Primer for Effectively Using Social Media
Social Media

Benefits for a small municipality

Social media is based on the dialogue between audiences or the concept of many to many. The “many to many” interaction opens up a brand new realm of opportunities for communication and engagement. Instead of one-way transfers of information, the barriers to creating two-way communication are lowering rapidly. By creating an online presence, local governments can take advantage of the following benefits:

Increased Participation and Engagement
Social media allows for participative dialogue on issues where feedback is desired.

Access to Networks
Social networks are created over time creating an audience on demand.

Crowd-sourcing Solutions & Innovation
The power of engaged people can be harnessed when the “crowd” builds innovative solutions.

Improved Transparency
Perhaps the most compelling reason to increase engagement is to build trust. By genuinely listening and sharing ideas with your citizens, you become more transparent.

Finances
The Society of Information Technology Management indicated that the cost of web based customer service interactions is 11 times cheaper than a phone transaction and 25 times cheaper than face to face.
Before building your social media presence, you need to be aware of the various types of communications and what you can achieve for each type.

### Information

Information provides users with details about the organization’s activities, highlights from events, news, and relevant facts about the organization. Information messages are characterized as a one-way flow of information from the organization to the public.

In the public sector, the area of emergency management has experienced success attracting mainstream social media support when information was desired on an up to the second basis. The 2007 Southern California wildfire situation provided proof of the effectiveness of social media.

During the wildfires, 1500 homes were destroyed causing massive evacuations. The use of Twitter and Facebook spiked during the disaster proving to be an effective communication medium.

### Community

Building an online community takes simple information a step further towards “dialogue and community building.”

Dialogue occurs when information creates an interactive conversation between the organization and the public. Community builds when others want to listen to the interactive conversation or seek other opinions from what they hear.

Examples of community communication can occur when:
- Acknowledging volunteerism or sponsorship, and highlighting the activity as well as participants.
- Advertising community events not organized by the city.
- Explicitly asking for a response to an issue through surveys, contests or questionnaires.

### Action

The final category and perhaps the most powerful response to communication is action.

Having people “do something” based on your message, such as, attending events, volunteering to help or donating money is a tangible concrete outcome. Mobilizing people to take action is one of social media’s greatest potentials.

A call for action may be for volunteers to support a municipality goal or function. The City of Vancouver in conjunction with the Vancouver Olympic Organizing Committee used Facebook and other social media tools to enlist over 5000 volunteers for the 2010 Olympic Games.

A challenge to change is an effective way for a municipality to seek action from the public. The City of Vancouver’s Green Action Plan used information to create dialogue and eventual action through environmentally conscious changes in everyday life such as reducing water consumption, greenhouse gas emissions etc.
Facebook is a social media web page that allows users to share photos, posts and videos. It is used as a major online marketing and communications instrument for individual businesses, companies, and governments in conducting fast and international accessible engagement means.

It is very user friendly and allows users with no technical background to instantly share information. Governments can easily create customized pages. Those who “like” the page become subscribed to receive new content automatically, viewable when they log into their Facebook account.

Users can see one another’s activities in reading, receiving, and commenting on Facebook content. Subscribers share information such as age, interests, education, job, and sex, which is shown on their profile page, and the extent of their shared personal information depends on the user's willingness to share it publicly. Their information can be used for statistical research purposes.

Twitter is a micro-blogging application that allows users to send messages or “Tweets” up to 140 characters in length. Tweets are sent to the twitter accounts of those users who have chosen to follow the originator of the tweet. If a viewer likes the tweet, they can retweet the message and all of their followers will receive the message in their account.

Like Facebook, Twitter’s strength comes from the previously built audience ready to receive information. Topics of discussion can be searched and you can also measure how many followers received your tweet.

RSS (Really Simple Syndication) is an information feed where a feed author publishes information such as news headlines, audio and video clips. Rather than having to go to the website for content updates, RSS recipients interested in the content subscribe to the feed to automatically receive updates. If something is of interest, they can usually hit the “read more” link to go to the full article.

Youtube and Flickr are video-sharing and photo-sharing websites that allows users to upload and view videos and photo albums. Individuals, corporations, and governments have incorporated Youtube and Fickr into their communication strategies to reach people all over the world. Both applications are free and accessible to all, allowing people to search for photos and videos of interest.
Getting Started

Twitter is a micro-blogging website that allows users to send messages, or “tweets,” up to 140 characters in length.

Tweets can be forwarded or “re-tweeted” to others through the user’s network of “followers.”

Web links and photos can be added to your tweets increasing the effectiveness of the communication.

Common Terms

- **Followers** – receive tweets from those accounts that they have decided to follow.
- **Hash Tag** – when a “#” is placed before a keyword or phrase (no spaces), it allows users to search other tweets containing the same keyword or phrase.
- **Hacking** – when someone gains unauthorized access to your account and then Tweets under your account.
- **Lists** – Curated groups of Twitter users, used to tie specific individuals into a group on your Twitter account.
- **Mentions** - A mention is any Twitter update that contains "@username" anywhere in the body of the Tweet. We collect these messages, as well as all your @replies, in the Mentions tab on the Connect page. If you include more than one person's name in your Tweet and you use the @username format, all of those people will see the Tweet in their personal Mentions tab.
- **Replies** - An @reply is any update posted by clicking the "Reply" button on a Tweet. Your reply will always begin with @username (insert username of the person you are replying to). Any Tweet that is a reply to you begins with your username and will show up in your Mentions tab on the Connect page.
- **Phishing** – when a user tricks you into giving up your username and password usually via fake login pages.
- **Spoofing** – Setting up an account posing as someone else.
TIPS for Effective Twitter Use

Know Your Audience – Prior to opening an account and sending information, survey your community to see what others are following and tweeting about.

Represent yourself accurately in your Profile – Your profile should clearly confirm why you exist. Use existing brands and logos to reinforce your presence.

Set up Protocols for who tweets and what can be tweeted – Figure out what approval levels are required for information to be tweeted. Confirm who has authority to submit and respond to tweets.

Tweet Regularly – Set up a regular tweet schedule because inactivity can doom your effort. Peak viewing occurs early morning, early afternoon and after dinner. Consider one tweet a day minimum to ensure relevancy with followers. Be careful not to over sensationalize a tweet to generate interest.

Tweet in 1st Person if possible – Twitter provides a more personal communication experience, capitalize on that if you can.

Be Careful Whom You Follow – Selecting whom you follow can be politically delicate. Look for individuals and organizations that represent common values, missions or objectives. Re-tweet messages that strategically support similar activities or initiatives your community may be embarking upon.

Monitor Your Account – Assign someone to monitor activity and ensure you are not being spoofed or insulted in a malicious fashion. Twitter has policies to prevent hacking and spoofing.

Measure Your Effectiveness – Monitor the trends in the number of followers you have. Use tools like Tweetreach at www.tweetreach.com to measure how many followers are getting your tweets. Don’t forget tweets can be re-tweeted.
Getting Started

In order to create and upload postings, photos, and videos, all Facebook accounts must be established with the web address at www.facebook.com/ format. It is highly recommended that cities name their Facebook webpage address with their city name. For example: www.facebook.com/thecityofcalgary. This will ensure that the city's Facebook page is easily found and identified by users. The city's logo can be used as the city's profile picture and the city's landscape picture can be used as the city's cover picture in order to visually introduce the city's style.

Common Terms

- **Likes** – Facebook allows users to give positive feedback and engage in things they care about, such as interesting news articles or upcoming events.
- **Friends** – Friends are people you can connect and share information with. Users can request to be someone’s friend through the “Friend Request” button.
- **Recommends** – This tool lets users recommend things that may be of interest, such as stories and events.
- **Audience Selector** – Allows you to choose who can and cannot see your profile content.
- **Cover photo** – Facebook allows users to have a large photo above their timeline.
- **Messages** – Enables users to send private messages to one another, however, this function should not be utilized as this is a public and transparent account.
- **Timeline** – Facebook allows users to share their stories through the timeline, such as photos, videos and status updates.
- **Wall** – The space on your Facebook profile that allows you and users to post comments, pictures and videos.
- **Tagging** - A tag connects a person, page, or place to something in a post, such as a status update or a photo.
- **Poke** – This can be used to gain the attention of another user, however, it is best if this function is not used.
TIPS for Effective Facebook Use

Establish Protocols for Content and Update Frequency – You will need to establish who creates postings, uploads videos and photos and most importantly who replies to comments, and a mechanism to process and approve content. The city's Facebook page represents the city online and interactively. The frequently updated information will build a highly functional and highly responsive image to users. Municipalities should check content and comments daily and post at least weekly; more frequent postings will generate larger audiences provided the content is relevant.

Ensure Optimal Settings – Facebook provides a specialized setting for organizational users such as governments. This function involves choosing audiences by location, age and interests.

Prepare to Moderate User Generated Content – A city's Facebook page represents the city online and the city should appropriately choose content shared and uploaded on its Facebook page in order to avoid any public relation problems. Inappropriate comments are unfortunately common, and you should make clear what types of comments will be deleted. Ensure that comments containing profanities, sexual content, racial slurs, and other types of discriminatory content are expressly prohibited and promptly deleted.

Keep your Content Simple – Provide simple, concise and clear content so users can understand your message immediately. The more interactive your content is, the more likely users will “like” you and begin to follow your information regularly. Videos and postings should be short and strong in delivering the city's message.

Measure Your Effectiveness – The “like” function of Facebook allows users to quickly provide positive feedback to every post, photos and videos the city shares on the Facebook page. The amount of received “likes” is quick metric. The amount of comments and number of times posts are shared with other users' Facebook pages can also be used as another indicator to measure the effectiveness of your message. The positive and negative feedback also give qualitative information to measure success of the content.
Getting Started

In order to begin uploading videos, a Youtube account must be created at http://www.youtube.com. When naming your channel it is important to use the city’s name, for example, “thecityofcalgary”, making it easier to be found. Incorporate your brand into your channel’s layout to reinforce your identity. You may review your subscribers’ Youtube channels to obtain information about their interests and age range.

Common Terms

- **Tags** – Tags are keywords that you can set on your account, hence when keywords are searched the videos on your channel will come up. Tags should refer to what is in the account of videos.
- **Channels** – Youtube accounts are referred to as channels.
- **“Likes”/ “Dislikes”** – Users are able to select whether they enjoyed the video or not. This can help to understand what the subscribers want to see on your channel.
- **Subscribers** – Consists of those who have subscribed to your account, therefore will receive updates when new videos are posted

TIPS for Effective Youtube Use

**Set up protocols** – Assign responsibilities for creating, editing, approving and posting videos, as well as moderating comments.

**Post regularly** – Establish a realistic timeline for how often videos should be produced and uploaded to retain subscriber interest.

**Subscribe to channels judiciously** – Subscribe to channels that represent common values, missions, or objectives and comment on their videos to draw potential viewers to your channel.

**Ensure video quality** – The sound and picture quality of the videos you upload is very important. Ensure that they meet your organization’s communication standards.
Getting Started

In order to begin uploading photos and videos, a Flickr account must be created at http://www.flickr.com. Accounts are either Free or Pro. Free accounts only allow users to upload documents, while Pro accounts ($25 per year) allow users to download and retrieve files.

Common Terms

- **Tags** – Tags are keywords that you can set on your account, hence when keywords are searched the videos on your channel will come up. Tags should refer to what is in the account of videos.
- **Groups** – Groups are used as a way to communicate with fellow members.
- **Organization** – Users are required to organize images using tags into sets of photos.
- **Contacts** – Consists of those who have subscribed to your account, therefore will receive updates when new videos are posted.

TIPS for Effective Flickr Use

- **Set up protocols** – Assign responsibility for creating, editing, approving, and posting videos, as well as moderating comments.

- **Post regularly** – Establish a realistic timeline for how often videos should be produced and uploaded to retain subscriber interest.

- **Subscribe to groups judiciously** – Subscribe to groups that represent common values, missions, or objectives, and comment on their photos to draw potential viewers to your group.

- **Ensure photo quality** – The quality of the photos you upload is very important. Ensure that they meet your organization’s communication standards.
RSS Feeds

Getting Started

RSS (Really Simple Syndication) is an information feed where a feed author publishes information, such as news headlines, audio and video clips. Instead of having to go to the website for content updates, RSS recipients interested in the content subscribe to the feed to automatically receive updates. If something is of interest, they can usually hit the “read more” link to go to the full article.

Each item usually consists of a simple title and a link to a web page for the full story. Subscribers can pick up multiple RSS feeds using an aggregator program (e.g., Google news reader, Outlook and Safari), many of which are free for download. If using Outlook or Safari, users can read their email and scan their RSS feeds all in one program. Subscribing to a feed is easiest done via the author’s website. Generally, just click on the orange button and look for the “subscribe to” mail function.

Setting up an RSS feed is still considered complex compared to creating Facebook and Twitter accounts. The technology is getting easier to work with and a number of fee based service providers are offering RSS hosting services. They typically charge the organization by the number of postings that occur each month. It is approximately $150 per month for a quality RSS hosting services.

The City of Calgary has an excellent example of a robust RSS news channel. Check them out at http://www.calgarycitynews.com/.
What you need to consider

Resources and time

When establishing social media applications it is important to designate who is accountable for maintaining these tools. When an individual or team is designated it is up to them to ensure nothing inappropriate is posted. Anything inappropriate in nature must be deleted as soon as possible.

Guidance material (such as this primer utilized in order to clarify expected conduct advantages, risks and consequences.

Although social media applications are free it can take up a lot of time maintaining the sites. It is important to set up consistent times when accounts will be checked routinely to ensure too much time will not be spent with upkeep. In order to keep the interest of users it is important to post at minimum weekly and respond to users every few days.

Be clear on all of your social media accounts that just because you follow, subscribe or friend others it does not mean that you support other accounts and their messages.

Develop the discussion about what to expect, what to watch out for, how often to tweet and post etc.
Comparison of Tools

When you use each most effectively

Twitter
- Rapid response micro-blogging.
- Short focused messaging.
- Great search functions to tie into other conversations or see who is talking about you.

Facebook
- Interactive with unrestricted content limits.
- Most engaging social media vehicle for receiving comments and creating dialogue.
- Requires the most effort to establish protocols and manage inappropriate content from Trolls.

RSS Feeds
- Output resembles a “one to many” traditional communication medium.
- Great for daily news updates.
- Suitable for organizations with more content and audiences that want to keep up to date.
- Less engaging than Facebook and Twitter.

Analysis Tools – Hootsuite
Used by McDonalds, Pespsi Co. and Telus, Hootsuite (http://hootsuite.com/) is one of the leading tools for managing and measuring all of a corporation’s social networks. Hootsuite allows a user to:
- Manage multiple social profiles – Facebook, Twitter, RSS feeds, Linkedin, Google+, Youtube etc.
- Schedule messages and tweets
- Analyze social media traffic with a number of different reports that can be customized
Managing less than 5 social profiles is currently free. In order to access some of the advanced analytics feature, a monthly fee of $10 per month is charged.
This City of Vancouver has recently decided to incorporate Hootsuite as their principle social media tracking tool.
4 Things to prepare for in advance

From protocols to trolls, these are the things to watch for

Define signing authority and requirements
- Identify an approving officer for online posting;
- Specify if replies to comments require sign off as well;
- Remember the quicker you reply, the more transparent you appear; and
- Try to post content to Facebook at minimum, twice per week and tweet daily.

Identify Resources to maintain your presence
- Ensure that the individual or team looking after the online presence is classified correctly and compensated for their effort. This will reinforce the importance of the activity; and
- Create daily schedules when content is posted or shared and when comments are made.

Workplace Protocols of Social Media Use
- Set ground rules for what will be accepted on your social media channels and what will be deleted; and
- Prepare a response flow chart to clarify handling of negative posts – Pay particular attention to when a comment deserves a response, when it should be ignored and when it should be deleted.

Spammers, Spoofers, Flamers and Trolls
- Promptly delete spam posts from advertisers;
- Regularly check for spoofers and imposers; and
- Moderate content carefully to remove flamers who use inappropriate language and tone, and trolls who post only negative comments and attach others with profane, vulgar, and hateful commentary.
Dealing with spammers, spoofers, flamers, and trolls can be tricky.

Removing constructive criticism can be viewed as unnecessary censorship. Knowing when the line has been crossed can also be complicated.

The US Air Force developed a simple decision tree to help social media monitors determine when a comment deserves a response or if it should be ignored, or deleted. Developing a similar decision tree will reduce the anxiety caused by the negative online elements.
Freedom of Information (FOI)

The primary concern with the Freedom of Information and the use of social media is the failure to protect personal, sensitive or confidential information that may damage or harm individuals or the reputation of the government if disclosed. Four important areas of the Freedom of Information (FOI) Act are copyright, privacy security, sensitive and personal information, and appropriate information and record management. In BC, all information stored and transmitted on government systems are regarded as government property regulated by the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FOIPPA). Based on the Office of the Chief Information Officer in BC, in order to manage FOI issues appropriately, government employee must understand:

- Inadvertent posting and exposure of personal information is a violation of FOIPPA.
- Unauthorized use of copyright information is an infringement of intellectual property rights.
- Employee cannot use their government employee status to privately comment on social media sites.
- Any information or advice provided online must be retained and filed in accordance with appropriate government record management standards of procedures.
Need Help Getting Started?

Contact the LGMA for details on customized training options that will help you get started or get more mileage out of your existing social media accounts

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End notes:
7. A. Mitchell, personal communication, June 17, 2012