

2019 MUNICIPAL SOCIAL MEDIA SURVEY

AN IN-DEPTH LOOK AT HOW ONTARIO'S 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 the overall tally has leveled out. The main questions we now hear from clients are, "How do we be more strategic?" "How many people do we need to do it well?" And mostly, "How do we positively manage the diverse and sometimes negative voices on these platforms?"

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

TOP 3 THEMES

Social media allows municipal governments 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

With fewer media outlets, there is greater reliance on social media to keep the public informed, which offers an opportunity to talk to and reach new audiences and build relationships.



MANAGING EXPECTATIONS AND TELLING A MORE HUMAN STORY

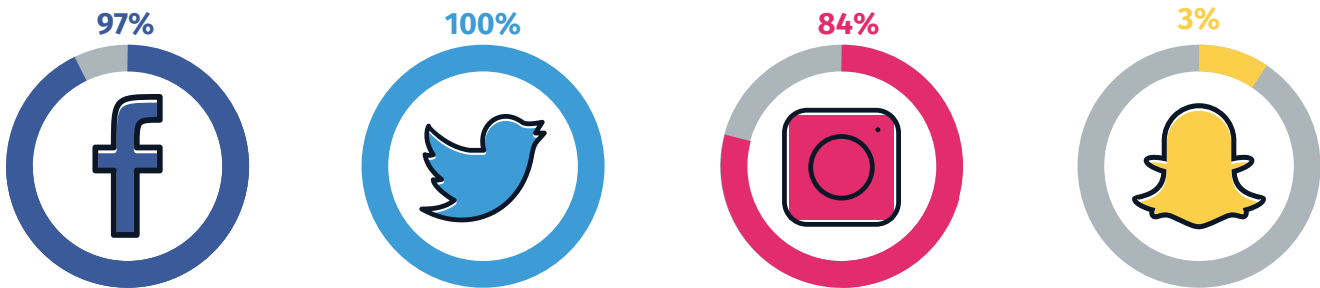
Social media is 24/7 and the community has higher expectations. Municipalities are challenged to meet expectations for response times. They are also engaging employees to help drive content and meet needs.



DEALING WITH DIFFICULT PEOPLE AND MISINFORMATION

When everyone has a voice, the door is open for criticism, complaint, and inaccurate information. We heard how this is one of the top challenges municipal communicators face.

CHANNELS



NUMBER OF ACCOUNTS MANAGED PER PLATFORM

FACEBOOK

RANGE OF 1 TO 18 FACEBOOK PAGES

4 PAGES

26 out of the 31 municipalities had an average of 4 Facebook pages



<5 PAGES

20 out of the 31 municipalities had less than 5 Facebook pages



>10 PAGES

5 out of the 31 municipalities had 10 or more Facebook pages



TWITTER

RANGE OF 1 TO 16 TWITTER ACCOUNTS

<4 ACCOUNTS

Half of the municipalities had less than 4 Twitter accounts



>10 ACCOUNTS

4 out of the 31 municipalities had 10 or more Twitter accounts



INSTAGRAM

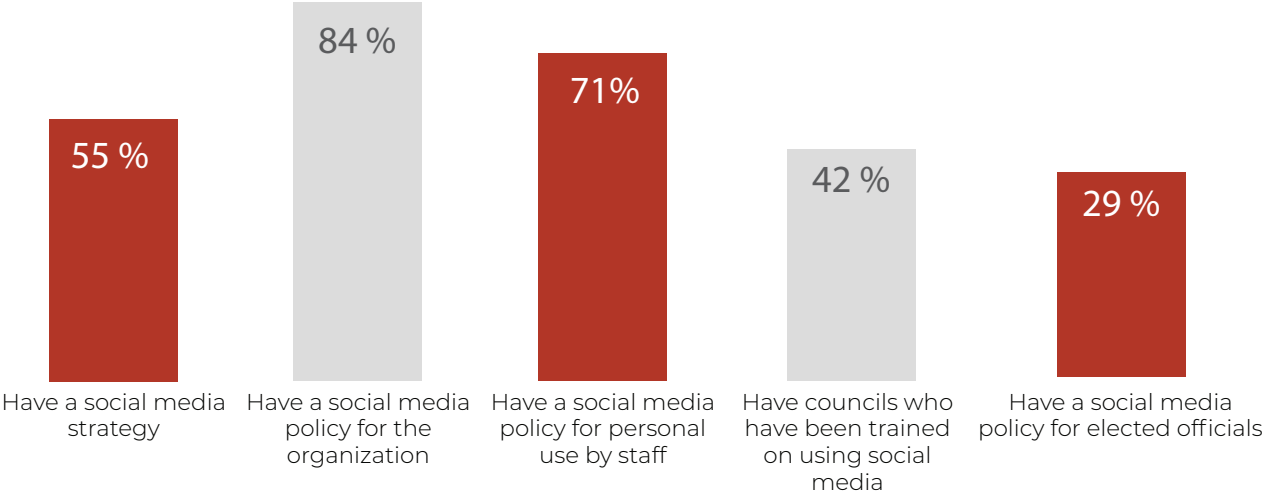
RANGE OF 0 TO 14 INSTAGRAM ACCOUNTS

1-2 ACCOUNTS

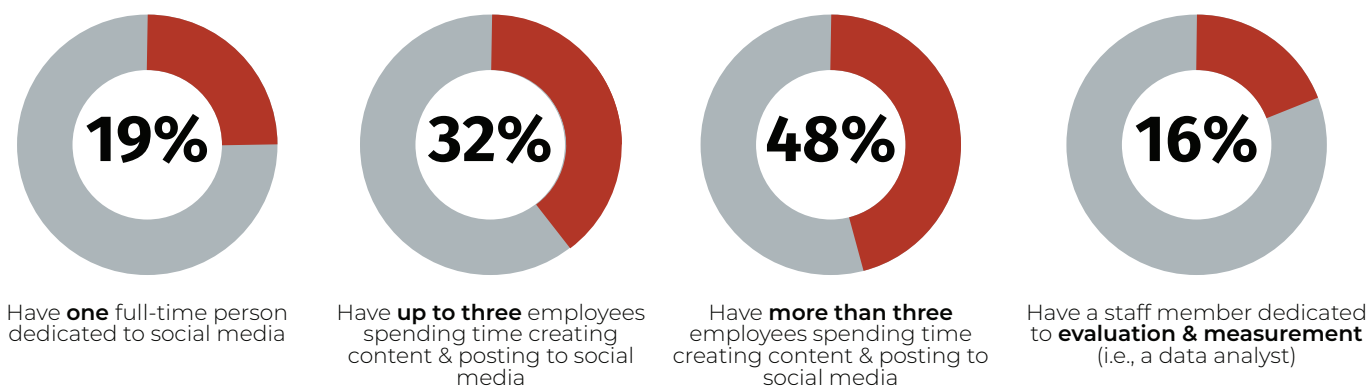
The majority operate only 1 or 2 Instagram accounts



MUNICIPALITIES HAVE STRATEGIES, POLICIES AND TRAINING



STAFF RESOURCES DEDICATED TO SOCIAL MEDIA



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. Stakeholders respond positively when we use a bit of humour and #realtalk on social media, and they seem to be more willing to forgive errors or delays if we're friendly and forthcoming about it."

STACEY HARE
Digital Communications Specialist
City of Guelph

"Social media has changed the scope of my role and made it more challenging. Where I used to write things, now I'm producing digital material. Moreover, social media has made my job even more of a 24/7 position. It never goes away and there is an expectation to engage at all times."

ROB HATTEN
Communications
Manager
Grey County

"More resources
to run it."

STACEY HARE
Digital Communications Specialist
City of Guelph

"Stop the spread
of inaccurate
information."

ERIN MIKALUK
Communications Lead
Town of Whitby

IF I HAD A MAGIC WAND

BEST PRACTICES

"We need to stop interrupting what people are interested in and be what people are interested in."

BRANDON CURRIE
Digital Communications
Team Lead
City of Waterloo

"Strategy. Don't fly by the seat of your pants when it comes to social. Look for opportunities to collaborate on messaging with your team and schedule in content."

MEAGAN GEUDENS
Manager, Public Engagement
(Digital)
City of London

"We respond to everything unless it's ridiculous or mean-spirited. We feature our community doing great things, as well as information. We don't force feed information, we have an open dialogue."

LAURISSA ELLSWORTH
Director of Marketing, Arts
and Communications
Town of Petrolia

5 CASE STUDIES TO INSPIRE YOU

CITY OF LONDON: EMPOWERING STAFF AND ENGAGING COMMUNITY ROVING REPORTERS

Staff with selfie sticks have helped evolve London's social media platforms into more friendly, conversational (less "corporate") and engaging community forums.

It all started last winter. A common pain point during any winter season is managing complaints about snow removal. London was able to change the tone by sharing quick selfie videos by the head of snow operations, John Parsons, who provided roadside updates.

The effort put a human face to an important public service. Residents responded, often with thanks to John and his crews. Communications staff also responded to those who shared concerns. The 'employee as roving reporter' has since been expanded to a year-round effort. Employees are encouraged to showcase their services by sending photos and videos of their work for Communications staff to share online.

The approach was used successfully to create engaging Instagram stories about preparations for London's turn to host the Juno Awards and the city's own "Jurassic Park" for the Raptors' championship games.

"It had so many positive impacts – changing our internal culture and developing employee pride, while also building a sense of community for our residents," said Meagan Geudens, Manager, Public Engagement (Digital) for the City.

London has long been a leader in developing positive social media relationships. When you create connections between staff and community, you can build trust and humanize municipal services – bringing citizens closer to their local government.



FRONTENAC COUNTY: #BUILDINGCOMMUNITY

USER AND STAFF GENERATED CONTENT DRIVES FRONTENAC COUNTY SUCCESS

Frontenac County has found a great solution to engaging sprawling, sparsely rural communities using limited staff resources.

When the County rebranded in 2016, it developed #inFrontenac, a catch-all hashtag that focused on quality of life in the County. It was not only used online but plastered on everything from vehicles to business cards.

The County first used the hashtag to grow its Facebook following. The economic development officer created an Ambassador program, visiting and photographing local businesses then profiling them on Facebook, tagging them and using #inFrontenac. This gives the County FB page exposure to the business' social media audience, many of whom become followers and create meaningful growth.

"A single post could generate 200 likes," said Marco Smits, Frontenac's Communications Officer. "So far we have profiled 160 businesses. The added bonus is with consent forms signed, I have a growing database of material to draw from."



When it came to Instagram, the County took the hashtag even further in the summer, encouraging residents and visitors to share their best photos in a weekend roundup every Monday. In all, the #inFrontenac hashtag has more than 14,000 posts on Instagram.

Frontenac also boasts one of the top 10 paramedic accounts on Twitter in Ontario. All Superintendents have access to the account, sharing good news from the road. All medics, including new hires, get an orientation session on guidelines for dealing with media, citizen journalists and social media. Local media use the feed for stories – generating good news about a critical local service and easing 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 links must be broken and out of date. They are not. The City currently manages 16 Twitter, 14 Facebook and 14 Instagram accounts, three YouTube channels, three LinkedIn accounts, and even three Pinterest channels. And they are all active. More than that, they are all 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 where they fit in strategically with work plans and corporate goals. And, they never work in a silo. They receive training. They get ongoing support from the Communications team. They attend quarterly Social Media Summits.

At these summits, they can bounce ideas off their colleagues, share experiences and best practices, learn about new trends, hear from guest speakers, and get support in how to deal with criticism or anger expressed on social media.

On the latter point, it's important to note that the City of Hamilton works hard to provide a harassment-free workplace for their employees and they recognize that being engaged with the public on social media increases the possibility of encountering negativity – sometimes severe. Some staff have even experienced targeted threats against them. The City takes this seriously. They have ensured disclaimers about what constitutes productive engagement are clear on each channel. They provide tools and strategies to empower their staff and help them effectively manage digital confrontations.



Social media is an important part of the City's "toolkit" to keep residents informed and engaged. Their goal is that a resident's social media experience will mirror any other experience they have with the City.

They work to keep content timely, fresh and honest. They are proud of what they have achieved and the collaboration they have built across the organization. They feel they have a good balance of general to specific content throughout their channels. And they look forward to continuing to improve the community's digital experience by working in partnership with each other.

CITY OF BARRIE: BUILDING ENGAGEMENT

TURNING IDEAS INTO ACTION AND SHOWCASING USER-GENERATED CONTENT

WOULDN'T IT BE GREAT IF ...

Positive change often starts with a simple idea but engaging directly with residents to solve a problem or improve services can be challenging. Between algorithms, breaking news and the sheer volume of posts, it's easy for ideas and opinions shared through social media to get lost in the discussion. Barrie's *User Voice* platform cuts through the noise and empowers residents to share ideas directly with the City.

Residents "make a suggestion" through *User Voice*, a free online platform, for others to vote on. Once the idea reaches 500 affirmative votes, it is presented to Council for consideration. Since the City of Barrie began using the platform in 2014, several resident-generated ideas have been implemented, including installing LED lights for a volunteer ice rink at a local park.

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

A PICTURE IS WORTH A THOUSAND LIKES

Through *Picture Barrie*, budding local photographers submit their best shots directly to the City. Since its launch in 2014, more than 6,500 people have submitted photos.

Barrie uses the photographs to generate their own social media content, and for publications like the waste calendar, parks and recreation schedule and even the City's Christmas card.

The system is so successful that Barrie's need for stock photography has been drastically reduced. The photos convey a sense of community pride and residents love seeing their work shared more broadly through the City's marketing channels.

Photographers are always given credit and must sign a waiver when submitting through *Picture Barrie*.

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

York Region's mixed communications model includes a centralized team of communicators as well as staff across the organization who communicate on behalf of the region.

This model works particularly 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 planning process in place before any new channels are set up. Both the Director of Communications and the department Commissioner must sign off, and on-call, after-hours staff must be identified and prepared to respond as needed.

The Region has one corporate social media specialist and approximately 60 site moderators. The specialist is in charge of training each moderator, overseeing social media governance, granting access, monitoring metrics, reviewing posts and making recommendations for improvement. She also runs quarterly meetings with the moderators to share insights, new trends and offer additional training.

The moderators are given ownership to run their channels by following the Region's social media policy. While they continue to refine their processes to ensure York's digital presence looks and feels consistent across all platforms, they are finding their model allows them to be responsive, flexible, and able to easily adjust depending on the community's feedback. For example, Instagram stories are increasing engagement from the public and it's where they have seen the highest growth. They also find that the number of negative interactions is decreasing because of their ability to respond quickly.

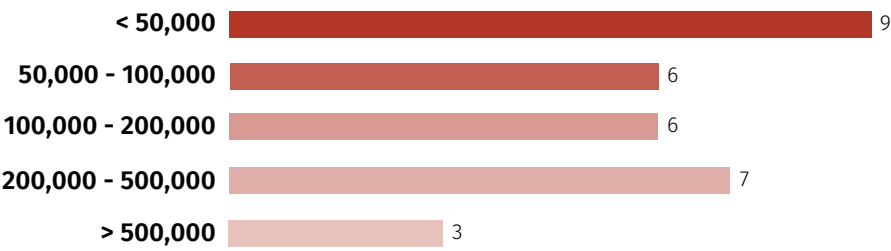
As they look to the future, they are hoping to bring in more influencers to help spread York's information, and build in more automation and Artificial Intelligence into their online presence so York Region is kept top of mind in their community.



WHO WE TALKED TO

This report is based on the responses from 31 municipalities across Ontario who responded to Redbrick's survey, sent out in summer 2019, about their used of social media.

POPULATION RANGE OF THE MUNICIPALITIES SURVEYED



ABOUT REDBRICK COMMUNICATIONS

Redbrick Communications is a Mississauga-based communications agency with an extensive municipal practice. We've been tracking municipal social media use since 2010.

Redbrick provides a range of strategic communications services including:

- Communications training programs
- Strategic communications planning
- Media relations
- Social media
- Issues management
- Crisis management
- Communications audits
- Internal and external communications
- Change management
- Public and stakeholder engagement

