



CAFÉ du SURO

Reputation
Management and Crisis
Communications
Through California's
Largest Wildfire

375

Presentation by Visit Ventura

CALIFORNIA

Ventura

A vibrant sunset over a beach. The sky transitions from a deep blue at the top to a bright orange and red near the horizon, with wispy clouds catching the light. The ocean waves are visible in the distance, and the wet sand of the beach reflects the colors of the sky.

Agenda

- Preparedness
 - Thomas Fire Overview
 - Response
 - Recovery
 - Key Takeaways
-

Preparedness



Preparedness

Crisis Communications Plan

- Sought resources from other destinations
- Looked at leading resources and publications from crisis management organizations
- Shared draft with partners for feedback (City, Sheriff's Office of Emergency Services, Chamber of Commerce, Fairgrounds, Port District, Downtown, California State Parks, & Channel Islands National Park)

Preparedness

Crisis Communications Plan

- Plan consists of scenario plans, action plans, assessment guidelines, & templates
- Presented to Board of Directors with healthy discussion and unanimous support
- Met with the City of Ventura to discuss implementation

Preparedness

Crisis Communications Plan

Protocol

- Set procedures for information verification, clearance, and approval, and coordinating with stakeholders

Roles and Responsibilities

- Identified a Crisis Management Team & a Tourism Response and Recovery Group

Preparedness

Crisis Communications Plan

Contact Lists

- Made extensive contact lists of stakeholders, media, & key audiences

Triggers

- Provided diagnosis tools
- Identified possible blind spots

Scenario Planning

- Built out message maps
- Conducted simulations

Preparedness

Communications Tools

Communications Tools

- Tips on dealing with the media, interview guidelines, potential spokespeople, background materials, Q&A
- Templates: media inquiry log, media statement, urgent information request, advisory notice/update, tourism industry debrief questionnaire, crisis message map

A nighttime photograph of a marina. In the foreground, several boats are docked at a wooden pier. The water reflects the lights from the buildings and the fire. In the background, a large fire is burning, with bright orange and red flames and thick smoke rising into the dark sky. The fire is situated behind a residential area with houses and palm trees. The overall scene is a dramatic contrast between the calm marina and the intense fire.

Thomas Fire Overview



Thomas Fire Overview

Initial Crisis

- Small brush fire started at 6:30 pm 20 miles from Ventura
 - Wind gusts reaching 60 miles per hour brought the fire to Ventura in 3 hours
 - 27,000 people evacuated in one hour
 - Visit Ventura began a crisis assessment and ongoing monitoring
-



Response



Response

Personal Action Plans

- Immediately enacted social media crisis strategy; stop regular posts, positive & transparent posts, unifying hashtags, grateful & community posts, engage all comments, let users vent, disseminate accurate information, dispel rumours, guide travelers
 - Shared guidelines with partners
 - Reached 4 million Facebook users in December (1.1 million engagements)
-



Response

Consumer Strategy

Organizational positioning, including integrated marketing communications, brand identity and risk management.

Response

Consumer Strategy

Website

- Created a landing page: visitventuraca.com/thomasfire with updates regarding: special hotel rates for evacuees from surrounding towns; where to find current updates; what is open; ways to help
- Shared with community partners, consumers, social channels
- 6,335 page views in December



Response

Consumer Strategy

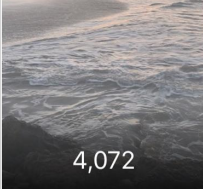
Social Media

- +1359 increase in followers
- Facebook reach: 4,206,563
- Instagram reach: 415,013
- Twitter reach: 189,000

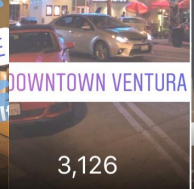


WE ARE CONNECTING
CURRENT ON GROUND INFORMATION
WITH LABOR FORCES

WE ARE PLANNING ON
STAYING ON SITE



10% off refills at
THE REFILL SHOPPE
Today when you
mention #Ventura Strong



31,706

28,060

27,082

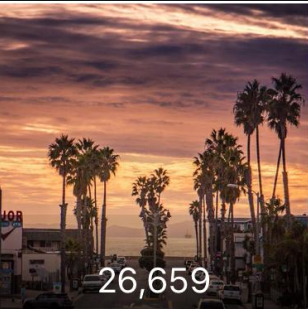
4,952

4,072

3,699

3,126

2,971



26,659



25,832



25,145



4,435

FREE PARKING
in Downtown Ventura
through December!
Effective Immediately.

VENTURA
Open!!!

3,294



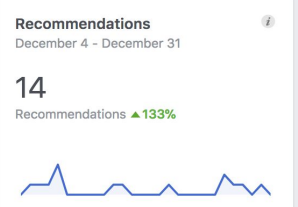
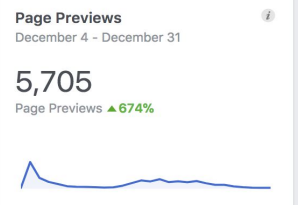
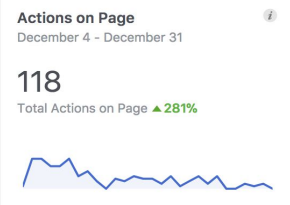
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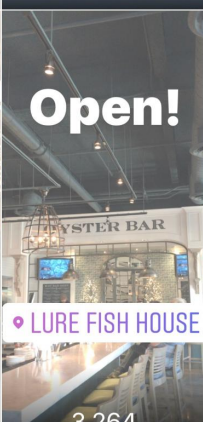
2,898



2,764



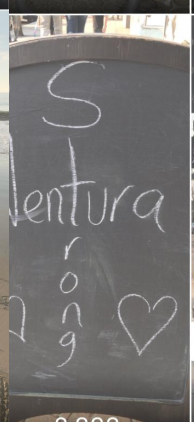
3,038



3,264



3,002



2,888



3,076



Response

Consumer Strategy

Blog

- Here's the Latest on Two Trees: 12/23, 67k+ reach
 - An update on your favorite spots in Ventura: 12/20, 20k+ reach
 - 20 Good things that happened in Ventura since the Thomas Fire: 12/16, 57k+ reach
 - This is what Ventura looks like right now: 12/11, 41k+ reach
-

HERE'S THE LATEST ON VENTURA'S TWO TREES.



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email address

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AN UPDATE ON YOUR FAVORITE SPOTS IN VENTURA



Sign up for our newsletter

email address

Subscribe



by Fiorilla Calderon

YOUR FAVORITE SPOTS ARE STILL HERE!

We could never thank each of the 8,400 incident personnel enough for all they've done to keep Ventura safe. Although the fire reached our hillsides, firefighters did an amazing job of fighting back and most neighborhoods -including our downtown, midtown, beaches, and harbor, were untouched.

Here are a few photos of some of your favorite spots. All photos were taken after the Thomas Fire impacted the City of Ventura.

In downtown Ventura, Main Street looks as it always has; charming, historic, and littered with locally-owned shops. Stop by for yummy eats, craft brews, live music, art galleries, and unique buys.



In the wake of the Thomas Fire, Venturans have learned that the Ventura Botanical Gardens were hit hard, more good news as the silhouette of the hills over, more good news as the silhouette of the hills over, more good news as the silhouette of the hills over. As the smoke clears, we're eager to learn more about their damage and needs. Here are responses:

How are the Two Trees?

Two trees are still standing. The young tree is still standing but it will recover. The replacement tree at the Rancho Ventura Trust will do all they can to minimize damage. It was completely charred from the fire.

Can we hike up to Two Trees?

Not for a while. We need to ensure we give it the time it needs to be ready to be hiked.

How can we help?

20 GOOD THINGS THAT HAPPENED IN VENTURA SINCE THE THOMAS FIRE



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email address

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THIS IS WHAT VENTURA LOOKS LIKE RIGHT NOW.

In no particular order, here are a few awesome things that happened in Ventura since the Thomas Fire.

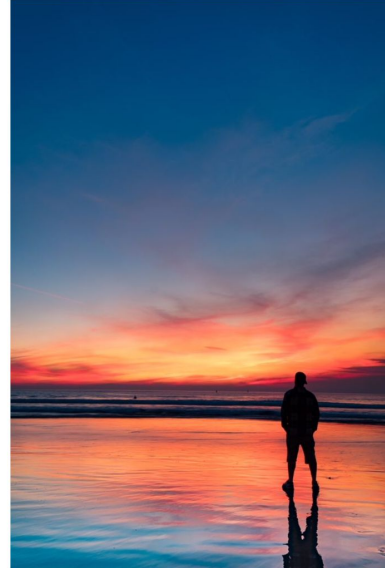
1. Surfboards for first responders



Photo by Steve Gattarachi/Surfers point Ventura ca

Neighbors at Ventura's Surfers' Point rallied to gather surfboards, stand-up paddle boards, and wetsuits for firefighters. Within 20 minutes of putting up this sign, there were 20 firefighters in the water. A surfing is

2. Diamond necklaces for those who lost their homes



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Response

Consumer Strategy

Email Marketing

- 45k+ recipients
 - Thomas Fire: The best ways to help: 12/08, 12.4%
 - Thomas Fire: Even more ways to help: 12/13, 11.6%
 - 20 good things that happened in Ventura since the Thomas Fire: 12/16, 9.1% An update on your favorite spots in Ventura: 12/20, 7.5%
-

CALIFORNIA Ventura

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#VenturaStrong



#VenturaStrong



20 good things.

In no particular order, here are a few awesome things that happened in Ventura since the Thomas Fire.

1. Surfboards for first responders



Your favorite spots are still here!

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EVEN MORE WAY:

It feels almost impossible to overstate the amount of love and support our community continues to receive from near and far. In Ventura, we are all working together to ensure everybody is safe. Thank you for everything you're doing!

Open your home to somebody displaced by the Thomas Fire. Bennett's office at (805) 654-2703. Or reach out to us at (805) 654-2703.

VOLUNTEER

It's only two weeks until Christmas and many of our community members are in need of ornaments and gifts. Throughout the week of December 1st-7th, the City of Ventura County invites everyone to their pavilion. People are welcome to bring ornaments and gifts. Complimentary snacks and water will also be provided for the kids. Head down and experience the best ways to help.

The Red Cross has an urgent need for volunteer work to casework to donation management. Contact us at (805) 654-2703.

HERE ARE A FEW WAYS TO HELP

Thank you to everyone near and away who has reacted to our needs. Our hearts are full.

The question we hear the most is, "How can I help?" In the wake of spontaneous disasters, many generous community members step up to help. One of the challenges of a crisis is that they can effectively help their neighbors and neighbors in the best ways to help.

Response

Consumer Strategy

Visitor Center

- “The fire does not in any way seemed to have dimmed [visitors] enthusiasm for the charms of Ventura. If anything, there is a deeper sympathy”
- Ventura City Fire T-shirts: 100% of proceeds for Ribbons of Life Breast Cancer Foundation
- #VenturaStrong t-shirts: 25% of proceeds for Ventura Botanical Gardens & Serra Cross Foundation

Response

Media Strategy

- Over 2.4 million news articles mention the Thomas Fire
- Over 55,000 mention Ventura specifically
- National and international
- Print and radio
- Joint statement published with VCLA
- 2 media pitches: The best ways to help, 20 good things that happened in Ventura
- 8 media inquiries related to _____ the fire's impact on tourism



The
New York
Times

THE WALL STREET
JOURNAL.



NEW YORK
PUBLIC
RADIO



The
Washington
Post



Response

Media Strategy

- Thomas Fire: Ways To Help PR: Sent 12/08 | 948 Recipients | Open Rate 24.3%
- 20 Good Things PR: Sent 12/16 | 2,456 Recipients | Open Rate 16.7%
- Ventura Post-Fire Update - Meeting Planners & Travel Trade: Sent 12/21 | 3,182 Recipients | Open Rate 16.4%

CALIFORNIA Ventura



HERE ARE A FEW WAYS TO HELP.

Thank you to everyone near and away who has reached out to make sure we are safe. Our hearts are full.

The question we hear the most is, "How can I help?" In the aftermath of spontaneous disasters, many generous community members step up to help those in need around them. One of the challenges of a crisis is mobilizing caring citizens so that they can effectively help their neighbors and neighborhoods. Here are a few of the best ways to help.

CALIFORNIA Ventura



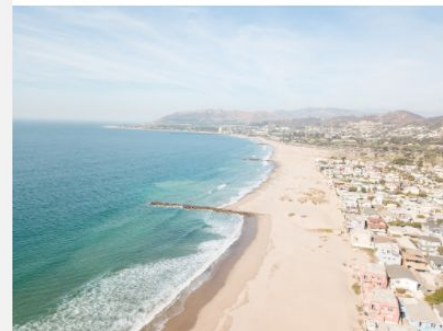
20 good things.

In no particular order, here are a few awesome things that happened in Ventura since the Thomas Fire.

1. Surfboards for first responders



CALIFORNIA Ventura



A little about how the Thomas Fire impacted Ventura.

We could never thank each of the 8,400 incident personnel enough for all they've done to keep Ventura safe. Although the fire reached our hillsides, firefighters did an amazing job of fighting back and most neighborhoods - including all of our hotels, downtown, midtown, beaches, and harbor, were untouched.

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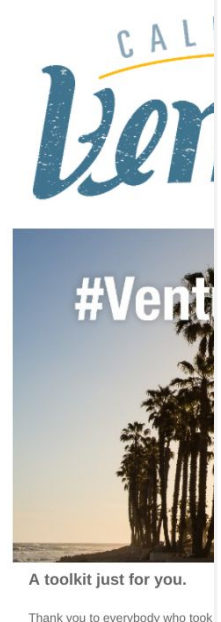
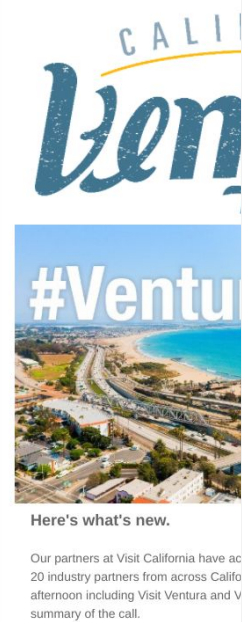
Ventura's majestic City Hall stands intact atop California Street. Unfortunately, the Ventura Botanical Gardens behind it were directly impacted by the fire. Plans to rebuild are already in place.

Response

Partners Strategy

Partner Updates

- 2k+ recipients
 - Crisis Messaging: 12/06, 29.5%
 - Open for Business Messaging: 12/08, 24.6%
 - Business Questionnaire: 12/11, 24.3%
 - Partner Update: 12/13, 18.7%
 - A Toolkit Just For You: 12/15, 20.3%
 - Partner Update: 12/21, 18.7%
-



It can be hard to find the right words to express how we feel. Visit Ventura is continuously updating our page to include the latest news from Ventura County, Santa Barbara County, and San Luis Obispo County for evacuees. Please share your thoughts and experiences with us. Visit Ventura is also sharing information through our social media channels. After all, it's important to stay informed and to be prepared. Crisis messages are used as needed. They are included in our communications. Please share your thoughts and experiences with us. Given the fires in Los Angeles and the head north, US 101 remains closed and evacuation routes are limited.

Let's work together to do our part. First of all, the Visit Ventura team hopes this week has been a whirlwind and our hearts continue to be affected by the fires it is that everybody on our team is alright and our hearts are in the right place. We have heard from businesses that are recovering from profit losses. And, we have guidance for a unified response. We encourage all Ventura business owners to disseminate accurate information to their community. Best practice in crisis communication is to share a positive message. This will help us begin to balance the message. While we understand that those most affected are the most vulnerable, we are inviting and lead to the perception of a positive message. Consider posting welcoming images for your business as usual, instead of images of destruction. Hashtags such as #VenturaStrong and #VenturaStrong need images for your marketing efforts. [Take a visit](#). We also ask that as you share your own social media, please tag @VisitVentura so we can better understand how we can better understand our needs with other visitors. We are listing

WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU

Together with the City of Ventura, Visit Ventura Partners, South Seaward Merced and Ventura County Coast, we are working to help mitigate the impacts of the fires. Your experiences and opinions are valuable. Please email us answers to as many of the questions below as you can. We can better understand your needs. Name, business/position, phone number, email address, and how has your business been impacted. Do you have any immediate needs? Has your business participated in any relief efforts? How many visitors/consumers have you lost? What feedback have you received? How many cancelled reservations?

Here's what's new. Our partners at Visit California have activated 20 industry partners from across California this afternoon including Visit Ventura and Visit California. Here's what's new. Our partners at Visit California have activated its local offices and global agencies are in conversation on social media. East Coast media coverage of the current political news cycle. The hashtag #thomasfire is trending. All 13 international offices are working market, providing the latest information. Visit California is in close contact with Emergency Services. Visit Ventura provided an update on the status of the market. Representatives from Los Angeles, San Diego, San Francisco, and San Jose are participating in a second briefing call yesterday including Visit Ventura and Ventura County Coast teams. Below is a summary of the call.

A toolkit just for you. Thank you to everybody who took part in the hearing from you has been very helpful. We've created a toolkit filled with images for website or social media, a printable FAQ page. All of our latest and you will find a link to the crisis toolkit through. [VIEW THE TOOLKIT HERE](#). We're happy to share that the Downtown Farmers' Market is returning. Please let us know if there is anything we can do to help. Wishing this weekend brings you relief. Marlyss Auster, Cheryl Bagby, Michele Suarez, Michele Foster, and Fiorella Calderoni

Here's what's new.

Over 30 industry partners from across California participated in a second briefing call yesterday including Visit Ventura and Ventura County Coast teams. Below is a summary of the call.

Response

Partners Strategy

- Created a toolkit for community partners: visitventuraca.com/toolkit
 - Shared the Crisis Communication Plan, downloadable and printable #VenturaStrong Posters, 'Thank you for being here' signs, social media guidelines, images for social media, FAQs, resources, latest communications
-



Recovery



- Recovery Checklist, Restoring Consumer Confidence, Recovery Options
- #DowntownVenturaStrong Thomas Fire Raffle
- World Central Kitchen
- Thomas Fire Benefit Concert

Thank

Recovery
Evaluation

Police

- Scheduled a debrief to capture lessons learned and opportunities for improvement
- Made revisions to the Crisis Communications Plan based on lessons learned

An aerial photograph of a coastal town, likely Santa Barbara, California. A long wooden pier extends from the beach into the blue ocean. The town features a mix of buildings, including a prominent multi-story hotel, and is surrounded by palm trees and greenery. In the background, there are hills and a clear blue sky. The text "Key Takeaways" is overlaid in the center in a large, white, sans-serif font. There are also two orange L-shaped corner brackets: one in the top right and one in the bottom left.

Key Takeaways



Key Takeaways

Tactical and Strategic

- Cannot underestimate the value of being prepared (having a crisis communications plan with templates and crisis messaging)
- An immediate and consistent unified message is the most effective way to communicate
- The right response will be different for each community



DEAR Firefighters.
THANK YOU for SAVING our HOME
#VENTURASTRONG



Questions?

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Communications Manager

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