- Ordinary times
- Create value for reporters
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- Offer human-interest stories
- Educate



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# Influencing the mass media

- Emergencies
- Ordinary times
- Create value for reporters
- Offer novel stories
- Offer human-interest stories
- Educate
- Perception trumps facts



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# Stories any reporter can tell

- "Jeanette, do my job!"



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# Stories any reporter can tell

- "Jeanette, do my job!"
- The day the kids came to visit



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- Your over-fertilized lawn or field is hurting babies



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- The drain isn't a hazardous-waste dump
- The great halftime flush



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# Stories any reporter can tell

- "Jeanette, do my job!"
- The day the kids came to visit
- Your over-fertilized lawn or field is hurting babies
- The drain isn't a hazardous-waste dump
- The great halftime flush
- It's not a water tower, it's an insurance policy



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# Influencing the mass media

- Emergencies
- Ordinary times
- Lather, rinse, repeat:
  - *A good story isn't a one-time fling, it's an ongoing affair*



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# Reaching your ratepayers

- Customer service
- Front-line customer service first



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# Reaching your ratepayers

- Customer service
  - Front-line customer service first
  - Add 5% to make it great



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# Reaching your ratepayers

- Customer service
  - Front-line customer service first
  - Add 5% to make it great
  - Dealing with hostile customers



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# Reaching your ratepayers

- Customer service
- Brand everything
- Community presence



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# Reaching your ratepayers

- Customer service
- Brand everything
- Community presence
- Who is your Elmo?



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# Reaching your ratepayers

- Customer service
- Community presence
- Brand everything
- Who is your Elmo?
- Hit the streets



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# Reaching your ratepayers

- Customer service
- Community presence
- Brand everything
- Who is your Elmo?
- Hit the streets
- Keep up appearances



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# Reaching your ratepayers

- Customer service
- Community presence
- Brand everything
- Who is your Elmo?
- Hit the streets
- Keep up appearances
- Who owns this place?



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# Reaching your ratepayers

- Customer service
- Community presence
- Ratepayer education
- Bill inserts



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# Reaching your ratepayers

- Customer service
- Community presence
- Ratepayer education
- Bill inserts
- Newsletters



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# Reaching your ratepayers

- Customer service
- Community presence
- Ratepayer education
- Bill inserts
- Newsletters
- Websites



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# Reaching your ratepayers

- Customer service
- Community presence
- Ratepayer education
- Bill inserts
- Newsletters
- Websites
- Q&A



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# Reaching your ratepayers

- Customer service
- Lunch groups
- Community presence
- Ratepayer education
- Informative outreach



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# Reaching your ratepayers

- Customer service
- Community presence
- Ratepayer education
- Informative outreach
- Lunch groups
- Service clubs



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# Reaching your ratepayers

- Customer service
- Community presence
- Ratepayer education
- Informative outreach
- Lunch groups
- Service clubs
- Outdoor and sporting clubs



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# Reaching your ratepayers

- Customer service
- Community presence
- Ratepayer education
- Informative outreach
- Lunch groups
- Service clubs
- Outdoor and sporting clubs
- Water for People



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# To recap

- **Schoolkids:** Talk to their parents and become future ratepayers and employees. Educate them.



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# To recap

- **Schoolkids:** Talk to their parents and become future ratepayers and employees. Educate them.
- **News media:** Influence public opinion. Make friends (and plans) well before you need them.



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# To recap

- **Schoolkids:** Talk to their parents and become future ratepayers and employees. Educate them.
- **News media:** Influence public opinion. Make friends (and plans) well before you need them.
- **Ratepayers:** Our customers and the people who decide whether we have the resources we need. Inform and treat them with respect and earn reciprocal respect for your utility.



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# Questions?



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# Questions?

## Thanks for coming

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