redbrick COMMUNICATIONS

2019 MUNICIPAL SOCIAL MEDIA SURVEY

AN IN-DEPTH LOOK AT ONTARIO MUNICIPALITIES USE SOCIAL MEDIA

Since 2010, Redbrick has been measuring social media use by Ontario's municipal community. The reality today is that most of you are using social media and have personal traffic has leveled out. The important questions are now how from clients are, "How do we be more strategic?", "How many people do we need to do it well?" And mostly, "How do we publicly manage the diverse and sometimes contentious conversations online?"

To this end, we took a deeper dive with a more in-depth survey of 31 municipalities across Ontario to learn how they are managing both their challenges and opportunities offered by the 24/7 world of social media. We were also showcasing the case studies that demonstrate inspiring and innovative ways to leverage social media.

TOP 3 THEMES

Local governments continue to connect directly with residents and stakeholders. With more experience under their belts, communicators told us that there are three things they focus on the most:

BUILDING COMMUNITY AND TWO-WAY ENGAGEMENT THROUGH STRONG VISUALS
Social media is a great way to connect with residents and stakeholders. It's also a great way to build relationships, which offers an opportunity to talk to and learn from our audiences and build relationships.

MANAGING EXPECTATIONS AND TELLING A MORE HUMAN STORY
Social media is a great way to tell the story of our municipality. Our communications departments are under pressure to meet expectations to respond faster. They are also engaging employees to help drive content and meet needs.

DEALING WITH DIFFICULT PEOPLE AND MISINFORMATION
Social media is a great way to connect with residents, but it also can be overwhelmed and inaccurate information. We heard how this is one of the top challenges municipal communicators face.

CHANNELS

NUMBER OF ACCOUNTS MANAGED PER PLATFORM

FACEBOOK
MEDIAN NUMBER OF ACCOUNTS MANAGED PER MEDIA

4 PAGES — Average number of pages managed

<5 PAGES — Most common number of pages managed

>10 PAGES — Maximum number of pages managed

TWITTER
MEDIAN NUMBER OF ACCOUNTS MANAGED

<4 ACCOUNTS — Average number of accounts managed

>10 ACCOUNTS — Maximum number of accounts managed

INSTAGRAM
MEDIAN NUMBER OF ACCOUNTS MANAGED

1-2 ACCOUNTS — Most common number of accounts managed

MUNICIPALITIES HAVE STRATEGIES, POLICIES AND TRAINING

Have a social media strategy

Have a social media policy for the organization

Have **up to three** employees responsible for creating content & posting to social media

Have **more than three** employees responsible for creating content & posting to social media

Have a social media policy for elected officials

STAFF RESOURCES DEDICATED TO SOCIAL MEDIA

Have **one** full-time person dedicated to social media

Have **up to three** employees dedicated to social media

Have **more than three** employees dedicated to social media

Have a full-time equivalent **Digital Engagement Coordinator** (i.e., a data analyst)

ENGAGEMENT IS GOING ONLINE

55% HAVE A **DIGITAL PLATFORM** OUTSIDE OF SOCIAL MEDIA FOR PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

WHAT YOUR COLLEAGUES SAID

GENERAL THOUGHTS

"I believe it helps build trust, it humanizes the organization, and it demonstrates transparency when we take a bit of time and emphasis on social media, anything we do, we have to make it fun and it's an area of debate I think in the future and forthcoming about it."
— STACEY HARE
Digital Communications Coordinator
City of Guelph

"Social media has changed the scope of my role and made it more challenging. We are expected to be experts in all things, including digital. Website, Intranet, social media. I've made my job even more of a challenge by being the person who thinks I'm expected to engage at all times."
— JOSÉ MATTEN
Communications Manager
Grey County

"Twitter is a great place to connect with people, and it's a great place to share information." — **STACEY HARE**

"Stop the spread of misleading information." — **ERIN KNAULAK**

"More resources to run it." — **STACEY HARE**
Digital Communications Coordinator
City of Guelph

IF I HAD A MAGIC WAND

BEST PRACTICES

"We need to stop interrupting what people are interested in to talk about what we want people to know about it." — **BRANDON CURRIE**
Digital Communications Coordinator
City of Waterloo

"Strategy. Don't try to be all things to all people. Focus on what's important to you and engaging with your team and audience." — **MEAGAN CELIDONIA**
Manager, Digital Engagement
City of Kitchener

"We respond to everything unless it's ridiculous or mean-spirited. We feature our community doing great things, we feature our staff, we feature the focus feed information, we feature an open dialogue." — **LAURENA ELLSWORTH**
Manager, Communications & Marketing, Arts
Town of Pelham

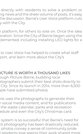
5 CASE STUDIES TO INSPIRE YOU

CITY OF LONDON: EMPOWERING STAFF AND ENGAGING COMMUNITY

ROVING REPORTERS

Staff and Council members have helped evolve London's social media platforms into more friendly, conversational (less formal) and more engaging communications.

It all started last winter. A common point-point during any winter season is managing complaints about snow removal. London was able to change the tone by using social media to show the City's snow removal operations. John Pearce, the City's elected liaison to Council, was



FRONTENAC COUNTRY: #BUILDINGCOMMUNITY

USER AND STAFF GENERATED CONTENT DRIVES FRONTENAC COUNTY SUCCESS

The County of Frontenac has been successfully leveraging social media to connect with communities using limited staff resources.

When the County rebranded in 2016, it developed #Frontenac, a catch-all hashtag that focused on quality of life in the County. It was not only used in the rebranded communications but also encouraged residents to use it.

The County first used the hashtag to grow its Facebook following. The economic development officer created an Ambassador program, encouraging and strategically rewarding residents for promoting their area on Facebook, tagging them and using #Frontenac. This gave the County FB page exposure to the Kaladonia Social Media audience, which is a very active and engaged community.

Its large and engaged community also helped the County's Communications Officer, Kyle Kirkland, to grow the County's Instagram following. Kirkland, who has a background in photo journalism, used a growing database of material to draw from.

When it came to Instagram, the County took the #Frontenac hashtag and used it to encourage residents and visitors to share their photos. It also used the hashtag to promote County events and tourism. The #Frontenac hashtag has more than 14,000 posts on Instagram.

Frontenac also leverages one of the top 10 paramedic services in Ontario. The County's paramedics have access to the account, sharing good news from the road. All stations, including new hires, get an introduction to social media and how it can be used to media, celebrate promotion and social media could make the NG911 stories – generating good news about a day in the life of a paramedic and leading workload for the Communications Officer.

CITY OF HAMILTON: FINDING BALANCE AND WORKING TOGETHER

The City of Hamilton's webpage listing all of their social media pages is so long that you might assume some of the accounts are inactive. But they are not. The City has over 100 Twitter accounts, 40 Facebook pages and 16 Instagram accounts, more than Ontario's three largest cities, which is accurate, and been three Ontario channels. And they are active. More than that, they are intentional, internally coordinated, well resourced and play an important part of service delivery.

How do they do it? Two words: Commitment and collaboration.

The staff who manage these accounts have a plan to follow. They understand their role. They know what they need to do to achieve their goals and complete tasks. And they never work in silos. They know they need to work together to support from the Communications Team. They attend quarterly Social Media Summits.

At these summits, they can bounce ideas off colleagues, share information about best practices, learn about new tools, hear from guest speakers, and get support in how to deal with issues or anger responded to social media.

On the latter point, it's important to note that the City of Hamilton does need to provide a transparent first response to the public and ensure they are recognized that staff are working on their behalf. Social media provides the possibility of encountering negatively – sometimes severe. Some staff have even experienced targeted harassment. Staff need to know that they can rely on their colleagues to provide support and assistance. Social media can be a challenging environment, but it can also be a place where staff can feel supported and help more effectively manage digital contributions.

Social media is an important part of the City's "toolkit" to keep residents informed and engaged. It's also a place where residents can have conversations about any other experience they have with the City.

They want to keep content timely, fresh and honest. They are proud of what they have achieved and the work they have done to build a strong communication culture. They feel they have a good balance of speed to specific content throughout their channels. And they are ready to continue to grow their community's digital experience by working in partnership with each other.

CITY OF BARRIE: BUILDING COMMUNITY

TURNING IDEAS INTO ACTION AND SHOWCASING USER-GENERATED CONTENT

WOULD IT BE GREAT IF ...

... the City had a place to post a simple idea but engaging directly with residents to solve a problem or improve service? Or if the City could showcase its beautiful parks, trails and other outdoor spaces, it knew for ideas and questions shared through social media to get lost in the discussion. Barrie's User Idea platform cuts through the noise and improves the quality of engagement with residents.

Residents "make a suggestion" through User Idea a free online platform for others to vote on. Once the idea gets 50 votes, it moves to the next stage where it is reviewed by the appropriate City staff. Staff can then provide an update, ask questions or even request more information. Residents receive notifications including emails when there is an update to their idea.

Moving the conversation from traditional social media platforms to User Voice has helped to create what staff call a "game-changer" where people can share ideas, build support, and learn more about the City's responsibilities.

A PICTURE IS WORTH A THOUSAND LIKES

Through Pictures Barrie, building local engagement and showcasing the City's beauty is the City. Since its launch in 2016, more than 2,500 people have submitted photos.

Users can use Pictures Barrie to generate their own social media content, and for publications and other marketing purposes. Photographers include and even the City's marketing friends.

The system is so successful that Barrie's need for stock photography has been significantly reduced. Pictures Barrie has also helped to build a community and residents love seeing their work shared more widely through the City's marketing channels.

Photographers are always given credit and must sign up when when submitting through the portal.

When residents see that staff and council truly value their input, you create meaningful engagement, build trust, and ultimately create a more engaged community.

YORK REGION: COMMUNICATIONS CAN'T DO IT ALONE

Well-thought-out social media strategies make a great start to effective communications, as well as staff across the organization who communicate on behalf of the region.

This made everyone pleasantly well when it comes to managing their social media presence especially because there is strong oversight and clear guidelines.

There is a rigorous application and governance process in place before any new channels are set up. Both the Director of Communications and the department Communication Issue Lead sign off, and on call, after hours staff are ready to respond to any emergency situations.

The Region has one corporate social media specialist and approximately 60 Ambassadors. The specialist is in charge of training each Ambassador, overseeing social media governance, granting access, monitoring metrics, and providing support to the Ambassadors when needed. Ambassadors are in charge of posting and engaging with the residents to share insights, new events and other additional information.

The Ambassadors are given ownership to run their channels by following the Region's social media policy. While they continue to refer to the specialist to ensure they're aligned, everyone knows what's happening across all platforms. They are finding their model allows them to be responsive, flexible, and able to easily adjust depending on the communication needs of the Region. Ambassadors are also able to provide feedback on what they see and what they have seen the highest growth. They are able to share information of negative interactions, so decreasing harassment of their ability to respond quickly.

As they look to the future, they are hoping to bring in more influencers to help spread York's information, and build more collaboration and activity. Improvements to the Ambassadors process to link Region's lead top of mind in their community.

WHO WE TALKED TO

This report is based on responses from 31 municipalities across Ontario who responded to Redbrick's survey, sent out in September 2019. Here is a map of the participants:

POPULATION RANGE OF THE MUNICIPALITIES SURVEYED

ABOUT REDBRICK COMMUNICATIONS

Redbrick is a full-service municipal communications agency with an extensive municipal practice. We've been working in municipal government for over 20 years.

Redbrick provides a range of strategic communications services including:
- Strategic communications planning
- Public consultation
- Digital engagement
- Social media
- Crisis management
- Issues management
- Internal communications
- Planning and development
- Public relations
- Public and stakeholder engagement

For free tools with social media, including sample policies, tips and tricks, visit **bit.ly/RedbrickTools**.

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