

Community Relations
Category A-Individual Achievement
Mobile Application

Name

Randall R. Townsend

Position

Public Affairs & Social Media Specialist

Duty Description

Manages Little Rock District's Command Information Program to include producing the District portion of the Pacesetter. Manages and monitors the District's Social Media platforms, including mobile app, Facebook and Twitter. Arranges town hall meetings and other internal events, and develops and maintains other Command Information products such as the electronic hallway displays. Assists other PA specialists with Community Relations, arranging special events and coordinating speaker's bureau requests. Assists Public Information and Media Relations by managing electronic media distribution lists, writing and editing news releases, arranging news conferences, responding to media, and managing news reading files. Serves as the face and voice of the district by receiving public visitors, managing incoming calls, and coordinating appropriate responses to information requests received via the district's Internet website and Facebook.

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Reply to
Attention of:

DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
LITTLE ROCK DISTRICT, CORPS OF ENGINEERS
P.O. BOX 867
LITTLE ROCK, ARKANSAS 72203-0867
www.swl.usace.army.mil

CESWL-PA

21 January 2013

MEMORANDUM FOR Headquarters, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (CE-PA), 441 G Street NW, Washington, DC 20314-1000

SUBJECT: Letter of Endorsement for Randall R. Townsend

1. References:

- a. 2013 MG Keith L. Ware PA Competition SOP, 20 Dec 2013.
- b. Email, HQ USACE, CE-PA, 9 January 2014, subject: 2013 MG Keith L. Ware PA Competition

2. This Letter of Endorsement is for Randall R. Townsend, Little Rock District public affairs and social media specialist. Mr. Townsend's innovation, leadership and determination in developing the first-ever U.S. Army Corps of Engineers hydrology mobile application makes him the number one choice for the Community Relations Individual Achievement Award. His planning, creative design, and unwavering resolve resulted in a Little Rock District mobile app for anglers, navigators, paddlers and park visitors. The ground-breaking app for external stakeholders is a creative community outreach tool that has catapulted the Little Rock District into the future in terms of communications technology and it greatly enhances community relations. I believe there is no other person more deserving of this award than Mr. Townsend.

3. My point of contact for further information regarding this award submission is James H. Woods at 501-324-5551 or james.h.woods2@usace.army.mil.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "G. Cummins", with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

GREGORY KENT CUMMINS
Chief, Public Affairs



DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
SOUTHWESTERN DIVISION, CORPS OF ENGINEERS
1100 COMMERCE STREET, Suite 831
DALLAS, TEXAS 75242-1317

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2. This Letter of Endorsement is for Randall R. Townsend, Little Rock District public affairs and social media specialist. Mr. Townsend is the key reason the Little Rock District Public Affairs Office has become a leader in pursuing new means to enhance its use of social media. His efforts in the development of a mobile phone application for community members and recreation users were the first in the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. It also garnered a USACE Innovation of the Year award. Mr. Townsend's tenacity in creating innovative tools and concepts has moved not only the District's Public Affairs Office communications program forward, but also that of the entire Corps of Engineers. I highly recommend Mr. Townsend for the Community Relations Individual Achievement Award.

3. The point of contact for further information regarding this award submission is James H. Woods, Little Rock District Public Affairs Office, at 501-324-5551 or james.h.woods2@usace.army.mil.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Martha J. Cenker", is located above the typed name.

MARTHA J. CENKCI
Chief, Public Affairs

SUMMARY

The Little Rock District Public Affairs Office's mobile application for phones and tablets is part of the district's modern and robust public affairs program that uses the latest communications technology in its social media activities.

Mr. Randall R. Townsend, Little Rock District public affairs and social media specialist, was the creator and driving force behind the first U.S. Army Corps of Engineers customer-focused mobile app for water levels.

Mr. Townsend planned, built, and launched the mobile app for marina owners, dock owners, anglers, navigators, paddlers, park visitors and community members. His ground-breaking app delivers lake forecasts, lake levels, turbine releases, forecasts for the Arkansas River, and much more. The app earned a national Corps of Engineers Innovation of the Year award. Mr. Townsend also received a Commander's Award for Civilian Service for his efforts.

PLANNING

Mr. Townsend birthed the mobile app concept, took charge of the planning, design and implementation, and produced the Army Corps of Engineers' first functioning mobile app for external community audiences.

Mr. Townsend was well versed in the effectiveness of mobile apps having researched the statistics about the application's use, relevance and effectiveness.

He discovered that, according to Mobile Marketing Association Asia, more people on the planet have smartphones than toothbrushes. According to the association, there are 6.8 billion people on the planet, 5.1 billion of them own a cell phone, but only 4.2 billion own a toothbrush. With this knowledge in hand, Mr. Townsend began asking potential customers what they desire in a mobile app.

Upon further study, Mr. Townsend discovered Google research that showed 90 percent of all media interactions happen on a screen, with 38 percent of those on-screen daily media interactions on smartphones, beating the desktop. He couldn't ignore mobile applications relevance as effective communication tools.

In the corporate world, smartphones are the most common starting place for a purchase, according to Google's research. About 65 percent of purchases begin on the smartphone before 61 percent move onto a personal computer to complete the purchase, or a tablet with the remaining 4 percent.

If people are using mobile apps to make purchases how much more likely are they to download a free app that keeps them safe while recreating on Arkansas and

Missouri waterways. During the planning process, Mr. Townsend was tracking this high use of mobile apps, so he knew that the district needed one for its biggest community audience ... recreational users. He saw a need and planned to fill it.

Mr. Townsend was cognizant that the district was used to giving users access to every permutation of data possible on the desktop. He realized mobile users have limited time, and the need to accomplish something or check on something quickly and move on. This is especially true for anglers and paddlers below the district's high-head dams.

Mr. Townsend kept digging up statistics that proved he was on the right track such as the fact that there are more mobile phones on the planet than there are televisions and that 91 percent of all U.S. citizens have their mobile device within reach 24/7, according to the Morgan Stanley Company.

Mr. Townsend realized the district's target community audience needed quick access to hydrology data and that an app was the best delivery method to accomplish that objective. Within two clicks the user can see the data they need for a successful day of fishing, floating or navigating.

The Little Rock District manages nearly 750,000 acres of public lands and water and is a national leader in water-based public recreation. The district manages more than \$6.5 billion worth of public infrastructure, including 12 reservoirs, more than 300 miles of navigation channel and hundreds of public parks. So with a mission-focus and eye towards meeting the needs of the customer, Mr. Townsend used qualitative research measures during his planning, including personal interviews with a sampling of community members. As he pursued the creation of a mobile app, a common theme kept surfacing that the most useful information for users would be the ability to quickly access current water level information for Corps-managed rivers, lakes and streams.

Early on, Mr. Townsend assembled a Project Development Team and dug deeper into designing an effective application. Since the primary use of the new app would be water levels, he approached the district's hydrology experts and secured initial funding of \$1,500 to get underway. Mr. Townsend also contacted Apple and Google to inquire about mobile app requirements.

During the planning phase, Mr. Townsend also sought out and attended specialty training to increase his knowledge about mobile apps and social media analytics including a Facebook Marketing Seminar, a Social Media Marketing Workshop, and Twitter Training Seminar. He aggressively pursued the knowledge and skills necessary to be at the forefront of social media use to engage external audiences.

Mr. Townsend expanded his planning efforts by reaching out to additional users of the McClellan-Kerr Arkansas River Navigation system and Corps parks to garner additional customer feedback. He employed social media polls to help with the design of the app. He sought out Corps subject matter experts to aid in its development. He also received and applied guidance from Headquarters U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

About mid-way through the development process and while waiting for approval from Apple and input from Google, Mr. Townsend began devising marketing strategies for rolling out the mobile app.

Mr. Townsend faced numerous roadblocks, but met each obstacle with unwavering resolve. After eight months of planning, developing and designing, his perseverance paid off with the official launch of the ground-breaking Little Rock District mobile app for anglers, navigators, paddlers, park visitors, and other community members in March 2013.

EXECUTION

When Apple finally approved the mobile app after two revisions to meet its stringent requirements, Mr. Townsend rolled out the Corps first-ever app that delivered current water conditions for Corps-managed reservoirs, rivers and streams within the district boundaries, including the McClellan-Kerr Arkansas River Navigation system. It also featured Southwestern Power Administration's projected daily generation schedules for district reservoirs and U.S. Geological Surveys stream flows for Arkansas and Missouri.

Mr. Townsend implemented his targeted publicity campaign at no cost to the government or users to ensure he reached a wide audience concerning this breakthrough Corps app. He employed a variety of communication tools, including news releases, video promo clips, QR Codes, Internet banners and social media updates.

The mobile app was made available for both Apple and Android platforms and downloadable from Google Play and iTunes App Stores. He also made it available for government Blackberry users and other mobile platforms by developing a non-native web app version. He advertised those instructions to impacted users.

During the execution phase of Mr. Townsend's mobile app, community members began downloading the product at a rapid velocity. In eight months the app grew to more than 12,200 subscribers and has not slowed down. The mobile app is the single most used social media platform for the Little Rock District dwarfing the district's 4,000 Facebook, Twitter, Flickr and YouTube users.

EFFECTIVENESS

Until Mr. Townsend built the Little Rock District mobile app, the Corps of Engineers did not have a single platform built for the largest growing information gathering media trend in the world...smartphones.

His efforts ensured the Little Rock District had a tool to target external audiences on the device of their choosing. He set the standard for the Corps. His app has become the benchmark for all others to pursue. Several districts have adopted Mr. Townsend's concept but have yet to recreate his efforts.

Mr. Townsend's motives in designing a mobile app were customer based. He wanted a product that industry and recreational users could use and appreciate. He's passionate about telling the Corps story and helping external audiences understand the importance of the SWL mission to the region and Nation. Many times he is the first contact for people calling or visiting district offices. He has a keen awareness of customers' needs and desires. His mobile app addressed these community needs and desires in a big way.

A highlight of the mobile application's effectiveness was spike in usage during a crisis. The app was used 4,600 times from Dec. 20-25, 2013. It proved to be an extremely useful tool for the public when heavy rains caused high flows on the navigation system and pushed all of the district's reservoirs into flood pools. This validated, not only the app's day-to-day usefulness, but also its effectiveness as a community outreach tool during natural disasters.

The district PAO has been using social media to try and reach its target community audiences since 2010. In just a single year the mobile app grew larger than all other Southwestern Division districts' social media platforms combined.

The app's accessibility and speed also have catapulted its user numbers beyond the entire Southwestern Division's Facebook audience reach which is at 8,578. To date the app has been downloaded 12,204 times and used nearly 160,000 times.

VALUE TO THE ARMY

Since the primary audience of this application is community members, including recreational users, anglers, canoeists, paddlers and navigators, there is no other person more deserving of the Community Relations Individual Achievement Award than Mr. Townsend. He used the latest technology in the public affairs arena to reach members of the community and was the first in the entire Corps of Engineers to do so!

The focus of Mr. Townsend's mobile app is water levels; however, he also ensured it included Water Safety messages as well as links to the district's public internet website and news releases. This potentially increases visibility of the district's mission to national and international communities of interest.

Mr. Townsend's proactive efforts in developing a mobile app, as well as his knowledge and application of social media analytics, are vital to the success of SWL's community relations activities. His aggressive communication efforts ensure SWL's mission is constantly in the public eye.

Mr. Townsend saved the Army a lot of money because he developed the skill necessary to create an app. He did the research, development, marketing and work! Since many Corps public affairs offices don't have the personnel and skill sets to develop apps they were seeking potential contractors to develop apps at an average cost of \$100,000. Mr. Townsend discovered that the average cost for a major company to create an app to sell to consumers for marketing goods and services can cost upwards of \$6 million in research, development, labor and marketing costs.

The operating costs of the mobile app will be approximately \$5,000 over five years and after five years the operating costs will be zero. Mr. Townsend will continue making adjustments to content and design when necessary based on customer and user feedback. The best part for members of the community is that the app is free! You can't get that much better in terms of community relations. Providing a product the community wants and desires at no cost and telling the Corps story at the same time!

SUPPORT MATERIAL

After the launch, Mr. Townsend received positive feedback from external stakeholders about the app and how it easily displays lake forecasts, lake levels, turbine releases, and forecasts for the Arkansas River. Because of his extraordinary efforts, the towing industry, anglers, boaters and paddlers now have the latest stage and flow rates for their favorite rivers and creeks on their smartphones or tablets. He ensured the app also featured Southwestern Power Administration's projected daily generation schedules for district reservoirs and U.S. Geological Survey's stream flows for Arkansas and Missouri.

Mr. Townsend's mobile app has received positive attention throughout the Corps of Engineers. USACE Public Affairs is examining how to apply Mr. Townsend's results across the Corps. Numerous districts have reached out to Mr. Townsend for assistance in developing mobile apps.

Community App User Feedback – A Sampling!



USACE Little Rock

Find the latest Corps of Engineers' lake levels, releases and forecasts needed to enjoy a day of fishing, boating and recreation in the Little Rock District. Industry shippers, anglers, boaters and...



“This new app is nice! Can you add graphs of lake levels?”

-Frits, fritsdruff@mac.com

“This is really cool! Did you make it yourself and HOW!?”

-Anonymous email

“Love the new app on the water levels in the state. Are there any plans for the Saline river reports to be added for south Arkansas and is there any apps from the Vicksburg District to have this for other lakes in the state?”

-Sent from my iPad, Terry Thompson

“Thanks for producing the USACE Little Rock App. It is wonderful and works great. I use it almost every day. Works very well on my iPhone 5. It avoids having to use up all of the pages in Safari.”

-Jon Lindemann

“Great new APP for I-Phone. Thanks.”

-Randall W. Goins, Sent from my iPhone

“Thanks for doing this. This is great for access away from the office.”

-Martin Hammer

“This is wonderful. I am going to post it on website and my fishing report.”

-Ricky Eastwold, Bull Shoals Lake Boat Dock.com

Groundbreaking, Innovative Community Relations Tool...

Mr. Townsend's commendable efforts helped enhance community relations and reflect great credit upon himself, the Little Rock District, Southwestern Division and the United States Army Corps of Engineers!