



The CLME Information Management System (IMS) and Regional Environmental Monitoring Programme (REMP).

A SOCIAL MEDIA STRATEGY FOR IMS-REMP DELIVERABLE D. 3.7

The “Sustainable Management of the Shared Living Marine Resources of the Caribbean Large Marine Ecosystem (CLME) and Adjacent Regions” is a GEF funded Project. Its main objective is the Sustainable management of the shared Living Marine Resources of the Caribbean LME and adjacent areas through an integrated management approach that will meet the WSSD target for sustainable fisheries.

This document provides essential background relevant to an evaluation of the challenges and benefits associated with the use of social media strategy for the IMS-REMP.

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A SOCIAL MEDIA STRATEGY FOR IMS-REMP

Creating a solid social media strategy as a part of a successful public awareness campaign has become a standard across most sectors. Regular news feed, and virtual plenary sessions on organizations' products, promotional an activity, policies and management actions, strengthens public relations by keeping users informed, interested, and involved. Thus, developing a social media strategy to promote the new entries and applications of the IMS-REMP component of the CLME Project is forward looking in its desire to remain pertinent, and reach potential users.

To ensure an effective use of resources and a successful social media strategy for IMS-REMP, it is important to know and understand how social media are used in the Caribbean region, evaluates the intensity and influence of current IOC-UNESCO and CLME Project online campaigns, and assess other potential new communication technology option. This brief overview will provides essential background relevant to an evaluation of the challenges and benefits associated with the use of social media strategy, and provide recommendations on the way forward.

The Caribbean Social Networks

The social network community is significant in the Caribbean region. Cyber research and intelligence firm Media Badger (2011) reports that there are just over 10 million people online in the CARICOM region, representing 24% of its population. From this online community, 4 millions people have an active Facebook account. However, when considering all Caribbean countries and adjacent regions, there are over 70 million Facebook users in the CLME region (IWS, 2011). Although the accuracy of these statistics may be questionable, it nonetheless provides an appreciation of the potential coverage of a potential IMS-REMP campaign through a social media platform such as Facebook.

It is also worth noting that Facebook is far more popular than Twitter in the Caribbean region. Although Twitter is increasingly being used, it does not reach a significant portion of the online community. Its conversation-like experience, based on a fast paste and continuous feed of information, could explain its absence from the top social network rank. Therefore, Twitter might not provide the best venue for an IMS social media campaign.

However, Facebook it is not the most popular social media in the Caribbean region. Indeed, social networks that best facilitate the exchange of video and music tracks are far more used in the insular Caribbean. Although the gap is narrowing, social networks such as CaribMassive, WestIndianTube, CaribFriends and BlackPlanet are still more popular than Facebook (Media Badger, 2001).

This trend could also be explained by the key topics being discussed on these forums. Contrarily to the North American trend, suggesting that Internet users are increasingly browsing social media to access and comment on news and information, the main themes of discussion on social media in the CARICOM countries are relationships and music. In fact, these leisure and personal subjects represent 65% of all posts made on social media, while politics and business only represent 23% of comments (Media Badger, 2011). This suggests that using Facebook, to promote a tool used for marine and coastal resource management such as IMS, might not attract the interest desired in the CARICOM countries.

IOC-UNESCO And CLME Project Social Media Presence

The IOC-UNESCO and the CLME Project are already using social media as part of their communication strategy. In fact, IOC-UNESCO initiated its Facebook page in 2009 to promote the organization and offer news feed on its activities. This IOC page currently has 1,116 likes, which represents the number of users who continuously receive IOC information updates on their newsfeed. Although significantly less influential than the UNESCO page, (which has nearly 50,000 followers) the IOC Facebook page is considerably more popular than the CLME Project (which only has 31 followers).

It also seems that IOC-UNESCO has multiple project-based Facebook pages, which divides the number of followers on any given subjects. A quick search through the Facebook search function reveals about ten different online campaigns referring to the IOC. Although this strategy focuses on the audience most susceptible to benefit from the disseminated information, it can also reduce the development of a diverse and sustainable online community in the long-term.

Alternative Digital Communication Tools

New communication technology applications have more to offer than just social media. Indeed, creating a custom application allowing users to upload relevant information directly from their mobile phone into the IMS-REMP database could be a more effective way to entice the use of IMS-REMP database and enrich its content. Pictures and videos of coastal erosion, extreme weather events, source of water pollution, or interviews on traditional knowledge, could all be added in a “Shared folder” within IMS-REMP database. This could allow users to post information that is useful to them, and enhance the relevance, and sustainability of IMS-REMP.

Digital marketing consultant, Alphonse Hà (Bào), from digital intelligence firm W.ill.am/, suggests that this approach could be successful. However, Bào also mentions that without a highly secured database access, it will be very difficult for IMS-REMP administrators to monitor the quality of information being posted by its users (personal comm., October 30th).

Following this brief overview, here are some key benefits and challenges associated with the development of a social media strategy and use of alternative communication tools for IMS-REMP:

Benefits

- Disseminates promotional materials including photos, maps, video, working documents, and main website;
- Creates networks with partnerships organizations that are susceptible to become source of information for IMS-REMP;
- Creates networks between individuals that are susceptible to use IMS-REMP;
- Promotes the IMS-REMP portal, especially new entries and applications;

- Allows for users to share pertinent information with IMS-REMP. Users can post pictures, news, and events that could then be migrated to the IMS-REMP database;
- Creating a social media page is usually free of charge.

Challenges

- Time consuming (average 0.5 hour daily): Site administrator must review comments made on posts, and respond when appropriate; add pictures, videos, and other visual aid; update news and events; create links with other relevant projects demonstrating the relevance of IMS-REMP;
- Social media in the CARICOM is essentially used as a form or leisure activity and is not principally use to be informed on work-related subjects;
- An IMS-REMP social campaign might be eclipsed by more popular and proactive IOC-UNESCO and CLME Project campaigns due to their high level of news feed input;
- Security issue: If the social media page is accessible to the public without access restriction, it could be difficult to monitor the quantity and quality of the information being shared jeopardizing the integrity of IMS-REMP.

The Way Forward

Therefore, it is not conclusive that an exhaustive social media strategy would best promote IMS-REMP. Nevertheless, millions of potential users can be reached with a Facebook campaign. Given that both IOC-UNESCO and CLME Project already have such a platform, it is recommended that IMS-REMP entries be added to those portals for its initial launch. Perhaps, sporadic news feed could also be added when important announcements or system modification needs to be publicized. Using the “Like” action, IMS-REMP can monitor all feedbacks associated with its feeds. This would require that either IMS-REMP be granted the status of administrator on these sites, or the current administrator takes the responsibility to upload the IMS-REMP promotional content.

This recommendation minimizes the time and human resources associated with the development and implementation of an IMS-REMP social media strategy, and maximizes all potential benefits.

References

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