

Exploring the Impact of Marketing in Conservation at ACI

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My breakout session at ACI turned out to be one of my favorite parts of the conference. I joined the Marketing and Communications workgroup led by Jenifer Wisniewski, Chief Marketing Officer at the National Deer Association.

Jenifer opened with a simple question: *How much are you actually spending on marketing each year—and what tactics are you using?* Hearing that some agencies invest thousands annually into social media ads, Google campaigns, billboards, and radio helped us to think about how effective outreach isn't accidental, it's intentional.

One of the highlights for me was learning about another agency's "Come With" campaign which is an effort to encourage current hunters to bring someone new along, whether to the range, a deer hunt, or other season. I loved the simplicity of the message and how it can spark real growth in participation just by inviting someone into the experience.

A big part of the discussion focused on micro-influencers. Instead of relying on big-name personalities that cost a fortune, agencies can find huge value in partnering with everyday voices who already have trust and passion in their communities. I shared how in Oklahoma, our news anchors often serve as micro-influencers for ODWC. They share our content because they genuinely believe in our mission, and it makes such a difference. For example, when they partnered with us on a weather and fishing clinic this year, their involvement drew in an entirely new audience and boosted attendance beyond what we could have done alone.

Other states shared some really creative approaches too—like teaming up with chefs to share wild game recipes, working with minority anglers, hikers, or wildlife photographers, and inviting micro-influencers to events as if they were part of the media. I walked away with so many ideas about partnerships that don't have to cost money, but can still move the needle in big ways.

What really stuck with me was the conversation around *internal influencers*—our own agency staff who could become trusted, recognizable voices for our work. While time is

always a challenge, there's so much potential in putting a real, relatable face to our message.

We also dug into the bigger challenge many of us face: proving that marketing is worth the investment. There's still this old mindset floating around that "we shouldn't spend money on marketing," when in reality, it's one of the most powerful ways to grow participation, generate revenue, and build trust with the public. Some states are already reporting back with clear ROI—showing exactly what they spent, the content they produced, and the results that came from it.

The session wrapped up with conversations about tools like push notifications and in-app messaging, which may seem small but can be incredibly effective at reaching people where they are.

What I loved the most, was the energy around that table. Everyone there cared deeply about telling our agencies' stories, finding new ways to connect, and building long-term support for conservation. I walked away inspired—not just with new strategies and ideas, but with a renewed passion for the importance of marketing in what we do every day.