FY2022 Citizen Centric Communication Enhancements

Improving public-facing fire incident communications by aligning digital resources and deploying new technology

OVERVIEW

During the fire season in FY2022 IDL implemented a plan to improve communications with citizens facing wildfire impacts. At its core, this initiative aligned the agency's fire-related web, social media, email, and media outreach communications to distribute consistent messaging and deployed technology creatively to reach more people with critical fire messages.

Prior to last year's fire season, IDL and the incident management teams (IMT) overseeing fires on IDL protection only used Facebook and email-based news releases to disseminate information about active incidents. Additionally, IMTs handling IDL fires would generally create new Facebook pages for each new incident. Consequently, those who were not Facebook users were unlikely to see incident information online, and the proliferation of Facebook pages created confusion and required entirely new audiences to be developed for each incident.

DEPLOYING TIME-SAVING AND PERFORMANCE IMPROVING TECHNOLOGIES

In Fiscal Year 2022 IDL leveraged four new communication technologies, enabling the swift dissemination of both initial attack and incident management team fire communications via multiple channels, including: IDL's website, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram, and email.

- **Loomly -** *A social media posting management tool*
  Loomly is a social media posting tool that allows IDL and incident management team (IMT) staff handling fire communications to post to all IDL social media accounts simultaneously. Thus, when IDL staff or IMT personnel produced social media posts through Loomly, those posts were automatically distributed to IDL's Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and Instagram accounts.

- **Custom Facebook Feed -** *A post aggregation tool for websites*
  Custom Facebook Feed is a WordPress website plugin that automatically aggregates hash tagged posts from Facebook and publishes them on a webpage. IDL used this plugin to display fire incident information posted to our Facebook page by IDL and IMT staff on a new Fire News Feed webpage located on IDL's website. The new page was viewed more than 54,000 times and allowed those who do not use social media to access content they otherwise would have missed.

  For large incidents or those near cities and towns, IDL created incident specific webpages that included detailed information about the fire including vicinity maps, links to InciWeb pages, and social media posts about the incident. These incident-specific pages were promoted via social media, email updates and new releases. These new webpages were well-received by the public and made information about high profile fires easy to find. For example, the Pioneer Fire's

incident webpage was viewed more than 28,000 times, and the Bedrock Fire's page received nearly 13,000 views.

- *Yoast Search Engine Optimization* – *A tool for improving the search ranking of webpages*
Prior to last fire season, IDL provided no information about current fire incidents on its website. With last season's implementation of the Custom Facebook Feed plugin and the publication of the Fire News Feed and incident-specific pages, messages about every incident on IDL protection that exceeded 10 acres in size or threatened structure were published on the agency's website. However, simply publishing content on a webpage does not ensure the public will see it. To ensure citizens searching for fire information would be directed to IDL webpages, staff deployed the Yoast Search Engine Optimization plugin on the agency's website. This tool allowed IDL to custom-tailor fire related webpages to increase the likelihood of those pages being indexed by search engines and displayed in search results. After deploying the Yoast tool, the agency's new Fire News Feed was the top search result in google for "Idaho fire news," and the Fire Restriction Finder webpage was the top search result in google for "Idaho fire restrictions." The Yoast plugin also ensured incident specific pages achieved high rankings in Google search, too.

- **Gov Delivery** – *A spam-proof mass email delivery system for government agencies*
During Fiscal Year 2022 IDL launched Gov Delivery, a mass email system designed for government agencies that excels at ensuring important messages are not flagged as spam. IDL used this system extensively during the last fire season to manage initial attack email communications, sending timely updates to local officials, citizens, and the media. IMTs managing fires on IDL protection also used this tool on a more limited basis. Key advantages provided by Gov Delivery include simplified list management that supports self-signups for updates, real-time analytics about message delivery and performance, and standardized message formats with easy-to-use templates. Standardizing the look and dissemination of incident-related emails brought a heightened degree of professionalism to IDL's communications.

LAUNCHING NEW HIGH-DEMAND WEBPAGES

In Fiscal Year 2022 IDL combined GIS technology with its website to improve citizen access to vital information.

- *Idaho Fire Map* – *A dynamic, near real time view of all fire incidents*
Prior to last fire season, IDL only produced static PDF-based maps to share with the public during fire season. Last season, IDL's GIS team modified an existing fire mapping application that they had previously developed for internal use to display, in near real-time, fire incidents. This new interactive fire map was embedded in the agency's public website and quickly became one of the most visited pages. The webpage was viewed more than 63,000 times last season, which represents nearly 10% of the agency's total web traffic. This new page was marketed using news releases, and social media. The page was designed to achieve high rankings in Google search and used the new Yoast Search Engine Optimization plugin.

- *Fire Restrictions Finder* – *An interactive, zoomable map displaying restriction area boundaries*
Prior to last fire season, the only online source of fire restriction information for Idaho was a site maintained by the BLM, IdahoFireInfo.com. The BLM site was cumbersome to use. Driven by the

high volume of phone calls IDL received seeking information about restrictions, our GIS team developed a public-facing fire restriction map that became the third most viewed page on IDL's website, garnering more than 51,000 views last fire season. Consequently, the volume of phone calls IDL received with questions about fire restrictions decreased dramatically, freeing staff to focus on creating new and timely incident-related communications. The Fire Restriction Finder webpage was marketed using news releases and social media. The page was designed to achieve high rankings in Google search and used the new Yoast Search Engine Optimization plugin.

PERFORMANCE METRICS

The plan IDL implemented in Fiscal Year 2022 to improve communications with citizens facing wildfire impacts worked, and the proof is in the numbers.

In 2020, from July 1 to December 31, there were 4,018 pageviews of fire-related content at www.idl.idaho.gov. In stark contrast, in 2021 during this same period there were 272,597 pageviews, a 6,684% increase. Also, during the same year to year periods the visitor count to IDL's website rose from 153,171 to 758,161, a 395% increase.

These remarkable increases in web traffic are credited to the deployment of new communication technologies, the creation of high-demand fire-related webpages and coupling this work with a more tightly focused and expanded use of social media.

IDL experienced similar increases in its social media traffic. The agency's Facebook reach increased from 124,412 during July 1 to December 31, 2020, to 517,625 during July 1 to December 31, 2021, a 316% increase. Results were similar on Twitter, with the reach from the same period in 2020 increasing from 139,100 to 271,028 in 2021, a 95% increase.

During these same timeframes the traffic driven to the IDL website by the agency's social media accounts increased dramatically, too. From July 1 to December 31, 2020, Facebook and Twitter referrals generated 3,370 user sessions on www.idl.idaho.gov. During the same period in 2021, their referrals generated 49,193 user sessions, a 1,360% increase.