

ABA Communications Board of Directors Report

Spring 2024

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The four months have been quite a whirlwind. ABA's communications have not been idle from a highly successful Marketplace to a complete website refresh.

This report covers four key areas:

- Advocacy efforts
- Newsletters
- Social media
- Website

Advocacy

Comms has assisted the GAP team in messaging through various channels regarding key issues over the first few months of this year.

- CERT Tax Bill
- New York MTA Congestion Tolling
- PANJNY Midtown Terminal revamp project
- FMCSA CDL Requirements
- EPA GHG Phase 3 final rule
- Windstar Line's Jeff Greteman's testimony in front of the Subcommittee on Highways and Transit of the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
- Monthly GAP report dissemination

Media Outreach

Since January 1, ABA has sent out four press releases and one media advisory and had 616 mentions in the press, with an approximate news reach of 873 Million:

Advisory

- Clean Freight Coalition to Release Landmark Study on Cost of Supply Chain Electrification

Press Releases

- ABA Begins Search to Replace Retiring CEO
- ABA Applauds Motorcoaches as Eco-Friendly Transportation Leaders

- Electrification of US Medium- and Heavy-Duty Commercial Fleets Requires Nearly \$1 Trillion
- ABA Urges Caution in Transition to Electric Vehicles

In addition, a few ABA blog articles also had some traction with the press:

- ABA Joins Call on Mayor Bowser and DC City Council to Reduce Crime and Enhance Safety
- ABA's Jeff Greteman Testifies Before House Subcommittee on Rural Transportation Challenges
- ABA Submits Comments on New York City's Congestion Pricing Plan

Looking Ahead

We will create more article-oriented posts and blogs on these critical topics through ABA member volunteers to help spread the message.

Newsletters

The association's newsletters underwent comprehensive evaluation, revealing mixed performance across the board.

Tour Stop (weekly)

Among the seven newsletters, only Tour Stop met or exceeded standard benchmarks for a digest format: an average of 36% open rate (vs. industry benchmark of 32%) and an average 4.2% click-to-open rate (CTOR) (vs. travel/tourism industry benchmark of 6.2%).

Bus Bulletin (4x week)

Bus Bulletin featured similar content from other industry newsletters and average engagement, with an average open rate of 32% (vs. the industry benchmark of 33%) and an average CTOR of 2.2%, vs. the transportation industry benchmark of 3%. The biggest problem with the Bulletin wasn't average engagement but the time spent each week putting together each digest: approximately 3 hours a day to source, verify, and determine information to be included.

Adjustments were made at the start of April, reducing its frequency to twice a week, focusing on ABA-related news, and sourcing the most important and relevant content for members. This increased the size of each Bulletin's content and readability. The shift appears to be positive: in just one month, the average Bulletin open rate is just under 40% with a CTOR of around 4.%. The time spent putting the digest together has dropped from an average of 12 hours a week to approximately 5.

Women in Buses (monthly)

Women In Buses Monthly experimented with a more dynamic layout to align with its website and social media content. The GAP Report stands out with a remarkable 35% click-through rate, prompting plans to repurpose its content as blog posts for a wider audience reach.

Insider (monthly)

The Insider saw an average open rate of 26% and a CTOR average of 3%. It is also the most advertised digest. Because the digest is a mix of the prior week's news from the Tour Stop and Bus Bulletin, the return on investment proved to be low. The newsletter was discontinued at the end of March; all advertisers were notified and their ad buys shifted to social media-branded content and pick-ups in Tour Stop, which provides better engagement.

No feedback has been given on the cessation of Insider.

Itinerary (monthly)

The Itinerary, the poorest performer (1.1% CTOR), was removed from the newsletter schedule, coinciding with a new partnership with Tourism Economics. Instead, monthly blog articles will convey similar information from Tourism Economics, ensuring content dissemination through alternative communication channels.

Moving Forward

These adjustments aim to enhance newsletter effectiveness, leverage high-performing content, and optimize engagement strategies through ABA's website and social channels while adjusting for other communication priorities. The transition towards more dynamic and targeted content reflects a commitment to better serve the association's audience and stakeholders, maximizing communication impact across various platforms.

Social media

At the beginning of the year, the ABA utilized five social media platforms—YouTube, LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram, and X (formerly Twitter)—each with varying activity levels and effectiveness. Similar to the newsletter assessment, each platform underwent evaluation based on content quality, engagement metrics, and audience reach.

Q1 metrics (percentage increase/decrease vs. Q4 2023)

Platform	Followers added	Engagement (interactions)	Impressions (content views)	Reach
Facebook	144 (+1.4%)	10,007 (+4,711%)	166,316 (+1,695%)	55,200 (+257%)
Instagram	113 (+106%)	345 (-34%)	20,985 (+2,632%)	8,000 (+1,200%)
LinkedIn	360 (+86.5%)	5,037 (+1,132%)	66,104 (+669%)	NA

YouTube

Due to limited staff resources, YouTube primarily serves as a video repository, maintaining a passive role in content generation. It is used primarily for embedding. Future plans, dependent on budget and personnel availability, could see this channel become more active.

X

X (formerly Twitter) faces challenges from audience shifts and platform modifications, resulting in dwindling organic reach. Despite maintaining a presence, ABA's activity on X remains passive. For

example, the most popular post on the account in Q1 was a 14-post thread of Windstar’s Jeff Greteman’s congressional testimony – and it only made 217 impressions and 67 engagements.

Instagram

Instagram, the association's newer platform, is gradually establishing a posting rhythm to boost content consistency and engagement. While follower and engagement growth is modest, the trend is upward.

Facebook

Facebook emerged as one of the primary platforms for ABA messaging, catering primarily to our tourism-related members and fans. Consistent posting has significantly increased follower and engagement metrics compared to the previous year. This has spawned additional advertising opportunities YGS is now offering their prospects.

LinkedIn

LinkedIn is the other primary platform for ABA messaging, catering primarily to our bus and motorcoach operators, charter services, suppliers, drivers, maintenance professionals, and travel and tour leadership. Consistent posting has maintained a steady growth of engagement and impressions, positively impacting our follower count.

Other social media

Additional social channels like Mastadon and Bluesky are being evaluated, considering factors such as member presence and content suitability. No accounts have been created at this time.

Moving Forward

Overall, the social media landscape presents challenges and opportunities, necessitating strategic adjustments to optimize engagement and reach across diverse platforms for consistent messaging.

ABA followers across all social media accounts as of April 22):

Facebook: 9,206, compared to UMA’s 4,200 (approx.)

Instagram: 2,192, compared to UMA’s 0 (no account)

LinkedIn: 5,409, compared to UMA’s 2,012

X: 4,810*, compared to UMA’s 1,724

**Caveat: there has been a flood of spambot accounts “following” a lot of organizations and branded accounts. ABA sees 30-50 of these accounts latch on every month.*

Website

The ABA initiated a website overhaul in collaboration with YGS in Q3 of 2023, transitioning from an outdated content management system to a more robust WordPress environment. Leveraging familiarity with WordPress from the Meetings team's Marketplace microsite, efforts were made to streamline website systems.

Getting an accurate read on 2023's site metrics is difficult, as Google underwent a massive analytics change from its original Universal to the new G4. ABA's analytics reporting for G4 occurred in April 2023; based on that switch, the ABA website saw 63,000 unique visitors across 8 months. Of those visitors, 12,000 visited the Marketplace website.

For Q1 of this year, the site saw 28,000 visitors—27K unique—which is a 10% increase over the preceding Q4.

Content migration commenced in February 2024, with the old site's design replicated on the WordPress platform by late March. Concurrently, YGS developed a Content Solutions Hub, with ABA as its inaugural user, necessitating time for alignment with ABA's requirements.

Despite initial challenges, the new site went live in early April. ABA staff has collaborated with Comms to identify and rectify minor functional issues, resulting in a cleaner website with responsive content in the News Center, reinforcing messaging across channels, and enhancing domain authority.

Furthermore, ABA engaged a consultant to conduct a comprehensive social media and website content audit. This initiative yielded short-, medium-, and long-term goals to improve search engine optimization, domain authority, site referrals, targeted traffic, and address harmful toxic backlinks.

These endeavors aim to ensure ABA's messaging is cohesive and consistent, providing members and stakeholders with enhanced resources and information essential for their business needs.

Tasks for the remainder of 2024:

- Create a prototype interactive audio training guide for crisis communications
- Create prototype crisis communications training scenario(s) to test at MKPL 25, with anticipated rollout for membership in 2026
- Create a UTM generation spreadsheet for specific campaigns (to help with website analytics)
- Create a documented taxonomy of keywords for use with generated content
- Clean up navigation and dead pages; consolidate as needed
- Use HTML content where possible (not reliant on PDF or image files to convey text)
- Address toxic backlink issue before it gets damaging
- Consistent metadata use and creation of SOP for webpage content creation
- Website content standards update
- Evaluate navigation to align with our 2 main audience types
- Reorganize the ABAF Research section for more of a "HUB" resource center
- New SOP for News Center content, Events listings, and channel dissemination
- Refresh the ABAF Scholarship section for 2025 season
- Create new branded visual guides for website and social content
- Refine hashtag usage
- Write/share more ABA content

- Encourage and identify a core group of members for consistent blog/article contributions on industry topics, to build a thought leadership pool
- Leverage engagement and opportunities for more paid advertising options
- Video testimonial content for Membership, in time for renewal season
- Video testimonial content for Marketplace, in time for July appointment season
- Summer info campaign on eco-friendly bus transportation (using TTI report and infographics as primary messaging campaign)
- Branding ABAF research as whitepapers and conducting mini-campaigns for public awareness
- Better merging of Destinations digital with website content hub