



Do Diligence Sounding Board Report

To: Interested Parties

From: Eric Eckl, Water Words That Work, LLC

Re: Results of a Review of the "Patricia, Lake" Advertisement

Date: 02/04/2010

Water Words That Work, LLC is preparing to launch a new market research service -- tentatively titled the "Do Diligence Sounding Board" -- for nature protection and pollution control organizations to use to evaluate marketing materials and messages.

The purpose of this forthcoming service is to allow you to quickly and affordably pre-test materials before they are final -- giving you an opportunity to improve your piece before you release it into the wild. Once the service launches, Water Words That Work, LLC will provide DDSB feedback to our clients in complete confidence.

As part of our field trials for this service, we tested 10 "social marketing" pieces from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Nonpoint Source Outreach Toolbox (<http://www.epa.gov/nps/toolbox/>). The EPA offers these materials up as examples for others to emulate -- so they are fair game for a public critique by the panel.

This report summarizes what 25 "everyday citizens" have to say about the "Patricia, Lake" print advertisement produced by Minnesota Water. To see the advertisement, point your browser to:

http://www.epa.gov/nps/toolbox/print/mw_lake_patricia.pdf

By the Numbers

Statement	1-Strongly Disagree	2-Somewhat Disagree	3-Somewhat Agree	4-Strongly Agree	Average for this Piece	Average for similar pieces
The piece gets my attention	0	1	4	19	3.75	3.29
The piece has a clear message	1	0	6	17	3.63	3.46

All sounding board answers are verbatim -- including spelling and typographic errors.

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The piece is believable	0	1	10	13	3.50	3.38
The issue is important to society	0	2	6	16	3.58	3.60
It is urgent to address this issue now	0	2	8	14	3.50	3.43
The issue has affected me personally, or people I care about	9	6	2	7	2.29	2.23
I could take this action, if I choose to	1	3	2	18	3.54	3.57
If I take this action, I am confident it would make a difference	3	5	7	9	2.92	3.14
If I take this action, I'm confident others will do their part, too	6	7	6	5	2.42	2.55

One Word Summary

Question Wording: "Pick one word that summarizes your opinion of this piece, for example: "Great," "OK," "Bad," "Inspiring," "Depressing," "Motivating," "Confusing," etc.

- depressing
- sad
- Informative
- Surprising
- Interesting
- harrowing
- Insightful
- Good
- clever
- Gripping
- Inquisitive
- Satirical
- effective
- provocative

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- Great
- Motivating
- depressing
- OK
- Clever
- Informative
- Motivating
- Strange
- Memorable
- arresting

Your Message in Their Words

Question Wording: "Imagine that you are telling a friend, coworker, or family member about this piece. In your own words, how would you summarize the message?"

They answered like this:

- "An obituary for a lake that encourages you to rake and pick up your leaves and turn them into compost or mulch".
- "pollution is killing our lakes"
- "Yard waste can create damaging levels of phosphorous in lakes".
- "This message talk about how yard waste such as leaves and grass clippings can damage or destroy a lake's ecology".
- "By not raking or sweeping up leaves it gets into the storm water drain system and causes excess algae to grow in lakes causing damage to the lakes".
- "it is a faux-obituary for a lake that "died" due to phosphorous level from other people's lawn clippings. it encourages people to mulch".
- "That yard waste not properly disposed of can ruin national treasures such as lakes and streams".
- "This piece is not only about saving lake Patricia but bringing the importance of properly disposing leaves properly".
- "Our lakes are a valuable resource and we need to protect them"
- "Wow, I didn't realize that organic waste like grass clippings and leaves can damage lake water -- I just learned about it in a really gripping ad that was written like an obituary".
- "A local lake's wildlife (fish, etc.) was killed off from storm-water runoff that could have been prevented".
- "Clever ad portraying the death of a lake due to pollution".
- "The message is that organic matter (such as leaves and grass clippings) in storm-water run-off that is discharged into lakes and other bodies of water can contaminate them by causing algae to grow and destroy aquatic life in those bodies of water".
- "The ad is an obituary for a lake that was "killed" because of pollution caused by storm-water run off. The ad is trying to get people to clear the fronts of storm-water drains".
- "A statement, cleverly designed as an obituary, regarding the "death" of Lake Patricia due to an overgrowth of algae cause by high phosphorus levels in leaves and grass clippings that entered the lake. People are urged to sweep or rake up leaves in the

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streets and near storm drains and to use them for mulch or compost in order to prevent this from happening to other lakes".

- "The piece is about the runoff and other environmental things that plague our lakes and rivers. This piece is all about change and what you can do to help with that change".
- "Lake Patricia is no longer a pristine lake due to contamination from contaminated runoff".
- "Clean the curbs of you street of leaves and mulch you lawn to help lake health".
- "Lake Patricia is a nice lake, but is suffering from pollutants from trees. Fallen leaves and grass clippings are releasing high amounts of phosphorus into the lake. The phosphorus produce algae, which is damaging the lake".
- "I read an article today that really makes you think. It is an obituary about Lake Patricia which has been destroyed by algae due to high phosphorus levels from leaves and grass. Just think, this body of water survived for over 12,000 years and it is sad that it was ruined due to contaminated runoff".
- "Leaves and grass clippings are contaminating Lake Patricia. Local residents should sweep these clippings from the streets and drains to help prevent this from continuing to happen".
- "It was an obituary for a lake, explaining that the lake "died" because of contaminated runoff. The reader was asked in lieu of flowers to keep grass and leaves away from storm drains and to compost them if possible".
- "This is an obituary about a lake. That's right, a lake'.
"This lake is considered dead because of algae resulting from phosphorus levels from leaves and grass clippings that found their way into the water system through storm-water drains".

Strengths of the Piece

Question Wording: "In your opinion, what is the strongest or most compelling thing about this piece?"

They answered like this:

- "The word obituary"
- "the obituary format"
- "The personification of the lake is an interesting and effective approach".
- "The most compelling piece of this article is the fact it was written as an obituary".
- "The whole angle that it took using an obituary as the hook for the issue".
- "the obituary set-up is very hard-hitting. it made me sad".
- "The obituary for the death of a lake. Something that will take much work, or maybe never, will be the same".
- "It is a very clever way to get peoples attention."
- "that it was written as an obituary"
- "Well, there's a coincidence that won't effect most viewers, but my name is "Patricia" so this one screamed for my attention. Beyond this coincidence, the obituary format is really compelling".
- "The lake's runoff was killed off from something other than a local manufacturer or illegal dumping".

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- "It emphasizes how quickly and easily man can harm an environment that can survive many other problems over the centuries".
- "The most compelling thing about the piece is the title "Obituary" - that really gets your attention. Also having a black and white photo gives the impression of lack of life in the lake".
- "I like that it is done in an obituary style, I think that it makes a big statement!"
- "The way the piece is presented as an obituary. It's clever and it really gets your attention".
- "The most compelling thing to me is that this piece is just right there and in your face. It addresses a problem and tells something you can do to help out. I also liked how it was set up to look like an obituary."
- "The fake obituary column".
- "The words are good".
- "It's usage of an obituary format to describe the damage human action has upon the natural environment."
- "This could happen to any lake, especially a lake that is near a residential area".
- "The end where it says in lieu of flowers that we can pick up a rake and clean leaves from the streets and around storm-water drains. We can all pitch in to help make sure this doesn't happen to our local body of water".
- "It moves the reader by relating the lake's age and making the lake sound like an important thing that is being damaged".
- "It grabs the attention of the reader, since an obituary for a non-person is unusual. It is nicely done without going overboard with the metaphor".
- "The most compelling thing about this piece is that the lake had been alive for 12,830 years".
- "The second most compelling thing, the damage occurred because of debris that entered storm-water drains".

Weaknesses of the Piece

Question Wording: "In your opinion, what is the weakest thing about this piece?"

They answered like this:

- "very plain looking"
- "the picture"
- "Why is only yard waste/phosphorous mentioned? What about fertilizers, pesticides, oil, etc.?"
- "It was too brief. It didn't explain in depth how lawn clippings and yard was can destroy a lake. I want to know more".
- "The picture of the lake is really not very captivating. It isn't very scenic and doesn't really make you want to do anything because the lakes beauty".
- "it should offer more suggestions to people. for instance, i don't have trees in my front yard, so i don't have anything to mulch or compost".
- "It should not be in black and white. Maybe show the picture of before and after".
- "The picture could have used some pictures showing examples of what the issue is."
- "poor choice of picture"
- "I am left wondering about the other 9,999 lakes, and I got distracted by the evenness of this number".

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- "What was killed in the lake?"
- "It could have further explained man's impact and more methods of preventing and correcting similar situations".
- "I would have liked to have seen a dead fish floating at the surface of the lake, but I'm stretching to find a weak point - the piece is very effective".
- "I think the block of text is a little large, perhaps it could be broken in two by the picture to encourage people to read the entire thing. When someone sees a big block of text like that, they are likely to skim or skip to the bottom".
- "It would be nice if the picture were in color".
- I think this piece needs a color picture of the lake, instead of just black and white. It would help with the message, I believe".
- "The other lakes and rivers surviving Lake Patricia. It does not make it seem as devastating".
- "The picture is weak. Color would be better showing the algae".
- "Not much really, the picture is a little low-res but I think that lends itself more to the newspaper obit look."
- "Blaming the problem on algae and not the people living in the area".
- "I didn't see any weaknesses. It was short and to the point".
- "The message is conveyed oddly. Passive verbs are being used when action verbs could be substituted. For instance, "An active member in the aquatic community, Patricia contracted damaging amounts of algae due to high phosphorous levels given off by leaves and grass clippings that entered her system.". The cause should come first, and then the effect should come last. An example is "The leaves and grass clippings from nearby streets and storm-water drains caused high phosphorous levels in Patricia, which resulted in damaging amounts of algae." Also, the fact that Patricia is an active member of the aquatic community should be a separate sentence".
- "Haven't heard of that lake; if it's a non-local ad, maybe a more prominent lake name would drive the message home better".
- "I don't find anything weak about this. If you must have a comment, perhaps you could provide a colorized version of the photo. I am only saying this in case a comment is mandatory."

Shop Talk vs. Plain English

Question Wording: Imagine that your friends, coworkers, or family member are looking at the piece themselves. If there are any words or phrases that might be difficult for them, please share them below:

They answered like this:

- "none"
- "Vocabulary is fine".
- "No difficult phrases noted. Maybe a bit more of an explanation about what a person can do to keep this from happening in the future".
- "Maybe phosphorus"
- "the line about contracting algae is a little confusing if people don't know the biology behind it".
- "none"
- "none"

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- "I have friends and family members who would never think it is right to use an obituary format as an attention getter this way. Although I find it very effective, some would be very offended -- especially if it caught them at a bad moment. I was one of three behind an ad campaign one time that used a similar format, and it backfired pretty badly with some of the people it reached."
- "N/A - the add was clear".
- "There should be no difficulty for anyone to understand the problem".
- "Possibly "aquatic community", but I think most people would know what it meant".
- "I don't think that any words are "too" difficult, though "phosphorous" might leave some people scratching their heads a bit. However, this sentence seems a bit wordy "An active member in the aquatic community, Patricia contracted damaging amounts of algae due to high phosphorus levels given off by leaves and grass clippings that entered her system."
- "The words and phrases were all understandable but when I read it, I wondered whether the phosphorus in the grass and leaves came from fertilizer or from some other source. The article didn't really explain that".
- "I think the language suits the piece just fine".
- "An active member of the aquatic community" I'm not sure if they may understand that reference".
- "No"
- "nope"
- "No words are difficult for people".
- "I can't think of any words that would be difficult as I have pretty bright friends. Also, I work at GE which has tested us to make us aware of this problem".
- "They would not understand how phosphorous levels and high algae counts can damage an aquatic ecosystem. Perhaps a brief explanation of the harm caused would help, as well".
- "None; I think it was straightforward".
- "I honestly can not find any words or phrases that my friends would find difficult to understand.
Stretching this, perhaps a person who is still learning the English language might not be familiar with the word "aquatic". However, as I said, this is a stretch".

How They Summarize the Issue

Question Wording: The piece touches on a social issue or problem. In your own words, what is this issue?

They answered like this:

- "what leaves and grass trimmings can do to water"
- "pollution"
- "You can help preserve lakes by composting your yard waste".
- "The issue is that common yard waste such as leaves and lawn clipping can hurt an ecosystem".
- "Not taking care of debris when leaves or tree clipping build up".
- "it wants to alert people to ways they can prevent runoff. the issue is, in general, concerning all the factors that can destroy a natural lake".
- "Improper disposal of normal environmental waste can still affect the environment".

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- "Correctly disposing of leaves".
- "lakes being damaged due to negligence"
- "Using lakes and streams for organic yard waste is profoundly harmful to ecosystems".
- "Re-examine the method that we manage runoff".
- "Rain runoff always ends up in our lakes and streams. Therefore, any chemicals and harmful materials in our environment may be picked up by this runoff and eventually collect in our water resources".
- "Organic material in storm-water run-off discharged into bodies of water can cause algae blooms to form as the organic matter decomposes and destroy aquatic life in those bodies of water".
- "Lake contamination caused by storm-water runoff".
- "Lakes are experiencing an overgrowth of algae due to high phosphate levels in grass clippings and leaves that enter their systems".
- "The issue is that our lakes are being destroyed by runoff and waste and that we as people, need to help out and do our part in the prevention of such things".
- "Runoff from grass clippings can contaminate lakes".
- Lake health problems and what you can do to help overall lake health.
- "Pollution and contamination of our waterways by our own actions, and how we can mitigate the damage with simple changes in our behavior".
- "People's laziness is contributing to a destruction of a lake".
- "We are not going to have any water to drink in the future if we don't all take part in protecting our local bodies of water".
- "The piece highlights pollution, and how people are indirectly damaging the ecosystem/environment. It also asks that the citizens should compost these leaves, especially during the fall, which is another great way to protect the environment".
- "The piece highlights pollution, and how people are indirectly damaging the ecosystem/environment. It also asks that the citizens should compost these leaves, especially during the fall, which is another great way to protect the environment".
- 1) "Lack of awareness of the need for a healthy environment".
- 2) "Lack of understanding about the importance of keeping storm-water drains free of leaves and debris".

How This Issues Touches Them Personally

Question Wording: "If this problem has touched you personally or someone you care about, please briefly share how:"

They answered like this:

- "none"
- "the lakes around my area are also polluted"
- "In the area in which I live, we don't have traditional lawns, so yard waste is minimal".
- "It hasn't touched me or anyone I know".
- "I've just heard of similar problems in news stories".
- "my mom used to swim in the lake by her childhood home until it was too polluted to go into".
- "The lake I loved to fish in was taken over by algae and is virtually useless".

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- "Hasn't touched me personally".
- "none"
- "I have friends who live on sensitive ecosystems of ponds that I am sure have been effected".
- "N/A"
- "I have seen first hand how polluted lakes and streams have become due to harmful materials build-up. This contamination negatively effects flora and fauna eventually destroying the eco-balance. It is much more difficult to repair this type of damage than it is to prevent it and can result in the loss of valuable animal habitat and human recreation areas".
- "I can no longer fish in a lake that I used to because of the algae blooms that have developed due to storm-water run-off - the lake is unsightly and there are few, if any, fish".
- "My family owns a cabin on a lake in PA and every year we see more and more pollutants and have noticed a big increase in algae in the lake".
- "I don't know anyone personally who has been affected but I've read numerous articles on the problem".
- "N/A."
- "N/A"
- "It is important to be aware of you surroundings. There are lakes i enjoy that have been destroyed buy litter and other things".
- "Not particularly - I don't know any fish". =)
- "Most of the lakes in Alabama have to worry about factories dumping pollutants in the area than leaves and grass clipping".
- "It has not touched me personally. I live in Maine and most of our lakes are clean. We did have a major clean up of our local lake - Lake Sebasticook. People started getting rashes from swimming but now it is fine".

The Action That is Called for

Question Wording: "The piece urges you to take some action to address the social issue or problem. In your own words, what is this action?"

They answered like this:

- "compost and mulch leaves and grass trimmings"
- "to get leaves and grass clipping out of drains"
- "Compost your yard waste in order to preserve lakes and waterways".
- "The action is pretty simple. It involves cleaning up yard waste and mulching it or disposing of it properly and now allowing it to enter the storm water system".
- "Rake or sweep leaves from around storm drains".
- "it wants me to compost and mulch my lawn clippings".
- "Properly dispose of leaves and yard waste".
- "To correctly dispose of your leaves."
- "take care of our water sources"
- "Always rake leaves, grass and other organic waste and dispose of it away from lakes and streams".
- "Re-examine the method to manage storm-water runoff."

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- "I do my part to keep my environment as clean as possible. I also encourage and promote healthy environmental practices wherever I can".
- "The piece urges you rake or sweep leaves away from streets and storm drains and to compost or mulch leaves in the fall".
- "Clear the fronts of storm drains to prevent things getting swept into them by the water".
- "Sweep or rake up all grass and leaves near storm drains and in the streets near your home to prevent them from entering the water system. Use them for mulch or compost".
- "It says instead of sending flowers, to rake leaves. This is the people's contribution".
- "To mulch your lawn or create a compost pile".
- "Clean leaves from curb and mulch and become more aware of issues".
- "To keep leaves, grass, and yard trimmings out of the stormdrains and sewers so that contaminated runoff does not do any more damage to lakes and streams".
- "I would need to bag my leaves and grass clipping to prevent lake pollution"
- "To let people know of the problem and for everyone to do their part in protecting your local lakes".
- "Sweep the streets clean of grass and leaves, and compost any grass clippings and leaves in your area".
- "Composting, maintaining yard so unclean water isn't running off into storm drains, choosing landscaping products that don't pollute water".
- - "Be aware of your impact on the environment because awareness is the first form of action".
- "Remove leaves from storm-water drains and nearby areas".
- "Tell your friends what you've learned and urge them to keep their storm-water drains clean".

About the Do Diligence Sounding Board

Just whose opinions are these, anyway? The "Do Diligence Sounding Board" is a standing body of U.S. residents who provide feedback on marketing materials and perform related tasks in return for payment.

A major corporation recruits the board members, maintains the system for securing their feedback, and handles the financial transactions. Water Words That Work, LLC pays to access to this service, as do other marketing firms.

The feedback that you receive from the sounding board is different from feedback you receive from your peers, for three reasons:

- The sounding board members who review your materials approach them like actual everyday citizen "in the wild." They are not professionals in the field and have not participated in the drafting of the materials.
- The sounding board members have never met you, and will provide their feedback anonymously. Their feedback will not be influenced by their personal relationship with you.

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- The sounding board more closely approximates the demographic makeup (especially race and education) of the U.S. "public" than the staff and board of most nature protection and pollution control organizations.

Demographic Trait	Environmental Professionals	Do Diligence Sounding Board	Traditional Telephone Poll, U.S. Sample	Actual U.S. (Census)
4 Year College Degree	95% or higher	~50%	~40%	24%
White/Caucasian	95% or higher	~80%	~80%	79%

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