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Feature: Telling the Story behind the Photos

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Oceanographic research and data sampling provide the knowledge and means to forecast key ocean-influenced processes and phenomena. These research cruises generate unique but challenging opportunities for education outreach and information managers attempting to convey the excitement of discovery to the general public in near real time. For outreach coordinators it's about unlocking the science creatively and demonstrating how the research benefits current and future generations; getting the public to understand the value of the science behind the research. The added challenges of having limited internet-connection bandwidth to transfer data back to land, as well as time constraints and physical exhaustion all compound the effort. Nevertheless, ocean research cruises provide an opportunity to leverage the innate fascination people seem to have with the open sea with a way to become connected with the science. Pairing outreach coordinators and information managers, helps to maximize the resources available to communicate the science to the public, as well as inspire younger generations to take an interest in the research.

One of the first outreach implementations for Palmer LTER cruises was a project called 'picture-of-the-day' (POD). Its intentions were to bring ship life closer to those at home and advance ocean education through imagery. A photograph during the cruises was sent emailed out with a brief description each day. As the cruises continued year after year, the photographs were collected and made available through a media gallery to both store and to fulfill the numerous requests for images, videos, and content used in other outreach projects. Successful in its design and

implementation utilizing limited data-transmission availabilities, this POD project prompted feedback from viewers, connected family, friends and scientists, gave a brief glimpse into what life at sea was like aboard the research vessels and exposed the public to the many oceanographic instrumentation technologies used during scientific research. While appealing, over time there was increased interest to involve the public more readily and build off of the POD concept.



Expanding on the PAL POD experience, the 3rd annual CCE process cruise this year outfitted two teachers with digital cameras, computers and video equipment and asked them to capture life aboard the R/V Melville. Kids, schools and classrooms, families and friends were all invited to interact with the two teachers aboard the ship through a blog where they could ask questions, investigate some of the big ideas surrounding this year's research and also interact with the teachers, scientists and graduate students themselves. Having an identifiable audience and a defined field of interest helped in knowing that we would be able to manage the feedback from participants. Additionally, unlike POD, the blog gave the readers the opportunity to guide the direction of inquiry and help our outreach program understand what the general public was interested in hearing. The teachers posted entries each day and although still nowhere near real-time, the blog replaced the passive reception of news from the ship with an interactive communication forum. What were ordinary daily routines at sea to scientists were now seen through a fresh pair of eyes from a teacher's perspective while aboard the cruise. Furthermore the comments posted by those on land added an additional collaborative point of view. The blogging tool far exceeded our goals, being easy to use and simple to set up. It allowed users to add photographs, short video clips and scientific content. It opened up communication between the ship and shore, built upon existing program components like Picture-of-the-Day and fulfilled the needs for outreach by combining information technology.