

Division A – Category 6: Internal

Entry Title: FAU Harbor Branch eNews

Research/Situation Analysis: Harbor Branch Oceanographic Institute (HBOI) is a research site of Florida Atlantic University and home to scientists, engineers and students who share the common vision of *Ocean Science for a Better World*[®]. The 144-acre site is located more than 90 miles north of the main campus in Boca Raton, making HBOI the university's most remote location and creating a challenging scenario in keeping all key players in the information loop. In accordance with HBOI's Strategic Plan, maintaining an open line of communication internally, both to faculty and staff on-site and to those on other campuses throughout the university, was cited by HBOI senior staff as a priority in 2014. HBOI leaders tasked the HBOI Communications team with creating a better form of relaying pertinent information on a regular basis. In the past, the institute had published a hard copy quarterly newsletter for both internal and external audiences which took weeks to prepare, print and distribute and cost more than \$10,000/year to produce. Due to the need for timely dissemination of information to HBOI and other university campuses, the flexibility to communicate in a matter of minutes and budget constraints, it was determined that HBOI needed to produce a digital newsletter that could be distributed via email. Primary research was conducted by the Associate Director of Communications, who researched companies that specialized in eNewsletter communication. Following conference calls and demonstrations by three companies, HBOI Communications selected Constant Contact as the preferred vendor for the variety of templates available, ease of use, low cost and statistical data provided. HBOI Communications met with senior staff to determine how often the eNewsletter should be distributed, and it was determined that weekly distribution of the "eNews" would be most effective. **Objectives:** (1) Create a weekly, up-to-date open line of communication with HBOI's internal audience and faculty/staff on other campuses by disseminating an internal eNews every Friday. (2) Reduce the budget that had historically been spent on newsletter communication by a minimum of 75% (\$7,500). (3) Distribute to more than 200 HBOI faculty/staff/students as well as more than 100 key faculty/staff at other FAU campuses with access to email and ensure receipt by utilizing a system that tracks open rates.

Implementation: The HBOI Communications team selected a template in Constant Contact, chose brand-appropriate colors, created a branded eNews banner and uploaded it to create the initial eNews format. Email lists were imported into Constant Contact via Excel spreadsheet and segmented according to geographic location and/or affiliation. The template and lists allowed the HBOI Communications team full editorial liberty to produce and distribute eNewsletters as needed completely in-house, saving time and money. To keep faculty, staff and students

engaged, each weekly newsletter featured three to six faculty/staff-provided, pertinent and timely news briefs with photos, many of which included links to pages with more information on the topic. This format allowed readers to quickly scan the week's news and select which stories on which they wanted more information. HBOI Communications kept the list-serve of contact updated manually, ensuring that the recipient list was accurate up-to-date and that all faculty, staff and students in the target audience were receiving the information that was being distributed. The eNews was distributed each Friday at 8am, and emails were sent by the Executive Director reminding faculty and staff to read the eNewsletter for the most up-to-date information from HBOI. Key messages were delivered to the leadership of the institute encouraging them to speak with their faculty/staff/students to educate them on the importance of eNews and content being sent to the Communications Team for weekly distribution. The eNews was added to agendas for group meetings including faculty, staff and students to reiterate the date of dissemination and the importance of reading it each week. The eNews has been utilized to inform a broad FAU audience of a vast range of important institutional news including grant awards, upcoming events, faculty accomplishments and achievements, before any of the information is made public through traditional media outlets.

Evaluation: Since its inception in March, 2014, the eNews has become the epicenter for the latest news coming out of HBOI, successfully keeping all of the various stakeholders, both on-site and on other campuses, apprised on a weekly basis. Faculty/staff/students have responded favorably in their reaction and engagement with the tool. It has served as a model for other Communications teams across the university who have implemented similar eNewsletters. (1) HBOI has successfully created and distributed one eNews per week since the inception of the program. In addition, the eNews platform has been used for breaking news and event announcements throughout the year. (2) The only cost associated with the eNews is the Constant Contact subscription, which is based on the number of contacts and runs \$40/month for up to 3,000 (a total annual cost of \$480, resulting in a savings of \$9,520/year.) (3) The eNews has a 50-60% open rate according to Constant Contact, which is very favorable when compared with the industry standard open rate of 24%. HBOI was recognized as a 2014 Constant Contact All Star Winner, an annual designation given to the top 10% of their customers for excellence in building customer relationships. **Budget:** The eNews is compiled and written by HBOI's Associate Director of Communications and takes approximately 1-2 hours per week to produce. The only direct cost for the HBOI eNews is the subscription. The platform provides up-to-date statistics on open rates, click-throughs and unsubscribes and comes at a fraction of the cost of the printed quarterly newsletter, saving the institute more than \$9,500 per year.

**FAU Harbor Branch eNews
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Harbor Branch Oceanographic Institute at Florida Atlantic University is a research community of 140 marine scientists, engineers, educators and other professionals focused on *Ocean Science for a Better World*[®]. The institute drives innovation in ocean engineering, at-sea operations, marine drug discovery and biotechnology, coastal ecology and conservation, marine mammal research and conservation, aquaculture, ocean observing systems and marine science education. The Communications department consists of three people including: the Associate Director of Communications, who manages all internal and external communications including eNews, media inquiries, website, advertising, social media and special projects; the Media Communications Coordinator, who manages videography and photography; the Specialty License Plate Coordinator who manages the marketing efforts for FAU Harbor Branch's four Florida specialty license plates and assists with Communications as needed. The Research Communications Project Manager works in coordination with the department in the area of technical writing.