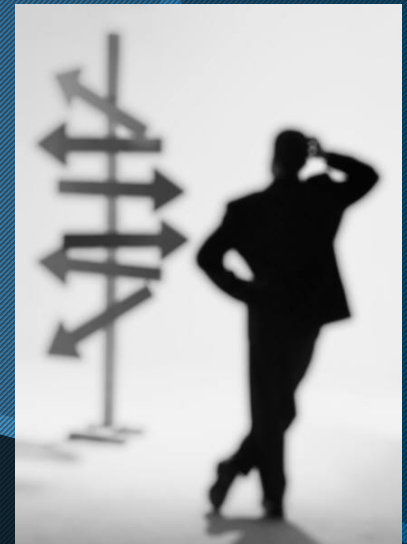# Social Media & Municipal Government

Is it Time to Get Involved?

What is Social Media?

In its simplest terms, Social Media is an electronic tool that provides a multi-directional exchange of information to members of the group.

Each member can equally contribute and receive information.

Why are local governments interested in Social Media?

Why are local governments interested in Social Media?

Because "that's where the people are"

But is it a Good Idea?

What are the mainstream tools of Social Media today?

Facebook
Twitter
LinkedIn
Google Plus
My Space

Don't be mislead by the popular press

A frequently cited study of government agencies found 66% use Social Media.

But they defined Social Media very broadly including blogs, wikis, instant messaging and chat.

The Bandwagon Effect

They Found:

There is a significant disparity among the levels of government that use of Social Media:

At the local level, the two most important factors creating the disparity are funding and technical staff to make sure it is done correctly.

But did not comment on effectiveness.

A recent study of 200 New Jersey municipalities found that 30% are using one or more of the popular Social Media tools linked to their municipal website.

Facebook - 42

Twitter - 17

LinkedIn - 0

Google Plus - 2

My Space - 0

But Quantity does not = Quality

Followers on municipal Facebook accounts in the survey ranged from a high of 2,700 to low of 3 followers. Many had less than 100.

Some towns have one Facebook account and others have as many as 6-8 Facebook Accounts

Who's Minding the Store?

Often it is the Police Department who is leading the way with Twitter and Facebook.

In addition they often seem to be operating as a separate entity from the municipality.

Where is the Brand Identity?

Where municipalities are using Social Media, the overwhelming majority **DO NOT** use it to create social interaction and increase citizen participation in government.

They typically restrict the tool so **interaction is only outward**. In other words, it appears as if they are just looking for wider distribution of information

That is not a bad goal, it is just not what people think of when they think of Facebook, Twitter, etc.

It is like placing a large billboard on a super Highway because you know more people will see it.

The USA Today effect
     snip-its of information.

Considerations in setting up a municipal Social Media account

1. Do you have the technical resources for the long term – volunteers?

2. Do you have a specific policy that clearly outlines the roles and responsibilities of account managers and municipal staff?

3. How will you comply with State Records Retention Guidelines and OPRA requests?

4. What about security?

Considerations in setting up a municipal Social Media account

1. Do you have the technical resources for the long term – volunteers, vendor, in-house?

Social Media such as Facebook and Twitter are becoming ever more complex. The person(s) setting it up will need training and more knowledge than the average Social Media user.

Proper Resources incur cost

Considerations in setting up a municipal Social Media account

2. Do you have a specific policy that clearly outlines the roles and responsibilities of account managers and municipal staff?

Create a clear and specific policy manual.

A good example is:
Best Practices for Local Government Social Media Usage in North Carolina

Considerations in setting up a municipal Social Media account

3. How will you comply with State Records Retention Guidelines and OPRA requests?
   (yes, it is a government record)

Facebook and Twitter – Backup is not Retention

SOS Online Backup - $80 per year
http://www.sosonlinebackup.com/
http://facebook2zip.com/   (free)
https://www.backupify.com/   Google

Notify visitors and people who post or send messages about OPRA

Considerations in setting up a municipal Social Media account

4. What about security?

By its very nature, social media is not as secure as a municipal website.

What will you do about controlling the level and type of dialog in postings?

The Ripple Effect may give you unwanted content.

Conclusions:

1. As with all technology advances municipalities
   will be slow adopters because of funding,
   the skill set needed and demographics .

Consider Shared Services.

Conclusions:

2. Municipalities need to step back and more clearly define their objectives for the level and type of citizen participation they are seeking vs the billboard approach to information dissemination.

Resist the bandwagon.
Define your Goals & Milestones

Conclusions - continued

The tool set for records retention is not yet well developed for social media in the way that municipalities need to comply with records retention laws.

A Backup for Disaster Recovery is NOT Records Retention

Conclusions - continued

The municipal message is becoming more fragmented at a time it needs to become more cohesive.

Having 6 municipal websites does not mean you are communicating more effectively.

Conclusions - continued

Even if you solve the other problems, having a Facebook or Twitter account with 50-60 followers is not cost effective for a municipality.

**If you are going to do this
ADVERTISE, ENCOURAGE GROWTH
& SET PARTICIPATION GOALS**

And Now - A Message from Our Sponsor:

Remember, The League of Municipalities has a FREE Web and Internet Consulting Service for its members.

This presentation will be placed on the NJLM Website in the 96th Annual Conference Presentations section.

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