

THE ANSWER IS YES.

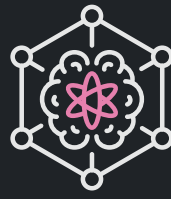


2023 NSPRA COMMUNICATIONS AWARDS

Gold Medallion Entry - Marketing Campaign

ESD 112 Communications - Vancouver, Washington
Educational Service District for Southwest Washington
Communications Department - 11 team members
Entry Title: ESD 112 Communications: The Answer is Yes.

Monique Dugaw, Executive Director of Communications
Educational Service District 112
2500 NE 65th Avenue, Vancouver, WA 98661
360.952.3575 | monique.dugaw@esd112.org



WE ARE A FULL-SERVICE COMMUNICATIONS DEPARTMENT at Educational Service District (ESD) 112, a state agency which serves the southwest region of Washington and partners across the state to equalize educational opportunities for all learners. Our clients include school districts, other ESDs and educational agencies, and ESD 112 programs. **While ESD 112 is an essential part of state and regional education services, annual state funding for basic operational expenses is minimal. Of ESD 112's budget, only 1% is directly appropriated by the state.** Our department relies on fee-for-service and contract partnerships to operate and maintain our staffing levels. As such, **we need to regularly market our communications services and justify the work we do to our educational clients**, much like a private agency.

At the beginning of the 2020-21 school year, during a time of uncertainty and turmoil for school districts and school communicators, we saw the need to redesign our marketing website and methods. The ESD had launched a new agency brand in 2018, and we needed to align our materials with the new brand. Our own team had also undergone many changes, including new leadership. We saw this as an opportunity to re-examine our marketing approach and plan more strategically. After significant research, planning, and implementation time, our new website and marketing campaign were launched in May of 2022. Since that time, we have already seen a significant increase in revenue, client contracts, and client engagement as a result of these strategic efforts, and we've been able to hire an additional staff member.



MONIQUE DUGAW
*Executive Director
of Communications*



HEIDI BARNES
*Director of Creative
& Web Development*



LAURA MARTIN
*WordPress Developer
& Content Manager*



XANDER HAYES
*TV ETC Coordinator
& Video Services*



ALLISON KLUMP
*Administrative Assistant &
Communications Manager*



MELISSA BURT
*Senior Graphic Designer
& Content Strategist*



FRED GUNNERSON
*Junior Graphic &
WordPress Designer*



SCOT BRENDE
*TV ETC Playback
Operator*



JUSTINE HANRAHAN
Communications Manager



MIKA YOSHIDA
Communications Manager



ARI VAZQUEZ
Bilingual Communications Manager



OUR TEAM AGREED that our marketing website at the time was not aligned with our ESD 112 agency brand and did not reflect new leadership and staff. We saw this need for a website re-brand as an opportunity to set a larger goal for our team, which was to: **Market our communications services in a strategic way and reinforce our existing reputation as education communications leaders in Washington State.**

Since the project was not for an external client, and the resources we could devote to it were limited, we confined our research to an analysis of existing web portfolio data and an informal, qualitative survey among our team members (plus our superintendent). We were confident that this method would provide the information we needed to meet our goal in an efficient, cost-effective way. Our Creative Director developed a combination [brand query and SWOT analysis survey](#) for our staff in October of 2020. About half of our team was new at that time, and it was important to get feedback from both new and long-standing team members with differing perspectives. The results of the survey helped us identify our audience/public(s), our objectives, and what tactics we should use to achieve them. The below summary includes sample survey questions and the most common answers by our team.

BRAND QUERY AND SWOT ANALYSIS RESULTS

Who are our audiences? Who do we need to reach?

Our region districts and other education providers (supts and other administrators, teachers and other program staff); Our programs (managers and staff); Families of ECE, etc.; Legislators, policy-makers and other state agencies like OSPI and DOH; Other ESDs

What is important to our audiences? Please share your ideas for targeting our reach with them.

Cost-effectiveness; trust; reliability; expertise; we are an extension of your team to help when you need an extra hand; I would think that more direct marketing would be more effective than, say, social media marketing. Perhaps there is a way for us to provide free content (blog, newsletter, social media, etc.) to entice audiences to then seek out additional paid services

What are our strengths?

Talented and award winning staff; unique understanding of education industry and issues; long history of success; innovative partnerships; strong reputation of excellence

Top words to describe our staff and services:

Highly skilled; knowledgeable; creative; passionate about our work; innovative; respected

How do we WANT people to perceive us and our services?

We exist to serve them; We're both nimble and highly skilled; Professional; Creative and knowledgeable about education issues that affect their programs and services; use our intelligence and skills to give them the very best—that our services are valuable and worth the investment

What are our weaknesses?

Marketing and business acumen for our own products! We are also stretched thin and bogged down with non-billable work; We're an additional cost for districts; the effectiveness of our work can be hard to measure; the theory behind a lot of our work is not widely understood by many of our audiences

Our perfect visual identity would be:

Colorful; modern; simple; clean

Are you itching to tell everybody what you think our brand should look like? If the answer is yes, what is that (in your humble opinion)?

Eye-catching without being flashy; fresh and clean and easy to update; something very minimal so that our team and our work takes center stage, rather than being overwhelmed by busy graphics; clever in our text and the simplicity of the design; approachable, inclusive, and visually compelling



AFTER DISCUSSING THE RESULTS OF OUR RESEARCH as a group, we identified a smaller subcommittee within our department that would meet regularly to take the input and turn that into actionable steps toward a department marketing campaign and new website. This subcommittee included our Executive Director, Director of Creative & Web Development, WordPress Developer & Content Manager, and Senior Graphic Designer & Content Strategist. The planning subcommittee met three times from February–April of 2021 and established our target audiences, our measurable objectives, the budget and resources for the campaign, our strategies and tactics, and who would serve in what roles, [compiling detailed notes](#).

IDENTIFIED AUDIENCE/PUBLIC(S)

The Brand Query and SWOT Analysis helped us identify our audience/public(s) as primarily:

- School district leaders (superintendents, other administrators)
- Fellow school communications professionals
- ESD 112 program managers
- Partnering educational agencies (other ESDs, state superintendent of public education)

MEASURABLE OBJECTIVES

Since our overall goal to “market our communications services in a strategic way and reinforce our existing reputation as education communications leaders in Washington State” was fairly general and hard to measure, we set some specific objectives to help us evaluate our success:

- 1. Increase our team’s billable revenue and district contracts by 10% by the end of 2022.**
- 2. Generate enough interest and revenue to support the hire of a new staff member by the end of 2022.**

BUDGET & RESOURCES

We budgeted approximately 10 hours of staff time per month among the primary staff contributors for 15 months. The project needed to be completed within our 40-hour work week while we were simultaneously serving our regular clients (no overtime or contract staff). Since we were working on the site design as time allowed, we gave ourselves until Spring 2022 to complete the work.

Limitations:

- No contract staff
- No overtime
- Regular client work takes priority
- No additional staff training

Resources/Tools:

- Existing software & web hosting subscription
- One month of Envato Elements site access
- Existing Getty Images subscription
- Web design staff expertise



STRATEGIES & TACTICS

Strategy: Focus design and messaging on simplicity and service.

Tactics:

- Establish tone-of-voice that is simple and consistent with ESD 112's culture of service.
- Review key messaging and adapt messaging for use on website channel.
- Develop/collect imagery, colors and typeface for site that is consistent with ESD 112's re-brand and SWOT survey feedback.
- Gather feedback from team members and superintendent on simplicity, effectiveness and messaging alignment with the strategy.

Strategy: Use the site to showcase wide range of services we provide.

Tactics:

- Gather and feature a wide range of content to display on the site including communications, writing, strategy, and graphic design projects for display. This display demonstrates the depth and breadth of work our team can support.
- Use environmental mock-ups and interactive tools to display portfolio work, rather than flat images

Strategy: Stay "top of mind" and in front of our target publics/audiences.

Tactics:

- Develop a blog portion of the website where we share tips & tricks, case studies, and other information helpful to school communications leaders and their staff
- Send out an e-newsletter with information from the blog on topics that reflect top issues in education.
- Develop a marketing content calendar (to assign blog topics) and newsletter distribution cadence; revisit this calendar at least monthly during existing staff meetings.

ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES

Executive Director of Communications (Monique)

- Make content suggestions and give final approval
- Communicate with ESD 112 superintendent
- Manage staff hours budgeted to project

Director of Creative & Web Development (Heidi)

- Take the lead on initial brand alignment
- Work closely with designers on website development and design

WordPress Developer & Content Manager (Laura)

- Build out the functionality of the new website using a sandbox site for development
- Migrate all existing portfolio projects from old site to new; add new web projects

- Write web-related blog posts
- Launch new site and create redirects

Senior Graphic Designer & Content Strategist (Melissa)

- Establish tone-of-voice and write copy for website, blog, and newsletter
- Assist with website design as needed
- Organize and build portfolio content, updating old projects and adding new
- Establish a method for updating the site regularly
- Coordinate and send out e-newsletters after launch

IMPLEMENTATION



ONCE THE INITIAL PLANNING MEETINGS CONCLUDED in April of 2021, we began the implementation process in earnest, which took approximately 200 staff hours and one year to complete.

KEY MESSAGING

Our Creative Director's motto is "form follows function," so it was important to establish the tone of voice for our brand and associated communications campaign early on. Because of this, implementation and planning overlapped slightly, as our Senior Graphic Designer and Content Strategist wrote up our website's initial messaging after the first planning meeting in February, using the meeting's notes about tone of voice established by the brand query and SWOT survey results.

The YES messaging fit perfectly with the ESD 112 agency brand and its established reputation of always saying "yes" to any requests made by district clients and educational partners. It also fit with many of the answers our team gave in the SWOT Survey about how to reach our clients and how we want to be perceived:

"We are an extension of your team to help when you need an extra hand."

"We exist to serve them."

"We're both nimble and highly skilled."

Having buy in and approval from our Executive Director at the start helped establish our department's tone of voice as **first-person, friendly, personable, straight-forward, concise, and fun**. This facilitated the writing of blog posts and other site text, serving as a creative springboard that aligned with our initial SWOT research.

During site development, we wanted our YES messaging to be prominent, but not in an overwhelming amount. We initially had the YES statements use a web effect that looked like they were being typed out, but rejected it because a statement then had to be "deleted" for a new one to take its place. It made us look indecisive. Instead, we opted for a more traditional rotator for the homepage, but instead of the photo rotating, the text does.

Initial YES messaging:

The answer is YES.

YES, we can help you pass a school bond or levy.

YES, we can redesign your website on a budget and help you maintain it.

YES, we can represent your data in a simple, beautiful graphic.

YES, we can help your overwhelmed staff navigate crisis communications.

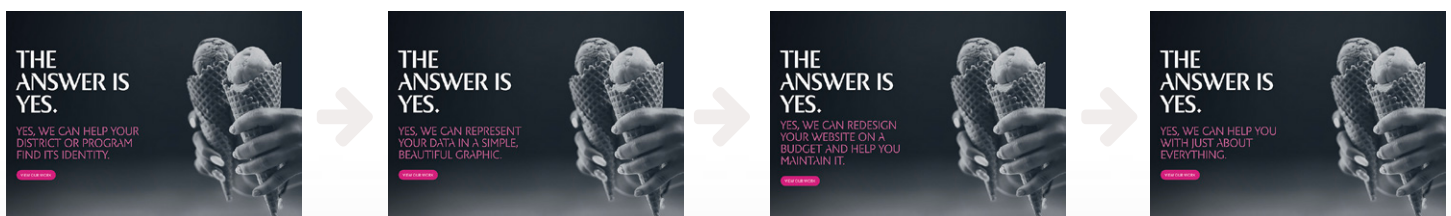
YES, we can shoot and edit your video and help you promote it.

YES, we can help your district or program find its identity.

YES, we can write your latest newsletter (design it, print it, and mail it too).

In a word, YES.

And in the rare instance of "no," we will help you find someone who can say YES. It's our favorite word.



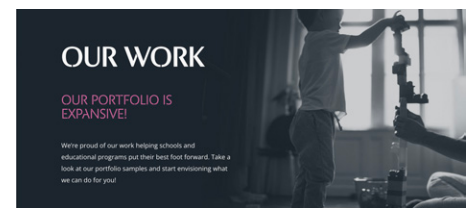
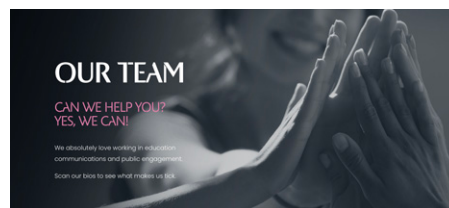
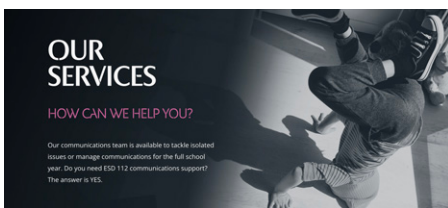
IMPLEMENTATION (CONT.)

DESIGN & IMAGERY

Our Creative Director established the initial look of the department branding, using our department's signature pink color as an accent with the more neutral colors from the ESD 112 agency brand color palette. The neutral palette of black, grays, tans and white with a handful of eye-catching pinks accomplished the Brand Query & SWOT Analysis requests that our visual identity be "colorful, modern, simple and clean," while also, "minimal so that our team and our work takes center stage, rather than being overwhelmed by busy graphics."

The website design primarily uses type, some icons, and white space to set the stage for images of our portfolio work in realistic, yet minimal and modern settings. We used environmental mock-ups to show work in the 'real world,' reinforcing the purpose and audience of the communications materials we complete for our clients. The design mock-ups emphasize that our work has substance and life.

For the headers of our web pages, we wanted to tie our brand back to the ESD 112 brand and our role in the agency's mission of "serving children, schools and their communities." The headers gave us an opportunity to include the "why" of our agency: education of youth. We worked to find stock images with people that would tie to the agency mission and also have some abstract representation of the page's content.

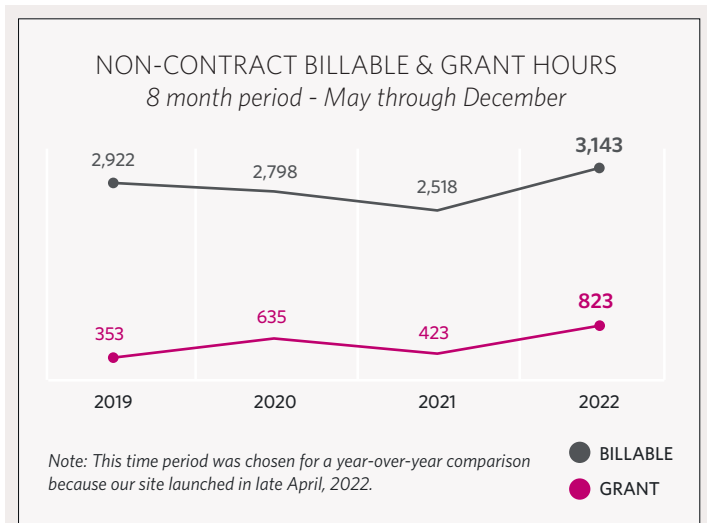
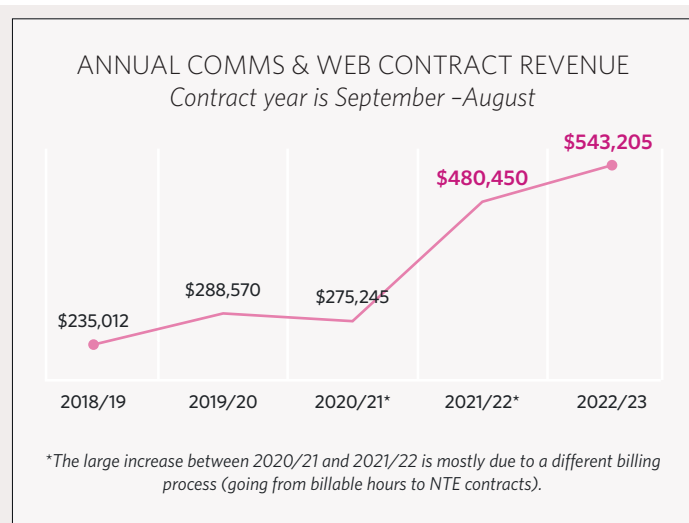


BLOG & E-NEWSLETTER

Once our website launched in April of 2022, it was time to send out [our first e-newsletter](#). We used our existing client and partner email list and pulled timely content from our blog, which aligned with our strategy of staying in front of our target audiences. We also setup a [shared marketing calendar](#) to plan out the topic of each bimonthly newsletter. Once a month, during our department staff meeting, we open up this calendar to ensure that we are on-track. The responsibility for writing articles for the blog and newsletter is divided between everyone in our department, ensuring that no one person has too heavy of a lift for our department marketing.



FROM THE START OF THE SUBCOMMITTEE MEETINGS in February of 2021 to the site launch the following spring, we spent the equivalent of approximately \$22,000 in staff time developing the website and blog. The site also requires about 10 hours per month to maintain. It is our philosophy that this investment in time marketing our services will pay dividends for years to come, and our communications and web contracts have already increased this year by \$62,755 (13%), more than covering the investment in time. In the time period from program launch to the end of December, we saw a 25% increase in billable hours and a 95% increase in grant hours (year over year).



To meet our goal of better marketing our communications services in a strategic way and reinforcing our existing reputation as education communications leaders in Washington State, our first measurable objective was to increase our team’s billable revenue and district contracts by 10% by the end of 2022. With increases of 13% for contracts and 25% in billable revenue, we soared past that objective, which we attribute in large part to our new website and marketing campaign.

Our team and services are growing, thanks to our strategic marketing. **With the increase in contracts and revenue, we were able to meet our second objective of generating enough interest and revenue to support the hire of a new staff member by the end of 2022.** We hired an additional web/graphic designer in May of 2022, a full seven months ahead of our objective. We’ve also added drone photography/videography and Instagram Reels videos to our list of services.

To date, we have [55 published projects](#) on display in our portfolio and [26 published blog posts](#). We’ve sent a newsletter bimonthly since launch and are seeing a steady increase in subscribers and hits ([view a sample newsletter](#)). Our WordPress Developer has created a [Google Analytics dashboard](#) for our team, which shows us that the e-newsletter (mailpoet) is the number two driver of traffic to our website. Since this is an on-going, long-term campaign, we are considering a professional Mail Poet subscription, which will give us more granular data on the traffic from our email and allow us to better plan our blog content going forward, as well as continue to measure our campaign results.



SUPPORTING MATERIALS

Research & Planning:

- [Brand Query & SWOT Analysis Survey Questions](#)
- [Planning Meeting Notes](#)

Implementation:

- The Answer is Yes website: comms.esd112.org
- [Shared Marketing Calendar](#)
- Bimonthly Newsletters:
 - [May 2022 \(launch\)](#)
 - [June 2022 \(summer\)](#)
 - [August 2022 \(back to school\)](#)
 - [October 2022 \(levy communications\)](#)
 - [December 2022 \(video communications\)](#)

Evaluation:

- [Google Analytics Report \(May 2022 - February 2023\)](#)
- [Revenue and Hours Spreadsheet](#)