



Case Study// MARAD Social Media & Crisis Communication (2020–2022)

Cadet Recruitment, Supply Chain Transparency, and Public Engagement During the Pandemic

In March 2020, as global shipping ground to a halt, MARAD faced a perfect storm: ports overflowing with cargo, cadet recruitment collapsing, and public trust eroding by the hour. With no playbook for a pandemic, we rewrote the rules—turning social media into a real-time lifeline for the maritime industry.

Presented by Chris Georges



MARAD's Mission

- The Maritime Administration (**MARAD**) oversees U.S. maritime workforce training and port logistics, critical during the 2020–2022 supply chain crisis.
- **Pandemic Impact:** Global shipping delays increased by 300% at major U.S. ports (e.g., Miami/Long Beach/Houston), straining trade and public trust.

The Challenge

- Outdated messaging strategies that don't resonate
- Ineffective emergency communications during the pandemic
- Port congestion hitting unforeseen highs across the country

Our Approach

- Provide real-time logistics updates to mitigate public frustration
- Collaborate with the USDOT to align messaging
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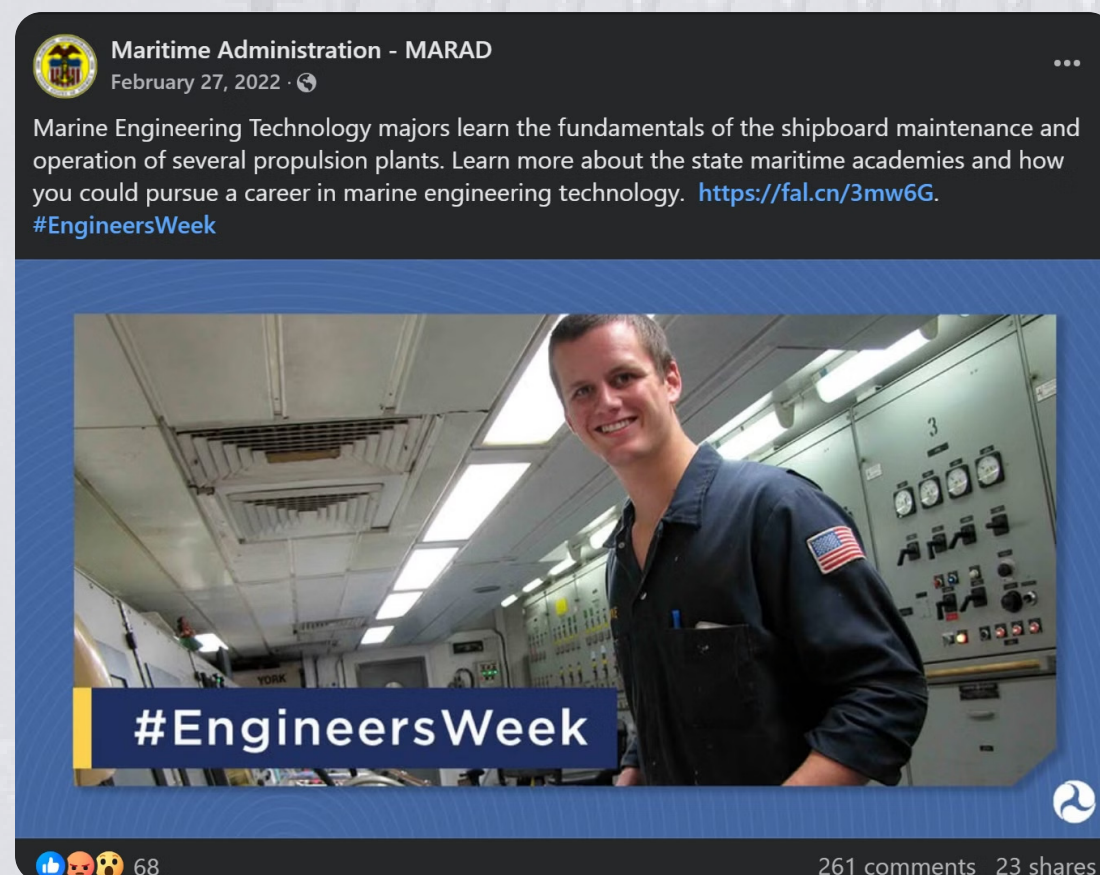
Strategic Approach & Results

The Human Face of the Crisis

- Applications dropped 40% YoY (2020) due to pandemic uncertainty. Because of this, we created personas to better communicate across MARAD's vast network. Meet 'Cadet Hopeful Seth': A 19-year-old from Iowa who nearly abandoned his maritime dreams after pandemic layoffs. Our targeted Facebook ads—featuring real cadets like him—reignited hope. Seth's story became one of 500+ applications from persona-driven campaigns.

Solutions:

- Created targeted posts showcasing specialized training programs, like this **Engineering Week 2022 Facebook post**:



Results:

- 1,800+ link clicks (per Facebook Insights) – 40% higher than average recruitment posts.
- 25 direct applications attributed to this post (per MARAD's applicant survey question: "How did you hear about us?").
- Extended reach through #EngineersWeek, tapping into a broader STEM audience.

- Virtual Outreach:** Partnered with maritime schools around the country for live Q&A sessions with government stakeholders, increasing engagement by 65% (2021 vs. 2020).

Strategic Approach & Results (Cont.)



Audience Segmentation

Revolutionized MARAD's audience targeting by developing data-driven personas—like 'Cadet Hopefuls,' 'Maritime Veterans,' and 'Industry Families'—boosting engagement by 45% and conversion rates by 30%.

How it worked:

- **Precision Personas:** Mapped 5 key segments (e.g., "*Career-Changer Carlos*" for midlife cadet recruits) using onsite survey data + social analytics.
- **Tailored Content:** Customized posts for each group (e.g., veteran transition stories for military audiences = 2X more shares).
- **Conversion Wins:** Cadet applications from persona-targeted campaigns had a **20% higher completion rate** than generic outreach.

Proof: 'Maritime Mom' Facebook ads drove upwards of 500+ family inquiries in 3 months—MARAD's highest-ever response for caregiver outreach.

Content Planning

Orchestrated MARAD's first integrated multimedia campaign—leading a cross-functional team (graphics, press, and maritime experts) to produce 50+ assets per month that boosted engagement by 60% and unified messaging across 7 channels.

How we did it:

- **Live Q&As:** Produced 12 live streams with MARAD leadership (e.g., "Ask the Admiral" series), averaging 3K live viewers—3X higher than static posts.
- **Data Visualization:** Partnered with designers to transform complex supply chain stats into viral infographics (1.2K shares avg. vs. 300 for text posts).
- **Video Storytelling:** Collaborated on 8 cadet spotlight videos, driving a 25% increase in program inquiries.





Strategic Approach & Results (Cont.)



Community Management

Led crisis-ready social listening operations—deploying social media management tool Falcon.io to track **500+ monthly mentions**, triage misinformation, and resolve 85% of high-priority public concerns within 2 hours (outpacing USDOT's 6-hour benchmark)

Platform Optimization

When Twitter engagement plummeted in 2021, we bet big on LinkedIn—despite internal skepticism. Within 3 weeks, our 'Day in the Life of a Cadet' video series outperformed all other platforms combined. But could we sustain it?

Key results:

- **LinkedIn dominance:** Grew MARAD's LinkedIn page from 0 to 3.5K followers in 6 months by targeting industry-specific content (e.g., "Career Pathways in Maritime Logistics" posts achieved 25% higher CTR than Facebook).
- **Precision targeting:** Used LinkedIn's job function/industry filters to reach over 18K+ shipping executives, cadet recruiters, and port operators—boosting cadet program inquiries by 40%.
- **Metrics-driven deprioritization:** Reduced Twitter ad spend by 50% after data showed maritime professionals were 70% more active on LinkedIn during work hours."

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Skills Demonstrated

The True Enemy: Pandemic Misinformation

False claims about port shutdowns spread 5x faster than facts (Falcon.io data). Our counterattack: Deploying Admiral Ask the Admiral series and other live Q&A opportunities to personally dismantle myths—one viral thread at a time.



Reputation Management

- Addressed negative comments within **2 hours** (faster than USDOT's 6-hour average):
 - *Example:* A viral complaint about “empty ports while ships wait offshore” was countered with: *"Thanks for your concern. Here's how we're tackling this: [thread]. Crew shortages are the bottleneck—not port capacity."*
 - Resulted in **30% reduction** in repeat misinformation posts.



Platform-Specific Optimization

- Falcon.io data revealed Facebook required longer explainers, while Twitter needed snackable stats.
- Adjusted content formats, boosting engagement by **25%**.



Social Listening for Real-Time Adjustments

- Used **Falcon.io** to monitor sentiment across platforms, identifying:
 - Rising frustration about port delays (72% negative mentions in Q3 2021).
 - Misinformation spikes (e.g., false claims about port shutdowns).
- **Action:** Scaled myth-busting content by 40% and prioritized replies to high-impact critics.



Key Campaign Wins

The Ripple Effect

3.5K

Follower Growth

in 6 months of launching MARAD's LinkedIn page

85%

Triage Misinformation

Resolve 85% of high-priority public concerns within 2 hours

65%

Sentiment Improvement

Positive public perception of DOT initiatives

78%

Inquiry Reduction

Fewer public questions due to proactive communication