

CASE STUDY

YouTube's TrueView Ads Help Waterways Council Boost Web Traffic 77%



Waterways Council, Inc. (WCI) is the national public policy organization that advocates for a modern and well-maintained national system of ports and inland waterways. Among WCI's key initiatives is urging for efficient funding levels for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to modernize and maintain the inland waterways lock and dam system. It also looks to educate audiences about the value of the inland waterways system as a component of the transportation supply chain.

The challenge, of course, was getting this message in front of the right people. In this case, WCI needed to reach one of the most highly sought-after groups in the country: congressional lawmakers and appropriators.

Testing the digital video waters with TrueView

WCI had previously searched for a platform that could efficiently get its message in front of this niche target. "We hadn't been able to find a regional platform for messaging. The only alternative was purchasing advertising from multiple city-specific print platforms, and that was prohibitively expensive," said Mike Toohey, president/CEO at Waterways Council.

YouTube originally didn't seem like the most obvious solution to WCI's challenge, but as the team recognized that [more viewers are spending time on the platform](#) and discovered all the ways they could target specific audience groups, they decided to give it a shot.

WCI created this inexpensive video that told a compelling story about the importance of the waterways, particularly to the agriculture sector.

About Waterway Council, Inc.

- Waterways Council, Inc. is the national public policy organization that advocates for a properly funded and well-maintained system of inland waterways and ports.
- Headquarters: Washington, D.C.
- www.waterwayscouncil.org

Goals

- Educate congressional lawmakers and appropriators about the important connection between agriculture and waterways transportation
- Educate the general public about the importance of efficient waterways for commerce and quality of life
- Generate 1M views of video ad in three months

Approach

- TrueView ad campaign
- Geo, affinity, and topic targeting to reach the right people

Results

- 1.1M views in three months; 1.6M views to date
- Boosts in brand awareness and brand favorability among those who watched the ad
- 77% increase in new sessions/visitors to the site during the first month of the campaign



[Inland Waterways Are Critical to Agriculture!](#)

The video was promoted with YouTube's [skippable TrueView ad format](#) and was also hosted on WCI's and other partners' websites.

Getting the message to the right people with custom targeting

With the video ready to go, the team could focus on how to get it in front of key congressional audiences and the general public. First, they set the campaign to run when Congress was in session (mid-August through mid-October) and geotargeted specifically to Washington, D.C. and select key congressional districts.

Then, they got more granular. They used a combination of [custom affinity targeting](#) to reach certain groups of people (i.e., political, business-minded, local news junkies) and [topic targeting](#) to show the ad before relevant content (i.e., jobs, travel, business, education, law and government).

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— Mike Toohey, President/CEO at
Waterways Council

“YouTube has tremendous reach and accessibility, allowing us to educate general audiences and reach more specific target audiences at the same time,” Toohey said.

Exceeding expectations and educating the public

The campaign met—and exceeded—WCI’s goals. Not only did over one million people watch the entire video during the campaign, it drove them to action. Traffic to WCI’s website increased 77% during the first month of the campaign.

WCI also ran a simple [Brand Lift](#) study to measure the impact on viewers’ attitudes and awareness. It found that brand awareness among the group that chose to watch (instead of skip) the ad was 28% higher than the control group that did not see the ad. It also found that viewers who saw the ad at least twice had 41% higher favorability than the control group.

Toohey concluded, “It was a wildly successful campaign and exceeded our expectations. We reached more than one million people who watched our 30-second spot in its entirety. It was so gratifying to think that those people could have a better understanding of the importance of our nation’s waterways to farmers and to the agriculture sector. This campaign helped us elevate the importance of our nation’s waterways to masses of viewers.”