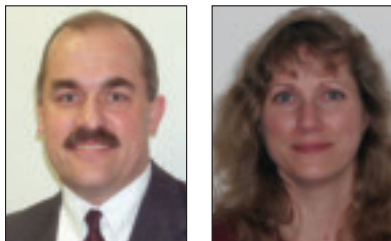


President's Message

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Environmental Health Marketing: Momentum, Synergy, and Future Steps

Note from Rob Blake, NEHA president: This year as president of NEHA my aim has been to make our "Invisible Profession" more visible. I asked Michèle Samarya-Timm to chair the marketing committee, which she has done admirably. The committee consists of Alicia Enriquez, Brian Collins, Charles Otto, Dave Pluymers, Mike Herring, and Pete Thornton. I have asked the incoming president Dick Pantages if this committee could continue their work into his presidency, which he has readily agreed to. I thought it would be fitting to ask Michèle to write a guest column on the work of the committee. I want to add my thanks to everyone on the marketing committee for their dedication and hard work this year!

I have always had great enthusiasm for my career choice in the field of environmental health. Being loquacious (sometimes to a fault!), I have been known to insert environmental health education into conversations not only with colleagues, but also with complete strangers. So when Rob Blake approached me last year, asking if I would chair the environmental health marketing committee, I readily agreed. Yes, it might take some time to get others to listen to the merits of our profession, but how hard could this be?

With an environmental health marketing committee comprised of equally enthusiastic professionals—Brian Collins, Charles Otto, Dave Pluymers, Pete Thornton, Alicia Enriquez, and Mike Herring—we set out to strategize how NEHA and its members could take steps to make our invisible profession materialize. As we brainstormed, we spent our time not only talking but doing a whole lot of listening. Members and affiliates had many thoughts on

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how widespread exhibition of our profession could be accomplished and were quite willing to share their ideas. Lots of localized and creative efforts are occurring throughout the country and these practices begged to be shared. So the initial roadmap was laid out for us. Let's showcase what is currently being done, and set these efforts out as models, best practices, lessons learned, and seed ideas for NEHA, its affiliates, its members, and indeed, everyone in environmental health professions.

Accomplishment one: the set up of a collaborative site, currently hosted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), to allow environmental health professionals to share their projects, provide dialogue and encouragement, and hopefully utilize this information as inspiration for further grassroots efforts.

Excited over the projected marketing outcomes from the collaboration site, the committee began discerning the next best steps. Around this time, Andy Timm (certainly no

stranger to NEHA or environmental health) saw a prototype template for this project in our printer, to which he asked, "Are you involved with this?" A pensive question, which provided a morsel of thought to our undertakings. Are we, as environmental health professionals, marketing only to ourselves? How do we let others—health departments, professionals, policymakers, industry, etc.—know about this marketing initiative, what we are striving to accomplish, and encourage further participation? Setting this information down in a concise and attractive single-sheet format took several drafts and much input from other professionals, including some valuable suggestions from the NEHA board of directors.

Accomplishment two: an environmental health profession marketing fact sheet, for use and distribution by affiliates and members.

Looking over the available marketing materials and resources, it was evident to the committee that a more dynamic component was also necessary. Discussions turned to the use of online webinar technology as a means of communicating with environmental health professionals and providing related professional development programming that could be ongoing, accessible, and free. Capitalizing on the characteristics of the Web to offer interactive training and using discussion group technology, we are able to provide a forum where participants can explore issues, share knowledge, and archive these scheduled interactions for future use and reference.

Accomplishment three: a regular schedule of educational webinars focusing on topics related to promoting the environmental health profession.

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As this issue goes to print, the environmental health marketing committee is still in the process of developing modes, methods, and recommendations on ways to mainstream our profession. Concepts in progress include educational sessions at the AEC & Exhibition in Tucson, a dedicated environmental health marketing Web site, an environmental health profession logo, and other innovations. However, it is evident that there is so much more that needs to be accomplished to market our profession and ourselves. How do we meet our desired goal? Marketing of the environmental health profession is not just a task for a small group of dedicated environmental health volunteers, and it is not a task that can be accomplished in just a year. We can take small steps toward our goal, but this is a much larger task.

We are specialists in various areas of environmental health, and we have learned when to reach out to other colleagues or subject-matter experts to provide advice and assistance on a particular problem or challenge. Conversely, as experts in environmental health, we can become frustrated when others outside our profession claim to be environmental health experts. With a task as huge as marketing the environmental health profession, we should be reaching out to the mix of marketing professionals who know *how* to market, and who can incorporate a whole host of specialist disciplines such as market research, brand management, advertising, promotions, and public relations into a full scale environmental health marketing campaign. We are not the only profession to

face this challenge. Perhaps one of the best professional campaigns, Johnson & Johnson's Discover Nursing campaign (www.discovernursing.com), includes commercials, ads, free career-related promotional items, statistics, and program and scholarship information. Or consider Pfizer's free public health publications (www.pfizer-publichealth.com/publications.aspx): *The Faces of Public Health*, *Milestones in Public Health*, and *Advancing Healthy Populations: The Pfizer Guide to Careers in Public Health*. Clearly, these professional awareness campaigns were accomplished with the input of marketing professionals. Our profession would benefit greatly if we could mimic the framework of these campaigns.

NEHA shouldn't be in this alone. Isn't it time to establish a national environmental health marketing collaborative to promote partnerships between associations, local and national government, academia, public interest groups, and industry to brainstorm, finance, and leverage resources, and to market and foster the growth and the visibility of our profession?

Some of the framework already exists. The Protocol for Assessing Community Excellence in Environmental Health (PACE EH) (www.cdc.gov/nceh/ehs/PIB/PACE.htm) is an innovative tool to engage the public's involvement in environmental health, collect necessary and relevant information pertaining to community environmental health status, rank issues, and prioritize environmental health program activities. PACE EH calls for an unprecedented commitment to community collaboration and involvement—areas that are continually identified as essential to the viability of the environmental health profession. Collectively—and individually—it is our responsibility to the

environment, our constituents, our profession, and ourselves to promote what we do.

It's not so difficult to share our passions and roles in environmental health with others. Real-time is the ultimate marketing tool. Each one of us should have ready a 15-second "sound bite" to bring out in conversations in the elevator, on the bus, standing on line at the grocery store, etc. We should certainly share this with our families so that our mothers, spouses, and children can understand what we do—and be proud.

Striving to establish recognition for this profession is essential for the continued success of our current work and the future of the environment we are working to protect. It is our responsibility to educate others on what we do and the importance of the environmental health profession. NEHA must continue to make national environmental health marketing inroads, as each member must continue to strive for a more local environmental health awareness. Together we need to continue to promote who we are, what we do, and how our experience and credentials ensure the very environment that is essential to our lives.

Success is almost always a collaborative enterprise, bringing people together to solve complex problems. We should look at environmental health marketing, like we do many of our undertakings, not as a problem, but as an environmental challenge we have the expertise to abate. 🐾

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