

FIVE SIMPLE ^{and free} WAYS

To use Tech to your Advantage

No denying it; we are deeply rooted in a technological age. However, some social forecasters are touting that we are at the end of the “Information Age” which began more than 25 years ago with the onset of the internet. They surmise that we are now entering a new age, perhaps the “Experience Age”. We are still firmly connected with data, yet information and data are not the same. Instead, technology today is being used more and more to enhance our experiences rather than simply organize information. To improve experiences, we use devices of all kinds – smartphones, diagnostic microcomputers, hi-res digital cameras, even smart refrigerators. Technology can seem intimidating and expensive. However, it’s not an “all or nothing” situation. Given the massive range of choices, you can be choosy, then stick with what works for your needs instead of chasing the latest fad. Here are five simple and free ways to use internet or software technology to your and your city or rural water system’s advantage by focusing on experience rather than information.

YOUR PLAN

Whether tracking your goals, your vision, or a simple to-do list, using technology to maintain your plan helps you stay on track and motivated as well as helps with communication to others.

- ◆ Manage tasks with built-in apps on your smart phone
- ◆ Set calendar reminders or alarms for important notifications
- ◆ Share a private Google calendar with others to track due dates
- ◆ Inventory software, hardware, and equipment using MS Excel alternatives such as Google spreadsheets, OpenOffice, or

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LibreOffice

- ◆ Use KRWA’s replacement scheduler template to track financial obligations with equipment
- ◆ Use Doodle.com to request availability on dates and times for meetings or events

YOUR STAFF

Using technology to manage and communicate with fellow staff members can save your city or RWD time and money, while creating a collaborative culture.

- ◆ Use WhatsApp.com as an alternative to group texts
- ◆ Use Band.us app as a communication, calendar, and document platform similar to Facebook only private
- ◆ Upload privately shared “how to” videos to Vimeo.com of real events as training and onboarding
- ◆ Document staff workflows in an SOP using a free MS Word alternative such as OpenOffice
- ◆ Utilize cloud storage and CRM tools using Bitrix24.com or Google accounts
- ◆ Recruit talent from your area using Indeed.com or LinkedIn.com
- ◆ Outsource design, projects, data collection, etc. using crowd

sourcing such as

DesignCrowd.com or Fiverr.com (using the site is free, but you select a winner at your desired cost)

YOUR BOARD or COUNCIL

Communicating and scheduling with volunteers can be challenging, especially if individuals have different preferences for being reached. Especially in this arena, keeping things simple and your platform choices minimal and clean are crucial.

- ◆ Predict the data the board or council needs for decisions and collect it using spreadsheets or other documentation
- ◆ Use live video or screencast video to showcase and promote your staff’s activities
- ◆ Use graphing tools to interpret and visually represent data or diagrams, such as Google spreadsheets or Draw.io
- ◆ Supply board members with information ahead of meetings using Box.com or Google Drive
- ◆ Conduct remote meetings or video conference calls using Zoom.com or Join.me

YOUR CUSTOMERS

Users in your city or RWD are a top

priority, but municipalities rarely have budgets for marketing. That's why using free tools are often the only option. Your worthwhile efforts can provide excellent PR and build loyalty for lasting benefits.

- ◆ Use MailChimp.com to build and deploy an email newsletter with automatic subscription and opt out management
- ◆ Feature experts or interesting stories from your community by having certain users write a short blurb in your email newsletter.
- ◆ Build your brand and image by developing a mission or vision statement
- ◆ Have a clean, updated logo

consistently featured on billing notifications, letterhead, business cards, your website, or email signatures

- ◆ Make sure email signatures among your staff are consistent and contain their full name, job title, system name or city, phone numbers, and your website address.
- ◆ Collect user stories or suggestions in a simple format using survey tools such as Google Forms or SurveyMonkey.com
- ◆ Build your social presence where your customers are, by using Facebook pages, Instagram, YouTube, and/or LinkedIn

YOURSELF

Now that you have everyone else taken care of, focus on your own experiences and use those tools like Google or Bing or VRBO.com to search for a great vacation setting! While it can be difficult, decide to step away, especially if you're short staffed; it is a necessary part of keeping yourself fresh and being exposed to new ideas.

By focusing on creating an experience, rather than collecting information or working with data, you can choose technology tools that benefit your plan, your staff, your board/council, your customers, and most of all YOU!

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Since 1997, Jen Sharp (JenSharp.com) has served business and government across Kansas and the US and even internationally, specializing in Web development, design & programming including e-Learning, ecommerce, content management systems, and other small business solutions.



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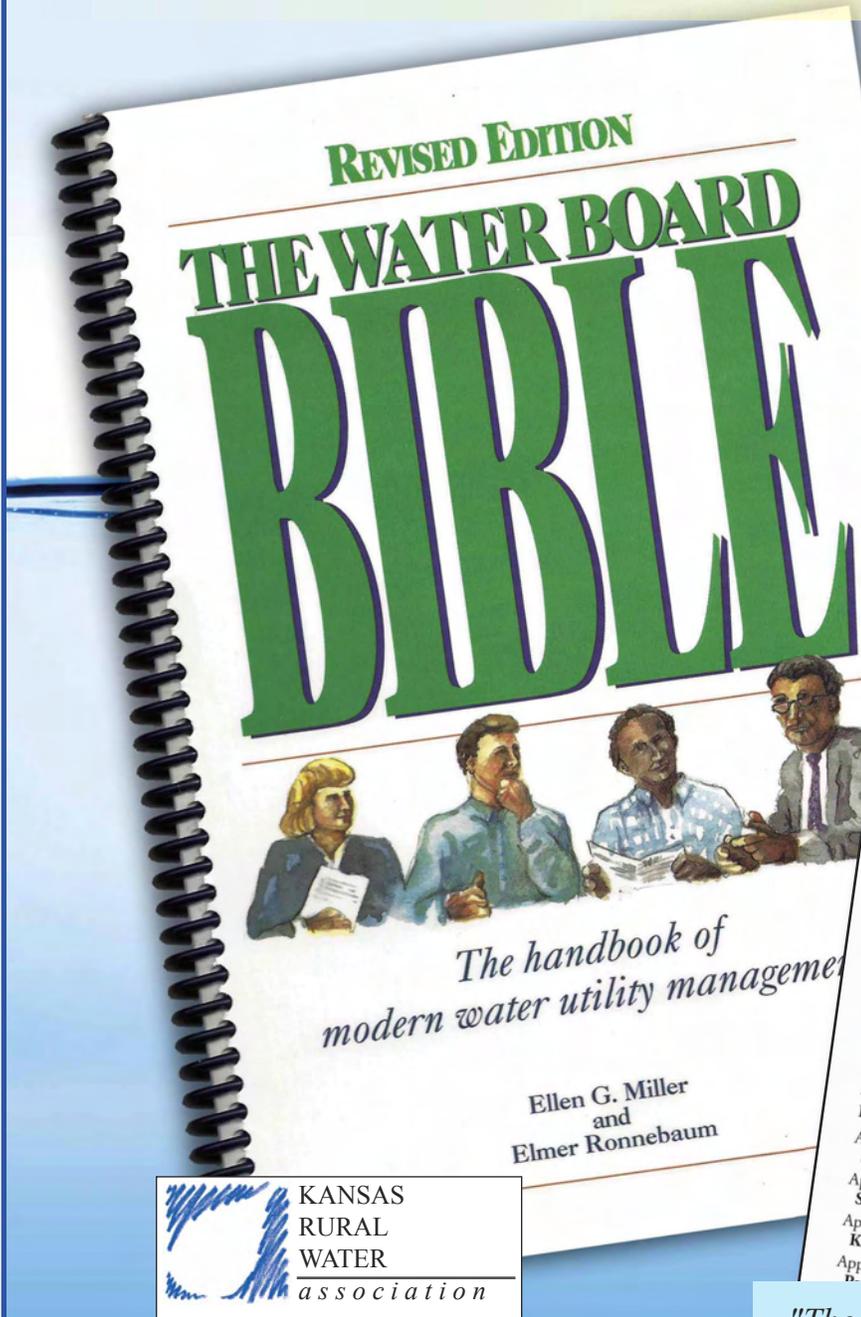
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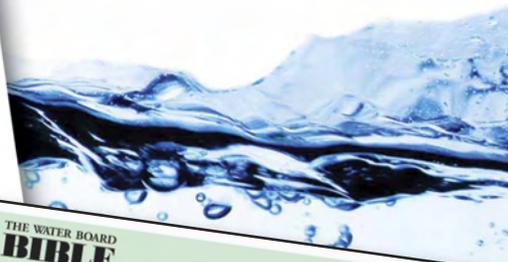
Proudly Serving the Midwest Since 1954

A newly updated *Water Board Bible* is now available from Kansas Rural Water Association



Building on the strong foundation document authored in 1993 by Ellen Miller and Elmer Ronnebaum, the "Bible", was reprinted in 1995 and again in 2010 with minor revisions.

A much more extensive review and updates in the 2016 printing were provided by Gary Hanson, Stumbo Hanson, LLP (ret.).



THE WATER BOARD BIBLE

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"The Water Board Bible strikes the right tone with respect to current trends including diversity in the workforce, open government and post-Flint regulatory climate as well as the relationship with the consuming public and their water supply expectations,"

– Gary Hanson

KRWA also continues to make its handbooks available to other state and national organizations. More than 42,000 copies have been provided.

To obtain copies, contact KRWA, 785.336.3760.

Funding for the 2016 printing is courtesy of the Kansas Rural Water Finance Authority. The Authority has offered to donate copies to every rural water district in Kansas, upon such request. The handbook will also be used for board training provided by KRWA.