

PM

PUBLIC MANAGEMENT

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THE P3 COMBO

HOW
COLLABORATION
CAN REINVENT
DOWNTOWN



Today, the vast majority of the public sector understands social media to be a communication tool to reach the community. Many, however, still view social platforms as the equivalent of fax machines, e-mail blasts, or campaign mailings—a process that a decade ago seemed to be at the forefront of communication.

By contrast, the private sector has evolved to approach social media as a medium to develop brand loyalty and even more so, as a method to grow an online community. Understanding the benefits of a private sector approach in a public sector environment can pay huge dividends to local governments in their efforts to engage with their community while simultaneously building transparency and trust.

In the past few years, local governments have embraced the use of social media and have a presence on popular platforms like Facebook, Twitter, or Nextdoor. Their return on investment on such platforms, however, is often diminished by how government accounts use these platforms.

Unfortunately, most approach it as a one-way communication tool while shying away from its true potential: two-way engagement. This type of engagement is an ideal approach to understand that social media is a medium to engage your community, not just push information to residents.

Fruitful Interactions

From a community’s perspective, interacting with government accounts that don’t engage is discouraging. Why? Because your community, particularly in a digital sphere, is increasingly becoming accustomed to interacting with private sector brands and customer service representatives through social media platforms and finding quick and successful resolutions from it.

Most Americans, for example, expect a response from a brand within 60 minutes of posting a comment, question, or concern on the brand’s social media page.

Take, for example, Southwest Airlines. Its social command center is tasked with providing support whenever Southwest is flying and answering customer online queries within 15 minutes. In addition to listening and responding, the social business team proactively develops engaging content to generate conversation.¹

Practically speaking, this means a traveler can quickly tweet or message Southwest with flight issues and will usually have a resolution within 15 minutes, which is often faster than standing in line to speak with the gate agent.

When that same traveler arrives home and attempts to tweet or message the local government online, a sad reality is that responses can often take days and won’t always include solutions. A major factor hampering this effort is that there

are often layers of bureaucracy that slow online response times or, for those staff members who have been tasked with the responsibility of responding online, they don’t have the authority to find a successful solution. While government solutions will almost always be more complicated than the private sector, the communication component of the solution (or paths to solutions) is the key takeaway here. The same expectations of professionalism and customer service we place on our front counter staff should be the same expectations we have for the interactions that residents have with us online. In essence, the “digital lobby” experience should mirror that of someone walking into City Hall to get questions answered.

Going back to the Southwest Airlines example, one major reason for its customer satisfaction is that staff working in the listening center are all empowered to make decisions and find solutions without needing to refer customers elsewhere in the airline’s organization.

TAKEAWAYS

- › In an era where more and more residents turn to digital devices for news and community information, understanding how to deliver a professional “digital lobby” experience is more important than ever.
- › Knowing how to grow and engage the community in a two-way

OUR SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORM

Pew research tells us that roughly three-quarters of Americans now own a smartphone and 62 percent of Americans look to social media for their news.² Another way to look at this: A growing majority of your residents would rather interact with local government through their smartphones and using social platforms rather than going to a government website, driving to city hall, or calling for information.

What Success Looks Like

Any digital community needs to be grown and cultivated through great content and interactions. Posting bulletins about commission openings or council agendas does not resonate and is almost never shared.

Few realize that platforms like Facebook track the popularity of a page's posts. What's more, if a post is

needs to be in a position to quickly respond in a voice and tone that is friendly and professional, not boring and robotic.

Remember, an individual's online relationship with local government relies heavily on the connection the person makes with an agency's brand and, by that measure, the tone of voice that is connected to that brand.

A successful government social media coordinator's job is to work every day to ensure constituents have positive experiences with the organization online. These are the same expectations we would have for our front-line employees working with the public.

A Key Role

Without question, budgets remain tight and the creation of new positions cannot be taken lightly.

The Mountain View, California, Police Department is among a few Bay Area police departments that have a full-time, non-sworn social media coordinator. This position has been pivotal in creating content and promoting positive day-to-day interactions with the community.

These day-to-day interactions create positive deposits in the bank of community trust. During critical incidents and times of crisis, a social media coordinator is able to quickly and accurately disseminate information to the public. Timely release of information allows the police department to be in the driver's seat of information, dispel rumors, and correct misinformation.

A Cohesive Network

All that said, social media is not the future of communication. Social media is the way communities network now. Those who are not effectively using digital platforms to the best of their abilities are not only falling behind, they are losing the ability to maximize connectivity with their residents.

An organization's digital footprint, and the connection it brings to its residents, provides cohesiveness to many residents and neighborhoods, especially at a time where fewer neighbors take the time to get to know each other in person. **PM**

DAY-TO-DAY SOCIAL MEDIA INTERACTIONS CREATE POSITIVE DEPOSITS IN THE BANK OF COMMUNITY TRUST. DURING CRITICAL INCIDENTS AND TIMES OF CRISIS, A SOCIAL MEDIA COORDINATOR IS ABLE TO QUICKLY AND ACCURATELY DISSEMINATE INFORMATION TO THE PUBLIC.

not performing well by not resonating with followers, Facebook will choose not to show it at all. This is known as the "Facebook Newsfeed Algorithm".

In contrast, bringing the community "behind the scenes" of government through photos or short, quality videos are extremely popular and help demystify the jobs that government staffs do to serve the community. Better yet, introducing staff through short biographies and sharing about their roles help personify government.

The key here is that on social media, content needs to be interesting, shareable, and most of all, it needs to create conversations. When those conversations take place, staff

That said, smartphones, social media, and the use of digital communications as a preferred medium are trends that will only increase with time.

The value and investment in a social media coordinator cannot be underestimated, and the need to have a position fully dedicated to that role will only become more imperative. Progressive government entities like the town of

Gilbert, Arizona, have gone "all in" on the digital front, with a digital communications team that

consists of a chief digital officer, digital media and marketing officer, digital journalists, and multimedia specialists.³



ENDNOTES AND RESOURCES:

- 1 Social Media Dallas, Listening with Heart: Southwest Airlines Social Command Center Tour: <https://www.smdallas.org/2016/03/08/listening-with-heart-southwest-airlines-social-command-center-tour>.
- 2 News Use Across Social Media Platforms 2016: <http://www.journalism.org/2016/05/26/news-use-across-social-media-platforms-2016>.
- 3 Town of Gilbert, Arizona, Digital Roadmap: <https://www.gilbertaz.gov/home/showdocument?id=9686>.



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