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What Makes Some Local Governments So Successful at Social Media?



Local governments are now well aware that social networking is an important communications and information-gathering method for residents, particularly with the proliferation of smartphones. From students to parents to professionals to elected officials, people from every walk of life are updating their statuses, Snapchatting photos, checking

their newsfeeds, and sharing news to their networks via social media.

Of course, not every local government social media presence is the same, in part because the communities are different. But shouldn't municipal governments be using the same general outline to promote transparency, enhance engagement and foster collaboration?

After researching more than 100 local government Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and LinkedIn accounts, as well as blogs, the International City/County Management Association found that the most successful social media efforts follow a general pattern:

1. They present content in a way that is

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5. They update their social media profiles on a daily basis.

Here's another way governments do social media successfully: They don't have just Twitter or Facebook. For example, the city of Fort Collins, Colorado, used Periscope to stream live video promoting its Mow Down Pollution event, demonstrating just how quiet and pollution-free an electric mower can be. Windsor, California, Town Manager Linda Kelly uses a blog (windsortownmanager.blogspot.com) to connect with residents on issues such as a community yard sale, economic development efforts, and a new virtual suggestions box. The city of Edmonton, Alberta, provides a wealth of resources on its LinkedIn page, such as a thirty-second mobile job application that becomes a SlideShare document.

Understand Your Audience and Define Goals

Governments that excel at social media know the people in their community (their likes and dislikes), how they have previously attempted to communicate with them and what was learned as a result, and which social media channels are most popular with residents and businesses.

Successful local governments also know exactly what they want to accomplish with social media, and why these goals are important. As they define goals and outcomes, they consider objectives that fall into one or more of the following categories:

- **Engagement:** communicating with the public in a meaningful way
- **Innovation:** opening up innovation beyond the walls of the organization
- **Participation:** making it easier for the public to share their ideas
- **Collaboration:** partnering and sharing information to maximize involvement

- **Crowdsourcing:** getting opinions and ideas from those who will be affected by government decisions

- **Knowledge Sharing:** maximizing limited resources by sharing experiences and information gained with multiple departments

Evaluate Efforts, Develop a Schedule

Being successful at social media requires defining metrics that tie directly to the statement of benefits, just as an agency would when evaluating the effectiveness of traditional communications.

The following metrics can be used to evaluate the success of a social media campaign:

- Follower count
- Retweets and mentions
- Discussion/engagement on Facebook
- Comments on blog posts
- Shared links
- Site traffic

To keep content fresh and relevant, and, more importantly, to keep citizens coming back, successful local governments establish a regular schedule for updates. One scenario could involve particular departments issuing updates on a certain day each week, with primary pages being updated more frequently as events warrant.

Stimulating Economies and Fighting Crime

In the effort to fight economic woes and showcase their communities as good locations for business, successful local governments are using social media for image strengthening/rebranding, providing the media with story ideas, enticing former residents to return, bringing jobs and job seekers together, and promoting local resources.

Law enforcement agencies across the country are turning to social media in their efforts to prevent and solve crime. Successful local governments are using the immediacy of social media for online police blotters, digital "wanted" posters, anonymous e-tipsters, social media stakeouts, undercover work, and informing the public about current situations. 🌟

sure to resonate with the audience and avoid repetition.

2. They try to foster a place where opinions and perspectives can be shared freely, by engaging and responding to comments positively.
3. They determine the tone and perspective of their organization's online persona and stick to it.
4. They consider all their stakeholders and publish content to include information relevant to local businesses, schools and other community organizations.