



## Scripps Institution of Oceanography: A New Focus To Promote Its Centennial Year and Beyond

### *Situation*

Scripps Institution of Oceanography (SIO) was two years away from celebrating its centennial anniversary. It had a glorious history for its research programs (El Nino, drugs from the sea, and many important areas in the earth sciences) and as a graduate institution known for training some of the world's most honored oceanographers. However, the institution had many conflicting message tracks emanating from different internal communications departments, resulting in an unclear position as it planned its centennial year. Further, it was often confused with other local entities with the Scripps name. It needed new focus and direction in its marketing communications and retained GCS to assist.

### *The Plan*

Tom Gable led a team at his previous firm, The Gable Group, and initially conducted an external audit of media, peers in oceanography and earth sciences and among community, government and civic leaders. The survey sought to generate unaided perceptions of perceived leaders in the earth sciences, reasons for the opinions and recommendations on how scientific organizations could better communicate their messages. The research found SIO to be known, but only in general terms. It was perceived as second to Woods Hole, a much smaller institute on the east coast with a less distinguished history but strong media relations. Respondents were confused about the SIO mission. Some thought they saved whales. The agency team also conducted an internal audit of senior management, scientific and communications staff. In addition to finding wonderful success stories, the research identified major disconnects. Different departments often didn't share their work with others. The organization was using eight different logos and five different tag lines. News releases went without any clear positioning. PR staff was too busy responding to incoming calls to get proactive in positioning and promoting SIO proactively. The SIO Web site didn't clearly communicate and was difficult to navigate. To help focus issues, Tom Gable developed a survey to have individual respondents rank the attributes of SIO and the importance of each to various constituencies. The combined data from the rankings and other research were used as the foundation for a half-day program led by Gable to help SIO reach agreement on its core values, most compelling attributes and means of improving the efficiencies and effectiveness of all its communication activities.

## ***Results***

The research, planning and interactive meeting resulted in major breakthroughs in positioning and strategic integration of various internal functions ongoing communications programs. Messaging strategy resulted in a focus on three core values and supporting evidence for each. The participants became members of a brain trust that would meet regularly to achieve several goals agreed to during the facilitation: focus the messages for improved positioning, develop comprehensive and integrated planning among all departments, discuss short-term and long-term priorities and collaboration, coordinate all activities for budget leverage, establish a pro-active program for media relations, develop new graphic standards and a user-friendly Web site and consistently demonstrate in all messages the importance of the overall SIO effort “to understand how the world is changing and provide data world leaders can use in making decisions that impact our future.”

The Gable program launched a new and unified communications initiative at SIO that within six months began raising awareness, understanding and appreciation of the institution among all constituencies. The program was now focused to support the centennial program and also achieving the institution’s primary goal of being recognized as the nation’s leader in the integration of ocean, earth and environmental sciences for the benefit of humanity.

###

