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Ocean Management Research Network Communication Strategy

Prepared for
Ocean Management Research Network

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DISCLAIMER

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Executive Summary

Oceans Management Research Network (OMRN) is an independent not-for-profit network, seeking the development of a communication strategy in order to aid in its promotion and to clarify its role to the main users of its work. This communication strategy has therefore been developed for OMRN, taking into account the following elements:

- The values of OMRN and communication issues perceived by OMRN members
- The values of OMRN and communication issues perceived by partnering organizations
- OMRN's objective as a Network
- Strategies implemented by similar organizations

Objectives have been developed for the communication strategy keeping in mind OMRN's overall objectives. These objectives are divided into long-term objectives, defining the framework of the communication strategy, and short-term objectives, being precise objectives whose implementation will help achieving long-term objectives.

The long-term objectives of the proposed communication strategy are:

- To increase the awareness of OMRN such that it can influence the broader federal government agenda with respect to the management of oceans;
- To establish OMRN as the premier organization in Canada for linking together the various actors present in the domain of oceans management;
- To establish OMRN as the main provider of knowledge and information on socio-economic issues related to oceans management in Canada;
- To establish OMRN as the premier organization in Canada for leveraging and coordinating research regarding socio-economic aspects of oceans management through the use of its network.

The short-term objectives of the proposed communication strategy are:

- To clarify and promote the cost-effective scientific value that OMRN can bring to its funding organizations (DFO, SSHRC and potential future funders), as well as other departments and associations in need of information related to the socio-economic aspects of oceans management;
- To develop regular, routine and salient communications between OMRN and its target audiences;

- To raise OMRN's profile to all its users i.e. funders, organizations involved in oceans management and the general public, and to clarify the value of OMRN's activities.

In order to develop and improve OMRN's communication, OMRN will need to communicate with various audiences. Distinguishing these specific groupings allows for consideration of specific strategies to focus communications with each of these groups. The key audiences for proposed communication strategy are:

- OMRN members including researchers and member organizations;
- OMRN's existing and potential future funders (including DFO and SSHRC);
- Public, Private and Non-Governmental Organizations with mandates related to oceans management such as Transport Canada, Environment Canada, Parks Canada and Industry Canada;
- Media and General Public interested in oceans management issues.

Different methods of communication have been identified which will allow OMRN to effectively communicate with the aforementioned key audiences. In implementing the communication strategy, OMRN will need to use different communication tools, such as:

- Direct communications
- Internal newsletters
- External newsletters
- OMRN website
- OMRN brochure
- OMRN monthly report
- Active participation at events hosted by other organisations
- Press releases
- Provide support for news media through the use of experts
- Articles in magazine and reviews related to oceans management

Furthermore, it is recommended that OMRN appoints a communication officer in charge of conducting and implementing the communication strategy. The communication strategy as a whole is estimate to cost \$43,510, depending on its implementation.

Finally, a feedback mechanism has been designed to evaluate the success of the communication strategy. The feedback mechanism includes various tools, such as a record of the number of inquiries and publications, and an analysis of website statistics.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In 2000, ocean and coastal researchers and managers from across Canada recognized the significance of the social-economic issues of oceans management. As a result, the Ocean Management Research Network (OMRN) was formed as an independent not-for-profit network, uniquely positioned to reach out to those seeking an improved understanding of the oceans' challenges. OMRN provides a positive framework for addressing these challenges in order to advance strategies and policies for a shift towards a new vision of oceans management that enhances the human dimensions, public participation, and greater awareness and capacity in our understanding of the oceans.



Today, the network connects over 800 Canadian researchers, students and managers who collaborate to promote and share leading-edge interdisciplinary research and management practices on a wide range of oceans-related issues. OMRN is composed of a Board governing the Network and is responsible for the various national and regional network programs, a Network Secretariat, and Working Groups that deal with thematic activities. OMRN activities consist of organizing workshops and a bi-annual conference, participating in national and international conferences, providing support for students, organizing public information sessions and providing multidisciplinary research on the human dimension of oceans management.

The network is currently facing various issues, mainly a lack of clear communication regarding its role, vision and impact on research for one of its principal funder, Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO), and for users such as Indian and Northern Affairs (INAC). The present communication strategy will therefore attempt to address these issues by defining the proper messages to be delivered to each targeted audiences and the methods of delivering these messages.

2. BACKGROUND

The Consulting team conducted several interviews with OMRN members as well as representatives of DFO, one of OMRN's main funders, and INAC, one of the users of its work. The interviews enabled the team to establish internal and external viewpoints of what the value of OMRN's work consist of and what are the issues related to this work.

2.1 Perceived value

According to OMRN members, the Network provides value in various forms. First, with over 800 researchers and managers from across Canada involved in oceans management, OMRN is an important source of knowledge on the socio-economical impact of the management of oceans. Secondly, the members find value in the fact that OMRN is independent from the government and any other pressure groups, a fact that allows the Network to provide neutral and reliable research, and enables all organisations to participate in OMRN's activities. Thirdly, the Network has members spread nationally across Canada, enabling it to cover issues and get perspectives from all parts of Canada. Lastly, OMRN members find value in the capacity of its activities to connect various organisations and individuals such as scientists and policy-makers for a better understanding of oceans management.

DFO recognised OMRN's value in its ability to connect actors and provide networking opportunities, something that appears to be difficult to obtain outside of OMRN's activities. Another value exists in the fact that OMRN enables DFO members to get in touch with researchers and academics in an efficient manner, hence making OMRN, a powerful intermediate. In addition, DFO have to consider the socio-economic aspect of oceans management in their course of actions, and since they do not have the capacity in-house to cover that mandate, DFO finds value in the ability of OMRN to be a source of knowledge and information on that specific aspect.

Last but not least, INAC finds value in OMRN's ability to provide networking opportunities that would otherwise be hard to establish. INAC also finds value in the fact that OMRN is a source of useful information and knowledge regarding the socio-economic aspect of oceans management. INAC recognized the fact that OMRN seems to be the only organization to bring an academic view on the issues related to oceans management on a regular basis.

2.2 Perceived issues

OMRN members were concerned with the fact that the Network has experienced issues in terms of communication with DFO, leading OMRN to have difficulties in understanding the needs of DFO. Moreover, it appears that DFO is not fully aware of the extent of the work that OMRN is willing to perform for them. Furthermore, the members raised the issue of funding given that OMRN is funded only for networking activities and not for research activities. This gives the impression that OMRN's role is limited to the functions of a networking agent and as such not taking part in research activities.

When interviewed, DFO members raised concerns about the actual value of the networking opportunities and expressed doubts that the overall value is worth all the funding (\$1 million). DFO members also criticized OMRN for putting too much emphasis on their desire to remain independent from the government, being concerned that this characteristic prevents OMRN from being able to meet DFO's needs. When it comes to the work previously done by OMRN, DFO members stated that the deliverables were too broad in scope to be used by DFO. They also indicated that there is a lack of clarity in terms of its methodology used, as well as the direction of the OMRN network.

INAC recognised as well that OMRN has some issues with communication on various issues such as communicating its role, the nature of its activities and the benefits that organisations could receive when participating in those activities. Moreover, INAC raised the concern that OMRN has not yet entirely developed its hoped-for value, i.e. OMRN is not working at its full potential.

2.3 Communication Strategy

The organizations interviewed agreed that OMRN is a useful source of information related to the social-economical aspect of oceans management. They all agreed that however, that OMRN is currently facing various issues. Most of the issues raised by these organizations can easily be connected to issues of communication. Therefore, OMRN needs a communication strategy that will bring an answer to these issues, and will notably:

- Demonstrate the value of OMRN's work.
- Clarify OMRN's role, objectives, directions, and methodology.
- Enable OMRN to understand the needs of its users in terms of academic content and deliverables.

3. STRATEGY

A communication strategy requires long-term and short-term objectives anchored to an organization's goals. The objectives of OMRN's communication strategy are as follows:

3.1 Long-term objectives

The long-term objectives of an OMRN communication strategy:

- Define where OMRN would like to be in the future (5 years)
- Keep communication activities focussed and on target
- Provide the basis for the decisions needed to implement a communications plan

These communication goals have been established based on OMRN's overall goals and needs. Therefore, before listing the long-term communications goals, it may be useful to note overall OMRN's goals (based upon OMRN's Executive Summary):

- To raise the role and profile of social science, humanities and policy studies within the realm of oceans research.
- To promote critical thinking, support diversity and inclusiveness of participants, encourage new partnerships and promote innovative, integrated research.
- To undertake to evaluate the current state of knowledge, to facilitate value-added research, to promote the use of most appropriate practices and to work towards establishing a long-term research agenda.

With these in mind, the long-term objectives of the proposed communication strategy are:

- To increase the awareness of OMRN such that it can influence the broader federal government agenda with respect to the management of oceans;
- To establish OMRN as the premier organization in Canada for linking together the various actors present in the domain of oceans management;
- To establish OMRN as the main provider of knowledge and information on socio-economic issues related to oceans management in Canada;
- To establish OMRN as the premier organization in Canada for leveraging and coordinating research regarding socio-economic aspects of oceans management through the use of its network.

3.2 Short-term objectives

These short-term objectives outlined in this report have been established in order to facilitate the achievement of the noted long-term objectives. However, while the long-term objectives are ongoing and meant to evolve with time, the short-term objectives are clear and more immediate in nature. They are focused on finite actions whose achievements can demonstrably allow for the success of the long-term objectives. The short-term objectives include the following:

- To clarify and promote the cost-effective scientific value that OMRN can bring to its funding organizations (DFO, SSHRC and potential future funders), as well as other departments and associations in need of information related to the socio-economic aspects of oceans management;
- To develop regular, routine and salient communications between the OMRN and target audiences;

- To raise OMRN's profile to all its users i.e. funders, organizations involved in oceans management and the general public, and clarify the value of OMRN's activities.

3.3 Target Audiences

The essence of a good communications strategy lies in understanding the means by which an individual or organization can succinctly and effectively communicate its message to its targeted audience and provoke the desired response and achieve the desired outcome. The first step in this process is to identify these target audiences. For OMRN these include:

- OMRN members including researchers, and member organizations;
- OMRN's existing and potential future funders (including DFO and SSHRC);
- Public, Private and Non-Governmental Organizations with mandates related to oceans management such as Transportation Canada, Environment Canada, Parks Canada and Industry Canada;
- Media and General Public interested in oceans management issues.

4. ACTION PLAN

The key to successful communications for OMRN is in the development and maintenance of ongoing relationships with all the key audiences. Each of these audiences will require a specific set of methods and mediums in order to ensure that communications with OMRN is of the greatest benefit for all parties involved. As indicated above, the key audiences can be sorted into four main groups. Distinguishing these specific groupings allows for considerations of specific strategies to focus communications with each of these groups.

Internal communications with OMRN members is essential to ensure the support for the members and maintain the cohesion of the organization. Communications with internal members will not only ensure that members are supported by OMRN, but will also ensure that OMRN is supported by its members by keeping them informed, ensuring transparency and providing support for OMRN decisions.

Communications between OMRN and their current and potential future funders will enable OMRN to maintain a continued source of funding and support for ongoing work. By ensuring that it communicates a clear direction and shows its ability to add value to its funding organizations, OMRN should be able to maintain good relations with these bodies and in turn ensure their continued support for OMRN.

The third group is composed of public and private organizations, whose mandates include oceans related issues. This group needs its own distinct strategy since it needs to be informed of the issues and the research itself. A strong and well-developed relationship with these players will enable OMRN to present itself as a credible source of information and as a facilitator for discussions around oceans, and oceans management related issues.

Finally use of news media is believed to be the best method of communicating with the general public. This would enable OMRN to build its presence through news articles, and enable them to get their messages out regarding the importance of the oceans management issues that it represents.

4.1 Audience (I): OMRN Members including researchers, and member organizations

Communications with OMRN members through their working groups is important in order to ensure that members are continually kept informed regarding the ongoing activities of OMRN. It also provides means of ensuring that information and interesting research can be shared throughout the organization. Communicating with members should also be done to ensure that they are onboard with the direction of OMRN, and ensure members are continually being kept in the loop. Communications with this group should be done using the following means:

- (1) Direct communications with heads of the working groups (regular meeting)
- (2) Internal newsletter
- (3) OMRN Website
- (4) OMRN Monthly report

4.2 Audience (II): OMRN's existing and potential future funders

The funding sources of OMRN are an extremely important audience of communications in order to ensure that they are both kept up to date with the ongoing activities of OMRN as well as to ensure that they clearly perceive the value of their investment in OMRN, hence guaranteeing a stable funding for the Network. As such the main focus of these communications is to clarify OMRN's mission and role, and to ensure that they can provide value to the funders. In order to reach this audience OMRN should:

- (1) Carry on direct communications such as face to face, telephone, and email to clarify the value that OMRN can bring;;
- (2) Organise regular meetings and group discussions to ensure that the funders needs are met;
- (3) External newsletter
- (4) OMRN brochure
- (5) OMRN websites

- (6) OMRN Monthly report

4.3 Audience (III): Public, Private and Non-Governmental Organizations with mandates related to oceans management

Organizations that concern themselves with the issues of oceans and oceans management are an important audience for OMRN, as these organizations can make great use of the information and networking opportunities that OMRN offers. These organizations also present opportunity for additional sources of funding or partnering on joint projects and events. In order to ensure proper communications with these organizations the following methods should be used:

- (1) Direct email or telephone conversations to establish initial relations.
- (2) External newsletter
- (3) OMRN brochure
- (4) OMRN website
- (5) Active participation at events hosted by other organisations
- (6) Articles in magazine and reviews related to oceans management

4.4 Audience (IV): Media and General Public interested in Oceans management issues

The use of news media as a communications target is an effective means for OMRN to access a wider audience in the general public. This provides a way of publicizing OMRN and enabling a wider use of the information that OMRN provides regarding oceans management. In order to communicate with this audience the following methods should be used;

- (1) Press releases
- (2) Provide support for news media through the use of experts.
- (3) OMRN website

5. METHODS AND MEDIUMS

The use of specific methods and mediums of communication is crucial to the ongoing success of OMRN and the promotion of its activities. Below is a description of the methods to be used as specified for each target audience.

5.1 Internal Newsletter

An electronic newsletter specifically written for internal members and researchers of OMRN should be emailed to these audiences as well as made available on the web site through the “About Us” section, as well as the “Members Only” section. This newsletter should focus on specific activities of OMRN and its secretariat as well as providing news from the different working groups. Highlights from specific projects or published works should also be included in order to promote research activities within the network. The main purpose of this newsletter is to keep members informed regarding the ongoing activities of OMRN, its successes, as well as any upcoming events. Space for individual member contributions can also be made in order to help OMRN members feel more involved.



OMRN Newsletter February 2008

5.2 External Newsletter

An electronic newsletter specifically written for external audiences such as funders and other organizations working in the areas of oceans and oceans management should be emailed to these audiences as well as made available on the website. This newsletter should feature current oceans issues, highlights of the research activities of OMRN members with links to the actual articles. It might also include the opinions of OMRN regarding current issues. The newsletter can also be used to highlight the current state of the oceans and oceans management in Canada. This newsletter should also serve the purpose of advertising for upcoming events being put on by OMRN. We recommend that announcements concerning upcoming events should be highlighted at the start of the newsletter. The main purpose of this newsletter is to raise awareness of the current issues regarding oceans and oceans management as well as to promote OMRN as a source of information and discussion regarding these issues.

5.3 OMRN Website



OMRN website

The OMRN website is an important means of communication as it serves as the public face of the organization. As such the website should be designed for an external audience, while still providing all the information needed by the members to keep them informed. The main page of the website should be used as a source of information regarding the oceans and oceans issues, with links to recent articles published by OMRN members and news articles relating to the issues. The website should also be used to promote upcoming events organized by OMRN.

Outside of the main page there should be a section for publications which can be searched and re-ordered in a user-friendly manner. There should be discussion groups linked directly to the news articles on the main page in order for users of the site to discuss the issues being presented. Keeping the website up to date with recent information is essential as it promotes frequent usage of the website and increases its effectiveness.

5.4 OMRN brochure

The brochure is an important means of promoting the work of OMRN, and the networking activities that it provides. As such, the brochure should highlight the types of work that OMRN does, as well as the general organizational structure of the organization. With regards to the work that OMRN performs, this should clearly indicate that the ability to coordinate directed research at the request of funders is part of the OMRN mandate through the use of the network as a whole to perform the required research. The brochure can also highlight some of the key issues of interest that the organization has with regards to oceans and oceans management. The main purpose of the brochure is to be a handout given at conferences and other events that OMRN holds and attends. It should contain all necessary contact information as well as highlight the website as the main source of information.

5.5 Monthly Report

The monthly report is an important means of communicating the activities and developments within OMRN and its secretariat. This report should continue to focus on highlighting the activities of OMRN in order to keep OMRN members and funders informed. It should also highlight interesting research and developments within the network, showing the importance of the work of the members. The monthly report should finally highlight the OMRN events, ensuring readers are kept informed as to what has transpired at the events, and what to expect with future events. The main idea of the monthly report is a more complete version of the internal news letter with more emphasis placed on the activities of OMRN.



OMRN Monthly Report – May 2009

5.6 Press releases

Traditional forms of news media are an important means of communication that OMRN can make great use of by providing comments and expert opinion on oceans management issues. By monitoring various sources of news from TV, newspapers and websites, OMRN can keep track of current important issues in the eyes of the general public.

Whenever an issue related to the oceans or oceans management is raised, OMRN should contact that news agency providing them with a press release presenting the opinions of OMRN regarding the issue, as well as stating the fact that OMRN can provide access to experts when the news agency requires them. Press releases should also be used to promote OMRN activities and the research conducted by OMRN's members by publishing press release to announce new studies, to communicate the results of studies or major developments of ongoing studies. Keeping in mind the limited time available to news agencies the press releases should be concise and to the point with reference to more complete sources of information as required. By sending out press releases to a wide variety of news agencies OMRN can not only get its name into publication and its opinions more well known, but it can gain from developing a sense of which media sources are most interested in these issues. With this knowledge more focused efforts can be taken to promote OMRN and its opinions. These press releases should additionally be made available on the OMRN web site for all to see. In addition those news agencies that have shown particular interest should be invited to OMRN conferences to further promote OMRN and its activities.

5.7 Participation in events

In order to promote OMRN activities to organizations involved in the management of oceans, OMRN should actively participate in events such as conferences and forums on oceans and oceans management organized by other organizations. This includes making presentations on OMRN activities or presenting OMRN viewpoints on given topics, facilitating workshops, and so forth. Participation in these events will give OMRN the opportunity to promote itself and become more visible.



5.8 Provide support for news media with the use of experts

OMRN has substantial resources at its disposal in the form of experts in the field of oceans management. This resource can be leveraged through news agencies by making them available to provide expert opinion and knowledge providing depth to the topics being discussed. In order to facilitate the quick access of experts, a comprehensive list of experts should be developed. This list should be updated regularly and kept internal to OMRN to be referenced when news agencies contact OMRN in search of experts. This ability of OMRN to provide access to experts should be advertised in its own section on the website, as well as in the press releases going out to news agencies.

5.9 Articles in magazine and reviews related to oceans management

OMRN should also publish articles in academic magazines and reviews related to oceans management. The articles could vary from reflections on the viewpoints of OMRN regarding the issues at hand to articles on the latest research findings regarding oceans or

oceans management. OMRN should also encourage researchers, academics, and other published members of OMRN to indicate their membership when publishing articles. Citations in such publications will enable OMRN to promote itself not only to organisations involved in oceans management but also to the general public though the individuals reading those articles.

6. RESOURCE REQUIREMENTS

We encourage OMRN to appoint a communication officer responsible for implementing the communication strategy. The communication officer will be in charge of tracking media and identify news regarding oceans related issues that OMRN can comment on. This officer will also be in charge of maintaining communication with the different partners of OMRN, and will keep track of events organized by different organisations on the subject of Oceans management (i.e. conferences) in which OMRN could participate.

When establishing the communication strategy for OMRN, the consulting team took into account the very limited resources that OMRN can dedicate to its communication. Therefore, all the methods recommended can be implemented with a minimal budget, as shown below.

<u>Tools</u>	<u>Details</u>	<u>Cost \$CAD</u>
Meetings	Meetings will be organised by the communication officer and can be held in OMRN's offices.	0
Newsletters (internal and external)	Documents will be prepared by the communication officer and disseminated via email and website.	0
Website	Website will be updated by the webmaster/editor or the company in charge of the website maintenance. Updates should be done at minimum, every two weeks.	\$4,800*
Monthly reports	Reports will be prepared by the communication officer and disseminated via email and website.	0

OMRN Communication Strategy - August 2009

<u>Tools</u>	<u>Details</u>	<u>Cost \$CAD</u>
Direct communications	Communication will be made via direct meetings, telephone, emails and will be organised by the communication officer.	0
Brochures	The content of the brochures will be prepared by the communication officer.	\$710**
Events	Cost will vary. OMRN should determine a budget for these activities.	-
Articles	The articles should be prepared voluntarily by the members and should be sent to be published by magazines such as 'Ocean Magazine'.	0
News monitoring	This task will be carried out by the communication officer.	0
List of experts	The list will be prepared by the communication officer.	0
Press releases	The communication officer will have to develop contacts with News agencies in order to publish press releases from time to time free of charge. He/she will also be in charge of writing them and submitting them to these News agencies.	0 ***
Communication Officer	Communication activities will require approximately 28 hours per week.	\$38,000****

* Web maintenance of 5 hours per two weeks at 40\$/hour with Creative Designs

** Brochures with Ottawa Flyer print (8.3 X11, double sided, z folded and aqueous side. 5000 copies)

*** Alternatively services such as CNW Newswire may be used at a cost of \$300 to \$600 per news release depending on the length, the language and the recipients of the release.

**** Alternatively, OMRN may decide to appoint one of its members or engage a student to fill this position.

In order to be implemented as designed, the communication strategy will therefore required a budget of approximately \$CAD 43,510.

7. FEEDBACK MECHANISM

In order to quantify the success of the strategy the following mechanisms should be used:

- (1) A count and inventory of the press releases, articles, publications published by OMRN, as well as the degree of their success.
- (2) Analysis of website statistics and the degree to which the website is used as intended.
- (3) Recording of the number of queries made by phone, email or on the website, regarding OMRN and its activities.

In order to allow for more informative feedback the following mechanism should be used:

- (1) A feedback mechanism built directly into the website, including an email address allowing for users to make general comments. This address should also be promoted in the newsletters, and brochures.
- (2) Direct conversations with people at events to see if there is information they require that is lacking.

Finally the successful nature of the communications with funders should be monitored using the following mechanisms:

- (1) The success of OMRN to maintain its funding.
- (2) Comments made by its funders regarding the clarity of OMRN's role and the usefulness of the work done by OMRN.

8. SOURCES

The recommendations outlined in this communication strategy are based on meetings with the client and interviews of OMRN members and representatives of some of the targets of the communication strategy i.e. DFO and INAC. The project team also reviewed other external examples of communication strategies, including the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of UNESCO's (2004). The team also relied on the experience of the team's mentor, an assessment of methods used by similar organizations, and a review of the current communications tools used by OMRN (brochures, website, newsletter ...). The strategy took also into consideration the limited budget for communication of OMRN, OMRN's communication goals, and the advice of the team's academic supervisor.