EPA BP Data on Socrata

or

How to Try New Things During a Crisis
Without Your Head Exploding

Jeffrey Levy
Director of Web Communications
US EPA
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The Situation: Conceptual

- Key dates
  - April 20: BP's Deepwater Horizon drilling rig exploded
  - April 22 (40th anniversary of Earth Day): rig sank
  - April 30: EPA launched http://www.epa.gov/bpspill
- Federal response leadership
  - EPA (onshore) and US Coast Guard (offshore)
  - For BP Spill, USCG leads, EPA supports w/data
- Data
  - QA/QC is critical, but process depends on type
  - Sampling
    - collect air, water, sediment, oily wastes and analyze in a lab
    - 7-10 days between sample and results
  - Monitoring
    - Real-time sniffing as air goes by
    - 1-2 days between measurement and results
    - : process, timeline to produce
  - Both sampling and monitoring require ramp-up of large numbers of people, equipment, funding

The Situation: Physical

- Emergency operations center: several public information officers plus one Webbie (first time embedded)
- Webbie being in the EOC meant
  - Part of team; team spirit **critical** given the high pressure, visibility
  - Easy to share thoughts, discuss options
  - Broader understanding of issues
- Who to embed?
  - Loooong hours (worked 30 straight days without a break, 10-14 hrs/day)
  - Expert thinker and coder
  - Graphics skills (good eye, good storyteller, able to use Photoshop)
  - Able to make decisions, brief senior management (head of Public Affairs and Deputy Administrator came through informally)
  - Able to produce under extreme pressure
- If you know Kay Morrison, thank her!

The upshot: someone else needed to assess, choose, advocate data tools

Overall Social Media Strategy

- Mission
- Tool
- Metrics
- Teach

Mission

- Administrator Jackson: deliver data as soon as available
- Open government: two different needs
  - Raw data for experts
  - Interpreted data for general public
  - Maps to navigate to both types
- Presentation and provision, plus navigation

Evidence of Mission Need

- Data pages were highly-visited: 1000x/day
- Letters from groups
- Questions via email
- Comments on FB, Twitter

Tool: Issues

- Any new tool had to make sense given other tools
- Internal lack of knowledge (multiple briefings) and time to focus (crisis response had many higher-priority issues at all times)
  - didn't want to confuse readers
  - how tools differed
  - conflicting beliefs of what tools could do, ease of use
  - skepticism about external tools
  - some training needed for staff

Tool: Considerations

- Initially: daily CSV and PDF files
  - Labor-intensive
  - Many small details to watch out for
  - Heavy burden given other Web work
  - Reader had to know Excel or scan through dozens of pages
- Also did Google Earth (more complex, more/different functionality)
- We knew the data download tool was coming, but in weeks and only in CSV

Tool: Socrata

- Online table, easily sortable and filterable (don't need to know Excel); wrote short instructions
- Download in multiple formats
- API
- Unique URL for each view
- Embeddable; could imagine bloggers; NGOs picking up
- Secondary benefits (to us, maybe not to you!)
  - Shareable filters and sorts
  - Stats
  - Branding, EPA URL ($)

Tool: Policies

- TOS: OGC quickly approved (thanks, GSA!)
- Accessibility: HHS worked with Socrata to be accessible
- Credibility: linked back to EPA site in metadata; all data also available on epa.gov
- Used 3rd-party icon, disclaimer to link

Tool: Decisions

- Provide multiple tools
    - CSV/PDF (eventually removed)
    - Data download tool
    - Socrata
    - Google Earth
    - Continued brief summaries

Tool

	Provision	Presentation	Navigation
Raw	epa.gov: • CSV • Data download tool Socrata: • Downloads • API	epa.gov: PDF Socrata tables Google Earth popups	epa.gov Maps Google Earth Socrata (by type)
Interpreted		epa.gov • Summaries • Reports by location	epa.gov: maps

Something to remember

During a crisis:

Normal willingness to experiment, time to focus are at a minimum

BUT

Need for innovative thinking is at a maximum

Metrics

- Data pages continue to be viewed, although interest has declined

- Some interest in Socrata, still assessing

- For ease of use, definitely worth the experiment

Teach: Lessons Learned

- Do work before crisis
  - Get TOS signed
  - Identify audiences
  - Have different tools built and others in mind
  - Build db ahead of time
- Remember the differences:
  - Raw and interpreted
  - Provision and presentation

Teach

- This webinar and PPT file, which I'll offer again

- We blogged about our data tools:
  - Socrata/Google Earth
  - Our own data download tool