



Town of
East Gwillimbury

Social Media Strategy

November 5, 2012

*Local residents are
already talking about
your municipality on
social media.*

*You just don't know
what they are saying
about you.¹*

¹ Association of Municipalities of Ontario, Watchfile, November 17, 2011

CONTENTS

Introduction.....	4
Situation analysis	7
Social media: general usage & trends.....	8
Strengths and opportunities.....	10
Weaknesses and risks.....	11
Mitigating strategies.....	12
Social media in Ontario municipalities.....	13
Best practices	17
Monitoring & responding	17
Site management.....	18
Site promotion.....	19
Site evaluation.....	19
The East Gwillimbury context.....	20
Proposed social media sites	24
Facebook.....	24
Twitter.....	26
LinkedIn.....	28
YouTube	30
Recommended strategy.....	32
Goals	32
Protocols	32
Posting: frequency	32
Staffing requirements	33
Monitoring.....	34
Organization & preparation of material	34
Responding to comments & input.....	34
Metrics	35
Draft social media policy	38
Glossary of terms	45

INTRODUCTION

Recently, there has been a dramatic shift in the process of sharing information. Social media are at the centre of this shift, where the process steers away from the traditional *one-to-many* model of communicating with mass audiences (such as signage and advertising). The new social media model is *many-to-many*, where discussion can occur among all involved parties and where all participants consider themselves entitled as equal partners in the process. In social media, everyone participates and everyone can have their own voice, allowing them to create their own channels of communication, called social networks. Passive audiences are being replaced. People are speaking out about what they like and they are connecting with others who share their interests.

Traditional media are no longer the communication gatekeepers. Information available publicly can now come from anyone, anywhere. Our primary source of news was once the paper, the radio or television; now, news is available on our computers, our cell phones and our tablets. We no longer wait for ‘film at 11’; instead, we have access to it any time of day, virtually anywhere in the world. Often, news is available to everyone through social media at the same time the traditional media are first hearing of it.



Social media are revolutionizing the basic rules of engagement. Where traditional media messaging was one-way, controlled, and relevant primarily to the organization, social media are networked, free-flowing and relevant to the participants. The principles of social media are sometimes referred to as ‘democracy in communications’.

***The Town has an inherent interest
in being part of on-line
conversations to enhance the
municipality’s brand reputation as
a public service corporation
committed to excellence.***

Journalistic principles don't always apply. Personal opinions can become the new reality, as information is not always filtered through the lens of objectivity or professional standards. Nor is it controlled by politics or interests of profit. Given that people tend to follow the opinions of their friends and associates with little control or influence from the prepared messages of corporations, amateur video is often taken as credible. Even traditional media are taking advantage of these new sources of video with an accompanying caveat that they are 'unauthenticated'. There is perhaps no better example of this rise in street journalism than the Arab Spring of 2011, a revolutionary wave of demonstrations where social media were used to organize, communicate, and mobilize citizens in the face of state attempts at repression and internet censorship.

Public perceptions

14%

Trust corporate messages

78%

Trust what their friends say

In the social media mindset, organizations no longer target audiences for distribution of selected information: now, people engage by choice in the sharing of information they decide is relevant to them. The opportunity for East Gwillimbury is not to promote Town messages but to demonstrate an open government. Social networking is more about people than about technology; it's more about listening than about talking; it's more about interactive sharing than about one-way message delivery.

At the same time, one aspect of communication and information-gathering remains the same. We have always relied upon word of mouth to keep up with the news, to keep connected with family and friends, and to maintain a sense of community. Word of mouth is even more relevant today, with the prevalence of electronic media that allow personal commentary and chat to be distributed widely and quickly. Social media are the new word of mouth.

Social media	Traditional media
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• networked• democratic content• inclusive (universal)• relevant to participants• bottom-up	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• one-way• controlled content• exclusive (targeted)• relevant to organizations• top-down

Figure 1: Comparison of traditional and social media

The rise in social media appears to coincide with the rise of the individual, including the desire for independence from the constraints and opposing motivations of established media. Social media allow people to network with others of common interests, to decide for themselves what content is most relevant, to add to the conversation without conforming to arbitrary standards, and to be included in a circle of friends and followers. Organizations that understand how their audiences are interacting on social media are able to use these networks effectively as part of their communication program to gain intelligence and to participate in the conversation.

The exponential growth in participation demonstrates the popularity of this form of communication, and offers large audiences with whom to interact. Municipalities consulted in the preparation of this strategy document indicated the issue is not *whether* municipalities should participate in social networks: the question is *how* they should participate.

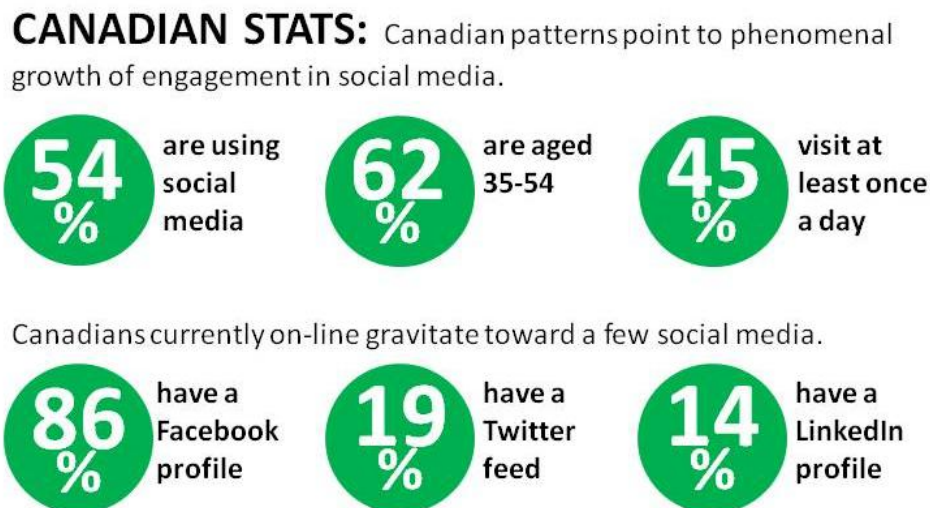


Figure 2: Canadian social media patterns

As the number of Canadian users increases, social media become harder to ignore. Even a year ago, over 50% of Canadians had a social networking account, of whom 86% had a Facebook profile and 45% visited various social media sites at least once a week. The number of Canadians with a profile on Twitter had grown from less than 1% to 19% in two years.² The possibility of engaging these numbers of local residents suggests how valuable social networks could be to the Town's communication program.

² The Ipsos Reid Canadian Inter@ctive Report 2011 Fact Guide

SITUATION ANALYSIS

In order to provide a broad background of understanding in consideration of a proposed social media strategy for the Town of East Gwillimbury, extensive research was undertaken in the preparation of this report. The following sections deal with these topics in detail:

- research into general usage and trends of social media
- review of strengths and opportunities as well as weaknesses and risks
- identification of mitigating factors
- review of social media usage among Ontario municipalities
- online survey conducted with East Gwillimbury residents regarding social media use
- study of prospective social media networks and best practices
- in-depth interviews with five municipal site administrators
- comparison of the social networking experiences and administrative practices of 11 participating municipalities
- review of the social media policy documents of 14 municipalities

Municipalities consulted

Town of Aurora
County of Bruce
Chatham-Kent
Town of Essex
Town of Georgina
City of Guelph
Town of Innisfil
City of Kingston
County of Lambton
City of London
City of Markham
Town of Newmarket
Town of Oakville
Township of Oro-Medonte
City of Port Colborne
Township of Springwater
Town of Tecumseh
Township of Tiny
Township of Uxbridge
City of Vaughan
Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville
York Region

SOCIAL MEDIA: GENERAL USAGE AND TRENDS

Within a relatively short period of time, on-line communications have transformed the way people share information. What was once an organized, one-way system of messaging to an identifiable audience using traditional media has become a multi-dimensional, networked system of simultaneous on-line information sharing with whoever chooses to participate.

Everyone who can afford an on-line device (and these options are growing too) can participate with little or no additional cost. Communication has become egalitarian, controlled not by the media but by the participants themselves. For the first time in history, everyone has a voice. Conversations are taking place all the time, on every subject, among geographically and culturally disparate networks of participants. This may be the most fundamental shift in communications since the radio.

With its universal availability, the new technology is bringing with it a new sense of entitlement: access to on-line networks; the right to contribute to the conversation no matter how relevant or interesting the comments; information that is relevant to and trusted by the people.

Organizations are using the new technology to participate in these conversations, to reach out to and engage their constituents. The conversations are already taking place: it is now simply a question of whether the organization wishes to be aware of what's being said and to contribute its voice.

Organizations are also responding to the new attitudes by incorporating on-line media into their communications programs. They are demonstrating a more overt appreciation for their role as servants to the public. There is growing acceptance of communication as a process of engagement rather than a stream of corporate messaging, fueled by the cultural phenomena of the 'rise of the individual' and the sense of entitlement. Organizations are contributing to the information sharing as participants equal in status to all the others in the conversation. They recognize that authenticity is becoming a new standard in public service, equal in importance to transparency. Where the communication goal once may have been an informed and passive public, it is now a consulted and engaged community.

Benefits for municipalities

- Satisfy public expectation for on-line communication
- promote principles of open government
- provide effective access to diverse audiences
- enable quick communication during crisis/emergency
- improved monitoring
- improved engagement
- promotion of events & revenue generation
- promote sense of authenticity
- attract top talent

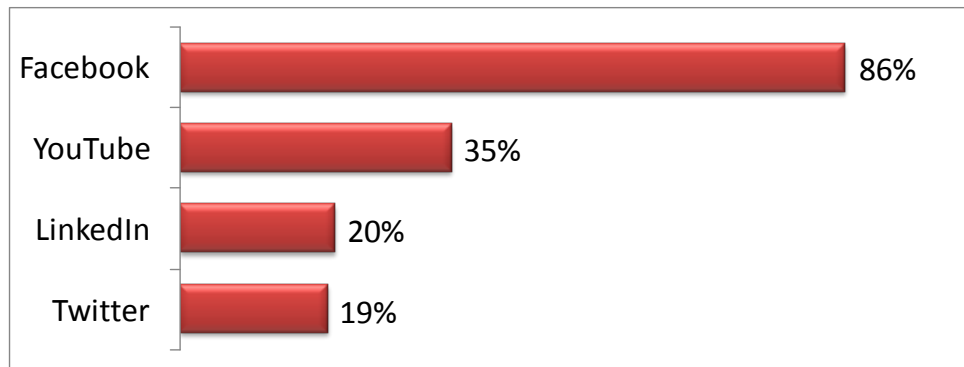


Figure 3: How on-line Canadians use social media³

Although infatuation with social media is beginning to slow, the penetration among Canadians is very strong. The most popular social networks here are Facebook, YouTube, LinkedIn and Twitter. More than half of Canadians are on Facebook. In three years, Twitter use in Canada has grown from less than 1% to more than 20%. Canada ranks fourth in the world for traffic on LinkedIn. More than 35% of on-line Canadians visit a social media site every day. Nearly two-thirds of Canadians aged 35-54 – and 40% older than 54 – actively use social media.

More Canadians spend time on social media than any other nationality, with every age group scoring above the worldwide average. On Facebook, the largest social network in the world, the 55+ age group is the fastest growing group of users.

The primary reason is to stay connected:

- 61% with family and friends
- 39% with professional contacts
- 55% with news and items of general interest

In all age categories, the amount of time spent on instant messaging and email is declining, while time spent on social media is increasing. In particular, instant messaging is down between 32% and 42%. Email remains popular among older audiences and is declining more sharply in the 15-34 age category.⁴

On average, each of us will share 415 pieces of content on Facebook, and spend 23 minutes a day on Twitter to send nearly 16,000 tweets.

³ “How are Canadians using social media” from stryvegroup.com

⁴ “How does Canada stack up in social media usage?” from virtuallyyoursjb.com

SOCIAL MEDIA: STRENGTHS AND OPPORTUNITIES

Social networks are *cost efficient*. They are virtually free of charge. Although there are costs associated with optional upgrades and advertising, it is easy to create a social media program at no cost except for staff time. Organizations can experiment with social networks without fear of losing money if the program is not successful.

Social networks are *time efficient*. Online networks allow questions and feedback within minutes. If information needs to be delivered quickly, such as an emergency situation for example, this can be delivered through social networks much more quickly than through traditional channels.

Social networks are *borderless*. Organizations are no longer limited to communicating with people in the immediate area.

In the past, government organizations have been described as slow and cautious. Social networks are instantaneous and spontaneous. By *engaging the public*, organizations can improve accessibility as well as transparency.

Social networks are less formal. In fact, it is the expectation of users that organizations engaged on social media are *humanized*. This is an opportunity to provide information with personality, and with a greater sense of authenticity. Authenticity is becoming as important as transparency to public audiences.

Social networks are incredibly *popular*. Almost half of the Canadian population has a social networking profile. This large sector of the population often prefers to receive information through these networks for all the other advantages mentioned here.

Social networks are *flexible* and well suited to influence, educate, rally, fundraise, sell or socialize. They offer opportunities to deliver information, receive information and guide audiences to other media for further information.

Strengths & opportunities

- cost efficient
- time efficient
- borderless
- engaging
- humanized
- popular
- flexible

*Social media don't belong to you.
They belong to your audience.
You're simply there to curate,
moderate and participate.⁵*

⁵ Municipal World magazine, fall 2012

SOCIAL MEDIA: WEAKNESSES AND RISKS

Social networks are relatively *new* and growth has been intense. Facebook, with over 950 million active users, was created only eight years ago. Four weeks after Google Plus was launched, it had 25 million users. Before 2008 there were no Ontario municipalities active in social networking and now many are engaged. This relative novelty can engender a feeling of uncertainty.

Traffic patterns and information exchange can be *inconsistent*. Social networks are changing and new ones are emerging. Sometimes these changes can provide improvements and other times they remove features that users have come to enjoy.

Social networks are *less controlled*. When a user creates a social media profile, it is hosted on a third party server with no guarantee posted information will always be available. Also, since everyone has an equal voice, it is difficult to validate the authenticity of information shared on social media.

Although social networks are time efficient, they can be *demanding*. Because people view social networks as instantaneous, they can expect instantaneous responses. Depending on the topic, this is not always possible. Depending on the audience, it is not always necessary. However, if sufficient time and resources are not assigned – if responses are too slow and information too stale – audiences can be disappointed.

Organizations may fear corporate engagement in social media will encourage employees to participate during the work day and this will be a *distraction to productivity*. A clear distinction must be made between the corporate profile, managed by designated staff in accordance with a clear protocol and governing policy, and personal profiles that employees may establish and participate in during their own personal off-work time.

The topics of discussion on social media can be *sensitive*. If this is handled improperly, the corporation can be embarrassed and its standing in the community weakened. This can happen, for example, if sensitive or confidential information is posted in error, and if significant mistakes of accuracy are made.

One of the temptations with social media is to use them to promote self-interest. It was recently found the top reasons for losing followers on Twitter were too much content (52%), too much self-promotion (48%), and too much irrelevant content (47%).⁶

Audiences can write *negative* things about the organization. This is very likely. However, it is important to remember these conversations are taking place anyway, with or without the participation of the organization, and engagement provides a good opportunity to be aware of what is being discussed and to respond with proper information.

Weaknesses & risks

- new
- inconsistent
- less controlled
- demanding
- distracting
- sensitive
- negative

⁶ Dknewmedia at marketingtechblog.com

MITIGATING STRATEGIES

Our review of the social media experiences of other municipalities revealed a few common initial apprehensions of staff and Councils. The experience of those municipalities indicated the success of the following mitigating strategies in managing these perceived risks.

Perceived risk	Mitigation
The public will expect more information and quicker responses than we are equipped to provide.	Assign appropriate resources before you begin. Create a disclaimer on the site that outlines hours of operation and approach to responding to comments.
We have insufficient resources to run a successful program.	Be selective when choosing sites. Start with a few and commit to them rather than dabbling with several sites. Establish roles and responsibilities for content generation and monitoring.
Confidential and sensitive information, and possibly erroneous content, will be posted by mistake and without proper authorization.	Limit site moderation to designated staff. Ensure the site administrator is an experienced communicator. Don't assign this to clerical staff. Create protocols for correcting mistakes.
We will receive public criticism in an open forum.	Be an active part of the conversation and use this opportunity to respond. Accept that some people may criticize, because they probably already are doing so. Establish guidelines for responding to different types of criticism. Train employees who will be responsible for responding to comments on networks.
Employees could use company time to participate on social networks.	Assign site administration to dedicated staff. Block access for employees who are not involved in content generation and monitoring. Include personal use of computers in staff policies.

SOCIAL MEDIA IN ONTARIO MUNICIPALITIES

It is a fairly recent trend for municipalities to be using social networks as a part of their communication program. Four years ago, there were no municipalities in Ontario with a profile on any social networks. A recent review of the 444 Ontario municipalities⁷ found 162 are engaged, and this number has grown by more than 240% since it was last measured by Town staff in September 2011.

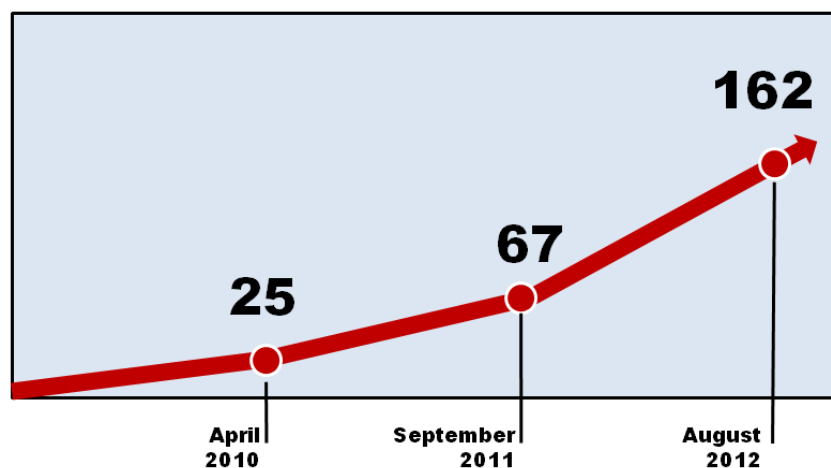
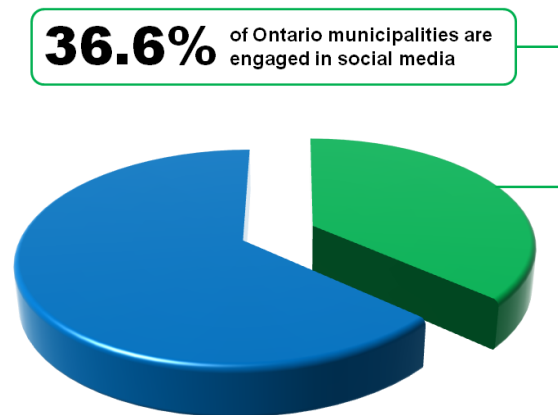


Figure 4: Growth in use of social media by Ontario municipalities

Participation in social media among Ontario municipalities is not dependent on population. The municipalities engaged in social media range from the City of Toronto with a population over 2 million to the Township of Shreiber with a population of 1,100. Of the municipalities using social media, 48% are larger in population than East Gwillimbury and 52% are smaller.

⁷ Research conducted by Eleven PR, 2012

When participating municipalities were ranked by population, it was discovered the median population was 20,031. The current East Gwillimbury population is 23,500, which is just above the median. In other words, slightly more than half the Ontario municipalities engaged in social media are smaller than East Gwillimbury, indicating that municipal engagement in social media is not weighted toward larger cities. In fact, it may be a more natural fit in smaller municipalities where the sense of ‘knowing your neighbour’ is stronger.

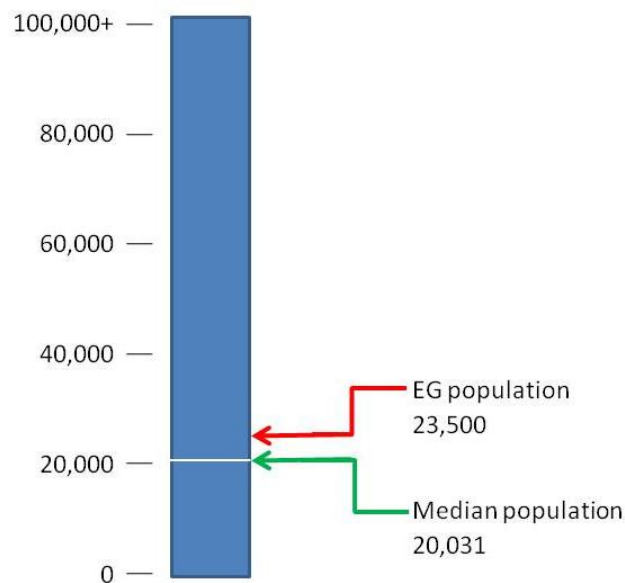


Figure 5: Ontario municipalities using social media, ranked by population

Municipalities are not the last organizations to embrace social media, but they are close.⁸

⁸ Association of Municipalities of Ontario, Watchfile, November 17, 2011

Facebook and Twitter are the most popular networks. Among Ontario municipalities engaged in social media in September 2011, each was using at least one of these two networks, and 55% were using both. A few municipalities were using LinkedIn, YouTube and other smaller sites such as Blogger.

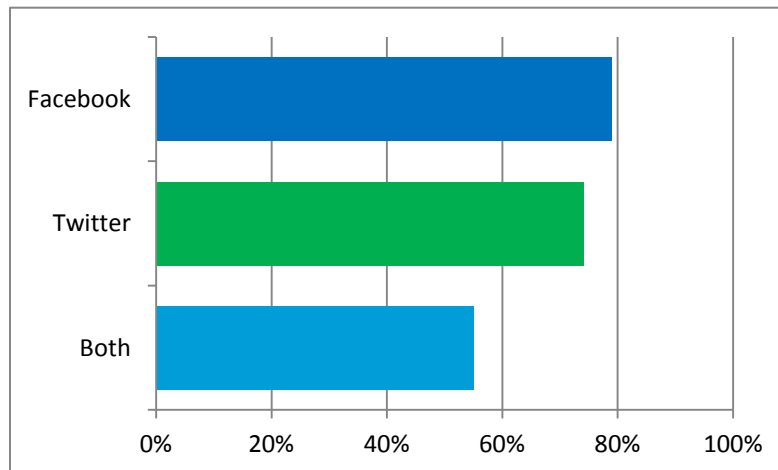


Figure 6: Primary sites used by Ontario municipalities participating in social media

In order to provide a contextual comparison, municipalities currently using social networks that were most similar to East Gwillimbury in terms of location and population were identified and site administrators were interviewed at length. Participating municipalities included four in York Region: the Town of Georgina, the Town of Newmarket, the Town of Aurora and the City of Vaughan, as well as the Region itself. In addition, staff at six Ontario municipalities with populations near in size to East Gwillimbury were interviewed: the Town of Tecumseh, the City of Port Colborne, the Town of Essex, the Township of Oro-Medonte, the Township of Springwater and the Township of Uxbridge. The findings of this analysis are discussed within the Best Practices section.

Lessons learned

Social media creates a conversation.

It's not a monologue, not a campaign, not a pitch, and not spin. Honesty is the only policy.

The first job is to listen.

It's not about marketing, or convincing. It's about engaging. Seek first to understand. Content travels quickly.

Build followers by providing content they don't find anywhere else. Make it relevant, make it meaningful, and make it interesting.

The benefits outweigh the risks.

Don't spend too much time worrying about the risks. Trust that people want to know you.

Make it personal to make connections.

Personalize your social media presence.

Humanize your organization.

Make yourself interesting. Add personality. Go beyond corporate news.

Update approval protocols.

The online world moves much too quickly to allow time for bureaucratic approvals.

Figure 7: Lessons from the experience of municipal site administrators⁹

⁹ Presentation to Ontario Small Urban Municipalities, May 2012

BEST PRACTICES

A social media program can only be successful when audience engagement is achieved. An investigation of best practices for creating a social media program revealed four primary objectives that are necessary for successful engagement:

- keep content fresh and interesting – if you update content on a regular basis, people will be more likely to follow your page
- listen more than you speak – gain insight into what your audience wants to discuss and let them guide the conversation
- invest in relationships with stakeholders in your community – many organizations simply pump out information out; instead, monitor what conversations are taking place and spend the time to engage
- personify the organization – avoid the mechanical feeling by varying the times you post, and modifying the language you use, to help give your network some life.

Monitoring and responding

Delivering messages to the audience is only one aspect of managing social networks, and not the most important one. More time should be spent listening than speaking. Administrators monitor discussion on social networks and offer a response where that is appropriate.

A review of best practices also revealed different types of conversations audiences may engage in, and the different types of response that would be appropriate. A *validation* statement such as, “I’m excited about the re-opening of the Sports Complex” is an opinion looking for validation from others. The person may not require an answer or comment but, if one were provided, it would be in the style of conversation to validate the opinion, appreciate the comment, and perhaps promote participation.

A *research* statement such as, “I’m looking for a place to take the kids for a hike,” expects help to find information or make a decision. The site administrator can provide this information in a customer service capacity which would then be available to others who would find that information helpful.

Why the revolutionary public uptake?

- two-way communication
- rise of the individual
- availability/entitlement
- companionship
- authenticity
- sense of independence
- trust in information
- entrenchment of technology
- portability
- accessibility
- interactivity
- instant availability
- speed
- convenience

An *observation* statement such as, “The new Grist Mill playground is beautiful” communicates either a positive or negative experience. Response to a positive comment would be appreciative and perhaps promotional. Response to a negative comment could ask for information or, offer an explanation.

A *request for assistance* such as, “Please send me directions to the Nokiidaa Trail” is a comment requiring customer service help and an opportunity to provide helpful information.

Often, when a user makes a *complaint* they are offering an opportunity to fix a problem. For example, “The Town is not doing a very good job maintaining the roads in my neighbourhood”, is another form of request for customer service. A non-defensive response or request for more information could be a positive way to continue the conversation.

There are *window breaking* statements that are critical, inflammatory and somewhat unreasonable. An example might be, “Municipal bureaucrats are overpaid and underworked”. People who make this sort of statement are not usually asking for resolution. Responses are not always appropriate here.

Finally, there are *ain’t it awful* comments on sites where people enjoy complaining in skillful banter as a substitute for real engagement or meaningful action. The diatribe and clever language accomplish nothing and lead to no improvement but to serve the moment with ritual and create a sense of bonding through a shared experience of misery and frustration. These comments should be monitored but response would only perpetuate the cycle of complaint.

Site management

Discussions with municipal administrators revealed three prevalent management strategies.

One content generator, one site administrator — A single administrator gathers all the information that might be relevant for posting on behalf of the municipality, sorts it to determine the most appropriate content, authorizes it, and communicates it on the social networks.

Multiple content generators, one site administrator — A number of content generators, often a representative from each department, collaborate with staff in their departments to create and validate content, and then submit it to the administrator who would then authorize it and post to the networks. In some cases, department representatives meet periodically to coordinate content and provide oversight to the administration of the social networks.

Multiple content generators, multiple site administrators — Multiple content generators, often a representative from each department, collaborate with staff in their departments to create and validate content. Individual department representatives then post content directly to the social networks. There is no formalized approval process. A central communications department attempts to provide guidance.

Site administrators also agreed that managing the municipality’s social media presence should be handled by an experienced communicator to avoid errors and protect the municipality.

Site promotion

Municipalities that post information to their social networks with links to their websites are engaging in promotion. Communication media are integrated. Community members visiting the website are able to click links and be referred to the social networks, and vice versa. All municipal network administrators surveyed mentioned the value of this type of promotion. The Township of Springwater included an advertisement of their networks in their bi-weekly page in their local newspaper. The City of Port Colborne provided links to their network in their electronic newsletter. York Region reinvented their media release template to include their networks in the footer. The Town of Aurora used a reciprocal strategy for liking and following groups and organizations. By choosing to follow groups with large followings, they were promoting their own network.

Site evaluation

Facebook's Page Insights is a popular tool for evaluating their program. It is accessible when a Facebook page reaches 30 followers, and it provides demographic information on the page's followers. It can also detail when the page receives new likes or un-likes. This tool can be helpful in determining whether specific Facebook campaigns are successful. The administrator at the Town of Aurora saw a peak in likes during their Earth Hour campaign.

Although the Township of Springwater did not have access to Page Insights because their following is less than 30 people, they were able to evaluate their Facebook program by looking at the number of impressions and feedback on certain posts. The number of impressions indicates how many people saw the post. The feedback shows the percentage of people who responded either with a like or comment.

For evaluating their Twitter programs, every administrator mentioned Re-tweets as a key metric. Twittercounter is a free site that allows administrators to see details on new followers and to determine traffic patterns.

THE EAST GWILLIMBURY CONTEXT

To provide local context regarding the potential for the community's social media use, an online survey was promoted in the Town Page as well as through word of mouth and social media channels. The survey asked 42 volunteer respondents about whether they use social media, the effectiveness of the Town's current communication tools, and the potential for social media as a prospective communication tool.

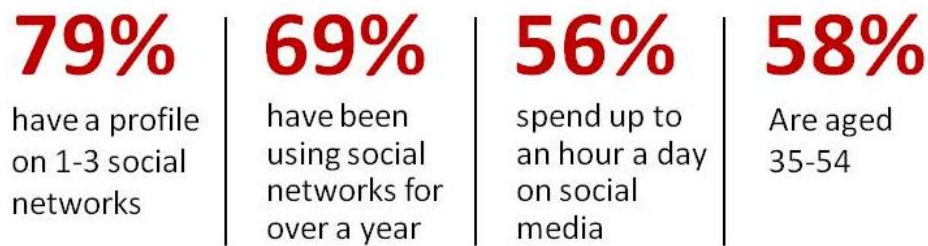


Figure 8: EG residents' use of social media

Most respondents (79%) indicated they had at least one social networking profile. Of these social network users, 69% had a profile for more than a year. They spend significant time on-line, most are over the age of 35, and most chose Facebook as their preferred social networking site.

The number one reason for participating on social networks was socializing. The second most popular reason was to find information.

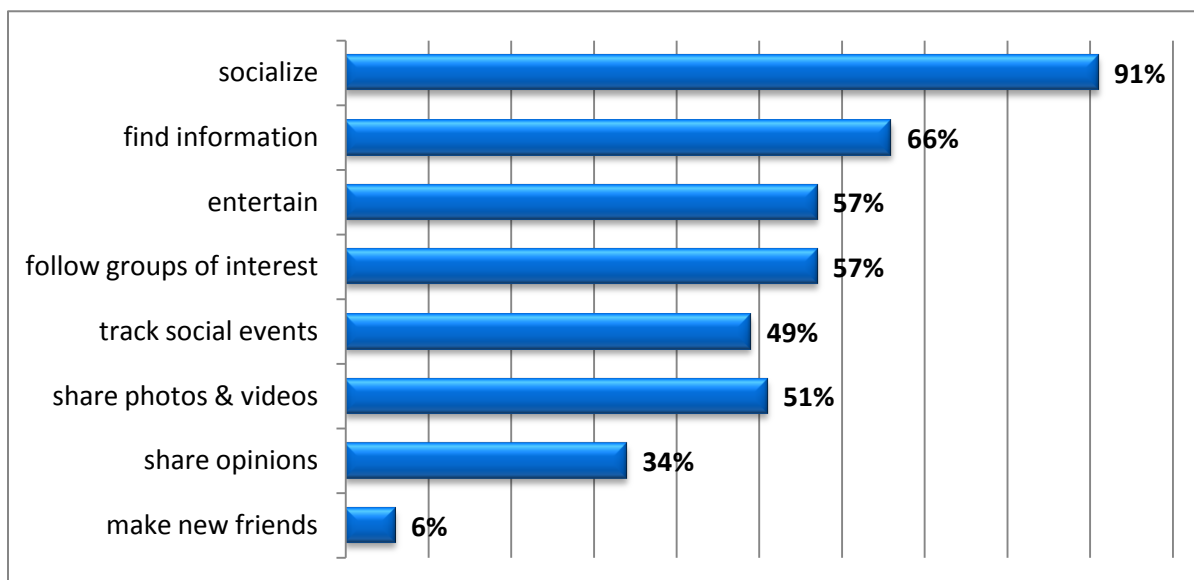


Figure 9: Why EG residents participate on social networks

Most respondents recognized the value of social media, with 79% indicating they agree or strongly agree that social media are valuable tools for communicating information. The survey also asked whether the Town of East Gwillimbury should include social media as a part of the communication strategy and 70% indicated they would like to receive information from the Town through social media.

The Town of East Gwillimbury has an established communication program that includes the website, weekly Town page in the local newspaper, various signs around the community, digital displays in community centres, and other print and display channels.

Community surveys of 464 residents were conducted in April and November 2011 to determine which forms of communication were found to be most effective. Results indicated 43% of respondents rely on word of mouth and 5% look to the Town website for information regarding the Town.

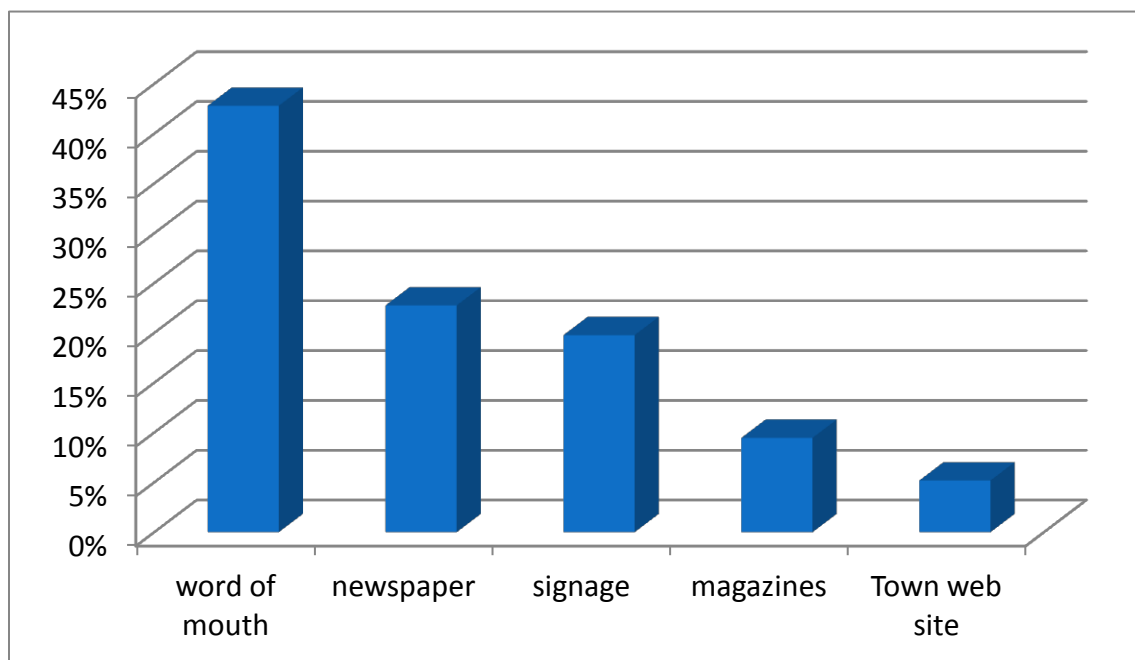


Figure 10: Effectiveness of traditional communication media

Social media are the modern word of mouth. The predominance of word of mouth as a relied-upon source of information emphasizes the potential value of social media. Followers can passively receive information as a captive audience, rather than having to actively seek out the traditional media such as the Town page or web site.

In the event of a disruption of service such as garbage collection, for example, traditional media require citizens to actively search for information about how this will affect their households. With social media, on the other hand, this information can be provided proactively by the Town and it can come directly to residents in the most timely fashion.

***Social media
are the modern
word of mouth.***

This, along with the use of the Town web site and Town page, suggests a very comfortable fit for social media within a balanced communication program. Electronic links between the web site and social media are easily established and maintained, and could become a standing connection residents would come to expect and rely upon for information updates. The Town page could strengthen the Town's social media presence with reminders how residents can plug into the network.

Municipal engagement in social media is growing quickly and, in northern York Region, all municipalities are involved to some extent except East Gwillimbury. The primary social media used in northern York Region are Facebook and Twitter, while other sites are used to a lesser extent depending on the needs of the municipalities. Figure 11 shows their participation.

In the Town of Aurora, content is developed by all departments and provided to Corporate Communications, which refines the information and posts to social media. Corporate Communications staff spend 3-4 hours per week collecting and authorizing the information; 1 hour posting and updating; and 3-4 hours monitoring and responding to comments and inquiries.

In the Town of Newmarket, Corporate Communications staff generate and post information for the corporation, and this is done primarily by one dedicated staff person. Information is sometimes provided proactively by other departments. Staff time spent on social media is in the range of 5-10 hours per week.

The Township of King currently maintains a blog to provide information specific to sustainability, which is updated and monitored by one Corporate Communications staff person. Township activity on social media is described as not very active, and about 5 hours a week of staff time is invested. The Parks and Recreation Department maintains a separate Facebook page for campers and families, not integrated with the Township's web site. Various authors provide content, which is approved and posted by two staff.

	Aurora	Georgina	King	Newmarket	Whitchurch -Stouffville
Social media					
Facebook	●	●		●	●
Twitter	●	●	●	●	●
LinkedIn					●
YouTube	●			●	
Flickr	●			●	
Blog			●		
Administration model					
One content generator, one site administrator				✓	
Multiple content generators, one site administrator	✓	✓	✓		
Multiple content generators, multiple site administrators					✓
Staff resources (hours per week)	7-9	10	5	5-10	

● Currently in use ● Planned for near future

Figure 11: municipal engagement in northern York Region

At the Town of Georgina, a Facebook profile is maintained for The ROC complex. This is done by staff in the Recreation Department and is fairly active. The Town plans to create a corporate Facebook page and integrate The Roc as a subpage. The Town has a Twitter feed but it is not maintained actively. This minimal social media presence requires approximately 10 hours of staff time each week, and the Town advises this should be more.

The Towns of Aurora and Newmarket have been involved in social media longer than the others. Staff are familiar with social media and processes have matured.

Engagement in social media at the Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville is decentralized, with multiple staff people creating and posting content, and the Communications Officer assisting where possible.

PROPOSED SOCIAL MEDIA SITES

Facebook



As the most popular and pervasive social media platform in the world, Facebook has the potential to be a very important component of the Town's social media presence and strategy going forward. Indeed, as the statistics earlier in this report demonstrate, Facebook is the primary or cornerstone social media platform for the majority of Ontario municipalities engaged in social media.

A recent survey of EG residents indicated Facebook is the preferred social network. Facebook is the leading choice for Ontario municipalities using social networks. Of the municipalities using social networks, 79% have Facebook pages.

Facebook customers create their own profiles and populate their own content. Engagement with visitors is enhanced when they choose to 'like' the organization's Facebook page in order to follow content there, and when they comment on it.

The peak times for Facebook users are 11:00 am, 3:00 pm, 5:00 pm and 8:00 pm. Monitoring at these times is recommended and pre-scheduling posts allows the administrator to monitor at these times even when s/he is not personally available. It is also important to make it clear to visitors when the page administrator monitors the site, in order to avoid unrealistic expectations from followers. If the site will not be monitored on the weekends and evenings, this should be disclosed on the page.

Facebook

- 950 million users spend an average of 20 minutes a day
- 31% use it more than once a day
- each has an average of 130 friends to share
- 510,000 comments & 293,000 photos posted every minute

Reasons for adopting Facebook

Following are some of the more compelling reasons in favour of making Facebook a central tool in the Town's social media strategy:

- **The audience is already there:** There are presently nearly 19 million Canadians on Facebook. This is 54.8% of the total Canadian population and 70.5% of the online Canadian population. The majority of the Town's target audience members are already registered Facebook users and are familiar with the way it works. Given the fact it's the most prevalent social media platform in existence, it is the easiest way to begin engaging citizens.
- **It's an effective tool for building profile and awareness:** Facebook is a particularly useful tool for helping to raise awareness and profile for the Town and its activities. Once users click the 'like' button and become a follower of the Town's page, they will continue to see the Town's

updates in their ‘news feeds’. This helps to keep the Town and its updates top of mind with followers. In addition, the multimedia nature of Facebook is conducive to promoting the Town and its news in different ways, including links, photos, videos and polls.

- **It’s cost effective:** The use of Facebook is essentially free. The only costs associated with the creation and maintenance of the Town’s Facebook page would be staff costs.
- **It allows for fast communications:** Facebook provides a way for the Town to respond to followers’ questions and comments with unprecedented immediacy, depending upon the degree to which the page is being monitored. There is also the ability to cross-link social media platforms and provide simultaneous updates on Facebook and Twitter.
- **It’s a great way to stay connected with an increasingly mobile user base:** Mobile use of Facebook is increasing dramatically with the rise in use of smartphones and tablets. Target audiences can keep in touch while they are out participating in local programs, activities, festivals, etc.
- **It can be an effective crisis communications tool:** In the event the Town is faced with a crisis situation that could have an impact on the delivery of municipal services or the safety of residents, Facebook can be an effective tool for communicating important news and updates in a quick manner to an increasingly mobile user base. Examples of the types of information that could be relayed during times of crisis could be: information meetings, evacuation procedures, areas of bottled water pickups, road closures, flooded areas, power outages, etc.
- **It can be an effective tool for identifying issues/problems/trends:** By monitoring the nature and topics of user comments, the Town can track some of the key issues and concerns facing residents. This can help identify emerging issues or operational situations that may need addressing.

Twitter



Twitter is the fastest growing social network today, with over 100 million users. In a North American survey, 47% of respondents stated they had a profile with Twitter. Of the Ontario municipalities using social media, 74% have a profile with Twitter.

One of the main advantages with Twitter is its ability to communicate to followers quickly. Twitter is faster than other social networking sites because of its brevity and mobile accessibility. Messages are quick to send, and quick to update.

This platform is designed for delivering short bursts of information and updates about Town news, events and other information relevant to residents. This can be useful not only to engage in ongoing conversation to increase community engagement but also to provide quick instructions and updates to residents during times of emergency, where quick facts can be distributed extensively, with links to the web site for more information.

Because Twitter traffic is so rapid, care should be exercised in message development. Sometimes, once a message has been sent and before it can be clarified or restated, it can be re-tweeted exponentially. Also, although Twitter does not allow others to post messages on your wall as is the case with Facebook, people can still ask questions by replying to your tweets and there is still a dynamic conversation taking place. It is important to check often and respond to any questions or comments.

Peak user times for Twitter are between 11:00 am and 3:00 pm. As with Facebook, third-party applications such as Hootsuite can be used to schedule posts at designated times. Clearly outlining when the Twitter feed is monitored can help avoid unrealistic user expectations.

Twitter

- 500 million accounts
- 1 million new accounts every day
- 36% use it at least once a day
- each has an average of 126 followers
- 125,000 tweets every minute

Reasons for adopting Twitter

Like Facebook, Twitter provides significant potential for communicating with key audiences in a fast, efficient manner. Usage continues to increase and can offer an effective complement to the Facebook page. Following are some of the key reasons in favour of maintaining a Twitter account as part of the Town's social media strategy:

- **It allows the Town to be the media:** Twitter, like Facebook, allows the municipality to essentially 'be the media' and disseminate news, information and other updates very quickly. This can be particularly useful to correct errors in mainstream news coverage.

- **It can help support the Town's other communications and marketing objectives:** Twitter can serve as a complementary channel for news, video, photos and other updates to the Town's followers.
- **It can be an effective crisis communications tool:** In the event of a crisis, Twitter, like Facebook, can be an effective tool for communicating important news and updates on the delivery of municipal services or the safety of residents. It is particularly effective in an increasingly mobile user base. Examples of the types of information that could be relayed during times of crisis could be: information meetings, evacuation procedures, areas of bottled water pickups, road closures, flooded areas, power outages, etc.
- **It's a great tool for identifying issues/problems/trends:** By monitoring the nature and topics of users' comments, the Town can get an idea of some of the key issues and concerns facing residents. This can help identify emerging issues or operational situations that may need to be addressed. Twitter also has a powerful search engine to monitor selected keywords within a certain geographic area.
- **It's a great tool for facilitating discussions:** It provides the municipality with an opportunity to respond to comments and questions, facilitating positive discussion and dialogue with followers.
- **It offers opportunities for social media cross-promotion:** Some organizations choose to link their Facebook and Twitter feeds, essentially cross-promoting via these two distinct channels. This can help ensure that important messages are relayed to as many audience members as possible. This linking process can be automated on the different platforms. This helps to maintain consistency of messaging in an integrated communications program.

LinkedIn



LinkedIn is the world's largest professional networking site. While there are 161 million individual LinkedIn members from more than 200 countries, there are also more than 2 million organizations with LinkedIn company pages. The company page tells the organization's story, highlights programs, engages with followers, shares career opportunities and helps drive positive word of mouth. Above all, the most popular use of company pages is to connect with prospective qualified job seekers, letting them know about open positions at the Town. A company page can also serve as an effective tool for connecting with suppliers or other business partners.

LinkedIn

- 161 million accounts
- users spend an average of 17 minutes per day
- 2 new members every second
- 4.2 billion professional searches per year = 12 million every day
- 50% have a BA or higher

A number of Ontario municipalities have created company pages on LinkedIn. The City of Owen Sound emphasizes its brand value and invites input into its strategic planning process. Halton Region introduces new staff. For millions of professionals, company pages are places to explore job opportunities, learn about companies of interest, and get the latest company and industry news.

Once an organization has established a company page, administrators are able to view informative analytics, access insights into who its followers are and what content appeals to them.

As with other social media sites, an organization can post a 'follow LinkedIn' button on its website to make it easier for residents and prospective employees to follow the Town and its activity on LinkedIn.

Reasons for adopting LinkedIn

Of all the various social media tools available, LinkedIn is the channel that requires the least amount of maintenance and presents the lowest risk profile. Although it presents only a modest degree of engagement, it can play an important role in the Town's holistic approach to social media. Following are the primary reasons for making a LinkedIn company page part of the Town's social media strategy:

- **Reveal the 'human' side of your organization:** The LinkedIn company page can be an effective tool for providing a peek at the people behind the brand of the Town of East Gwillimbury.
- **Recruit qualified potential employees:** One of the key strengths of LinkedIn is its ability to help identify relevant and qualified candidates for open positions within the municipality. Not only can LinkedIn be used to advertise the position, but the Town's recruiting staff will be able to review the skills, capabilities and employment histories of job candidates who are registered LinkedIn users.

- **It's a low-risk social media platform:** Since there is no ability for followers to post on the Town's company page, LinkedIn does not present any specific risks with respect to negative responses, inappropriate content, etc.
- **It's a low maintenance social media platform:** Once it has been set up, the LinkedIn company page does not require extensive curating. While the Town can make updates or changes at its discretion, the majority of elements on the company page will be static. This can provide a social media presence without extensive investment in staff costs related to LinkedIn maintenance.

YouTube



YouTube is the most popular website for sharing videos, with 790 million users per month. In North America, 38% of the population use YouTube regularly. Of the Ontario municipalities using social networks, 31% include YouTube in their program.

YouTube channels allow users to upload, organize and share videos about the organization. Once uploaded, videos can be organized into different playlists and shared over social networks such as Facebook and Twitter. The public has the opportunity to comment on videos.

YouTube

- 3rd most visited site on the internet
- 4 billion videos viewed every day
- users spend an average of 15 minutes per day
- 35 hours of new videos uploaded every minute

Reasons for adopting YouTube

A number of Canadian municipalities are successfully using YouTube to engage with and inform residents and other key stakeholder groups. Municipalities with effective YouTube channels include: the Town of Newmarket, the City of Calgary, the City of Ottawa, the Regional Municipality of Niagara and the City of Edmonton. Following are some of the key reasons in favour of adopting and maintaining a YouTube channel as part of the Town of East Gwillimbury's social media strategy:

- **It's a time-saving way to inform key audiences:** Time and money are required to develop video content, and this is what YouTube is best known for. At the same time, however, animated PowerPoint presentations can also be informative and are much less demanding of resources to create. YouTube content can remain relevant for months or even years, serving as a dynamic and important information resource for thousands of residents, business owners and visitors who can access the video content at their leisure. Having this online archive can also help save time in cases where information is much more effectively delivered in videos than by phone or email. Such is the case with the video describing the mosquito control application.
- **When used properly, video is an incredibly powerful communications vehicle:** If a picture is worth a thousand words, then video is worth exponentially more. Canadians are becoming increasingly accustomed to getting their news and information in an easy-to-watch video format. And with the increased utilization of mobile video on smartphones and tablets, video will have an increasingly important role to play going forward. A well-thought-out and executed YouTube channel can provide the Town with a powerful communications platform.
- **In a community with limited mainstream media coverage, YouTube can fill in the gaps:** Particularly in a small town setting, a well-maintained YouTube channel can become a popular and important source of information for residents and visitors. In the past, municipalities would need to communicate via the local newspaper or radio station and, to a large extent, were at the

mercy of the reporters/editors. Today, it's possible to 'be the media' instead of needing to 'convince the media' to cover Town stories.

- **Great value for the dollar:** In the past several years, the costs associated with creating high quality video content have dropped dramatically. Ten years ago, putting a video on the website would have been cost prohibitive and taken weeks to produce. Now, thanks to more powerful consumer cameras, editing software and YouTube, virtually any individual or organization can create near-broadcast quality content relatively quickly and inexpensively.
- **An opportunity to establish and reinforce the Town's brand:** Each video on the Town's YouTube channel presents an opportunity to communicate and reinforce the Town's branding and corporate positioning. This can be done quickly through the use of sound, graphics, superimposed words, taglines, etc. Over time, it's an inexpensive and effective way to strengthen and bolster the municipality's brand presence.
- **The ability to create custom 'folders' or categories within your channel:** As the number of videos within the channel increases over time, the possibility exists that these will look cluttered or cause confusion to visitors looking for specific content. By organizing videos under folders or headings, the Town can make the channel more user-friendly for visitors and make it easier for viewers to quickly access the content they're looking for which, in turn, can help increase the odds they will return.
- **It can be an effective crisis communications tool:** In the event of a crisis, especially when video images are important to understanding the situation, YouTube can be a great tool for communicating important news and updates quickly.
- **Opportunities for cross-promotion:** The Town can choose to promote newly-posted YouTube videos by announcing them on Twitter and Facebook, helping to raise awareness among followers and generate increased views.

RECOMMENDED STRATEGY

The recommended strategy is to create social networking profiles for the Town of East Gwillimbury on Facebook and Twitter during an initial evaluation period of approximately six months. As staff become more familiar with protocols and more efficient in implementation, LinkedIn and YouTube can be added.

Goals

- reach members of the community who would like to engage with the Town of East Gwillimbury through social networks
- offer a moderated forum for two-way communication and participation from community members
- enhance the Town of East Gwillimbury's transparency, approachability and authenticity
- integrate social media with current communication tools in an effective overall communication program

Protocols

A successful social media program requires frequent and ongoing curating and maintenance. Content must be fresh and relevant: it needs to be updated regularly and often. Ineffective monitoring and lack of awareness of issues being discussed will erode public confidence. Failing to respond to questions from residents in a timely manner can frustrate followers and diminish the overall impact of the social media program. With that in mind, and based on the experience of other municipalities and established best practices, the following protocols are recommended as part of the Town's social media strategy.

Posting frequency

- **Facebook:** It is recommended to establish a routine schedule of one to two posts per week to create consistency, maximize awareness and deliver timely responses to comments and messages.
- **Twitter:** In order to establish an ongoing presence worth visiting, and to create a following among stakeholders, it is recommended that the Town tweet original content one to three times a day and monitor on-line conversations and respond/retweet in a prompt manner.
- **LinkedIn:** After the Town profile is established and branded, all appropriate job openings should be posted and new employees announced. This could begin six months after Facebook and Twitter are launched, and content would be handled on an as-needed basis.
- **YouTube:** A YouTube presence may be created six months after Facebook and Twitter are launched and videos would be posted as they become available. A Town channel would be created when that is appropriate based on content.

It is important to keep in mind the fine balance between posting relevant news and updates on the one hand and inundating residents with too much information on the other. The findings of a recent survey indicated that more than half of those who stopped following popular Twitter pages did so because too much information was being shared, and too frequently. Another top cause of fatigue is updates that are too self-promotional in nature. While the success of the Town's social media plan depends on consistent engagement and ongoing interactions, it is important to avoid posting too many updates or using social media purely as an advertising function.



Figure 12: People lose interest in too many irrelevant updates¹⁰

Staffing requirements

Estimating the staff resources that will be necessary to conduct an effective and successful social media strategy requires consideration in three categories:

- monitoring
- gathering, preparing and posting material
- responding to comments and input

After soliciting the experiences of a range of organizations and a number of municipalities, and with a comprehensive understanding of the East Gwillimbury context, it is estimated that 7-10 hours per week will be required of a dedicated staff person to properly manage the social media function for the Town of East Gwillimbury. This requirement can be revisited following the evaluation period, when actual traffic and usage patterns are better known.

¹⁰ Illustration from Real Simple magazine, January 2012

Monitoring

Engagement is a two-way process. To be successful, it involves an investment in the art of listening. It is recommended that a significant portion of the time be spent monitoring the various social media for topics important to key audiences.

On an ongoing basis, staff will advise Council regarding the topics identified during monitoring, trends in on-line conversations pertinent to the Town, and the results of measurement.

While it remains necessary that some of the monitoring work will be manual in nature, there are also some powerful tools and applications readily available without cost to help automate and streamline this monitoring process, allowing the Town to use its resources in the most efficient manner possible. These are discussed in the Metrics section.

Organization and preparation of material

Given the dynamic nature of social media, it can be difficult to predict the amount of time that should be dedicated to organizing and preparing material. However, Town staff do presently have experience generating content for such things as the web site, staff newsletters and the mid-year and year-end reviews. On the basis of that experience, two indicators have emerged that suggest content on social media should be organized and posted by one administrator. One is the ongoing challenge among Town staff (for whom this is not a primary responsibility) to find the time to generate and handle content. The second is that the content most suitable for social media requires a specialized kind of writing. For these reasons, it is recommended that a communications staff person take responsibility for generating content (in consultation with other subject matter experts as necessary) and posting content to social media. Experience has demonstrated this is the most reliable way to generate the content required.

Responding to comments and input

Central to the question of resources required is the consideration of timely responses to public questions and comments, and the potential volume of public commentary is unknown at this time. In some instances a quick answer may be appropriate for a simple inquiry, while other instances may involve working with various departments and the Mayor and members of Council to provide information about sensitive topics that may be controversial in the community.

It should also be noted that staff will not respond to all comments. The discussion in the Best Practices section indicates the kind of responses that would be most appropriate. Sometimes, the best course of action is to keep monitoring without responding.

Metrics

Establishing goals will be integral to determining which elements of a social media campaign are successful and where changes or improvements may be needed. Tracking the following benchmarks will help to provide tangible indications whether the program is successful.

Followers/fans: This is one of the most fundamental benchmarks to measure success and also one of the easiest to track. As a social media campaign progresses, the number of individuals who follow the Twitter feed, become fans of the Facebook page, connect via LinkedIn or watch YouTube videos can indicate whether the campaign is reaching a significant audience. Also, measuring comment-to-post ratios can help quantify return on the investment. Other measures of success on Twitter could include the momentum effect of “retweets”, and the number of hashtags used to relay information.

Sources of traffic: Social media will be used to drive traffic to the Town’s website for more information. Google Analytics can report the number of unique visitors in a given time period and where those visitors came from. For example, this can monitor web traffic generated by a Twitter link or a Facebook page. The numbers of visitors arriving via social media will ideally increase as the social media campaign progresses.

Comments: Another key measure in any social media strategy is the number of user comments on the content generated by the Town. In addition to quantitative numbers, monitoring the tone of the conversation can help measure whether the Town presence is helping to reduce negative comments.

Beyond outputs: We can look beyond simple numbers (such as page views, followers and likes) by linking on-line behavior with off-line action. For example, how does the social media presence influence attendance, project support, customer service satisfaction, or a reduction in complaints?

Following are some tools available to provide further metrics. These cost-effective tools can provide valuable insight into the types of content that elicit the best responses, the source of traffic on social media platforms, and who is connecting with the Town online.

- **Facebook:** Facebook Insights is the best integrated application available to administrators of Facebook pages. It provides demographic information about users such as location and gender, the number of page views each posting receives, and positive and negative feedback. One notable metric available on Insights is “People Talking About This,” a feature that quantifies how many people have engaged with a page in any way in a given week.

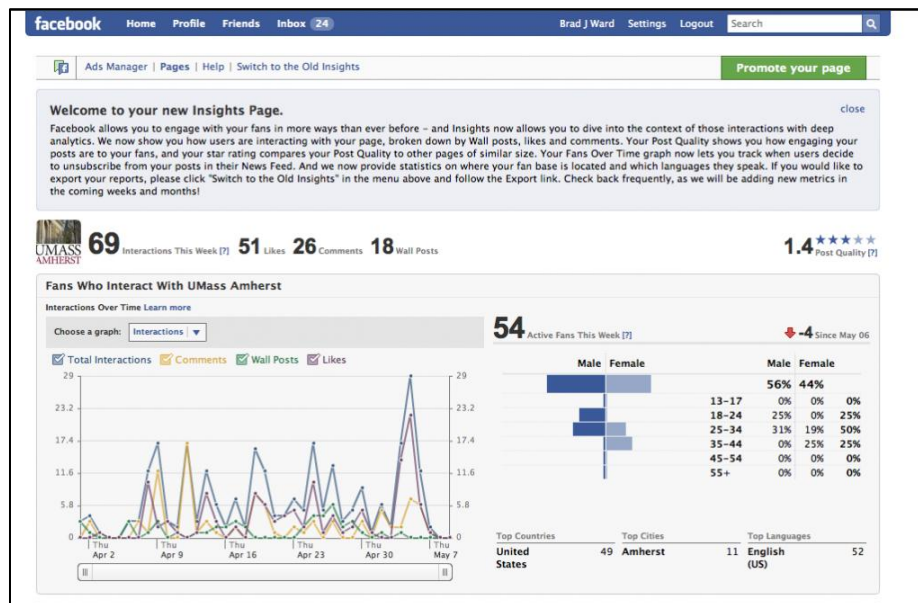


Figure 13: sample Insights page

- Twitter:** TweetReach is a third-party website that provides a comprehensive overview of a Twitter account’s reach, exposure and interaction with other accounts. The site provides an important understanding of the number of individual impressions made by a Twitter account and the size of the engaged audience. TweetReach reports are generated free of charge, though the company also provides more comprehensive reporting for a fee.

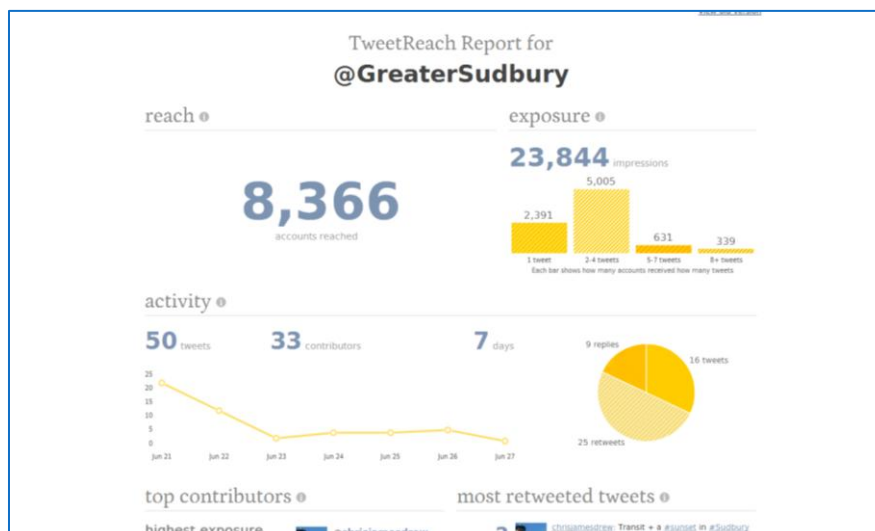


Figure 14: sample TweetReach report

Klout is another third-party application that scores a Twitter account based how many individuals retweet the message or interact with the account in other ways. The score provides an insightful snapshot on areas of reach and audience engagement that are working successfully and those that need improvement. This service is provided free of charge and can also provide insights into the Town's Facebook, YouTube and LinkedIn profiles.

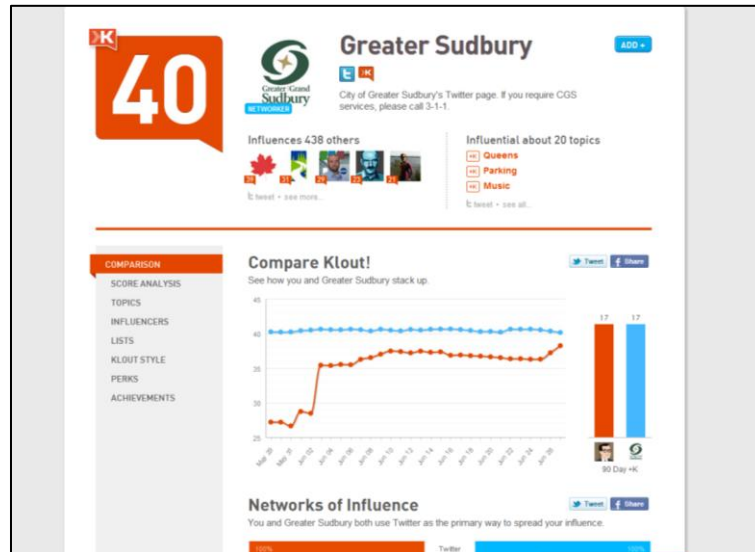


Figure 15: sample Klout report

- **LinkedIn:** Simple subscription to the reporting service results in information about the number of profile reviews received, the individuals accessing the profile, and the number of times the profile has been searched. These quantitative measures can be supplemented with an in-house assessment of the quality of applicants, as well as anecdotal evidence of reach, awareness and good will.
- **YouTube:** There is an analytics service offered on the YouTube site that provides a breakdown of simple quantitative indicators such as video views, ratings, comments, and links.

DRAFT SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

Purpose of the policy

The following draft social media policy is proposed as a guiding document to provide principles and guidelines that will govern the Town's participation in social media. It also provides guidance and protocols and defines roles and responsibilities for the content and administration of the Town's social media accounts.

Principles of engagement

The Town of East Gwillimbury is committed to openness and transparency, and the value of engaging stakeholders in meaningful conversations regarding Town programs, services and policies. The Town recognizes that social media provide valuable opportunities to communicate with stakeholders and provide timely, accurate, and helpful information. Furthermore, the Town has an inherent interest in being part of on-line conversations that mention the Town in order to enhance the municipality's brand reputation as a public service corporation committed to excellence.

The Town supports the following principles in the administration of social media:

- promote engagement and a culture of two-way communication to build trust and relationships
- provide timely, accurate and responsive information
- present a professional, respectful and positive public image
- support transparency and accountability
- provide factually accurate information
- promote approachability and authenticity

In order to reach as many people as possible, the Town balances its communications program by engaging in traditional media as well as social media. The primary purpose of social media is to take part in ongoing conversations of interest to the Town, disseminate brief messages quickly, provide links for further information, and promote Town-sponsored activities.

Site selection

Corporate Communications staff will act as site administrators to provide oversight and administration for Town social media sites. The Town will maintain a series of corporate social media accounts and new accounts will be established from time to time by Corporate Communications. Establishment of new accounts will result from research to validate the need and affordability, including added benefits and costs, a manageable content approval process, demonstration that new sites will not interfere with the Town's other communication channels, legal concerns, and required resources.

Content

Content and conversations on social media should be professional, and intended to inform and engage. Information posted by the Town is accurate, relevant and consistent with corporate policies and protocols. Only properly authorized staff (site administrators) will post content and comments on the Town's social media sites. Administrators will respect confidentiality and sensitivity of information, including financial and business information, privileged information, legal advice, personal information, home addresses and telephone phone numbers, or any information not generally available to the public.

Town participation in social media reflects established municipal values and support the policies, programs and municipal decisions of the Town, its public agencies and other levels of government. Site administrators ensure that privacy, confidentiality, copyright and data protection laws are respected.

Unsuitable content

The site administrator monitors all Town social media and may remove any post with unsuitable content as described below, and may block/ban users for repeated violations of its social media guidelines. This is stated in the Town disclaimer on each site. Some examples of inappropriate content include but are not limited to the following:

- comments that are profane, abusive, threatening, harassing, intimidating, hateful or intended to defame any person or organization
- content considered to be disrespectful or insulting to Town staff or representatives
- comments that suggest or encourage illegal activity
- content that promotes, fosters or perpetuates discrimination on the basis of race, creed, colour, age, religion, gender, marital status, status with regard to public assistance, national origin, physical or mental disability, gender identity or sexual orientation
- sexual content or links to sexual content
- content posted by persons whose profile picture or avatar, username or e-mail address contains any of the aforementioned unsuitable content

- solicitations or advertisements, including promotion and endorsement of any financial, commercial or non-governmental agency
- information that may compromise the safety or security of the public or public system
- messages not supported in the Town's current advertising protocol
- comments that are topically unrelated to the issue
- public disclosure of personal and confidential information
- religious and political messages
- promotional messages for personal gain or personal solicitation
- harmful software, viruses, Trojan horses or malware in any form
- data that could reasonably be expected to cause, directly or indirectly, strain on any computing facilities, or interfere with others' use of the service, such as chain letters and mass mailings (spam)
- commercial endorsement or solicitation
- confidential and personal information
- jokes, slurs, or innuendos
- content for the purposes of promoting a candidate for any elected or appointed office
- content that violates intellectual property rights of any other party
- content that contains personal information about an identifiable individual other than the individual posting the content

Negative comments

The Town invites all stakeholders and interested parties to share and discuss their opinions provided that all comments remain respectful. The site administrator responds to questions and comments that are consistent with the Town's social media guidelines and policy, and does this within a reasonable timeframe.

Some level of criticism is expected, and this presents an opportunity to participate in the ongoing conversation, correct misinformation and deliver service. Negative comments should be responded to using constructive feedback rather than censorship.

It is sometimes appropriate, within the professional judgment of the site administrator, to allow public commentary to take its course without Town intervention.

External links

Content that contains links to other external sites are permitted providing they link to:

- committees of Council
- established non-profit or public East Gwillimbury organizations recognized by and endorsed by the Town
- other governments agencies
- educational institutions

During a municipal election year, links to sites operated by or on behalf of candidates including current members of Council will be disallowed as of June 1st, or whenever a candidate files their nomination papers; whichever comes first, until a new term of Council begins.

Disclaimer & Terms of Use

Each Town social media site will contain a disclaimer such as the example shown below:

This site is maintained by the Town of East Gwillimbury for the purpose of providing useful information and relevant dialogue. It is informal and should not be considered official communication from the Town. For official information on the Town of East Gwillimbury and its programs, services and policies, please visit eastgwillimbury.ca. The views of external participants commenting on this site do not necessarily represent those of the Town of East Gwillimbury.

The Town monitors this site during regular business hours, Monday to Friday, 8:30am-4:30pm, excluding statutory holidays. We cannot commit to replying to all comments or moderating all discussions on this site.

Content

All information provided by the Town on this site is for information purposes only and is subject to change without notice.

This site may also contain information that is posted here by a variety of public sources. Except as otherwise noted, these are the personal responsibility of the persons who post the entries. In no event shall the Town of East Gwillimbury be held responsible or liable, directly or indirectly, for any damage or loss in connection with the use of or reliance on any posting, content or information provided by another party on this site.

The Town expects that participants will treat each other with respect. When you participate at this site, you assume personal responsibility for your comments, your username and any information you provide. We reserve the right, without notification and at our sole discretion, to remove any objectionable content posted by the public. Objectionable content includes, but is not limited to: personal attacks and harassment of any kind; pornography; language that is considered threatening, defamatory, abusive, vulgar, hateful or racist; content that suggests or encourages illegal activity or incites violence. We may delete comments

that are spam, are clearly “off topic” or that promote services or products. Comments that make unsupported accusations will be taken out of the discussion. Any individual who repeatedly violates the terms of this policy will be blocked from posting to this page.

The appearance of external links on this page does not represent official endorsement by the Town of East Gwillimbury.

The Town does not accept responsibility for ads, videos, promoted content or comments accessible from any external web site and we do not control or guarantee the accuracy, relevance, timeliness or completeness of information contained on a linked website. We do not endorse the organizations sponsoring linked websites or the views they express or the products/services they offer.

Users are hereby notified that they are fully responsible for the content they load on this site or any related links. The user is responsible for all copyright and intellectual property laws associated with this content.

Loss and Damage

We have taken reasonable precautions to ensure there are no viruses associated with this page and advise we are not responsible for any loss or damage resulting from your use.

Personal Information

Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and YouTube are third party service providers that may collect, store, and manage your personal information whenever you access and use this site. Please refer to their terms of service and/or privacy statements for particulars. Note that the Town of East Gwillimbury has no control over what is done with your personal information.

Your personal information is also collected here for the purpose of including your posts on this page and for the purpose of engaging in an interactive dialogue, and does so under the authority of the Municipal Act, 2001 (Ontario) subject to compliance with the Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (Ontario) ("**MFIPPA**"). We reserve the right to reveal identity information in the event of a complaint or legal action arising from any posts.

If you have any questions about the Town's collection of personal information through this page please contact:

Corporate Communications

Town of East Gwillimbury
19000 Leslie Street
Sharon, Ontario
(905) 478-4283 ext. 3827

Copyright, branding and logos

Intellectual property issues (e.g., copyright, trademark, brand names, logos, moral rights to a work, etc.) exist and must be respected. Proper permission to use others' intellectual property will be obtained prior to usage.

Personal use

The Town social media presence is for corporate purposes only. Outgoing messages of a personal nature will not be posted on the Town's social media. Only the site administrator posts Town content to Town social media sites. Other Town employees are not permitted to represent the Town on these sites. Town employees who participate in conversations on the Town's social media sites do so as third party visitors and, as such, are personally responsible for their comments, usernames and information posted.

Administration

Management Responsibility

Corporate Communications staff will serve as the site administrator for the oversight and administration of social media for the Town of East Gwillimbury. All Town activity on social media will be approved by the Director of Communications, in consultation with the CAO and department heads as required. Login and passwords for the sites are confidential information and will be stored under the supervision of Information Technology and Corporate Communications.

Control of Content

The site administrator works collaboratively with staff to ensure that information published online about activities is accurate, easy to understand and responsive to public inquiries. The site administrator reserves the right to edit or remove content from Town social media sites where it is deemed unsuitable, inappropriate or in violation of this Social Media Policy.

The Town will retain any content that is edited or removed from a social media site. The time, date and the reason it was edited or removed will be recorded.

Funnel of information

The site administrator relies upon Town departments to provide ongoing information as content for keeping the sites up-to-date. The site administrator is responsible for ensuring the clarity and relevance of posted content. Each department will appoint an employee from its full-time staff to be responsible for online content relevant to that department and to serve as the contact person for new requests.

Privacy Act and Record Retention

Social media content generated by the Town are records owned by the Corporation and is a “public” record subject to the rules of the *Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* (and other provincial and federal laws). This includes information classes unique to social media, including lists of subscribers and posted comments.

Each Town site will include in its disclaimer a clear indication that any articles and any other content posted or submitted for posting are subject to public disclosure.

Content that is considered to be transitory records of the Town may be deleted/purged from the website as soon as they are no longer needed.

Monitoring

The site administrator will monitor social media sites on an ongoing basis to track conversations and ensure that all content is in compliance with the policy guidelines. Inappropriate content is immediately recorded for record-keeping purposes and deleted.

Protocols

Oversight provided by the site administrator will:

- monitor social media sites to track public conversations on topics of interest to the Town
- on the basis of this review, respond to comments and inquiries as appropriate and in accordance with the communications protocol
- consult regularly with designated representatives of Town departments to collect raw content, and package appropriately for the Town's social media sites
- post Town content to Facebook twice per week, and to Twitter one to three times per day
- record any content that is inappropriate and remove this from the Town sites
- report regularly on the results of all monitoring and measurement activity

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

@	In Twitter, the @ symbol comes immediately before a person's user name and lets them know a tweet is directed to them (eg: @JohnSmith). When a username is preceded by the @ sign, it becomes a link to a Twitter profile.
App	An app is an application that performs a specific function on your computer or handheld device.
Avatar	An image used to represent a person online within forums and social networks. It can be an actual photo or a graphical representation.
Bit.ly	A popular free URL shortening service that provides statistics for the links users share online. Use it to condense long URLs and make them easier to share on social networks like Twitter.
Blog	A word that was created from the two words "Web log". Blogs are usually maintained by an individual with regular entries of commentary, descriptions of events, or other material such as graphics or video. Entries are commonly displayed in reverse-chronological order. "Blog" can also be used as a verb, meaning to maintain or add content to a blog.
Comments	Interaction from readers or followers on Facebook and blogs.
Community	A group of people with a common interest around a product/brand, product, or site online.
Direct message (DM)	This is Twitter's version of a private message, like an email sent directly to one person. No one else can see a DM but the person it is intended for. That person must be following you to receive a DM.
Facebook	A social networking site that allows users to connect and share information with friends by posting status updates, sharing photos, joining groups, or becoming fans of organizations and businesses.
Fan page	A profile on Facebook for businesses and organizations. Customers and enthusiasts can become "fans" of your fanpage, and can then receive updates, share information, and comment on posts from the business.
Fan	A fan is someone who is enthusiastic about a particular business or organization and elects to receive updates from that business on Facebook. Fans can also add content to a business' fanpage and comment on posts from that business.

Flash Mob	A large group of people who assemble suddenly in a public place, perform an unusual and pointless act for a brief time, then quickly disperse. The term flash mob is generally applied only to gatherings organized via social media, viral e-mails, or phone.
Flickr	A social network that allows users to store photos online and then share them with others.
Follow	On Twitter, to follow someone means that you will see their tweets. Followers are people who receive the updates from other Twitter users.
Forums	Discussion areas on websites, where people can post messages or comment on existing messages.
Friend	On social networking sites (like Facebook), friends are contacts whose profile you link to from your own profile.
Hashtag	Because Twitter provided no easy way to group tweets or add extra data, the Twitter community came up with their own way: hashtags. People use the hashtag symbol # before a relevant keyword or phrase in their Tweets to categorize those Tweets and help them show more easily in Twitter Search. (eg. #socialmedia, #marketing, #hashtag.) Clicking on a hashtagged word in any message shows you all other Tweets marked with that keyword..
HootSuite	A Web-based Twitter client for individuals and organizations. With HootSuite, you can manage multiple Twitter profiles, pre-schedule tweets, and view metrics, and teams can collaboratively schedule updates to Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, WordPress, and other social networks via Web, desktop, and mobile platforms. It helps organizations use the social Web to launch marketing campaigns, identify and grow audience, and distribute targeted messages across multiple channels.
Like	An action that can be made by a Facebook user. Instead of writing a comment for a message or a status update, a Facebook user can click the “Like” button as a quick way to show approval and share the message.
Link/URL shortened	Because tweets are limited to 140 characters, it’s difficult to post long links. Link shorteners like TinyURL, Bit.ly and is.gd take a long URL and condense it down to a shorter version. Clicking on the shortened link takes you to the original long link.
LinkedIn	A social networking site for professionals to connect with each other. LinkedIn provides opportunities to join industry groups, recommend the work of others, and post and answer questions among your peers.

Link	The highlighted text or images that, when clicked, jump you from item of content to another.
Listening	Setting up searches on various social networking sites to monitor (or listen) for mentions of specific key words (like your company, your product, your city, etc.).
Post	An item on a blog, Facebook wall or other forum.
Profile	Profiles are the information you share about yourself when you sign up for a social networking site. They usually include a photo of yourself and basic information like personal/business interests, etc.
QR Code	A Quick Response Code (or QR Code) is a two-dimensional barcode that is readable with special scanners or readers. These scanners can be downloaded as apps onto smart phones. The code consists of black and white modules arranged in a square pattern that can be encoded with text, a URL, or other data.
Retweet	In Twitter, a tweet that has been reposted by someone other than the original sender. Re-tweeting is usually done to pass on good information to your followers.
RSS feed	Really Simple Syndication. This allows you to subscribe to content on blogs and other websites, and have it delivered to you through a feed without having to visit the site.
SEO	Search Engine Optimization. The process of arranging your website and creating content that will give it the best chance of appearing near the top of search engine rankings.
Sentiment	In the context of social media, sentiment refers to the attitude of user comments related to a brand online. There has been an explosion of free and paid social media monitoring tools that measure sentiment, including TweetMeme, HootSuite, and PostRank, to name a few.
Social media	Social media is a catch-all term for the tools and platforms people use to publish, converse, and share content online. It is about dialogue, not a one-sided stream of information.
Social networks	Online places where people gather to interact.

Tag	Keywords attached to a blog post, bookmark, photo, or other type of content so that you and others can easily find them through searches.
Tweet	A post on Twitter of 140 characters or less.
TweetDeck	An application that connects users with contacts across Twitter, Facebook, MySpace, LinkedIn and more.
Twitter	A micro blogging platform where users share updates/information with their followers in 140 characters or less.
Twitter Search	A search engine operated by Twitter to search for Twitter messages and users in real time.
Twitter handle	A user name on Twitter (eg. @TownofEG).
URL	Unique Resource Locator. This is the technical term for a website address (eg. www.eastgwillimbury.ca)
Wall	Shared discussion board specifically about an individual or organization displayed on their profile.
Web 2.0	The 2nd generation of the World Wide Web. A term coined to describe blogs, wikis, social networking sites, and other web-based services that emphasize collaboration and sharing content.
YouTube	A popular video hosting website that allows users to upload, share, and view video content.