

SPACE EDUCATION AND OUTREACH SYMPOSIUM (E1)
 Calling Planet Earth - Space Outreach to the General Public (6)

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THE LIGHTSAIL STORY, PUBLIC OUTREACH STRATEGIES & RESULTS

Abstract

With the mission to empower the world's citizens to advance space science and exploration, The Planetary Society is the world's largest non-profit space interest organization. Through the case study of LightSail - and communications and public outreach methods that carried it to the world stage - The Planetary Society will share strategies that transformed a small cubesat spacecraft test mission into an international public interest phenomenon.

Solar sailing is part of The Planetary Society's legacy; Cofounders Carl Sagan and Louis Friedman saw the potential to fly by light, and Bruce Murray saw tremendous public engagement potential for images taken with spacecraft.

LightSail public outreach objectives centered on welcoming people around the world to be part of the mission. Objectives were met through the implementation of a measurable, multi-tiered communications and public outreach plan. Ingredients:

Optimal Timing: With Orion's test flight as the concluding space story of 2014, The Planetary Society identified January 2015 as an optimal time to publicize LightSail test launch news.

Inclusive Messaging: Themes were "citizen-funded" and "democratization of space."

Inspiring Spokespeople: CEO Bill Nye delivered messages about how citizens could join LightSail's journey. With assistance from Neil deGrasse Tyson, Board Member and astrophysicist, LightSail news drew immense public interest.

Rich Storytelling: Archival footage of Carl Sagan discussing solar sailing with Johnny Carson on a 1976 episode of "The Tonight Show" was paired with LightSail described by present leader, Bill Nye. The story went viral.

Science Education: Through transparent reporting, embedded reporter, Jason Davis, provided the public with educational information.

Multimedia Assets: A microsite, videos, images, animations, Planetary Radio, social media, and print materials engaged a broad public audience.

Public Engagement Campaigns: High media visibility and public interest primed public engagement efforts to succeed:

1) Selfies to Space: Citizens had a chance to submit photos and names to ride aboard LightSail's second mission. 2) Kickstarter Campaign: The LightSail Kickstarter expanded the citizen-funded aspect of the mission to thousands of added supporters. Kickstarter attracted 23,500 backers who gave 1.3M USD. 3) Special Events : LightSail's test launch from Cape Canaveral offered on-site opportunities for people to join the mission.

Success Metrics Results: Quantitative and qualitative measures of success were set and exceeded. Success for LightSail's test mission garnered support for its second mission and demonstrated strong public interest in inclusive, citizen-focused space projects.