

# Is Your Social Media Program Measuring Up?

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Is your municipality making an appropriate investment in social media? Do you think you have the best municipal social media program in Ontario? Is your municipality overdue to get started?

Redbrick's [Municipal Social Media Survey](#) has tracked social media use by Ontario's 444 municipalities over the past five years. Our latest survey looks at which municipalities are on social media, what platforms they're using and how. This year, we've added a peek at municipal use of mobile apps and open data.

## Who's Using Social Media and How?

Ontario's municipal governments may have been slow to adopt, but 68 per cent are now using social media. In fact, it is being used by 92 per cent of municipalities with populations over 10,000.

Smaller municipalities are playing catch up; 85 per cent of the municipalities who've started

using social media in the past year have populations under 15,000. Many are doing a great job of it. Our "Most Liked Per Capita" and "Most Followed Per Capita" lists include some small-town standouts. Places like Ignace, Pelee, Schreiber, Terrace Bay and Tweed can even boast that they have more 'likes' than residents!

We also found the more experienced municipal social media users are refining their approaches, getting more creative, sophisticated and engaging as they get more comfortable.

That is not to say that they are adopting all of the newest platforms. The largest audiences are on Facebook and Twitter, and that's where most municipalities are going to find them. For a closer look at what platforms municipalities are using and how, [check out our infographic](#).

Social media use by Ontario's 444 municipalities has grown by **11 times** in the past five years.



## Emerging Areas: Apps & Open Data

One in five municipalities offer some type of mobile app. Most relate to waste and recycling collection schedules, or related information. Typically, it's Ontario's larger and urban municipalities that offer broad, "one-stop" mobile apps for residents, with features like event listings, alerts, and information on roads, transit and recreational services.



Some have taken it a step further, promoting civic engagement through a "contact your councillor" tab, or improving customer service through a "report a problem" feature. This allows residents to snap pictures of things like potholes, graffiti, or broken streetlights, and submit a quick, location-based report.

[View Redbrick's municipal app directory.](#)

Less than 30 Ontario municipalities are offering up their raw data through a dedicated open data portal, but it's something that's attracting more and more interest. Traffic and transit data, mapping data, and information on municipal facilities and services are some of the more common things you'll find on a municipal open data portal. Ontario leaders include [Guelph](#), [Ottawa](#), [Waterloo](#), and [Greater Sudbury](#).

[View Redbrick's municipal open data directory.](#)

## Social Media Policies

It's harder to track how many municipalities have social media policies in place, but it's easy to say that you should have them if you don't already. Employees can be disciplined for their personal use of social media, and examples of social media related terminations are piling up.

As a professional employer, you have a responsibility to inform your employees about their legal and professional responsibilities. Municipal governments also have a strong interest in managing risks and avoiding issues. Many employees think they are protected by an inherent right to free speech. Those employees are wrong, and misperceptions should be addressed before someone gets hurt by them.

We recommend that municipalities have policies to govern personal use by all employees. You should also have policies and training to govern use by dedicated communicators. These employees need to have a particularly clear sense of what's expected of them. Sooner or later, they are going to be faced with difficult decisions - and most of those will have to be made quickly, outside of regular business hours, when they're on their own.

## Council Use

It took a while, but social media use by elected officials has exploded, particularly on Twitter. We have noticed for some time that most Federal MPs and most MPPs have Twitter accounts. It's expected of them. Municipal politicians have been slower to adopt it, but they're catching up fast.

Our best measure of this is the level of social media activity at AMO's annual conference, which attracts hundreds of elected officials. In August 2015, for the first time, social media activity at the AMO Conference was arguably more important and more prominent than traditional media coverage. The change was pronounced enough that AMO will be modifying its media relations program for the conference in August 2016.

## Policies Governing Council Use?

Different politicians have different ideas about how they should be using social media. For example, some councillors tweet during Council meetings, because they are engaging with the public. Meanwhile, some councillors think that their tweeting colleagues are rude, unprofessional and irresponsible, because they are not really listening to the discussion.

Who's right? They both are. Social media can be used to engage the public on important topics, but it is unrealistic to think that someone can fully participate in a meeting and tweet at the same time. Texting and driving is illegal because multi-tasking is a myth. The bottom line is this: Councils should decide what is appropriate within their council chamber and incorporate those principles within their Code of Conduct.

We often get questions about appropriate behaviour on social media. Views about that will vary. In a practical sense, dinner party rules apply. People gravitate to other people that are charming, polite, positive and friendly. Loud, negative and rude behavior can steal the spotlight for a while, but in the long term, your seat at the table will disappear.

## Social Media Use by Senior Staff

Not long ago, it was rare to find a municipal CAO or other senior staff on LinkedIn, let alone Twitter. That's changing. More LinkedIn profiles are popping up, and we're seeing lots more 'eggs' on Twitter that bear names we know in the municipal community. Most are following

the wise strategy of starting out by 'lurking,' as opposed to 'launching,' on that platform. A cautious bunch, they are on Twitter almost anonymously, testing the waters without tweeting very much.

You would have no trouble convincing these managers that their municipality, department or initiative should have a social media plan. So why do so few of them have a social media plan to guide their personal use? Senior managers have invested a lot of time and hard work to get to where they are, and a lot of career-limiting damage can be done in 140 characters.

We think everyone should have a personal social media plan, which is why our website includes a [template](#) that you can use to develop your own.

A good social media plan can be short and sweet. Map out answers to obvious questions:

- *Why are you using it?*
- *What are your goals?*
- *What is your strategy to achieve those goals?*
- *Who is your target audience?*
- *What types of things will you comment on?*
- *What topics will you avoid?*

The most important question is less obvious:

- ***How do you want to be remembered, five years after you retire?***

There is an element of personal branding to social media. If you don't manage your brand, you may not like where you land.

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**Redbrick Communications** is a Mississauga-based agency with an extensive municipal practice. The results of our annual [Municipal Social Media Survey](#) can be found on our website's [Resources](#) section, along with sample social media policies, municipal apps and open data directories, advice on social media use and policy development, and more.

Redbrick staff often provide communications and social media related workshops for individual municipalities and at municipal conferences.

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