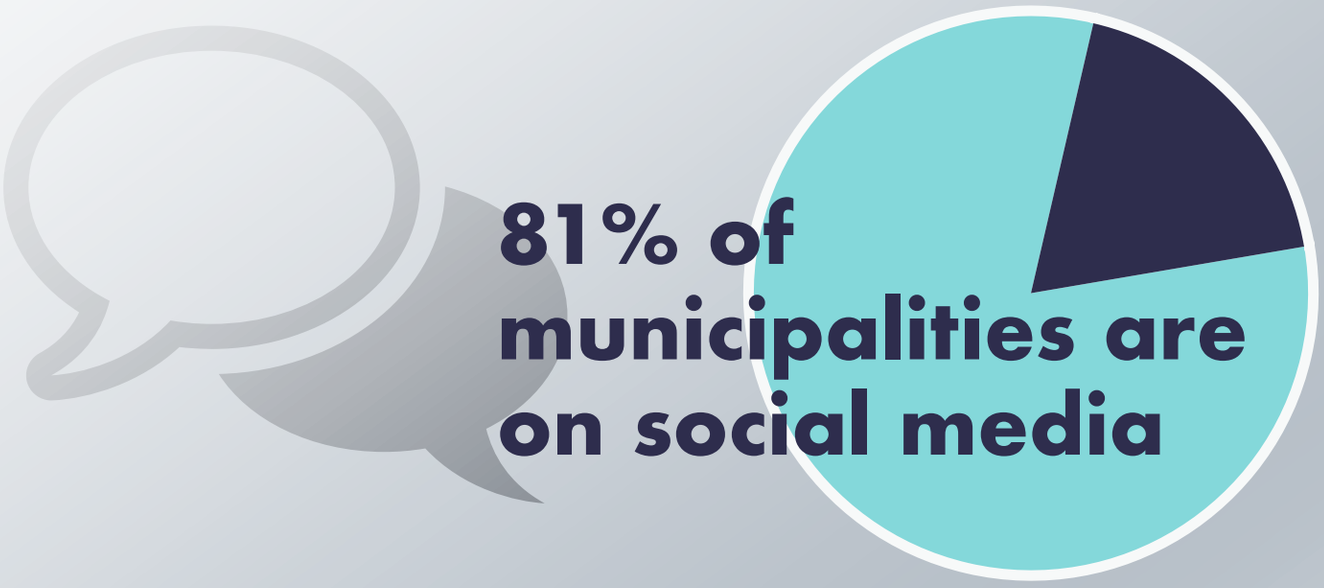
redbrick
COMMUNICATIONS

2017 Municipal Social Media Survey

By now, Ontario municipalities recognize that to get in front of their audiences, they have to be on social media. Municipalities are becoming more creative, sophisticated and engaging on social media. A significant portion of municipal Heads of Council are getting social online, too. Read on for a comprehensive look at how Ontario's municipalities are using social media.

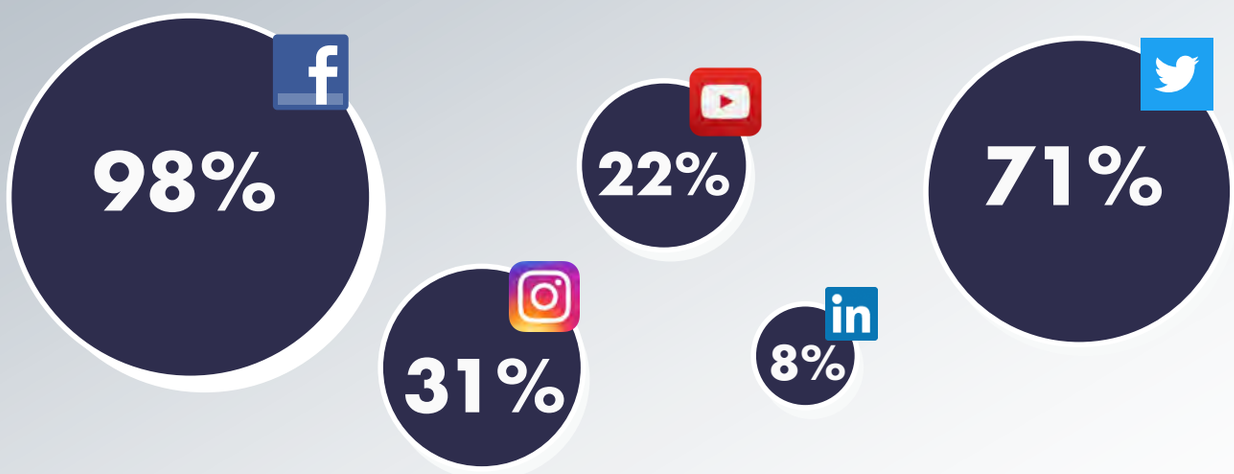


Ontario Municipalities on Social Media

Year over year

Social Media Use by Channel

*Which social media channels do municipalities use the most?**



From 2016 to 2017, Facebook use grew even more – with almost all social municipalities using it. Twitter use decreased, but still remains prevalent. Instagram began to gain rank as the third most popular channel for municipalities.

**Data was gathered by actively searching for Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram accounts for each municipality. Data for YouTube and LinkedIn was recorded when municipalities promoted these channels on their website or through other social media accounts.*

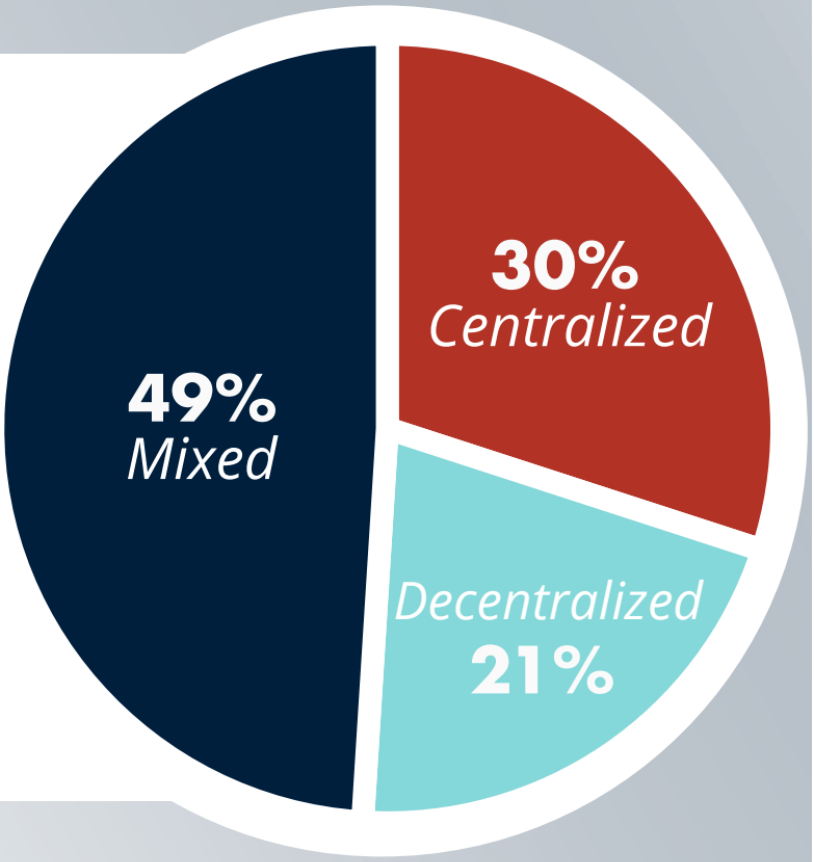
Social Media Approach

With so many social media channels, different municipal service areas, multiple audiences, and limited resources, how are municipalities approaching social media?

Centralized
Municipalities with just one main account per social media channel

Mixed
Municipalities that use a central account and up to three specialized accounts for different departments and service areas

Decentralized
Municipalities with four or more accounts dedicated to different departments or service areas



In 2017, many municipalities switched from a decentralized or centralized approach to a mixed approach. Many find it difficult to contain all of their municipal service offerings in one account (centralized), yet multiple accounts (decentralized) are harder to maintain on a consistent basis. A mixed approach seems to be the most practical approach to social media for most municipalities.

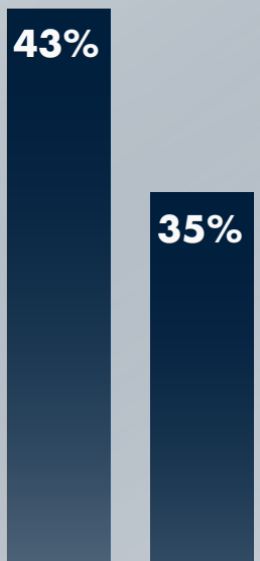
Smaller municipalities (less than 10,000) favour a Centralized or Mixed approach.

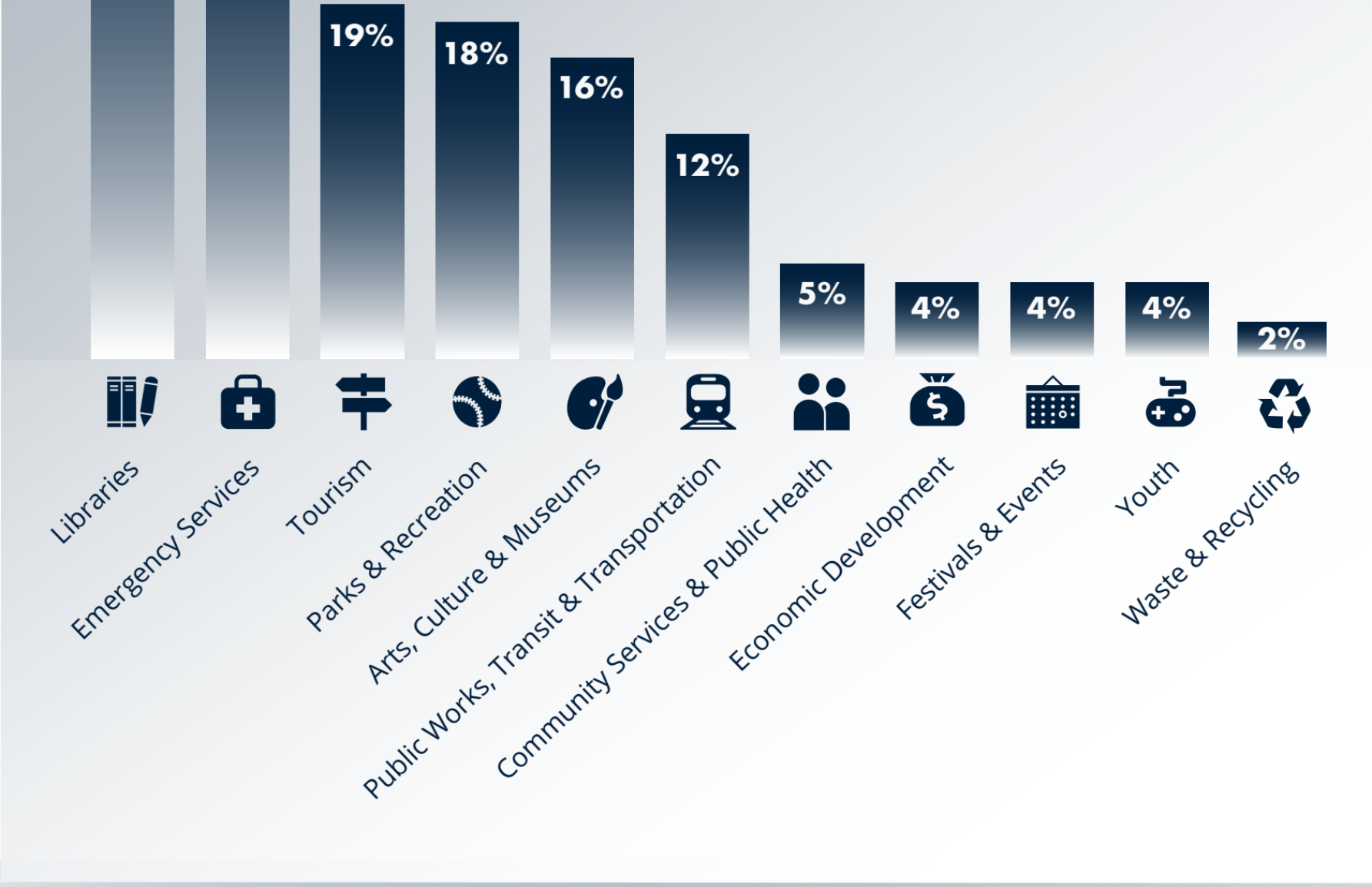
Medium municipalities (10,000 – 75,000) favour a Mixed approach.

Large municipalities (75,000 or more) favour a Mixed or Decentralized approach.

Specialized Accounts

Of the municipalities using a decentralized or mixed approach, these departments are most likely to have their own dedicated social media presence:





Social Media Use by Population

96%

100%
on social media

72%
on social media

*up 13% from 2016

Under 10,000

on social media

*up 5% from 2016

10,000 to 75,000

*up 3% from 2016

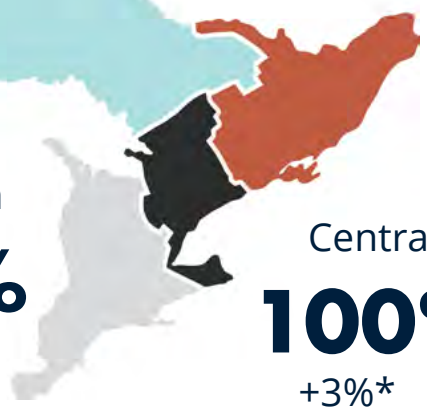
75,000+

Social Media Use By Region

Social media use is highest in Southern Ontario. As of 2017, all of Central Ontario municipalities are using social media.

Northwestern
77%
+15%*

Northeastern
58%
+12%*



*change from 2016 results

Most Liked and Followed Municipalities

Which municipalities have the most likes and followers on their central Facebook, Twitter and Instagram accounts?

FACEBOOK

Most Liked Central Accounts

1. *Niagara Falls*
2. *Mississauga*
3. *Ottawa*
4. *London*
5. *Kitchener*
6. *Tweed*
7. *York Region*
8. *Kingston*
9. *Barrie*
10. *Niagara Region*
11. *Sudbury*
12. *Brockville*
13. *Pelee*
14. *Guelph*
15. *Oakville*
16. *Thunder Bay*
17. *Waterloo*
18. *Burlington*
19. *St. Catharines*
20. *Prince Edward County*

Most Liked Central Accounts Per Capita

1. *Pelee*
2. *Tweed*
3. *Sioux Narrows-Nestor Falls*
4. *Schreiber*
5. *Terrace Bay*
6. *Matachewan*
7. *Sundridge*
8. *Nipigon*
9. *Opasatika*
10. *Ignace*
11. *Assiginack*
12. *Red Rock*
13. *Temagami*
14. *Machar*
15. *Cobalt*
16. *Gauthier*
17. *Georgian Bay*
18. *Smooth Rock Falls*
19. *Point Edward*
20. *Pickle Lake*

TWITTER

Most Followed Central Accounts

1. *Toronto*
2. *Ottawa*
3. *Kitchener*
4. *Hamilton*
5. *Waterloo Region*
6. *Mississauga*
7. *City of Waterloo*
8. *London*
9. *Guelph*
10. *Kingston*
11. *Niagara Falls*
12. *Peel Region*
13. *York Region*
14. *Niagara Region*
15. *Burlington*
16. *Durham Region*
17. *Barrie*
18. *St. Catharines*
19. *Oakville*
20. *Oshawa*

Most Followed Central Accounts Per Capita

1. *Pelee*
2. *Georgian Bay*
3. *Sioux Narrows-Nestor Falls*
4. *Nipigon*
5. *Terrace Bay*
6. *Gananoque*
7. *City of Waterloo*
8. *Prescott*
9. *Red Rock*
10. *Schreiber*
11. *Lake of Bays*
12. *Point Edward*
13. *Niagara-on-the-Lake*
14. *Guelph*
15. *Assiginack*
16. *Petrolia*
17. *Gravenhurst*
18. *Kitchener*
19. *Niagara Falls*
20. *Stirling-Rawdon*

INSTAGRAM

Most Followed Central Accounts

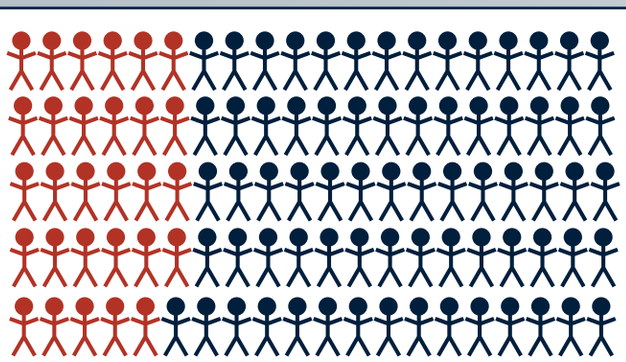
1. *Toronto*
2. *Kitchener*
3. *Ottawa*
4. *Newmarket*
5. *York Region*
6. *Markham*
7. *Vaughan*
8. *Brockville*
9. *Oshawa*
10. *Barrie*
11. *Hamilton*
12. *Pickering*
13. *Midland*
14. *Tweed*
15. *Gravenhurst*
16. *Port Colborne*
17. *Burlington*
18. *Whitchurch-Stouffville*
19. *Halton Region*
20. *Petawawa*

Most Followed Central Accounts Per Capita

1. *Pelee*
2. *Assiginack*
3. *Terrace Bay*
4. *Nipigon*
5. *Tweed*
6. *Pickle Lake*
7. *Prescott*
8. *Petrolia*
9. *Perth*
10. *Schreiber*
11. *Gravenhurst*
12. *Brockville*
13. *Gore Bay*
14. *Midland*
15. *Minto*
16. *Carleton Place*
17. *Port Colborne*
18. *Mississippi Mills*
19. *Petawawa*
20. *Pembroke*

Tweeting Heads

How are Heads of Councils (mayors, reeves, wardens and regional chairs) using social media?



29%

of Ontario's Heads of Council are on social media.

55%
*of Heads of Council use Facebook.**

81%
*of Heads of Council use Twitter.**

**Of the total HOCs on social media.*

Most Liked and Followed Heads of Council

Which Heads of Council have the most followers and likes on Facebook and Twitter?

FACEBOOK

Most Liked Accounts

1. *John Tory, Toronto*
2. *Jim Watson, Ottawa*
3. *Bonnie Crombie, Mississauga*
4. *Linda Jeffrey, Brampton*
5. *Matt Brown, London*
6. *Cam Guthrie, Guelph*
7. *Walter Sendzik, St. Catharines*
8. *Steve Black, Timmins*
9. *Berry Vrbanovic, Kitchener*
10. *Christian Provenzano, Sault Ste. Marie*

Most Liked Accounts Per Capita

1. *Carol Moffatt, Algonquin Highlands*
2. *Robin Jones, Westport*
3. *Eric Duncan, North Dundas*
4. *Ron Lane, Gore Bay*
5. *Peter McIsaac, Powassan*
6. *Shawn Pankow, Smiths Falls*
7. *Kurtis Smith, Adelaide-Metcalfe*
8. *Jack Siemens, Emo*
9. *Steve Black, Timmins*
10. *Peter Politis, Cochrane*

TWITTER

Most Followed Accounts

1. *John Tory, Toronto*
2. *Jim Watson, Ottawa*
3. *Bonnie Crombie, Mississauga*
4. *Jeff Lehman, Barrie*
5. *Berry Vrbanovic, Kitchener*
6. *Cam Guthrie, Guelph*
7. *Rick Goldring, Burlington*
8. *Matt Brown, London*
9. *Fred Eisenberger, Hamilton*
10. *Rob Burton, Oakville*

Most Followed Accounts Per Capita

1. *Carol Moffat, Algonquin Highlands*
2. *Robin Jones, Westport*
3. *Eric Duncan, North Dundas*
4. *Todd Case, Warwick*
5. *Kurtis Smith, Adelaide-Metcalfe*
6. *Brett Todd, Prescott*
7. *Jeff Lehman, Barrie*
8. *Jeremy Williams, Orangeville*
9. *Dan Mathieson, Stratford*
10. *Graydon Smith, Bracebridge*

City of Waterloo
Social Media Advocacy

What if we told you your municipality's social media engagement could increase by almost 40%? Would you believe us? Turns out, you can achieve an increase like this – with some help.

More and more people, brands, and organizations are saturating social media with content, making it difficult to have your voice heard. One way to cut through the noise is paid advertising on social media. Another, is tapping into your influencers and peers to amplify your message, which is what the City of Waterloo is doing.

City of Waterloo communications staff are running a 'employee advocacy' program on social media. Essentially, the communications team is turning to other staff to spread the word about City matters and projects. As a result, Waterloo's staff are driving much of the City's social media success, through their own personal social media accounts.

The City has been running this social media program since November 2016. Communications staff create content and share the posts over a dedicated social media content management system. Other staff (about 25) and council members then choose what they want to share on their personal accounts, with the ability to edit it as they please. The City's aspirational social media policy allowed for this type of set up, and management was supportive of staff using social media. Waterloo's communications staff say they take about an hour each week to curate the content, with 10 minutes of time per staff member to post to their accounts.

The outcome of this employee social media advocacy program? Overall engagement on employee posts is now 38%, compared to 1.2% on corporate accounts. So far, there have been no major issues. Some employees have been met with some mild dissent on social media, but – isn't that par for the course in 2018? It should also be noted that staff have guidance and support from communications in the event of any negative feedback.

You may be thinking '*that would never work in my municipality*'. But don't rule out an advocacy program just yet. If you want to navigate this somewhat uncharted territory, start off by gauging interest and support from leadership and staff. Next, find out if you have the right social media policy in place. When (or if) you're ready to take the leap, try using an employee advocacy software platform like Bambu by Sprout Social, Amplify by Hootsuite, or Sociabble, to name a few.

And lastly - good luck! Employee advocacy programs such as these may just be the way of the future.

Social Media Trends

What is Snapchat and does my municipality need to be on it? What about Instagram? Is Twitter no more? Should I stream the council meeting on Facebook Live?

If you're in the public sector, you might have asked yourself one (or all) of those questions over the past year or two. Social media is growing and morphing at an exponential rate, and it's difficult to keep up – especially when you're dealing with limited budgets and long approval times.

Here's our take on some of the trends that have been cropping up over the last couple of years, what you should pay attention to, and what you can put on the back burner.

Snapchat

As a municipality or public-sector organization, Snapchat should probably be at the bottom of your social media to-do list. Its user base has dwindled in the last year. To add insult to injury, Instagram has also adopted most of Snapchat's defining features. Now, anything you do on Snapchat, can be done better on Instagram (in the humble opinion of Redbrick's social and digital media strategist).

The one thing you might want to use Snapchat for is creating your own location filters to promote things like events or recreation facilities. We've seen a few municipalities have success with them and they're fairly easy to set up. You can learn more about these filters here: **www.snapchat.com/create**.

Instagram

Now that Snapchat's out of the way – what about Instagram? Well, you'll want to pay a little more attention to this social media channel, especially if you're hoping to engage a younger audience. Instagram has capitalized on the fact that anything visual creates the most engagement. At minimum, you need a photo to post. But the app itself does so much more with video, 'stories', and more.

In the public sector, Instagram lends itself well to departments like tourism, libraries, recreation, arts and culture, and events. For best practices on Instagram, we recommend following media outlets like CBC (@cbcnews) and the Globe and Mail (@globeandmail).

Twitter and Facebook

Even with new players in the social media game, Twitter and Facebook are still relevant. In 2017, Facebook use increased among municipalities. And despite recent concerns over privacy on Facebook, it's still one of the most widely used social media channels.

Twitter is most useful for breaking news, policy updates, and emergency communications. For municipalities, a Twitter account is critical in the event of an emergency. Municipalities like Brantford and Chatham-Kent relied heavily on Twitter during significant flooding events, and of course, it was critical for updates during the BC and Fort McMurray wildfires.

However, our results show that many municipalities shut down (or stopped updating) some of their separate departmental Twitter accounts, likely because of the amount of resources it takes to keep them active. The key here is to pay attention to metrics. If certain Twitter accounts aren't getting engagement anymore, it may be time to dedicate fewer resources to them. And at the very least, keep at least one active Twitter account in case you need it for emergency communications.

Livestreaming and Video

Another emerging trend over the past few years is livestreaming, which can be done through webcasting and on Facebook, Twitter (through Periscope), and Instagram. Any sort of positive public event – especially those that are already being broadcast on television – are safe to share through a livestream. For example, many municipalities livestreamed events as part of Canada 150 celebrations.

Some municipalities are now livestreaming their council meetings and posting them on YouTube. We recommend this practice, as it's a great way to get people engaged who otherwise might not go to meetings. It's also a good record for the discussions that took place.

About Redbrick Communications

Redbrick Communications is a Mississauga-based consulting firm with an extensive municipal practice. We've been tracking social media use since 2010. For free help with social media, including sample policies, tips and tricks, visit www.redbrick.ca.

Follow us on Twitter: @RedbrickComms or @BrianLambie
Contact us at 905-271-1669 or ruby@redbrick.ca

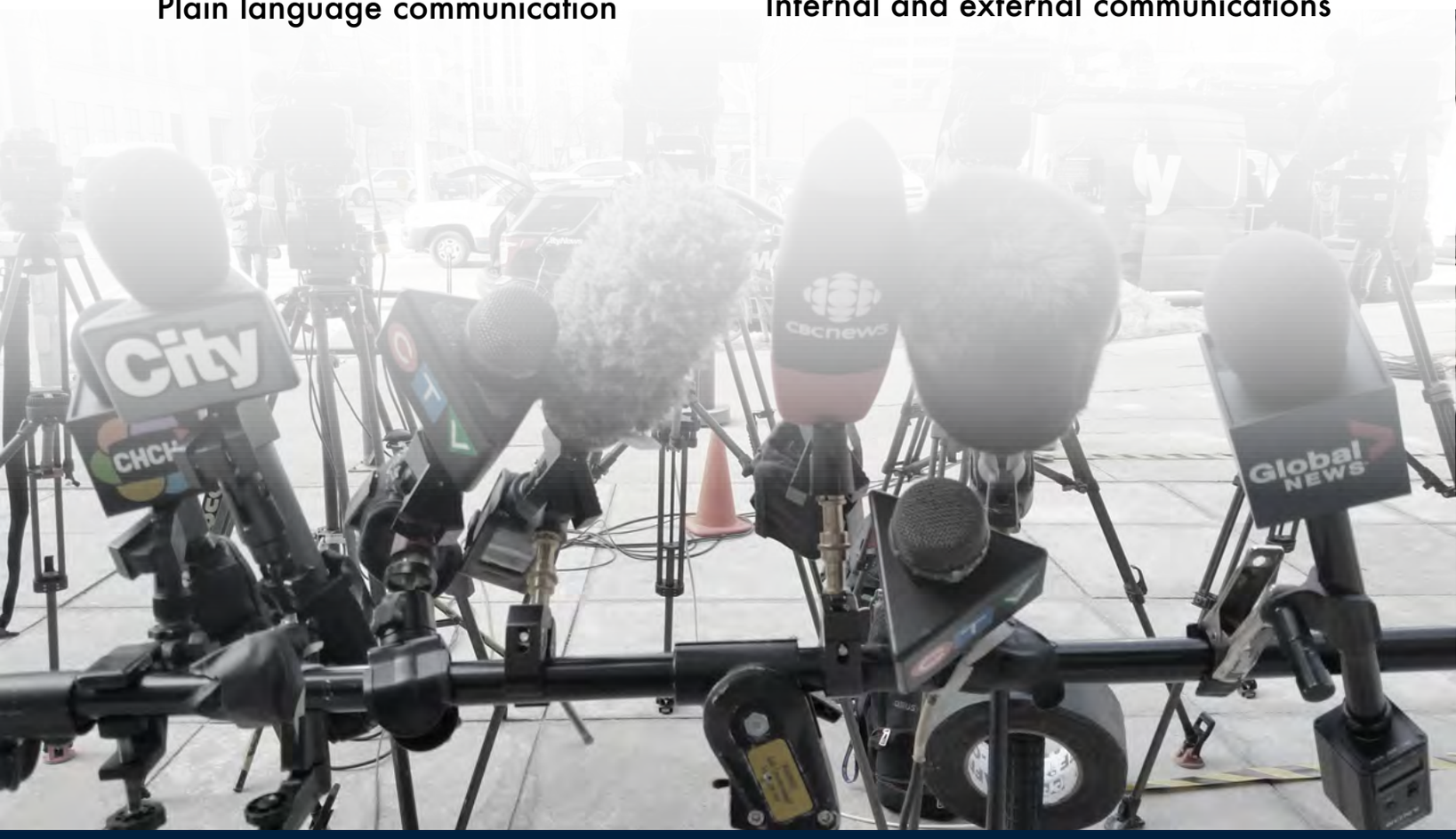
Redbrick provides strategic consultation, hands-on public relations support, writing services and training programs.

Training Programs

General communications
Managing media relations
Managing media interviews
Issues management
Presentation skills
Using social media
Plain language communication

Public Relations Support

Strategic communications planning
Media relations
Social media
Issues management
Crisis management
Communications audits
Internal and external communications



METHODOLOGY:

- Redbrick's Municipal Social Media Survey looks at social media use by all 444 municipalities in Ontario.
- Our research has looked at social media activity between April 2010 and August 2017.
- Data on 'Likes' and 'Followers' applies to central accounts only, and was collected on August 3.
- Population Data is based on 2016 population census data from Statistics Canada.
- Geographic divisions are based on the Ontario Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing OnRAMP regional divisions.
- Produced by Teri Clark, Social and Digital Media Strategist, and Jacqueline Demers, Senior Consultant.