MAKE YOUR VOICE HEARD

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Before the internet and social media, it was difficult to make your voice heard. If, let's say, you disagreed with the point of view a magazine writer took in a column or story, you could pen a letter to the magazine's editor. If you were very lucky, that letter might appear in a month or so in the magazine's "letters from readers" section. Far more likely, your missive, when received, was balled up and tossed into the editor's "round file." All in all, it was tough to get a drumbeat going.

Now, for better or for worse, social media has given everyone who is on it an instant and unfiltered voice of their own. Not unexpectedly, famous individuals often have an outsized "megaphone" on social media platforms. We are also seeing, however, that surprisingly potent voices are coming out of unexpected places.

For instance, in 2020, Massachusetts Senator Edward J. Markey faced a primary challenge from Representative Joseph P. Kennedy III. With the family's political history and name recognition in the state, Kennedy was heavily favored to win. That is until 16-year-old high school junior Calla Walsh and her band of internet activists got behind Senator Markey. Dubbed "Markey Teens" by Ms. Walsh, these teenagers, according to Ellen Barry of the *New York Times*, "...carried out a devastating political maneuver, firmly fixing Markey as a left-wing icon and Kennedy as challenging him from the right. They carried out ambitious digital organizing, using social media to conjure up an in-person workforce—'an army of 16-year-olds,' as one political veteran put it, who can 'do anything on the internet.'"

Ms. Walsh and her online troops played a decisive role in Senator Markey's victory, which saw turnout among voters between 18 and 24 shoot up to 20.9 percent in the 2020 primary, a remarkable gain from only 6.7 percent in 2018.

My point has nothing to do with politics. It's simply this. We need to be sure that the messages from our community are not only reaching our intended audiences, but also resonating with them. Long-time advantages, such as having the "official" or "traditional" voice or having the "facts" or "science", on our side are still of value. In today's volatile communications environment, however, such edges are a starting, not ending, point.

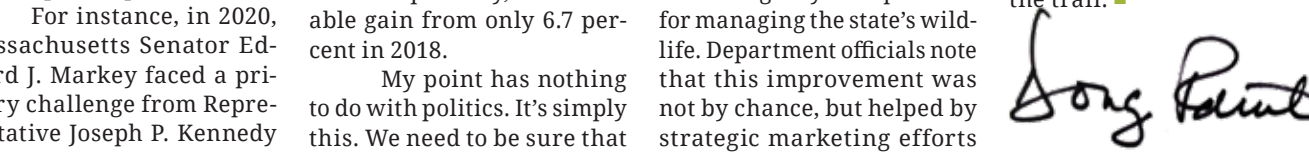
I write all of this to congratulate our friends at the Arizona Game and Fish Department who, working with long-time researchers, Responsive Management, completed a new study that included taking a hard look in the mirror.

The wide-ranging survey included public awareness and opinions about the department itself. The survey showed a notable uptick in the number of residents who identified the correct name of the department and knew that the agency is responsible for managing the state's wildlife. Department officials note that this improvement was not by chance, but helped by strategic marketing efforts throughout the state with feedback from specific socio-demographic groups and regions around the state.

The department's overall performance rating continues to be highly positive. Perhaps more importantly, it continues to be seen as the most credible source of information on wildlife issues from a list of five possible sources in the state. Survey respondents also noted that information from the department is accurate, clear and easy to understand as well as easy to access.

The question is, how do the rest of us stack up?

Hope to see you down the trail. ■



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Learn More About the GEAR UP YOUR SUMMER GIVEAWAY on Page 38.