

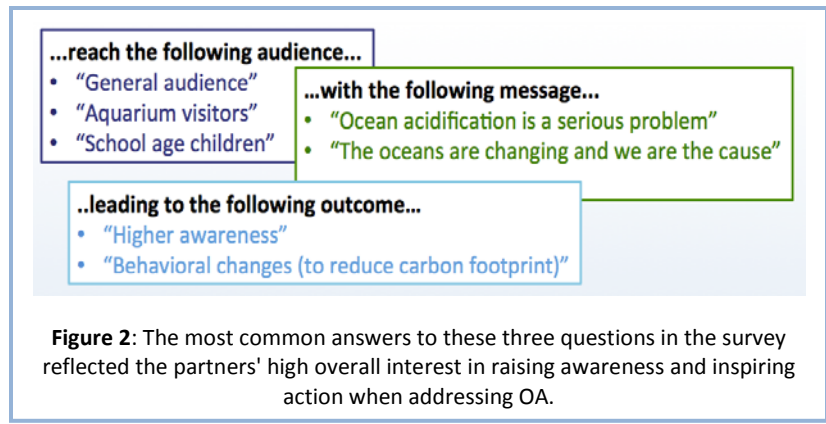


Efforts to Advance Awareness, Understanding and Action around Ocean Acidification

Findings from partner surveys, interviews and online review

The Ocean Project recently conducted a survey and in-depth interviews with representatives from its network of partner zoos, aquariums, museums (ZAMs) and other conservation organizations to investigate whether and, if so, how these institutions are addressing the issue of ocean acidification (OA). This research was then analyzed in combination with information obtained from a comprehensive review of the online presence of more than 50 partner institutions.

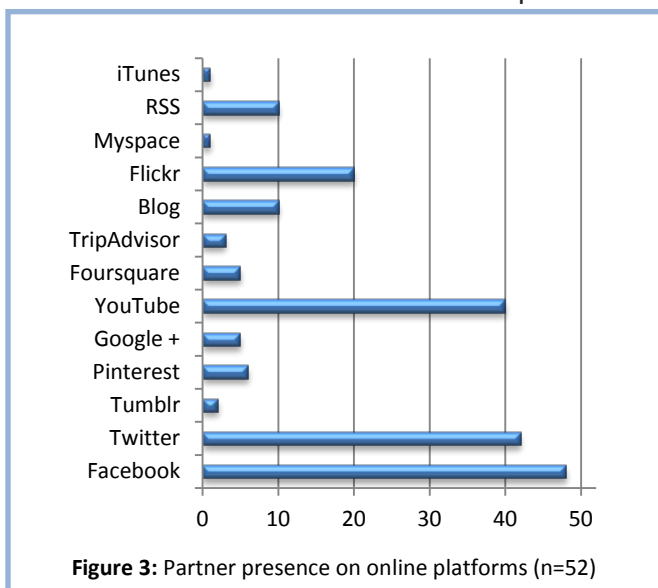
The survey of our partners, completed in Summer 2012, received 230 responses, representing a wide array of institutions from across the United States as well as a few other countries. The results of the survey - especially when segmented to highlight the input of ZAM staff who are directly involved in supervising, developing, or conducting communication activities - affirmed the way in which organizations across our network are increasingly active in communicating conservation with their audiences. (See the PowerPoint presentation, "Findings from a survey of our partner institutions," for additional data.)



Partners reported communications on a wide array of ocean-related topics, including OA. Approximately 35% of staff active in communications indicated that their institutions are already addressing OA in some way (see Figure 1). Another 52% of these respondents noted that their institutions either are planning to do so, or "thinking about it." And approximately two-thirds of those

with an interest added that their institutions hope to expand their efforts in the coming year. Partners also indicated a keen interest in focusing not just on raising awareness of OA, but also on inspiring action by their visitors (see Figure 2). What specifically they would like their visitors to do, however, was often unclear.

To explore these topics in more depth, we next conducted a series of interviews with representatives from a dozen leading ZAMs that had expressed a higher level of interest in the issue. These interviews, completed in Fall 2012, largely echoed the findings from our survey. We confirmed, for example, that OA is most often addressed in conjunction with climate change. Among aquariums, we learned it is often referenced as part a coral reef or other animal exhibit, while for the science centers it was more commonly covered in relation to information such as carbon records, or through interactive experiments. Perhaps most important, these interviews underscored the shift underway among our partners, with their increasing emphasis on communicating not just to raise awareness but also to inspire action. In the survey, more than 75% of respondents had relayed a belief that visitors would welcome information about how to help address the problem of ocean acidification. And in the



interviews, this was again a common theme, summarized in the words of one, as an end goal of "get(ting) people to commit to doing something (about it)!"

With this in mind, one of the major barriers to additional outreach around OA appears to be the absence of easy and obvious "asks." Even though more than two-thirds of those surveyed from across our network already felt well informed about OA, and nearly all recognized its significance for the future of the ocean, they still saw it as a complicated issue to explain, and one without a simple solution step for visitors.

The above may well be the reason that the issue is underrepresented in partners' online presence. Our prior market research had emphasized the importance of online communications, and, not surprisingly, all of the 52 ZAMs evaluated had a website, and most also had a presence on each of the three of the major social media platforms: Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube (see Figure 3). Currently, OA is rarely mentioned, even on organizational websites. It was mentioned on only 12 of the 52 ZAM websites, and addressed as a standalone topic on only four.

The online review also confirmed that our partner ZAMs are just beginning to use their online presence as a way to inspire conservation action, especially so with a newer issue such as OA. Of the 20 most common recommendations for action found on the web sites, for example, only three could be linked in any significant way to OA. The most popular of these were installing energy-saving/efficient thermostats, light bulbs and appliances (13/52 websites), followed by choosing "green" transportation alternatives (10/52 websites), and supporting green power/alternative energy (3/52 websites). In contrast, the most popular action-oriented asks were for donations, information downloads, and volunteering unrelated to OA.

Moving ahead, the partners with whom we've consulted, including those staff most directly involved in shaping communications for their institutions, are seeking assistance in three main areas: developing strategies, evaluating efforts and obtaining examples in the form of case rest in seeing what early adopters do. Notably, those early adopters expressed a willingness to pilot test, evaluate, and share experiences and best practices with others in the network, with many emphasizing that they now have increasing amounts of flexibility within their communication efforts. As one partner put it, they are "trying to move in a direction where (their) entire education and outreach programs are more nimble."

In sum, this comprehensive background research of our partner ZAMs - the survey, in-depth interviews and online review - revealed the way in which our partners are typically very interested but only just beginning to engage their visitors on this important issue. Above all, our partner ZAMs are ready and willing to try new approaches, evaluate the results, and share their successes, as well as any lessons learned.

