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MAXIMIZING THE VALUE OF COMMUNICATIONS: A COMMUNICATIONS ASSESSMENT OF WATER COMPANIES IN JORDAN

AQABA WATER COMPANY, AQABA, JORDAN

PUBLIC ACTION FOR WATER, ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENT PROJECT
PROSPERITY, LIVELIHOODS AND CONSERVING ECOSYSTEMS (PLACE) IQC TASK ORDER #5

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PREFACE

The Public Action for Water, Energy and Environment Project (PAP) is a public education and behavior change communication program developed to support USAID's technical and policy investments in the Jordanian water and energy sectors, and to support specific initiatives in the environment, in particular with regard to solid waste. The project has been awarded to ECODIT, a US small business holding the Prosperity, Livelihoods and Conserving Ecosystems, or PLACE, Indefinite Quantity Contract with USAID.

PAP is a five years program that has been designed in three phases:

1. Data collection and assessment phase of 9 months ending July 31, 2010;
2. Participatory strategic planning phase of 3 months that will include dialogue with the relevant stakeholders; and
3. Implementation phase lasting about 4 years.

This study designed to conduct a communications assessment of Aqaba Water Company, one of the key water utilities in Jordan, and to examine how its communications department collaborates with other areas of the organization, to ultimately support the needs of its subscribers/customers in service delivery.

The objectives of the project as relevant to this assessment and outlined by the Public Action for Water, Energy and Environment Project are to determine:

1. What kind of experience has the customer been receiving?
2. What kind of institutional culture is supporting/obstructing the proper flow of information internally and what is necessary to bring about a more cohesive and systemic change in how business is done?
3. What support do communications individuals need to enable them to deliver on their responsibilities?
4. What kind of skills and competencies exist within staff of these agencies?
5. Whether communications efforts are being tracked for results and sustained in other efforts?

A communications assessment involves the following steps

- Review and research of existing situation through background documents and reports
- Study and analysis of current communications practices
- Analyze existing communications vehicles
- Conduct executive interviews
- Identify key opportunities and challenges and make recommendations

The communications assessment findings serve as both a baseline and a springboard

for developing an outstanding and targeted communications process that all involved know will be effective because it is based on solid research findings. It is important to recognize that quality utility services, high levels of customer service and effective communication go hand in hand. Positive reputations are not developed solely through effective communication. Similarly, a water utility that provides high quality services will not garner the support it deserves without an effective communication program that keeps its staff and community informed and allows for two-way dialogue and interaction.

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

Although an effort was made to reduce the number of acronyms used in this text, many are commonly used and are included here – specifically donors, government institutions and commonly used technical terms. Whenever the acronym or abbreviation appears the first time, it is defined in the text.

AED	Academy of Educational Development
ASEZA	Aqaba Special Economic Zone Authority
AWC	Aqaba Water Company
BMP	Best Management Practice
GAM	Greater Amman Municipality
GOJ	Government of Jordan
JVA	Jordan Valley Authority
JEA	Jordanian Engineering Association
MoE	Ministry of Environment
MoE	Ministry of Education
MEMR	Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources
MWI	Ministry of Water and Irrigation
NGO	Non-governmental organization
PAP	Public Action for Water, Energy and Environment Project
U.S.	United States
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WAJ	Water Authority of Jordan
WDM	Water Demand Management
WEPIA	Water Efficiency and Public Interaction for Action Program
WSDs	Water Saving Devices

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Jordan is among the water-poorest countries in the world. Research done by the Public Action Project (PAP) indicates that while the public is aware of scarce water resources they are less aware of the extent of challenge, have little understanding of the real cost of water, and there is a lack of shared responsibility to find solutions for this crisis.

A communications assessment was undertaken of the two main water utilities in Jordan—the Jordan Water Company (Miyahuna) and Aqaba Water Company (AWC) in Aqaba. This communications assessment provides the following:

- Understanding of public experience and kind of information they receive
- Identification of utility priorities and needs
- Overview of current communications efforts
- Establishes level of alignment with customer needs and key stakeholders
- Snapshot of department communication
- Review of internal communication processes

The communications assessment included the following:

- Review of key external reports
- Review utility strategic plan and goals
- Situation analysis of key external factors
- Executive interviews of the CEO and all major department-heads
- Interviews and meetings with select stakeholders and external agencies
- Comprehensive evaluation of current communications efforts-- messages, audiences, methods and feedback
- An inventory of current communications material, also referred to as the envelope test

Major findings

Executive interviews of the CEO and all major department-heads at Aqaba Water and all the supporting reports from the company emphasized the following priorities and issues:

- **Strong commitment to customer service:** They have an easily accessible customer service center in downtown Aqaba. All staff trained at handling any service request – from new connections to bill payments. They serve about 500 customers per day at the center. They've greatly improved service with updated technology such as hand-held new meter readers and electromagnetic readers for large customers. Their Customer Service Center has roll-up displays on AWC water, brochures on conservation, TV monitor with slides and video. They would like to do more to promote online options for customer service. They are also interested in a one-stop shop for customers and promoting phone number.

- **Pride in high water quality and a high focus on operations:** A high percentage of customers drink tap water. They expressed no concern with radioactivity levels of Disi water. They do foresee future challenges and need for customer communications with desalination. With the ultimate goal to provide better services for customers, they have streamlined all their operations. They have achieved great success in response times for requests and complaints. They have among the lowest rates for non-revenue water at 20.6%.
- **Need for water conservation and communications focusing on behavior change:** Major growth areas in Aqaba are residential and tourism. They recognize the need to teach people the value of water. They have a high commitment to reclaimed water. However, they feel that they are running out of their current supply and are considering new desalination source.

Communications Program at Aqaba:

A comprehensive review of the communications function at Aqaba showed the following:

- At Aqaba, the Public Relations Manager is an integral part of the company and executive team.
- The department still needs to create a strategic communication plan and media plan.
- They use several external communications strategies:
 - Customer newsletters
 - Brochures distributed at the customer service center
 - Proactive website
 - Video and slides on Aqaba Water
- Most internal communications efforts are informal – no employee newsletter.
- Limited outreach in schools –recent contest to encourage water awareness
 - The recent pilot USAID program on water saving device showed lack of customer acceptance.
 - They also stated the lack of NGO support in Aqaba
 - They had little or no awareness in Aqaba of plumbing codes
- Currently have a social media presence, which they would like to enhance and improve.
- They mentioned challenges in terms of communications with Aqaba Special Economic Zone Authority (ASEZA) and a lack of coordination there
- They are looking at various e-services and other online options and would like to promote these to customers.
- Identified the need for
 - Communications Training (strategic and tactical)
 - Customer newsletters
 - Water efficiency program
- Their key challenges are the lack of resources and expertise.

Recommendations

Create annual strategic communications plan (high priority; 3 months; Public Action Project (PAP)/Aqaba partnership)

- ▶ Support Aqaba's Business Plan.
- ▶ Facilitate workshop with all major department-heads to create strategic communications plan.
- ▶ Multi-step communications process to emphasize utility goals & address needs of all audiences.
- ▶ Facilitated communications between utility and ASEZA on key issues.

Enhance communications with employees: (high/medium; 3 months or less; Aqaba and PAP to facilitate)

- ▶ Create employee e-newsletter.
- ▶ Enhance customer service training for key issues.
- ▶ Quarterly e-mail from CEO to all employees.
- ▶ Increase face to face opportunities for communications.
- ▶ Emphasize role of employees as Ambassadors.
- ▶ Continue all employee celebration efforts.

Expand e-communications: (high priority; 3 – 6 months or more as indicated; Aqaba, PAP, additional resources)

- ▶ Web site (several enhancements such as profiling new programs, more multi-media content, and links to new electronic features described below possible in 3-6 months with current resources; major enhancements and features will take 6 months or more and additional resources).
- ▶ Mobile applications (currently being explored and will be implemented within 3 months with current resources; major enhancements and features will take 6 months or more and additional resources).
- ▶ E-mail blasts or direct marketing using electronic email to target large audiences or a specific demographic group (3 to 6 months – options available in Jordan and their costs will need further study).
- ▶ Automatic e-alert systems that notify customers by sending them an e-mail or an online mailbox message when the website is updated or their bill is posted online or other criteria are met (3 to 6 months – options available in Jordan and their costs will need further study).
- ▶ Multi-media- interactive web games (6 months or more and additional resources).
- ▶ Videos (3 to 6 months, Aqaba/PAP).
- ▶ More effective use of social media (within 3 months, Aqaba/PAP).

Communications Training: The key to the success of the training sessions mentioned below is for AWC to create plans and programs that they can start implementing (high priority; 3 to 6 months PAP to provide/facilitate training with some of the above).

- ▶ Strategic communications planning – workshop training with the goal to develop Aqaba's strategic communications plan (3 months).
- ▶ Media Training (3 months – create Aqaba's media plan and policy).
- ▶ Social Marketing Training (3 to 6 months; medium to long term water conservation communications implementation).
- ▶ Advanced Social media Training (3 to 6 months – expand on Aqaba's social media sites).

Research and evaluations: A dedicated research and evaluation component effort should be part of the utility's strategic communications plan to capture baseline data and determine progress in selected areas of the communication effort. Surveys, customer satisfaction surveys, intercept interviews, evaluation of program accomplishments, and other tools should be planned and implemented regularly. In addition, major areas of the strategic communication plan, such as internal communications, must be evaluated each year.

In addition to the above recommendations that focus on several areas of communications and programs, it is strongly recommended that Aqaba launch a multi-year comprehensive water-efficiency/demand management program with a comprehensive communications effort to support this long-term social marketing program.

- ▶ Emphasize water is a limited resource
- ▶ Everyone can do their part to make difference
- ▶ Key indoor and outdoor behavior changes
- ▶ Key incentives/rebate programs
- ▶ Customized programs for large customers such as hotels, developers
- ▶ Plumbing code education, workshops and enforcement efforts
- ▶ Irrigation programs
- ▶ Expanded use of reclaimed water

The following table provides additional details and time-frame for implementation of various tactics.

Key Topic: Demand Management/Water Conservation:

Main messages:

- Water is one of the most precious resources in Jordan
- Instill conservation behavior as a long-term way of life
- Focus on a comprehensive social marketing campaign to emphasize behavior change; provide easy actions that promote the how-to's of conservation
- Key messages on preventive maintenance, how to find and fix leaks, etc.
- Key indoor and outdoor incentive programs
- Explore partnerships with other agencies such as energy utilities to offer incentives and rebates for conservation
- Educate key audiences on Jordanian Plumbing Code
- Customized programs for large customers
- Water self-audits
- Advocacy messages emphasizing the viability of conservation as a source

Communications Tactic	Target Audiences	1-3 months	3-6 months	6 + months
Use the back of the bill for key messages	All customers	x		
Create and distribute refrigerator magnet to all customers at customer service center with key messages	All customers		x	
Develop key information on website; provide interactive game to encourage conservation behaviors; create web-based self-audit that can help people assess their water use and make changes; offer incentives for participation	All customers		x	x
Create targeted brochures with specific messages; Target and distribute to key audiences	All customers - Women - Youth - Large users			x
Internal messages in employee newsletter, web pages to promote conservation; contests for employees to encourage water efficiency	Internal employees	x		x
Add conservation messages to social media page; offer contests for participation	Youth, utility kids, all customers,	x		
Provide information on customers bill to let them know of their consumption, how it compares to typical consumption and how they can track their consumption from last year	Large use Customers			x
Key advocacy programs and efforts to promote the importance of water conservation as an alternative source	CEO Key Executive Staff Key decision makers Government and Ministry Officials Stakeholders Media	x		
Comprehensive ongoing media strategy to promote efficiency and water conservation	Media Key stakeholders All	x	x	x
Comprehensive communications to educate on plumbing code changes	Developers and builders Retailers End-use customers Early adopters who would consider changing their fixtures		x	x
Long- term -develop and implement comprehensive incentive	Retail			x

program. Indoor appliance rebate program could include: -Point of purchase education -Utility insert with rebate information -Advertising campaign -Dedicated web site information -Other targeted promotions	Media All customers			
Customized large and commercial customers incentive program	Hotels, Developers Restaurants, Large Users			x

In addition, Aqaba Water communications should focus on the following:

- ▶ More effective messaging at the back of customers bill with key contact information and key messages.
- ▶ Refrigerator magnets with contact information, key messages distributed at customer service center.
- ▶ Add inter-active self-guided tour to Aqaba Water model display; locate at customer service center.
- ▶ Sticker for meter readers with key contact information.
- ▶ More interactive web games.
- ▶ More videos.
- ▶ Key advocacy programs with stakeholders.
- ▶ Comprehensive media strategy especially with Al Waseet newspaper.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Project Background and Objectives

Jordan is a small country with limited natural resources, and is among the most water-poor countries in the world. The country is currently exploring ways to expand its limited water supply and use its existing water resources more efficiently. Jordan has stood face to face with water shortages for more than two decades. The annual amount of water available per capita is less than one-third of the international water poverty line. This ongoing water shortage has caused drastic over-pumping of groundwater aquifers that has resulted in a major decrease of available water. Global climate change may lead to greater strain on already limited resources.

Over the past few years it is becoming clear that Jordan's water future will be bleaker. Global warming will reduce rainfall even further, and the country is expected to get hotter. This will increase demand for water for all sectors. Jordan's population is also expected to grow rapidly and will reach 7 million before the end of this year¹.

The government of Jordan is currently developing all affordable sources of renewable water, including treated wastewater and desalination plants. Among the major sources of supply being developed include providing water for Amman from the Disi aquifer, the proposed Red Sea-Dead Sea Conveyor, and a desalination plant being considered for the city of Aqaba. These sources are costly, unlikely to supply significant quantities of water before 2014, have huge significant customer and utility service impacts and in the long run place additional, irreparable stresses on aquifers. They also validate the need for significant customer communications and customer service.

Current research indicates that while the public in Jordan is aware that Jordan has scarce water resources they are less knowledgeable about the extent of the shortage. Since water is currently heavily subsidized, the public is unaware of the real cost of water and is unwilling to pay higher costs for water. There is also a lack of shared responsibility for the challenge and a current expectation that the problem is the government's problem and their responsibility to meet the supply needs for the future.

Why conduct an assessment?

With the challenges facing the water sector and all the customers of Jordan, it is critical to get a sense of the customer's role and understanding of these issues and how it will impact their future. This assessment will help determine the following:

¹ Embassy of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.

- The kind of information being provided to the customers
- What kind of experience the customer is receiving?
- What kind of institutional culture is supporting the flow of information internally?
- The snapshot of all communications and help identify what is working and where there are gaps
- The level of alignment between the utility, key stakeholders and customers
- Internal and external intelligence

The assessment will help answer the following questions. Do your employees have the information they need? What's the most effective way to reach your customers and really get their attention? Are there any barriers preventing your organization from achieving its goals?

A communications assessment, or audit, determines and improves the value of communications both within an organization as well as to key outside audiences.

Following the assessment, the recommendations will include both short-term actions that can be implemented fairly quickly and long-term commitments that can create the culture of the organization that helps support its goals.

1.2 Research Methodology

A typical assessment involves a series of steps that begin by broadly identifying the major areas of communications within the company. We then identify communications successes and weaknesses in order to focus communications planning on the most actionable areas with the highest potential rewards for the organization and its audiences. We refer to our needs-based analyses as communications assessments because our process focuses on identifying and enhancing value.

The approach for this assessment usually involved the following steps

- **Review and research of existing situation through background documents and reports:** Documents reviewed included the Communications strategy for achieving behavior and policy change for water, energy and environment (PAP, 2011); Best Management Practices, Miyahuna Water and Aqaba Water annual reports, Utility websites, and more.
- **Study and analysis of current communications practices:** Knowing the specific practices associated with strategic communications are the first step to assessing an organization's performance and capacity with respect to those practices (communications checklist Annex A).
- **Analyze existing communications vehicles:** Conduct an inventory and assemble samples of the communications vehicles distributed to various target

audiences and evaluate them for effectiveness, accessibility and timing. An inventory is also called an envelope test and helps answer:

- Are the key messages of the utility being captured and communicated?
- Who are the key audiences?
- How frequently is the communication occurring?
- Is the utility perceived as a credible source in the communications?
- What are elements of branding that are being used?
- What is the distribution mechanism?

- **Conduct executive interviews:** conduct interviews with executives to ensure that the communications assessment reflects their issues/concerns for the organization's success — beyond those of the communications department. One-on-one interviews with executives should explore their view of the role/purpose of employee communications in the organization; how they visualize ideal communications; how do they collaborate with the communications department; what they expect each team member to know about the company; communications strengths and weaknesses; and major company goals that are communications sensitive. Interviews should be conducted with senior management of the overall organization.
- **Identify key opportunities and challenges and make recommendations:** It's time to put the results into action! This critical finale to the assessment process is the ultimate benefit of a communications assessment — delivering recommendations based on the stakeholder needs.

The communications assessment findings serve as both a baseline and a springboard for developing an outstanding and targeted communications process that all involved know will be effective because it is based on solid research findings.

2.0 KEY FINDINGS

Aqaba Water Company – Background and History

Aqaba Water Company (AWC) was founded in 2004 as a legal successor of the Aqaba Water Authority in order to enhance the operational efficiency of both water and wastewater sectors in the Governorate of Aqaba and improve as well the services provided to the public.

AWC today owns and operates both the water and wastewater systems in the Governorate of Aqaba. It also manages a set of fixed assets amounting to JD 58 million, with its services provided to about 135,000 people over a service area of 6,800 square kilometers, this area being the only sea outlet of Jordan and an important commercial, industrial and touristic center particularly after it is announced to be a special economic zone in 2001.

AWC covers its capital and current expenses by means of its own resources and receives no public funding in order to perform its duties. It has succeeded in improving its performance indicators considerably despite limited national water resources and the many challenges faced today.

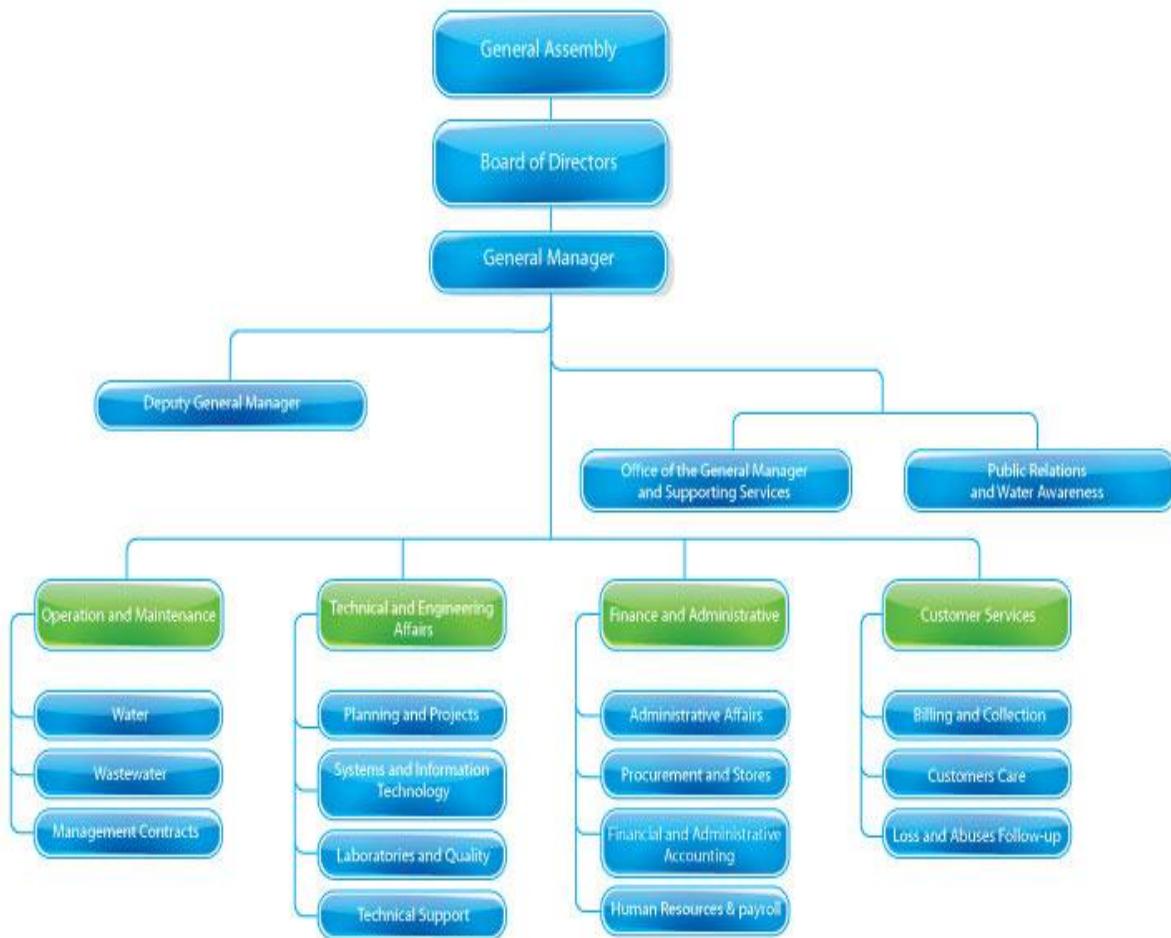
AWC has been successful in reducing the percentage of non revenue water from 37% in 2004 to 20.68% by the end of 2010, and also in covering 30% of the demand through reclaimed wastewater for both industrial and agricultural uses. Today, AWC stands firmly on a solid ground of the many achievements attained since its establishment that put it at the first ranks both nationally and regionally. The company adopts a scientific approach in all various operations on the basis of well-thought plans using modern technology and insisting on the creation of a strong organizational and technical environment at all our fields.

AWC manages 100% of both the water and wastewater systems in the Governorate of Aqaba using the SCADA system.

The difference that AWC has made at all levels, since established in 2004, has lead to a highly considerable success. AWC used to suffer at the beginning from customer billing arrears amounting to JD 5.2 million, poorly qualified or even unqualified cadres, non-automated systems and great imbalances in performance indicators.

With its strong vision, AWC changed all these deficits to become an exemplary success story. Its water and wastewater expertise is today quoted by many related utilities in Jordan and the neighboring countries. AWC continues to diligently work towards meeting international standards.

Aqaba Water Organizational Structure



Aqaba Water's organizational structure provides for open lines of communication between the various functions and departments. The direct reporting relationship between the public relations department and the general manager also helps emphasize the role and importance of communications in the utility. As the utility grows and expands its customer base and service area, it should review its structure to make sure that functions and roles are well defined and help the utility to accomplish the goals set forth in the company's annual plan.

Analysis of on-site interviews

The following is an overview of communications from the utility's perspective as identified by the consultant during the on-site interviews. This section is not a verbatim report of responses to the consultant's questions. Rather, it contains comments that appear to identify significant beliefs, concerns and suggestions of participants. It also highlights key issues identified by each department critical to their operations and the services they provide that may have an indirect influence on communication needs. Many of these comments led to recommendations in this communication assessment report.

Aqaba Water Company, Meeting with Chief Executive Officer, Engr. Imad Zureikat, December 11, 2011.

- The CEO shared the many accomplishments of the company reinforcing the fact that on the threshold of the seventh year of the company they are reaping the benefits of their actions in many fields and despite many challenges, have learned to overcome and employ their expertise to emphasize efficiency and professionalism, and provide excellence in water services and sanitation throughout the province of Aqaba.
- He discussed several achievements including getting water from Disi to the north villages of Quweirah; rehabilitation for desalination plants Qatar and al Risha to secure the villages of Wadi Araba with additional quantities of water; and efforts underway to secure additional water resources to meet the increasing demand for water in the light of the growing investment activity witnessed by the Aqaba Special Economic Zone and the consequent population growth.
- He emphasized the strategic planning steps taken to deal with the challenges of the future including completion of the Master Plan of water for Aqaba Governorate, and the plan to include projected water needs and the necessary additions to the network to keep pace with expected demand for water through the year 2030.
- He stressed on the importance of human resources as their most important investment and investment in benefits, earnings, as well as training.
- One of their greatest achievements is the reduction of non revenue water – they have successfully reduced from 37.3% in 2004 to 20.6% in 2010, and their continuing goal to reduce even further. He attributes this success to a comprehensive program ranging from efforts of all business lines, from automation and the preparation of the necessary technical studies, as well as creating a team from qualified experts in the management of customer services capable of dealing with this issue efficiently and professionally and competently.
- He stated that the company has a strong commitment to customer service and sees excellence in providing services not just as a goal in itself but a means to achieve the satisfaction of the public, which is the true measure of our overall performance.

- In addition to customer satisfaction, reduction of non revenue water, high water quality, and communications are key priorities.
- He recognizes the need to teach people the value of water.
- He mentioned the utility's high commitment to conservation and shared recent successes of using reclaimed water for industrial and landscape purposes.
- Among the major growth areas in Aqaba are residential and tourism. He also shared the significant increase in demand during the hot summer months.
- Aqaba Water is considering new desalination source. While they had all the plans ready for their own source, they have currently kept those on hold due to the Red Dead project. However, he strongly believes that they need to look for a new source within the next two years.

Aqaba Water, Meeting with Director of Operations and Maintenance, Engr. Jehad Al-sagarat, , Belal Al-Assi and Director of Technical and Engineering Affairs, Engr. Naeem Saleh, December 11, 2011.

- The directors provided information on various aspects of Aqaba's operations and services and planning.
- AWC provide drinking water to 100% of the residents of the Governorate of Aqaba, as 99.5% of them obtain their drinking water directly from the utility's networks throughout the service area.
- They also provide our customers with water supply service in the city of Aqaba around the week, 24 hours a day.
- They mirrored the CEO's goals to achieve better services for their customers
- They also reiterated the accomplishments with non revenue water, down to 20.6% in 2010 and the goal to reduce it even further.
- They shared that one of the major advantages that AWC has is ownership of capital, unlike Miyahuna.
- The call center at Aqaba oversees operations and customer complaints related to service. They receive about 20 calls a day at the call center. The utility boasts very quick response times to customer calls and complaints and also for new connections. Average response time for complaints is within 17 to 30 minutes.
- One of the challenges mentioned by the directors was related to the plumbing code. They expressed lack of knowledge of the new plumbing codes being proposed by IDARA. They strongly supported unified plumbing codes but also felt that ASEZA should take responsibility for its implementation in Aqaba.

- The Technical and Engineering Services department is also responsible for the Master Plan and Business Plan. These are currently being updated.
- They emphasized the major need for new supply and said Aqaba would reach a critical point in supply in two years. Average growth rate of population has been about 3.8% and they've witnessed growth rates in demand that have doubled and tripled. They stated that they are looking at desalination if Red-Dead Conveyor Project doesn't come through in time.
- A common thread that emerged from these directors and all departments was a strong allegiance and respect for the CEO. They attributed the success of AWC to his leadership and provided numerous examples of his dedication, work ethic and approachability.
- They are interested in one-stop shop for customers and promoting a single phone number that customers can remember to call for all their needs.
- Each of these departments strongly supports the need for comprehensive communications. They said that Aqaba Water does not have a strategic communications plan.
- They also emphasized the need for better inter-governmental relations, especially with ASEZA. They continue to experience challenges working with ASEZA – often land-use plans are written without consulting Aqaba Water for water use planning.

Aqaba Water, Tour of Customer Service Center, followed by meeting with Director of Customer Service, Mr. Waheed Abu Ajameya, December 12, 2011.

- The customer service center has been moved to downtown Aqaba to provide better access to customers. The center includes 8 customer service stations, and each of the representatives is trained to handle any customer need – from billing to new connections.
- They live by the motto “We serve our customers so that we grow; we grow so that we serve our customers.”
- Daily average no. of visitors to the center mounts is about 500.
- Change of billing from quarterly to monthly caused some challenges, overall the transition was smooth.
- Customer satisfaction survey showed more than 70% satisfaction rate.
- They have updated technology and several integrated systems in place including hand-held meters and electromagnetic meters for large customers. These systems help:

- Shorten the time taken to read water meters that provides more time for collection
 - Reduces the time and effort related to printing and distributing water bills
 - Ensures more accurate readings of water meters and reduces errors
 - Allows field surveys to gather information about customers
 - Provides daily reports on the performance of meter readers or collection areas
 - Makes it possible for employees to do other jobs
- There is a high level of coordination between PR department and customer service.
- The customer service center has roll-up displays on AWC water, brochures on conservation, TV monitor with slides and videos.
- AWC also include key conservation messages at the back of water bill.
- Recently they worked together on pilot project with USAID/IDARA to distribute water saving devices to 350 households. They are awaiting results but there were some customer challenges to acceptance of the devices.
- One of their recommendations is that they would like to see tariffs reduced for big customers.

Aqaba Water, Meeting with Public Relations Manager, Aref Albtoush, December 12, 2011

- Aqaba has strong support for communications. The communications department has full support of CEO. Currently there are two staff members in the department.
- One of the main tasks of the department is to create the annual report. This takes almost six months.
- The department also manages the website, creates videos, creates brochures on water efficiency and conservation, and distributes information at customer service center.
- They believe that customer awareness on water scarcity but there is limited customer participation on taking actions. They are now adding a focus on social marketing and water efficient behavior.
- They have limited programs for schools and water conservation outreach for youth and school-age kids. However, they recently had a contest to encourage water awareness in schools and received several essays and art-work from kids.
- The public relations manager expressed a strong need to create a strategic communication and media plan.

- Most internal communications efforts are informal but effective. They do not have an employee newsletter. They also have limited e-communications with their employees. However, when there is some special occasion or good news, the PR manager sends an email to all employees with the news.
- They currently have a social media presence through an Aqaba Water Company Facebook page, videos on their YouTube page and are looking at Twitter. They would like to enhance their social media presence.
- Specifically, they identified the need for
 - Communications Training
 - Customer newsletters
 - Water efficiency program
- Among the key challenges he mentioned was lack of resources and expertise.
- He also stated that there is a lack of NGO support in Aqaba.
- He reiterated that communications with ASEZA is not coordinated. However they would be very interested in exploring a partnership with ASEZA directed at the community.
- He expressed some of the customer frustrations with the pilot USAID program on water saving device and their lack of acceptance. There was low motivation to change the devices, they were not satisfied with the performance, and the change in color of the water caused by using the devices was not acceptable.
- He would like to do more to market e-services and other online options and look for ways to motivate customers to participate.

Aqaba Water, Meeting with Information Technology, Mr. Khaled Saraira and Mr. Khalil Hamid, December 12, 2011.

- Aqaba Water has achieved a high level of integration of IT services with utility functions. They use the SCADA system, and state of-the-art internal Sharepoint site.
- Their call-center that has integrated state-of-the art technology.
- The utility has a very effective website with several features such as web streaming, PDF version of their annual report, ability for the customers to view their bills online and more.
- They are also in the process of establishing mobile bill payment.
- IT currently does not have new technologies such as web alerts, email blasts, etc., but are open to exploring these and various other features such as web subscription features that would provide automatic customer notification via emails when web pages were updated, email blasts to customers on major issues, multi-media communications options, interactive web games and more.

- They expressed the need to further promote e-services and web site as a source of information and customer service.

Aqaba Water, Water Quality

- Aqaba Water prides itself in the high quality of their water. In fact they emphasize the fact that most people drink water from the taps and have a high level of trust with the water they receive.
- They stressed that they have no concern with radioactivity levels of Disi water and have been drinking it for years. Many of the managers and directors felt that studies about the radium levels were false or political.
- However, as they explore desalination as a future supply option, they believe that there may be need for customer communications regarding water quality.

3.0 DETAILED ANALYSIS

Whether the changes are due to diminishing resources or increased service costs, the need to communicate with customers is of upmost importance. Utilities in today's rapidly changing world use effective communication as a management tool to help them achieve their goals and lay a foundation that supports success for all their customers. Strategic, planned communication is achieved through the commitment of government agencies and company leaders, adequate resources and personnel, careful research and planning, creative implementation, and evaluation of results.

Internal communications with employees is also important. Everyone at the utility is a communicator and must accept a portion of responsibility for that role. Employees who are informed and involved take greater pride in their performance and perform more effectively.

It is important to recognize that quality utility services, high levels of customer service and effective communication go hand in hand. Positive reputations are not developed solely through effective communication. Similarly, water utilities that provide high quality services will not garner the support it deserves without an effective communication program that keeps its staff and community informed and allows for two-way dialogue and interaction.

The bottom line analysis shows that effective communications can save the utility money – both in terms better operations as well as increased efficiencies and reduced customer complaints. In addition, good communications are the key to gaining public support and trust. This is particularly important now as the country braces for key resource issues that will affect the future of the entire community. Also, during these times of critical resource constraints, strategic communications can be the key to a sustainable future for the kingdom.

Strategic communication forces a utility to examine how its communication funds are used, and whether there are measurable results from the effort.

Guiding Principles for Aqaba Water Company's Communication Effort

- ***All communication efforts must be tied to the utility's business plan.***
To be effective, communication efforts must be driven by the company's mission and goals, and be designed to support high quality water services.
Communications should focus on the customers.

- ***Strategic communication requires research and evaluation to be woven throughout the communications effort.***
No plan will be successful without research and evaluation components. While this assessment provides a starting point, research component of the utility's strategic communications plan should capture baseline data that can be used to determine progress in selected areas of the communication effort. In addition, major areas of the strategic communication plan, such as internal communications, must be evaluated each year.
- ***Strategic communication and public relations is a management function.***
An effective communication and public relations program must have the support at the highest level of the organization and should be a planned, systematic effort based on two-way communication with stakeholders. At all levels, it is imperative that communication occur consistently and information be presented with clarity. A variety of communication vehicles should be used to connect with key audiences.
- ***Internal communication must be a priority.***
No communication effort will be successful if employees do not become ambassadors for the utility. Employees have the ability to make or break the image of the company. Employees who did not reflect the values of the organization and are negative, non-responsive or unable to provide timely and appropriate answers to community requests will quickly undermine any communication effort. Employees should be provided with the information, tools and training needed to support them in their roles as "Ambassadors." The communication effort should focus on engaging stakeholders to take action.
- ***Technology should continue to be used and enhanced to support an efficient, timely and effective system of communication.***
The utility should continue to embrace new technologies that directly influence communications in today's world. E-mail, voice mail, web sites, electronic surveys, an employee Intranet, and social media can all be used advantageously to improve and expand the utility's communication infrastructure.

4.0 RECOMMENDATIONS:

The assessment of the issues and priorities of Aqaba and the corresponding communications needs revealed the following:

Aqaba Water has done an excellent job in putting the customer first. As a result they have been very successful in building customer trust, reducing response times, creating operational efficiencies, emphasizing the high quality of water and making it easy for customers to work with the utility. They have taken advantage of their customer service center as a prime location to interact with their customers and provided key information about their services there. They seek feedback from their customers and have achieved high levels of customer satisfaction. They have also focused on employee satisfaction and recognize the value of their employees as providing the backbone for all their services and as ambassadors for their organization. They are moving fast to embrace new technology and take communications to the next level. The quality of their communications products is high.

However, they have not tapped into their customers to promote behavior change and are yet to look at future demand management options. They also lack a holistic and comprehensive approach to communications. They are limited by a lack of expertise and could use partnerships to leverage their current successes to achieve more. They are also at the cusp of growth and need to set processes in place so that they can continue to serve at the same quality levels as the demands on their services increase.

The utility also needs focused efforts and established processes for advocacy and inter-government relations. A more collaborative working arrangement with ASEZA is very important and will serve the needs of the customers for the long run.

This is the perfect time for them to embark on a comprehensive effort to enhance communications and usher in long-term change.

The following recommendation provides the direction to address this need:

Create an annual, strategic communication plan.

Effective communication should be planned to support the utility's strategic directions and should constitute a comprehensive and effective communications effort. It should focus on both informing people and involving them. Regular formal and informal research, knowing the system, understanding the problems, seeking stakeholders' opinions, evaluating what works and what doesn't, and determining how the system can improve are all important components of the communication effort.

The review of the communications department showed that one of the greatest needs is for an annual, strategic communication plan. For communication to be effective with the upcoming opportunities and challenges that are ahead for Aqaba, its customers and the country as a whole, it must be a planned, systematic, comprehensive, two-way process

designed to create better understanding of the role, objectives, accomplishments and needs of the organization. Experience demonstrates that effective communication programs are based on research.

The communication plan should be tied directly to the utility's strategic and business plan and take into account all of its major audiences (i.e., customers, key stakeholders, business leaders, community members, and news media), the information they need and want to know, and the channels of communication that will be used to reach them. Without a plan, it is difficult to create an open dialogue, deliver the messages that are important to these audiences, and build support. An effective strategic communication plan includes multi-step communications process of research, planning, communication and evaluation, and addresses the following questions for every action or activity the utility undertakes:

- Who needs to know?
- Why do they need to know?
- When do they need to know?
- How are we going to tell them?
- What do we want them to do with the information they receive?

Without a written communication plan, adopted and approved at the beginning of each year by the CEO, strategic communication that reflects the utility's priorities and delivers key messages to target audiences may be lost in the day-to-day communications that can overwhelm large utilities. A strategic communication plan can dramatically increase the efficiency and effectiveness of the utility's communication efforts because all projects are considered in terms of whether or not they support the utility's strategic directions. It also provides a vehicle for reporting on progress and demonstrating accountability through evaluation criteria built into the plan.

A well-defined communication plan builds understanding and staff involvement in utility communication efforts, and encourages telling the utility's story in "one clear voice." However, it must be remembered that a plan is just that-it should be dynamic and not viewed as set in concrete. It will need to be revised and adapted as objectives are accomplished and new communication challenges arise.

It is important that consideration be given to the budgetary and personnel resources that will be needed to successfully implement the strategic communication plan. The recommendations provided in this report are extensive and comprehensive and the utility must prioritize by need and importance how communication resources are expended. Staffing and budget allocations for the communications department should be evaluated annually to ensure program effectiveness.

The following table provides guidelines for a strategic communications plan.

Strategy	Identify the vision	The communications vision is aligned with, but distinct from, the organization's overall mission.
	Choose goals and outcomes	Goals and outcomes are well defined, measurable, and help guide a defined plan of action.
	Select target audiences	Audiences are specific (not the general public) and include key decision makers or individuals with influence on the issue.
	Develop messages	Messages are specific, clear, and persuasive, reflect audience values, and include a solution or course of action.
	Identify credible messengers	Messengers are seen as credible by the target audiences, and can be recruited and available to the cause.
	Choose communications mechanisms/outlets	Outlets (e.g. both in the air (media) and on the ground) are chosen for their access and availability to target audiences
	Scan the context and competition	Risks and contextual variables that can affect communications success are identified and factored into planning when possible.
Implementation	Develop effective materials	Materials are developed in attractive, accessible, and varied formats for maximum exposure and visibility.
	Build valuable partnerships	Linkages exist with internal and external stakeholders who can help align with and carry the message.
	Train messengers	Internal and external messengers are trained in key messages and are consistent in their delivery.
	Conduct steady outreach	Outreach and dissemination to audiences through multiple outlets is regular and sustained.
	Monitor and evaluate	Activities and outcomes are regularly monitored and evaluated for purposes of accountability and continuous improvement.
Support and Integration	Support communications at the leadership level	Management understands and supports communications as an integral part of organizational viability and success.
	Earmark sufficient resources	Fundraising regularly includes dedicated resources for communications practice.
	Integrate communications throughout the organization	Communications is seen as an integral part of every organizational project or strategy.
	Involve staff at all levels	Communications is not seen as an isolated function; most if not all staff members have some knowledge and/or participation in communications efforts.

Create individual communication plans for implementing any major initiatives or changes in utility practices and programs.

In addition to the annual, strategic communication plan, specific communication plans should be developed in detail for any major changes, initiatives or projects that the utility is planning or is likely to face. The current assessment has revealed the following major areas of focus and ideas and tactics for each have been presented below.

The communications department should work closely with those departments responsible for these areas.

Whenever possible, the utility should try to seek input before making changes, and communication following any changes should be delivered in a timely manner. When input is sought from task forces or committees, communication follow-through in reporting back to those groups is imperative to building trust and credibility.

Although it may seem time-consuming to develop individual plans, good communication planning usually takes much less time than dealing with controversies that arise due to poor communication.

The greatest need Aqaba Water has is for a comprehensive demand management/water conservation program with a strong emphasis on social marketing and communication. While some tactics can be implemented fairly easily and quickly, others would require longer term planning. We advise the utility to carefully consider and prioritize both the short-term and long-term strategies and adopt a comprehensive approach to water conservation.

- **Demand Management/Water Conservation:**

Comprehensive Communications and Social Marketing Campaign to inform the community on the scarcity of water resources in Jordan, motivate them to be part of the solution and take action, and bring about long term behavior change.

- Create a multi-year comprehensive water-efficiency/demand management program to achieve the following:
 - ▶ Emphasize water is a limited resource.
 - ▶ Everyone can do their part to make difference.
 - ▶ Key indoor and outdoor behavior changes.
 - ▶ Key incentives/rebate programs.
 - ▶ Customized programs for large customers such as hotels and developers.
 - ▶ Plumbing code education, workshops and enforcement efforts
 - ▶ Irrigation programs.
 - ▶ Expanded use of reclaimed water.

- **Customer Service:**

Focused communications on several services related to greater access and customer service functions can help streamline several key functions of the utility, reduce the demands on current resources, and pave the way for better long-term communications and access. This will also help the utility take advantage of the changing culture and integration of technology in many of the service functions. For example, even as the utility experiences a growth in their customer base, comprehensive marketing can shift the load from the customer service counters to the other services such as online services and e-marketing.

- **Water Quality:**

While the current public perception at Aqaba Water for water quality is high, as the utility braces for future supply, they should plan appropriate communications to engage the public.

Key Topic: Demand Management/Water Conservation:

Main messages:

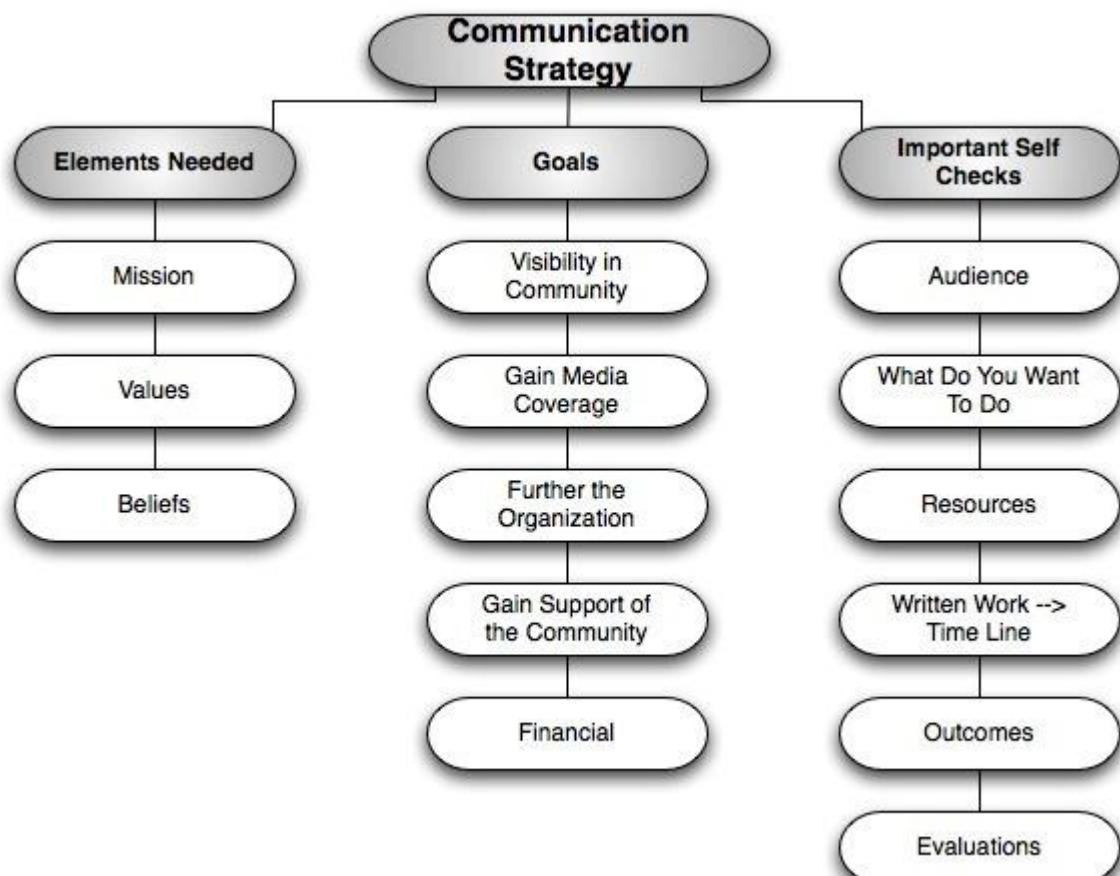
- Water is one of the most precious resources in Jordan
- Instill conservation behavior as a long-term way of life
- Focus on a comprehensive social marketing campaign to emphasize behavior change; provide easy actions that promote the how-to's of conservation
- Key messages on preventive maintenance, how to find and fix leaks, etc.
- Key indoor and outdoor incentive programs
- Explore partnerships with other agencies such as energy utilities to offer incentives and rebates for conservation
- Educate key audiences on Jordanian Plumbing Code
- Customized programs for large customers
- Water self-audits
- Advocacy messages emphasizing the viability of conservation as a source

Communications Tactic	Target Audiences	1-3 months	3-6 months	6 + months
Use the back of the bill for key messages	All customers	x		
Create and distribute refrigerator magnet to all customers at customer service center with key messages	All customers		x	
Develop key information on website; provide interactive game to encourage conservation behaviors; create web-based self-audit that can help people assess their water use and make changes; offer incentives for participation	All customers		x	x
Create targeted brochures with specific messages; Target and distribute to key audiences	All customers - Women - Youth - Large users			x
Internal messages in employee newsletter, web pages to promote conservation; contests for employees to encourage water efficiency	Internal employees	x		x
Add conservation messages to social media page; offer contests for participation	Youth, utility kids, all customers,	x		
Provide information on customers bill to let them know of their consumption, how it compares to typical consumption and how they can track their consumption from last year	Large use Customers			x
Key advocacy programs and efforts to promote the importance of water conservation as an alternative source	CEO Key Executive Staff Key decision makers Government and Ministry Officials Stakeholders Media	x		
Comprehensive ongoing media strategy to promote efficiency and water conservation	Media Key stakeholders All	x	x	x
Comprehensive communications to educate on plumbing code changes	Developers and builders Retailers End-use customers Early adopters who would consider changing their fixtures		x	x
Long- term -develop and implement comprehensive	Retail			x

<p>incentive program. Indoor appliance rebate program could include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Point of purchase education -Utility insert with rebate information -Advertising campaign -Dedicated web site information -Other targeted promotions 	<p>Media All customers</p>			
<p>Customized large and commercial customers incentive program</p>	<p>Hotels, Developers Restaurants, Large Users</p>			x

Key Topic: Customer Service					
Main messages:					
Communications Tactic	Target Audiences	1-3 months	3-6 months	6 + months	
Use the back of the bill for key customer service information such as customer care messages, website, key numbers, bill paying options, how to check their bills online, Facebook page, online services and more	All customers	x			
Create and distribute refrigerator magnet to all customers at customer service center with key contact information	All customers		x		
Create and distribute sticker for water meters through meter readers with key customer service information	All customers		x		
Create customer brochure/rack card with key customer service information and new services; distribute brochure at all customer locations	All customers	x	x	x	
Distribute brochure along with meter readers	All customers				x
Train call center and customer service representatives to provide key customer service messages	Internal employees	x			x
Add customer service information to social media page	Youth, utility kids, customers,	x			
Add information display board/customer roll-up poster at customer service center about services offered	All customers		x		
Provide information on customers bill to let them know of delay in reading so they don't worry and show up at customer service center	Customers with complaints	x			
Comprehensive advertising campaign in collaboration with cellular companies on new services being offered	All				x
Work with media on new and expanded opportunities for customer service	Media Key stakeholders All	x	x	x	
Promote new and expanded opportunities for customer service to internal employees and staff through all means	Internal employees	x	x	x	

The following communications chart can be utilized to create specific strategies and connect these to relevant factors. For specific campaigns that AWC implements, it is recommended that they use this chart to guide the details of their implementation.



Enhance communication with employees.

The internal framework of communication is the infrastructure that supports all external communication efforts. A strong emphasis should be placed on furthering internal communications throughout the utility. As frontline communicators, employees should receive important information before the public. The utility should stress the role of employees as communicators and ambassadors for the utility, and support them in this effort by providing timely information, a clear, consistent message, and training when appropriate.

We recommend the utility consider implementing several strategies for enhancing employee communication: These include:

- Consider staff e-newsletter at all locations so that those without computer access can get the news.
- Provide customer service specific training and list of key points and frequently asked questions to front line customer service and call center employees prior to any key issue or new program that can result in an increase in customer calls and questions. Include communications department as part of the trainers.
- Emphasize the role of employees as Ambassadors for the Utility. One excellent way to create employee "ambassadors" is to include a communication component as part of employee training. Reinforce employees' efforts by highlighting good ambassadorship in the employee newsletter and other publications, or by recognizing an "Ambassador of the Month" at manager and staff meetings.
- Increase opportunities for face-to-face communications. Aqaba Water does a good job with this informally but should plan to institutionalize some of these practices. The printed word is an efficient way to provide information, but changing perceptions and behaviors – and building trust and employee morale - requires two-way communication. Research shows that employees prefer face-to-face communication from direct supervisors over memos and newsletters. We suggest that those who plan and run meetings create opportunities for discussion and interaction. An opportunity to dialogue and ask questions promotes better understanding of issues and problems and, in turn, creates better ambassadors for the utility.
- Send quarterly e-mail to all employees from the CEO. Topics should highlight key issues of importance, recognition of key successes and employee contributions. Copies of e-mails should be posted (and /or distributed through their paycheck) for those who do not have access to computers.
- Celebrate staff contributions and efforts at events and celebrations. Often employees shy away from formal recognitions, but the small day-to-day acknowledgments of their efforts can make the difference between a motivated or disgruntled staff. While the utility should continue any formal recognition programs, managers and supervisors should also be encouraged to recognize staff members in a more informal way on a regular basis.

Continue to expand and promote the utility web site, other e-communication and multi-media options.

The utility's web site is a communication device. As more and more people within the utility purchase personal computers and gain access to the Internet, the utility web site should become more of a communication and marketing tool, particularly for the younger generations. The utility should continue to emphasize this area in order to remain competitive in the in communications.

The web site should also be evaluated in the context of how it delivers the utility's key messages. Users should be asked to suggest the types of information they find most useful by responding to an online survey or e-mailing responses.

The information on the site should be constantly updated. While it is fairly easy to get people to visit a web site once, the challenge is getting them to return regularly for new information. The website's potential as a supplementary communication channel will continue to grow each year.

The web site should also be used to post factual information in a prominent spot for easy access. Utility newsletters and other publications should promote the web site as a source of information when people have questions.

The web site should evaluate new applications such as automatic alert systems. In addition, the utility should consider electronic mailing lists such as listservs and e-mail blasts, mobile version of the web site, prominent social media presence and promotion of all of these options through the web site and other communication methods.

The utility should continue to produce videos on various stories related to water – from where the water comes from, to key messages promoting conservation, to water quality, how to take care of leaks, and more. These should be shown at the customer service center, posted on the web site, on YouTube and on the utility's social media pages.

Provide communication training for staff:

Comprehensive communications training will be very useful to the PR manager and other key decision-makers in the utility, especially if a comprehensive demand management effort is developed and implemented in the near future. Following are the various types of training that are recommended for Aqaba's PR and other senior staff.

Strategic Communications Planning:

Comprehensive workshop and training designed to help the utility create a comprehensive strategic communications plan. In addition to the communications department, top management and key decision makers from all the departments need to attend this training so that the goals of the strategic communications plan are aligned with the business plan.

Media Training:

From creating a media policy to basic media training on what constitutes a news story and how to write a news release or media alert for a special event, to working with the television media, to proactive media strategies to help the utility tell its story to the public.

Social Marketing Training:

Social marketing training this would be useful for the PR manager and other decision makers and stakeholders, especially before developing and implementing a

comprehensive demand management program. Training will include main concepts of social marketing and begin applying them to the utility's program right away. Topics include the social marketing process, audience segmentation and strategy development with the social marketing mix, developing a preliminary strategy for Aqaba's program; participants will receive in-depth instruction in all aspects of creating a campaign, from research and strategy development to creating messages and materials.

Social Media Training Workshop Courses:

Advanced training workshops to train the team on how to engage in social media network conversations for the utility with the communities. Social Media training will include a multiple social media networks such as Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube; traversing the global net-waves. Training will also include website presence as it pertains to social media network integration and how to integrate social media with the utility website for maximum effectiveness. The training will also discuss how social media network portal marketplaces and communities require a proper amount of listening to understand the conversation of customers, stakeholders and all other voices in these social media communities and the value of the customers input.

Research and evaluation

Research and evaluations components need to be part of the strategic communications efforts. While this assessment provides a starting point, research component of the utility's strategic communications plan should capture baseline data that can be used to determine progress in selected areas of the communication effort. Surveys, customer satisfaction surveys, intercept interviews, evaluation of program accomplishments, and other tools should be planned and implemented regularly. In addition, major areas of the strategic communication plan, such as internal communications, must be evaluated each year.

5.0 CONCLUSION

Aqaba Water has done an excellent job in putting the customer first. The time is ripe for them to take a more holistic and comprehensive approach to communications. This is also the perfect time for them to embark on a comprehensive demand management and water conservation program to usher in long-term change.

The utility also needs focused efforts and established processes for advocacy and inter-government relations. A more collaborative working arrangement with ASEZA is very important and will serve the needs of the customers for the long run.

6.0 ANNEXES

6.1 Annex A:

Communication Checklist

This quick-to-complete checklist was used as part of the assessment to review the list of communications efforts and material used by the utility.

Please check one response for each question.

Always *Frequently* *Occasionally* *Never*

1. A utility newsletter is sent to customers on a regular basis.

Always *Frequently* *Occasionally* *Never*

2. An employee newsletter is sent to all employees on a regular basis.

Always *Frequently* *Occasionally* *Never*

3. Efforts are made to acquaint new customers with the range of utility services:

Always *Frequently* *Occasionally* *Never*

4. Key management and utility employees and staff respond quickly to questions and concerns.

Always *Frequently* *Occasionally* *Never*

5. Customers have opportunities to voice ideas and concerns about utility and services through:

Advisory committees

Emails

Letters

Public meetings/forums

Web

Monitored blogs/social media

Other

6. Partnership and outreach programs include:

Business/civic partnerships

Schools

Other stakeholders

Volunteer groups

Other

7. Key messages for customer services staff is communicated via the following methods:

Scripted talking points and Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ's)

Regular training
One-time training
Other

8. Specific departments are encouraged to arrange special events to encourage customers to learn more about their utility.

Always *Frequently* *Occasionally* *Never*

Please check as appropriate.

11 Two-way communications with employees is achieved through:

Message from the CEO

Email

Meetings

Memos

Newsletters

Web messages

Other

12. Who is authorized to speak on behalf of the utility to the media? Check all that apply

CEO

Key management staff

Communications Manager

Other

13. Do you have a media policy?

Yes *No*

14. Do you have regular communications including media training for key executive management?

Yes *No*

15. A customer survey is conducted on a regular basis.

Yes *No*