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# Upwell Pilot Report



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# Executive Summary

The ocean is in crisis, plagued by overfishing, habitat loss, and acidification, among other issues. While the ocean serves as the engine for our climate and plays a central role in the global food system, it still fails to register for many as a relevant and primary issue. It is, quite literally, out of sight and out of mind. The virtual invisibility of the ocean in public discourse is a major obstacle for the ocean conservation community to adopt and implement solution-based policies.

The key to Upwell's success—and thus, the success of the ocean conservation community—is not to blast new, shiny information into the interwebs, but rather to nurture and bridge virtual and real-life distributed, diverse networks, and to leverage the combined reach and power of those networks of communicators to participate in and amplify the best content and campaigns. In inventing a new kind of collaboration, we've provided the tools and the space, and relied on the ever-growing community of ocean communicators to work together to make change.

Upwell's array of goals—to utilize the immediacy of online communications, experiment with ways to increase the reach of valuable content, empower and foster a broader network of ocean communicators, and enrich our understanding of the conversational ecosystem surrounding ocean topics—coalesced our broader vision of “**conditioning the climate for change.**” We believe that by getting more people talking about ocean issues and raising the baseline of conversation, broader audiences will be more likely to take action, change behavior, and push for policy change that will have positive effects for our oceans.

Our primary metric for understanding the conversations analyzed in this report is what we refer to as a “**social mention**” (or “social item”). Upwell defines a social mention as the text inclusion of a monitored keyword in a post on social media platforms like Twitter, Facebook, blogs, mainstream news with RSS feeds, forums/boards, YouTube or Pinterest. Social mentions are online acts of self-expression in which individuals, organizations and other entities invest (at least) a small amount of social capital.

Upwell employs Big Listening in order to understand the volume and character of online conversations about ocean issues. **Big Listening** is the art and practice of tracking topical online conversations over time—listening to what “the internet,” writ large, is talking about. When combined with data-informed campaigning, Big Listening provides a methodology for increasing both the frequency and volume of online conversation around a particular issue. The basic idea is to identify pockets of real-time or historical conversation, wherever they may be, and then to use that information to make the conversation bigger. Big Listening is distinguished from traditional social media monitoring by its scale, fluidity, focus on issue or cause monitoring, and expanded access to historical data.

In our work to date, the team at Upwell has come to believe that there are three measurable characteristics of the online ocean conversation. We are increasingly attentive to:

1. Constant level of conversational volume (Baseline),
2. Notable outliers in increased volume (spikes), and
3. Density of conversational hotspots (spike frequency).

Upwell practices Big Listening on English-language conversations in the following eight topic areas: Overfishing, Sustainable Seafood, Marine Protected Areas (MPAs), Oceans, Cetaceans (whales and dolphins), Sharks, Tuna, Gulf of Mexico and Ocean Acidification. For each topic, both real-time and historical data provide essential context for understanding the volume, evolution and characteristics of the overall conversation.

Each topic we monitor is characterized and defined by a set of search terms (including exclusions) that we refine on an ongoing basis. While we recognize the limitations of “**keyword groups**,” such as their reliance on text-based results and the absence of contextual awareness, they do provide a powerful tool for analyzing online attention. The development and active refinement of keyword groups is at the heart of Big Listening methodology.

At the time of writing, our current **Baseline** (v3.1) is the average of the lowest 20% of social mention values for a topic on a given day of the week. In addition to the Baseline, we track significant increases in online attention for a particular topic, or spikes. When you graph those social mentions, you can actually see that burst of attention ‘spike’ the graph—hence the name. Upwell defines a **spike** as occurring when the social mention volume for a given day meets or exceeds one standard deviation from the mean of all recorded values for that same day of the week.

Upwell’s campaigning model is informed by Big Listening data and combines a few additional key elements. Our campaigns are **attention campaigns**, focused on raising attention to ocean issues. They are **minimum viable campaigns**, operating on short time-frames and focused on rapid delivery of content, continuous learning and iteration. They are run and amplified across a **distributed network**, rather than being housed on and amplified by way of our own platforms.

What we do with attention campaigns is drive more attention to existing content and actions that are not on our properties. They’re not associated with our brand. We use this loosely held connection, tying into the momentum of the news cycle and being strategically opportunistic in the pursuit of creating spikes in attention.

Through our minimum viable campaigns, we employ ongoing, iterative, continuous delivery of content, resisting our urges toward perfection and providing irreverent, timely, contextual content to audiences immediately instead of strategizing for six months or a year. We focus on

the quickest, dirtiest thing we can get out the door that we think will have a measurable effect on a conversation.

By applying both these models, Upwell has crafted a new way of campaigning that is easily delivered, measured, and adapts to the ever-changing sea of conversation. In summary, through our campaigns, Upwell:

- Surfs existing conversations in order to increase and expand attention.
- Measures social mentions (rather than policy outcomes, petition signatures, or public opinion) to evaluate the success of our campaign efforts.
- Delivers, measures, and learns from campaigns on a short time cycle, embedding lessons and insights immediately. We sacrifice perfection.
- Collaborates with a network of ocean stakeholders and curating a diverse set of existing ocean content, rather than building on our own brand and creating our own content. Our campaigns are not aligned with Upwell program priorities or policy goals, but instead amplify attention to the priorities and goals of those in our network.
- Running our campaigns across a distributed network of ocean communicators, rather than relying on our own platforms as information hubs.

Rather than collect a large set of official MOU's and partner logos to put up on our website, we built a loosely held, distributed network. We've reached out to nodes of people who control the communications channels that reach lots of supporters and followers who are interested in ocean issues. We've been scrappy and ruthless about who we put into that distributed network, trying to make it diverse and ensure the reach is big.

These are the values that guide Upwell in building and strengthening our distributed network:

- **Trust:** we share only science-based content, ensuring that other science-based institutions know that the content we share is trustworthy.
- **Transparency:** we share our campaign and big listening data with our network, so they can apply our lessons in their own work.
- **Brand-agnostic:** we work as willingly with Greenpeace as we do with Deep Sea News, as we do with the Facebook page "I Fucking Love Science." We will share an organization or individual's content or campaign, as long as it promotes ocean conservation goals and fits our curation criteria (detailed below). Often, promoting content from an array of brands means releasing control of the message.
- **Issue-agnostic:** We aren't only focusing on overfishing, through GMO salmon or catch shares, to cultivate the network. We amplify any ocean campaign or content as long as it fits our curation criteria, raising attention for the crisis the ocean faces.

- **Personal:** We build relationships with humans, not organizations. The liveliest online conversations happen between people, not institutions. We model the authentic behavior of the internet.
- **Generous:** We provide small bits of advice and feedback to help our network do better. If their work will get more people talking about the ocean online, it fits with our mission.

Our Big Listening practice helps us understand the volume and character of ocean conversations, individually and in relation to one another. It also helps us to strategically choose where to invest attention. Knowing the scale of conversations—for instance, that the sharks conversation regularly spikes to over 40,000 social mentions in a day (and often much higher), whereas the marine protected areas/marine reserves conversation sits at about 50 per day—helps us right-size our expectations for attention, identify pockets of audiences ripe for engagement, and time our campaigning efforts to capitalize on the regular ebb and flow of conversation.

We **curate things to amplify** that meet these criteria:

- Good science
- Socially shareable
- Conservation impact
- Building social capital
- New influencers
- Topical
- Spikeability
- Under amplified

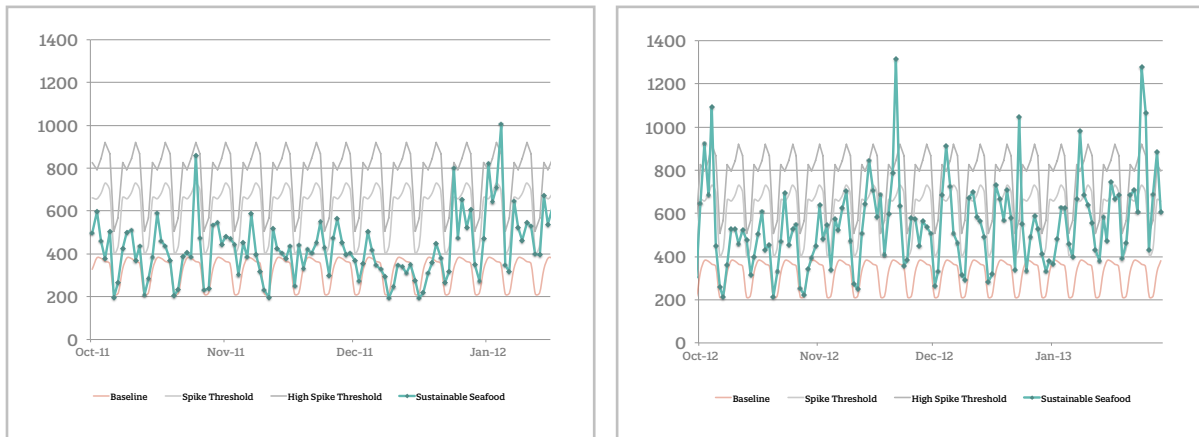
Once we've identified an opportunity, choosing a tool for dissemination is only part of the battle. We often research, curate, and create in order to provide the most shareable content. There's no exact science to what we do—our methods are mostly informed by years of experience campaigning in social media. However, a few scenarios, outlined below, highlight the most common ways we approach attention campaigning.

- Scenario 1: The science and the message is good, but the content isn't shareable.
- Scenario 2: There's conversation beyond the ocean community. Can we tap into it?
- Scenario 3: Team Ocean isn't coordinated. Can we create more message redundancy?
- Scenario 4: The Upwell network doesn't have direct access to Big Listening data. Can we provide insights to make their campaigns more effective?

Over time, we've seen the number of social mentions generated from each attention campaign grow, concurrent with the growth of our distributed network. This is the proof in the pudding. As we continue to expand Team Ocean and encourage networked sharing, the number of social mentions about the ocean will increase, and ultimately increase the baselines of ocean conversations.

Both the **Sustainable Seafood and Overfishing conversations have substantially changed** since the founding of Upwell. Both distinct conversations have seen significant increases in spike volume, spike frequency, and ratio of average daily social mentions to the average baseline.

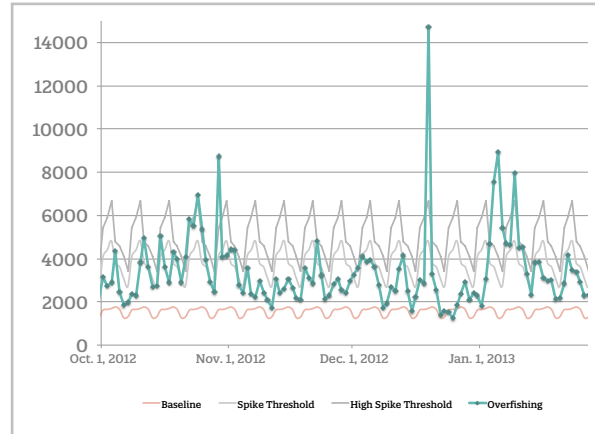
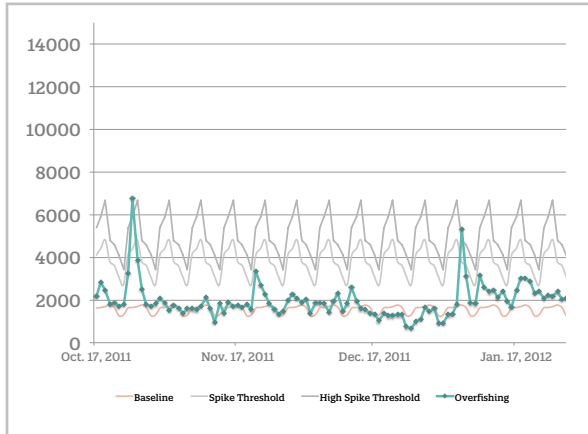
## Sustainable Seafood



Side-by-side comparison for Winter 2011 (left) and Winter 2012 (right) showing social mentions by day for Upwell's Sustainable Seafood keyword group, as compared to the baseline, spike threshold and high spike threshold (Winter 2011: 10/17/2011 - 1/31/12; Winter 2012: 10/1/2012 - 1/29/13)

In Winter 2011 (above left), when Upwell began Big Listening in Sustainable Seafood, social mention volume was an average of 423 mentions per day. By Winter 2012 (above right), **Sustainable Seafood social mention volume is up 29.9%. Spike frequency in the Sustainable Seafood conversation increased 265%**. Those spikes were not just occurring more often, they were also getting bigger. Large volume spikes, those meeting Upwell's high spike threshold, saw a 475% increase.

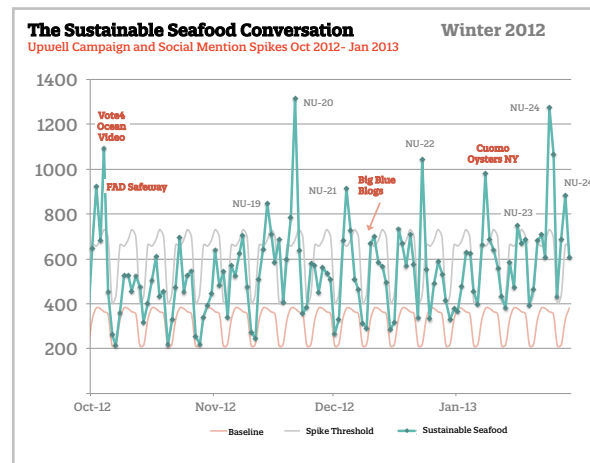
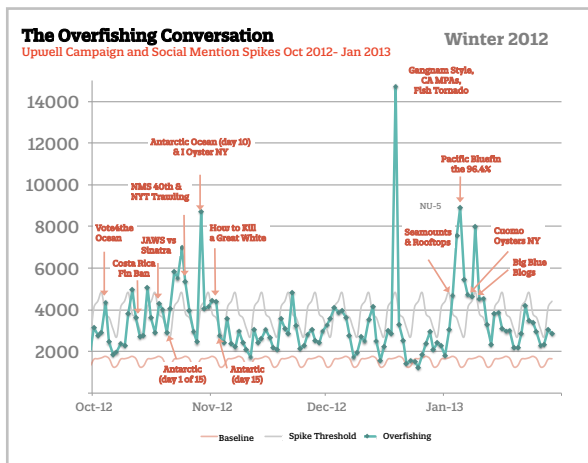
# Overfishing



Side-by-side comparison for Winter 2011 (left) and Winter 2012 (right) showing social mentions by day for Upwell’s Overfishing keyword group, as compared to the baseline, spike threshold and high spike threshold (Winter 2011: 10/17/2011 - 1/31/12; Winter 2012: 10/1/2012 - 1/29/13)

In Winter 2011 (above left), when Upwell began Big Listening in Overfishing, social mention volume was an average of 423 mentions per day. By Winter 2012 (above right), **Overfishing social mention volume is up 71%. Overfishing spike frequency increased 784%.** Those spikes were not just occurring more often, they were also getting bigger. Large volume spikes, those meeting Upwell’s high spike threshold, also saw a similar 475% increase.

Annotated campaign graphs are included in this report, and illustrate more specifically where and how Upwell intervened in these two conversations.

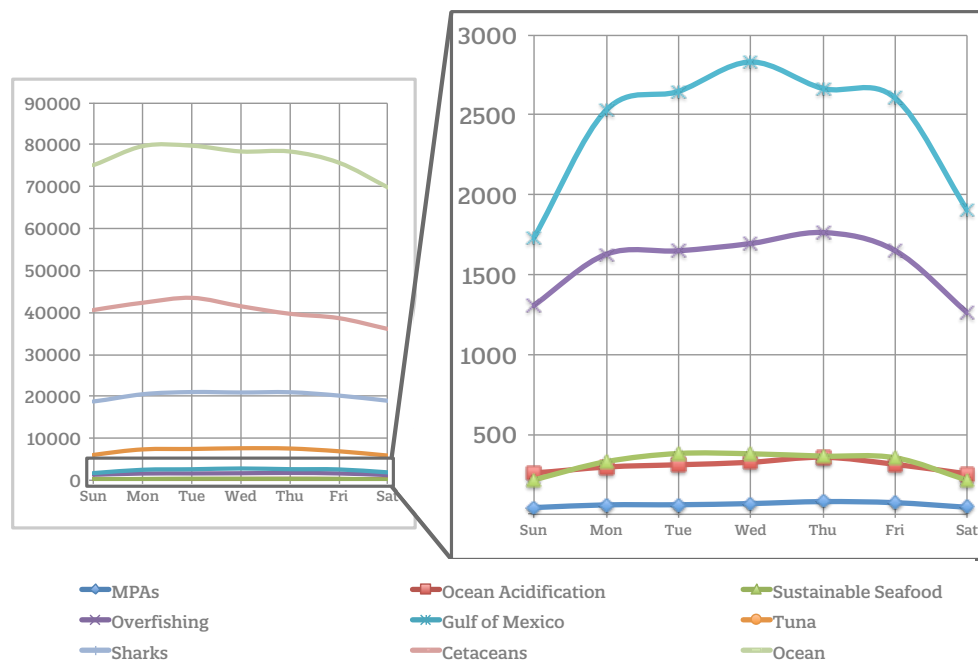


The Tide Report, Upwell’s blog and social media channels, topic-specific webinars, plus staff speaking engagements, guest blog posts and project consulting have provided channels for delivering shareable content, and practical training and tools to a diverse audience of time-

starved ocean activists. According to our February 2013 survey, through these tools and opportunities, Upwell has helped the community:

- Receive content that they wouldn't come across through their usual channels
- Stay up-to-date on the hottest ocean news
- Save time by providing content that they could amplify to their community
- Made them feel like they're part of a community
- Helped them balance humor with serious issues in their communications

## Which ocean topics have the most Baseline volume?



### Social mention Baselines for Upwell's primary ocean topics

Perhaps not surprisingly, when we look at overall levels of conversational Baselines, the generic "oceans" conversation is orders of magnitude larger than the conversations for its constituent components. While to some extent this is the result of so many conversations being conducted under the "oceans" banner, the word "ocean" is itself so widely used that, without proper filtering, those other uses can distort the apparent size of the discussion. The next two largest of our topics, Cetaceans and Sharks, also demonstrate comparatively high Baselines when assessed against the others. We can see substantial differences among our lowest-volume topics. MPAs has the lowest Baseline, Ocean Acidification and Sustainable Seafood are basically tied for second-lowest (each exceeds the for certain days of the week), and Overfishing comes in at



about five times higher than them.

Collectively, overfishing represents a grab bag of ocean brands. The **Overfishing conversation** brings together species such as sharks, tuna, salmon and lesser known but equally important fish, with wonkish report subjects such as fisheries management and lackluster international conferences. The topic encompasses a relatively broad conversational area, and one that has historically churned out quarterly bursts of dire news.

Overfishing has about five times the Baseline volume of Sustainable Seafood, and roughly two-thirds that of our next biggest topic, the Gulf of Mexico. The comparison with Sustainable Seafood is particularly interesting because the two topics are obviously intricately connected—the difference is how people talk about them. Whereas sustainable seafood suffers from a fragmented and cloudy brand identity (what is sustainable seafood, anyway?), overfishing has charismatic ocean species such as sharks and bluefin who are in clear and present danger.

Danger is catnip to the internet. The Overfishing conversation actually benefits, from an attention point of view, from the ongoing damage that we are doing to our oceans and fisheries. Bad news spikes high and fast online and then it goes away. Intriguingly, the spikes within Overfishing have been occurring more frequently as Upwell has been monitoring (and campaigning on) the topic. Overfishing is becoming more spikey and the spikes are increasing in volume.

The **Sustainable Seafood conversation** is low-volume with low-level spikes, even while the concept is becoming increasingly well-established in consumer minds. For comparison, Marine Protected Areas has a lower baseline than Sustainable Seafood but occasionally spikes higher than the Sustainable Seafood max. Ocean Acidification displays the same characteristic. And despite their obvious connections, the volume of the Sustainable Seafood conversation is only one fifth of that of the Overfishing conversation. Good news for fisheries and consumers, it turns out, is not as attention-generating as bad news.

The overall brand of Sustainable Seafood is fragmented, awkward and wonky. People simply do not talk about the sustainable seafood that they ate last night, or, crucially, not in those terms. The food service industry has recognized this: one trade publication forecasts growing demand for sustainable seafood even as it pointed out that consumers prefer the term “wild”—which obviously means something very different. Furthermore, “sustainable seafood” itself is not a term well-suited for short-form platforms like Twitter—it takes too many characters and is hard to use in a sentence that doesn’t read as dry. Taken as a whole, the fragmentation of the Sustainable Seafood conversation means that it is more difficult to accurately capture it accurately with keywords, and that a low volume doesn’t necessarily mean people aren’t talking.

Unlike Overfishing, which has regular media hooks through connections to Shark Week, dire report releases and celebrity activists, the Sustainable Seafood conversation doesn’t generally translate into spikes from live events and or big news stories. Where we do see spikes occur they

are usually based in one of three elements: well-known brands promoting their sustainable offerings (Safeway, McDonalds), fraud, or a bridge campaign (many of them attributable to Upwell). One other notable burst of attention can be expected from the Sustainable Seafood Summit—although the resulting content hasn't been particularly shareable.

A comfort with complexity is necessary to forecast weather. Big Listening, similarly, requires significant human skill and intuition to, first, develop robust conversational descriptors (keywords) and then, second, to use the resulting information to identify opportunities for a campaign to spike a given conversation. Upwell has intentionally cross-trained campaign and listening roles so that this integration between listening and intervention is as efficient as possible. This comes not from any computer readout but from regular, hands-on practice. 'Weather' forecasting of the social web is a nascent practice. Regular Big Listening to a given conversation is essential for building an analyst's awareness of the conversational dynamics at play. It is most efficient to listen on an ongoing basis. Presence in the conversation is the difference between watching a baseball game and reconstructing it through the box score.

The structure of Upwell intentionally underpins the process for doing Big Listening. Each member of Upwell draws on a variety of tools and practices—some shared, some personalized—to generate immediately actionable insight into each day's online events. We supplement our personal suite of tools and practices with shared Upwell systems (such as Radian6).

**Personal Listening Systems** [human and machine-assisted]

+ **Shared Listening Systems** [machine-assisted and human-network-assisted]

+ **Morning Meeting** [humans in conversation]

= **Big Listening**

While the context for Big Listening is constantly shifting, we believe that current trends point to some likely future developments. These include:

- New firehoses
- Divergent functions
- Smarter robots
- Privacy fights
- Buyer beware
- Social science catches up to social media
- More visuals
- Spike marketplaces
- More upwellings

Emergent best practices for online campaigning from the Upwell pilot include:

- You can't predict what will go viral.
- Timeliness and a hook are still really important, but the half-life of news online is shorter than it used to be. Pay attention to ROI on campaigns.
- Bridge conversations, movements and communities to make your message go farther.
- Identify opportunities based on Big Listening.
- Use simple messaging.
- Think about the whole viewing and sharing experience.
- Narrow in.
- Be poised for rapid response.
- Pair content with asks, but balance asks across a spectrum of engagement.
- Celebrate victories.
- Normalize obscure issues or complex ideas with iconic imagery, cultural anchors, or tribe signifiers.
- Define your goals and metrics based on what is actually measurable.
- Revive old stuff.
- Videos: shorter, prettier, more pithy.
- Memes: don't try to make them from scratch.
- Celebrity promotion: not a silver bullet.

Collaboration in communications is hard, and can be expensive. Emergent best practices for Collaboration, the Distributed Network Way from the Upwell pilot include:

- Provide brand neutral content.
- Embrace the larger ecosystem of communicators.
- Be open to ad hoc partnerships.
- Share other organizations' and people's content.
- Find unique high-touch activities to cultivate personal relationships.
- In difficult times, be human.

In running rapid attention campaigns, and focusing primarily on social platforms as the medium for our ocean famous-making, Upwell has developed a few best practices that can be applied to other small, nimble online teams.

- Develop systems to capture insights.

- Encourage a flat structure.
- Keep the campaigning team small, but not too small.
- Keep time for developing creative assets to a minimum.
- Run lots of little campaigns, and extend the ones that work.
- Lean on the personal interests, strengths and networks of your team members.
- Recognize and admit your weaknesses.

Top insights and best practices for amplifying attention to ocean issues in general, as well as some that are specific to those communicating about overfishing, sustainable seafood, and marine protected areas from the Upwell pilot include:

For ocean communications:

- The ocean is out of sight and out of mind.
- We assumed there would be a lot of great ocean content. We were wrong about the 'great' part.
- Plan social media outreach in advance of scientific report releases.
- Lower your science hackles.
- Cross-promote social content via collaborative outlets.
- Anthropomorphize ocean creatures.
- Don't let beautiful ocean pictures do all the talking.

Sustainable Seafood:

- Scary stories get attention.
- "It's complicated" is a bad relationship status and a bad brand.
- The actual practice of eating sustainable seafood continues to be challenging, and news coverage is not making it appear easier.
- Focus on specific products, brands and species rather than the overall sustainable seafood issue.
- Recipes and fluff pieces don't generate social mentions.

Overfishing:

- Focus on actions that are doable and close to home.
- Sensational stories make headlines.
- Sharks are the quarterback of overfishing, and Shark Week is the Super Bowl of online ocean conversations. Don't sleep on Shark Week.

#### Marine Protected Areas:

- The MPA conversation is tiny in comparison to other ocean conversations.
- Our MPA vocabulary is fragmented, awkward and wonky.
- Share successes.
- Emphasize individual connection to MPAs as public commons to create support.

This is the final report of Upwell's pilot phase, completed in February 2012. In it, the founding team of Upwell documents new methodologies for conversation analysis, the shape of key ocean conversations, the impacts of our campaign efforts, and emerging best practices for a new era of online communications. We do so in service of the larger marine conservation sector, and with the hope that what we have learned in our short effort will speed all our collective efforts. The ocean is our client.