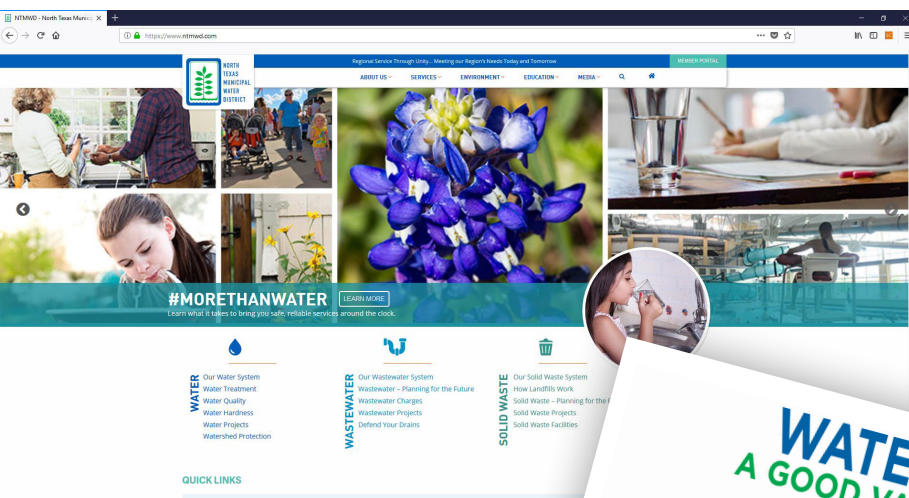


More Than Water: North Texas Campaigns Educate Customers on Water Rates

Janet Rummel



The North Texas Municipal Water District (NTMWD) serves more than 1.7 million people in an area that spans 2,200 square miles north and east of Dallas. The district provides wholesale water, wastewater, and solid waste services. Like many other water providers, costs to store, treat, and deliver water are rising. Some NTMWD plants, pumps, and pipes are decades old, requiring ongoing repairs and upgrades. Additional water regulations or changes to existing requirements calls for additional staff, processes, projects, and technology.

North Texas is one of the fastest-growing regions in the United States, requiring the development of new water sources and associated infrastructure to support its thriving cities. It's a challenge to explain to customers why this investment is needed, especially when there are associated rate increases. Many

customers don't think much about their water and wastewater services until there's a significant rise in their monthly bill. When that occurs, many customers, especially those on limited budgets or struggling to afford basic water services, ask why the increase is necessary. People who have faithfully conserved water may wonder why their rates are going up when they've diligently kept their own usage down for years.

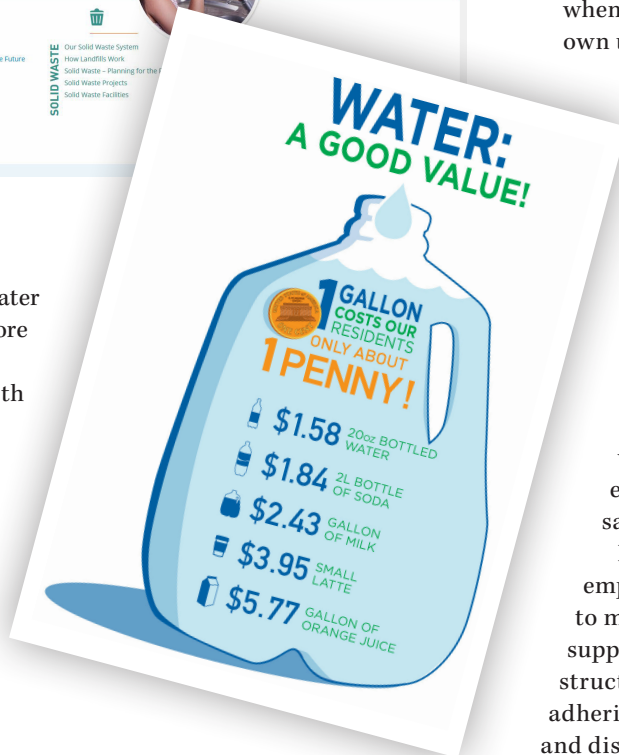
Education Efforts

It might help if all of NTMWD's customers understood that less than 20% of the cost of water is related to the amount that's actually consumed. Most of the wholesale rate funds the vast and complex system of infrastructure used to provide water, including the team of water professionals who work to ensure that customers' water is safe and reliable.

In its messaging, NTMWD emphasizes everything it takes to make water available: securing supplies, maintaining old infrastructure and building new systems, adhering to regulations, and treating and distributing the water. For the past three years, the district has increased its focus on educating the communities

it serves about the process of providing reliable drinking water at reasonable rates, and why regular rate increases are investments that ensure service today and tomorrow.

The NTMWD communications team developed a comprehensive campaign to emphasize the benefits



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of water compared with its relatively low cost as a way to demonstrate fiscal responsibility and stewardship; this approach also continued to highlight the importance of conservation to meet communities' needs. The #MoreThanWater campaign was developed and launched in 2017 to explain that water itself is just one of the many factors that go into providing superior, affordable water service to NTMWD's customers. Campaign elements conveyed a "we-get-it-done" attitude while showcasing the infrastructure and "hidden heroes" that support the region's quality of

life and vibrant communities. The campaign was disseminated through all of NTMWD's communication channels, as described in the following sections.

Infographics

One of the best ways to explain what's involved in water distribution is by showing everything that goes into the process. The NTMWD communications team created several infographics that showed the many aspects of getting water to communities. A water glass infographic illustrates the complexities of managing a large water system and how that affects the costs of water. A cost-comparison infographic underscores the value of tap water compared with other beverages and points out that homes and businesses in NTMWD communities receive tap water for about a penny per gallon.

Similarly, a "Getting Water to You" infographic describes how NTMWD partners with cities in its service area to get water from source lakes to customer taps. A water-treatment-process infographic explains the complex treatment processes required to turn lake water into high-quality drinking water.

Website

Recognizing that websites are a powerful source of information for consumers seeking information about a water provider, NTMWD overhauled its website to reflect an updated brand and provide a more content-rich, user-friendly interface. A dedicated #MoreThanWater webpage was added, with links to rate-related videos, fact sheets, and frequently asked questions as well as the new infographics.

The NTMWD team created a series of #MoreThanWater-related images for the website homepage—pictures showing aspects of daily life made possible by water (i.e., water recreation, clean dishes, colorful yards). All of these images include the branded hashtag, a short explanation on the topic, and a link to related pages. The hashtag #MoreThanWater is prominently displayed on the website and leads visitors to information on how NTMWD prices water and the many factors that can determine rate increases.

Videos

To share its vital work with the public, NTMWD created videos that give a comprehensive look at the district's nonstop operations. The "Journey of Water" video takes viewers behind the scenes for a look at water treatment and distribution. The video features leaders, operators, and specialists

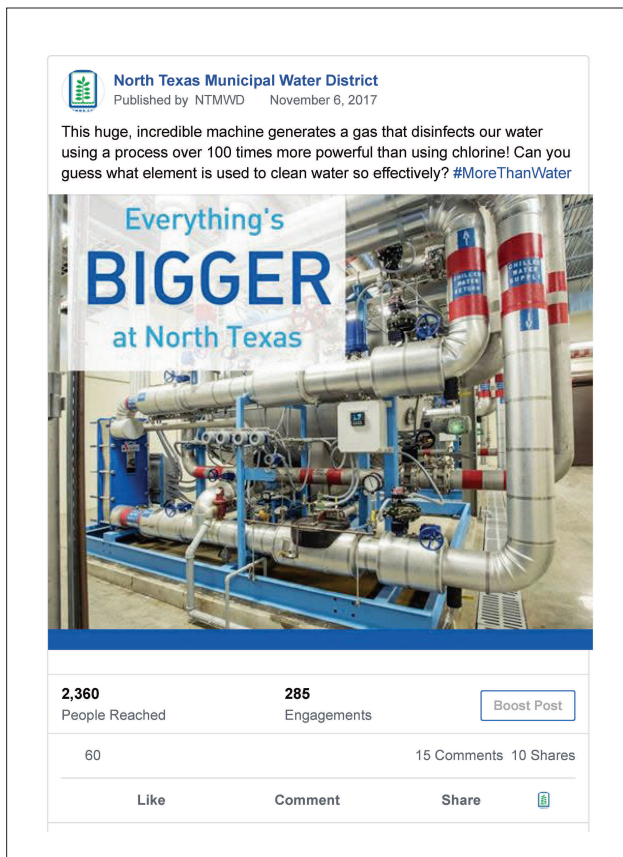


Figure 1

explaining the many steps of the process and the important work they do. The narrative places emphasis on the history, expertise, and care that NTMWD puts into treating and testing to ensure that high-quality water is delivered consistently.

“Who We Are” covers the history and breadth of services, giving member and customer communities a way to explain the full suite of NTMWD’s services to residents. The video emphasizes the district’s historic vision to meet the growing needs of North Texas and features people from some of the facilities who make these services possible.

“Water Rates Pay for #MoreThanWater” was created to help viewers understand the value of water in supporting communities’ prosperity and quality of life. Narration and footage focus on the expansion of the population and economy, the importance of water in serving growing cities, and the need to increase rates as NTMWD invests in vital infrastructure. A whiteboard-style animated video was added to the mix to illustrate how monthly water bills pay for much more than just the water flowing from the tap.

These videos communicate the district’s message to a large number of North Texans. The videos are posted on NTMWD’s YouTube channel and cross-promoted on its other social media channels. NTMWD member cities also use the videos to connect with their customers.

Social Media

To help its member cities and communities and their customers understand the need for rate increases, NTMWD launched three paid social media campaigns under the #MoreThanWater umbrella to attract more followers and educate the public about everything it takes to provide water and the reasons behind rising costs. These social media posts featured a cohesive set of branded graphics, the #MoreThanWater hashtag, and compelling photos to support these messages.

The #MoreThanWater campaign has helped NTMWD communicate information about the complex infrastructure, processes, and skilled employees behind the region’s tap water in a simple and straightforward manner.

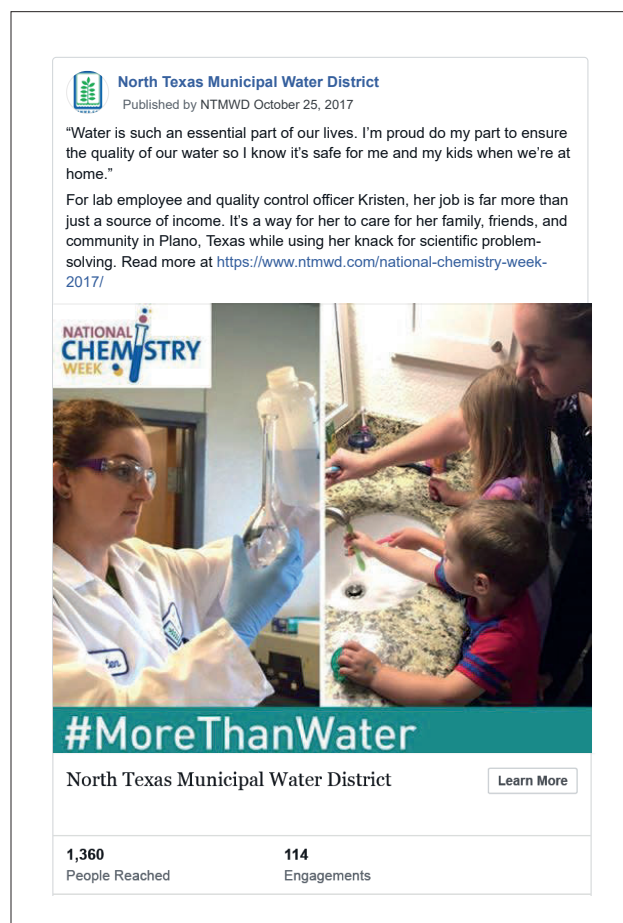


Figure 2

NTMWD made minimal investments to boost the posts for multiple days. These posts featured employees, processes, and the benefits of NTMWD services for North Texans where they live, work, and play. At the same time, many posts wove in iconic Texan phraseology and interests or demonstrated how NTMWD water supports favorite local activities, ranging from boating on district lakes to hydrating local athletes under the “Friday Night Lights.” The infographics and videos were also emphasized and shared in these campaigns to show all the steps that water delivery entails.

A “Bigger in Texas” campaign played on Texan terminology and pride to emphasize the massive scale of NTMWD’s systems and services. Posts highlighted statistics such as the district’s 575-plus miles of pipe and the NTMWD ozone treatment facilities—among the largest in the world (Figure 1).

Social media posts highlighting NTMWD employees helped humanize the organization, showing the personal interest that they have in providing quality services—most of them are NTMWD customers, too.

A “Your Water System at ~~Work~~ Play” campaign emphasized the high quality of life that district water provides to North Texans. Posts highlighted how water is integral to daily life and listed water’s benefits, ranging from boating and fishing on NTMWD reservoirs to keeping students hydrated and helping families stay cool in the Texas heat.

A “Hidden Heroes” campaign showed the dedicated people at NTMWD who work to deliver reliable district services. Posts featured employees in all facets, including a diver removing rags from clogged pipes at a wastewater treatment plant, maintenance crews repairing a broken pipe over a weekend, and a chemist in a laboratory monitoring water quality. This helped humanize the organization, showing the personal interest that NTMWD employees have in providing quality services—most of them are NTMWD customers, too (Figure 2).

The social media campaigns have been highly effective. The #MoreThanWater campaigns have increased overall traffic and engagement on NTMWD social media channels regarding topics related to district services, with some posts scoring up to 13,000 views. The campaigns also significantly boosted the popularity and visibility of the hashtag #MoreThanWater (Figure 3).

Campaign Success

The #MoreThanWater campaign has helped NTMWD communicate information about the complex infrastructure, processes, and skilled employees behind the region’s tap water in a simple and straightforward manner. Because investments in the water system will be required on an ongoing basis, this foundational message is now a mainstay in the NTMWD communications program, with the ultimate goal of getting communities to better appreciate the value of their water and how it affects their daily lives. 💧

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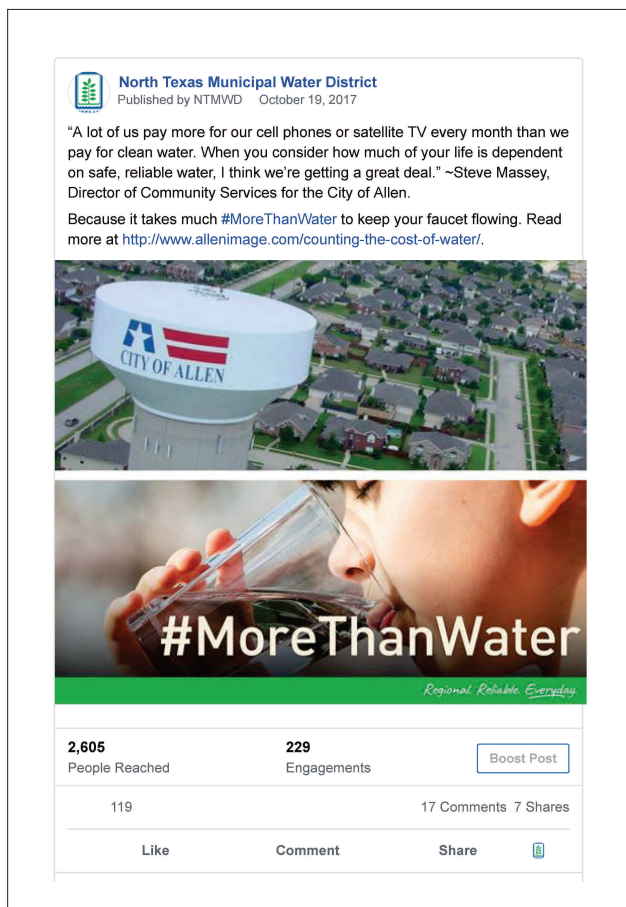


Figure 3



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