

Council Communication

November 3, 2014, Study Session

Discussion of City Communication Tools

FROM:

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SUMMARY

At recent goal setting sessions, the City Council expressed interest in evaluating existing City communication tools. The attached matrix provides information about our current communication tools with a brief description of each tool and a brief statement about the strengths and weaknesses of each tool. It also includes quantitative data as a result of the most recent citizen survey and informal qualitative information.

BACKGROUND AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS:

The attached evaluation is an informal communication audit. A formal audit is often conducted by organizations using an external communications expert. The City conducted a formal communication audit in 1999. As a result of the communication audit, the City created graphic standards, brand identity, a communications plan and decentralized communications.

Staff Assessment

The City communication tools are effective and provide an assortment of ways for people to get information about the City and to provide information to the City. Survey results indicate that citizens think the City does a good job of providing information.

Opportunities

- Increase cross promotion of communication tools
- Mailing the newsletter separately from utility bills would shorten the lead time to two weeks which provides the opportunity to include information that is more time sensitive. Approximately \$15,000 budget increase.
- Creating short 30 second informational videos for the website could be useful to communicate basic information: topics might include “storm water flows directly to streams” or “bacon grease clogs city pipes”. Approximately \$200 per video.
- Increasing use of Jefferson Public Radio may heighten awareness of city communications. Recent costs have been approximately \$500 per two week run.

Unknowns

- How do people get information if they are not using the internet, local media, mailings, social media, etc?



- How can the City encourage citizens to be pro-active and seek information about local government? The City can provide information but cannot make people read the newsletter, watch local news, use the website, read newspapers, watch or attend public meetings, read direct mail pieces etc. All types of communication require the user to be pro-active and seek information.

Challenge

The competition for people's attention is greater than ever. With constant improvements in technology, people have access to more information than ever before and likely use a variety of tools to get information. Local government is competing with the world for citizens' attention.

FISCAL IMPLICATIONS:

N/A

STAFF RECOMMENDATION AND REQUESTED ACTION:

N/A for informational purposes only

SUGGESTED MOTIONS:

N/A

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Communication tools evaluation
2. Example of analytics report of city website
3. Communication Plan



Communication Tools (External) (78% of citizens rate city public information as excellent or good: 2012 Citizen Survey)	Description /Objective	Strengths	Weaknesses	Comments
City Website (59% of citizens use the website: 2012 Citizen Survey)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This is the city’s primary communication tool and has the most comprehensive information • Provides one-stop access to city information. Information is cross referenced so it is accessible from a variety of entry points 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Designed to allow staff to post to the site from desktop computers (versus submitting info to a single point of contact) • Provides access to on-line services e.g. bill pay, permit requests, registration for rec programs etc. • Meets ADA requirements for sight and hearing impaired • Has analytic/reporting functions to review page visits, how long viewers are staying on a page, how they are accessing the site 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The sheer volume of information and material can be daunting for viewers • Quality and volume of content differs by departments as most of the posting and maintenance of data is done by individual departments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4,600 users subscribe to the site and receive email updates when new information is posted • Numerous interactive tools including bill pay, conservation scheduling, building inspections. • Let Us Know tool provides easy access for citizens to communicate with City (usually about problems needing fixes: overflowing drains, broken curbs, etc.) • My Ashland (mobile app) provides access to calendar, news, agenda, full site etc. plus “report an issue”: users can submit photos with location coordinates e.g. report graffiti, potholes, street lights in need of bulbs etc. (approx 950 users)
City Source Newsletter (82% read the newsletter: 2012 Citizen Survey)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Included with utility bills (approximately 11,000) and includes info on city services, programs, upcoming meetings etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inexpensive, flexible, easy to read • Ensures coverage to “every household” in Ashland (mailed with paper bills included as a link with e-bills) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requires a long lead time of six weeks – eight weeks • Doesn’t work well for issues that are timely and/or “last minute” • Challenging to communicate bigger more complicated issues due to space, formatting etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Utility bills are sent in nine different cycles. Some people get their bill and newsletter at the beginning of the month others at the end of the month thus the newsletter contains dates for the following month. The long lead time can be challenging for commissions and staff. Means they have to commit and provide info nearly two months in advance

Communication Tools (External) (78% of citizens rate city public information as excellent or good: 2012 Citizen Survey)	Description /Objective	Strengths	Weaknesses	Comments
Open City Hall	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An online forum for citizens to provide feedback on city issues and a tool for city officials to hear from citizens who do not attend city meetings or want to speak in public 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On-line forum for civic engagement and a tool for citizens to voice their opinion. • Designed to communicate complex issues and solicit informed feedback • Comments are monitored by Peak Democracy. Inappropriate comments are removed and the poster is notified with the option to modify • Requires user to “register” prior to posting the first comment. This allows peak democracy to verify the email. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No issues • Departments are still adjusting to its usefulness and place within their communications/outreach plans and efforts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 475 subscribers – automatically receive a notification when a new topic is posted • All city web subscribers receive email notification of new topic.
Social Media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Citizens who rely on social media for information can follow the city on Facebook and Twitter • Information posted on the city website is automatically “pushed” to city Facebook and Twitter accounts • City also has a Flickr account, YouTube account and UStream 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Doesn’t require separate posting to each social media site • Directs people back to the city website 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social media users must be proactive to automatically receive updates • Not a good use for in depth info. Twitter limited to 140 characters • To extend the reach requires dedicated users to like/comment/tweet/re-post etc. reach doesn’t extend without user action 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FB is now a pay-to-play tool – the “organic” reach is a thing of the past. Must pay to reach users or only reach about 10% • FB about 600 + people • Twitter about 550 + people • Ustream is used to record study sessions – average 25 views per meeting.
RVTV (42% watched a public meeting on RVTV)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funded through PEG fees and the general fund, RVTV provides live broadcasts and web stream of all city council, planning commission and parks commission and budget committee regular meetings and Town Hall. Broadcasts are replayed twice per week, webcasts are captured, stored and available for viewing on the city website for up to one year 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reliable and knowledgeable RVTV staff who are always willing to help and to improve coverage • Viewers can watch city meetings from home (don’t need cable to watch) • Videos are archived on city website • Includes live web streaming of meetings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aging audio/visual equipment causes occasional problems in council chambers • Unless viewers are aware of city programming, they tend to channel surf and happen to land on the public access channels by chance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PEG fee revenue has declined over the years as cable TV subscriptions decline (due to an increase in satellite TV, online TV) causing increase hit to general fund • Three year renewable agreement with SOU to provide services

Communication Tools (External) (78% of citizens rate city public information as excellent or good: 2012 Citizen Survey)	Description /Objective	Strengths	Weaknesses	Comments
News Releases	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prepared news releases are sent to the local media and posted on the city's website and emailed to all employees • Releases are timely, relevant and contain the facts: who, what, when, where, why and how 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Easy to write and distribute • Quick distribution • Helps keep City website content fresh/current • City controls the message 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not always "picked up" by the local media • Short shelf life 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • City has a good relationship with local media. They are responsive to City requests.
JPR Underwriting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Usually a 30 second message about a specific city event/program 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reaches a radio audience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Costs can add up depending on frequency and duration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • JPR has a broad listening audience with a higher than usual percentage in Ashland. Because it broadcasts very few underwriting announcements per hour, the "ad" doesn't compete with other ads as can be the case with other media
Community Forums	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Usually done in partnership with the Chamber of Commerce, this tool is most effective to convey complex information to a live audience. Usually the information is presented by a panel of experts with a moderator taking questions from the audience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An informal setting with audience participation provides the opportunity to clarify confusion, misinformation about complex topics that affect the entire community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requires a lot of marketing, community outreach to get citizens to attend 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This tool was used recently for the Drought Summit. Was also used for the water/wastewater master plan, and TSP

Communication Tools (External) (78% of citizens rate city public information as excellent or good: 2012 Citizen Survey)	Description /Objective	Strengths	Weaknesses	Comments
Display Advertising Printed Materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Display advertising is generally limited to agendas for council meetings, planning commission and parks • A variety of printed materials (brochures, door hangers, flyers) are created as needed to provide information about city services/programs e.g. conservation, firewise etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • City controls content • Print materials/ mailing provide a way to reach a target audience/target customer base • Clearly branded as City of Ashland information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Display advertising is expensive and has a short “life span” and competes with many other advertisements for readers attention. Broad distribution of printed materials is limiting (materials are placed in racks at Com Dev lobby, Council Chambers and the library) • Targeted mailing lists are not always accurate and are challenging to sort/filter 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Budgets for display advertising were cut several years ago.
Citizen Survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Statistically valid survey of resident opinions about the community and services provided by local government. • Conducted every two years 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compares responses to other cities with similar populations and with universities • Provides staff and electeds an opportunity to identify challenges and to plan for improvements, sustain services and amenities • Available online for citizens to participate even if their household was not selected in the sample size (results are non-scientific and not included in final report) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sometimes people who are unfamiliar with statistics don’t trust that the results represent the majority of the community • Readers who feel different from than the results tend not to believe the results represent the majority of the community

Discontinued Communication Tools	Description /Objective	Strengths	Weaknesses	Comments
Budget in Brief (budget cuts)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Produced from 2000 through 2007. Eight page booklet mail to all households in July. Provided basic information about the current FY budget. Included pages called “Where does the money come from?” and “Where does the money go?” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Presented basic information about the city budget into layman language Easy to read/digest 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expensive 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This worked really well for a number of years but eventually became too expensive and was a victim of budget cuts
Informational Videos	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The City, in conjunction with RVTv, produced a number of informational videos ranging from transportation safety to AFN. The videos aired regularly on RVTv and are streamed on the city’s website The annual budget of \$10,000 for videos was cut in 2003 PSAs have to be produced and are costly. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Good medium to communication city information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Labor intensive and expensive 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Getting the “bang for the buck” is really dependant on how the video is being distributed i.e. just RVTv or also on Youtube, imbedded as content on website, cross promotion with other partners
Water Quality Report	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Eleven page booklet mailed to every Ashland household Exceeded reporting requirements of EPA (water testing/ contaminants) and included water facts and figures, maps, water sources etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Good information about Ashland water, conservation, source etc. Fairly easy to produce and mail Easy to read.... 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expensive (about \$5,000) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> EPA used to require the information be mailed to all households but has changed the requirement to posting online only
Utility Bill Insert	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This was an insert separate from the City Source (when the newsletter was mailed separating) and included tips and facts, some dates 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quick, easy to read 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Due to space, did not provide any in depth information on city issues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This tool was eliminated when the City Source was no longer a separate mailing

Pages

Sep 1, 2014 - Sep 30, 2014



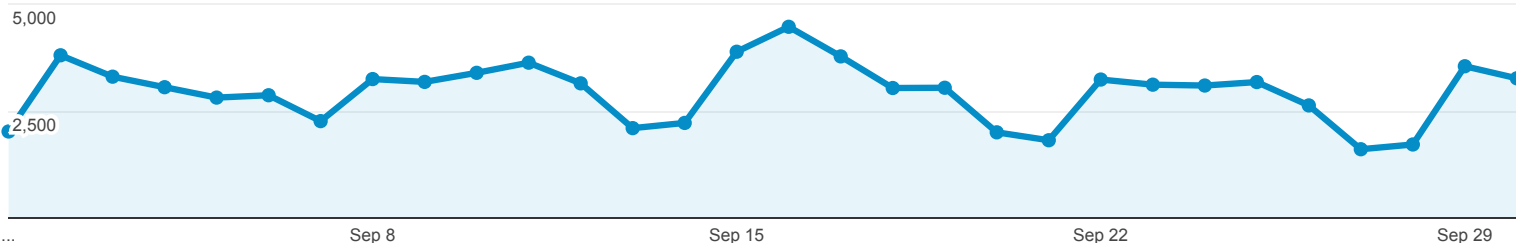
All Sessions
100.00%



+ Add Segment

Explorer

Pageviews



Page Title	Pageviews	Unique Pageviews	Avg. Time on Page	Entrances	Bounce Rate	% Exit	Page Value
	88,508 % of Total: 100.00% (88,508)	68,310 % of Total: 100.00% (68,310)	00:01:32 Site Avg: 00:01:32 (0.00%)	38,615 % of Total: 100.00% (38,615)	61.69% Site Avg: 61.69% (0.00%)	43.63% Site Avg: 43.63% (0.00%)	\$0.00 % of Total: 0.00% (\$0.00)
1. City of Ashland, Oregon - HOME	21,693 (24.51%)	16,910 (24.75%)	00:02:28	14,308 (37.05%)	65.52%	57.09%	\$0.00 (0.00%)
2. City of Ashland, Oregon - Administration - Personnel Homepage	8,052 (9.10%)	5,605 (8.21%)	00:01:02	3,391 (8.78%)	55.03%	42.11%	\$0.00 (0.00%)
3. City of Ashland, Oregon - Agendas And Minutes	3,889 (4.39%)	2,614 (3.83%)	00:01:15	641 (1.66%)	62.56%	23.12%	\$0.00 (0.00%)
4. City of Ashland, Oregon - Mobile	3,847 (4.35%)	3,104 (4.54%)	00:00:48	2,870 (7.43%)	62.02%	58.31%	\$0.00 (0.00%)
5. City of Ashland, Oregon - Municipal Code	2,992 (3.38%)	2,345 (3.43%)	00:01:11	346 (0.90%)	31.50%	16.78%	\$0.00 (0.00%)
6. City of Ashland, Oregon -	2,457 (2.78%)	1,720 (2.52%)	00:00:59	175 (0.45%)	27.43%	17.66%	\$0.00 (0.00%)
7. City of Ashland, Oregon - Staff Directory	1,553 (1.75%)	1,264 (1.85%)	00:01:32	425 (1.10%)	64.00%	40.57%	\$0.00 (0.00%)
8. City of Ashland, Oregon - Contact Us	1,338 (1.51%)	1,185 (1.73%)	00:01:58	416 (1.08%)	75.72%	57.62%	\$0.00 (0.00%)
9. City of Ashland, Oregon - FAQ	1,336 (1.51%)	987 (1.44%)	00:00:53	430 (1.11%)	40.23%	27.77%	\$0.00 (0.00%)
10. City of Ashland, Oregon - Calendar	1,233 (1.39%)	963 (1.41%)	00:00:57	289 (0.75%)	61.94%	27.90%	\$0.00 (0.00%)

Rows 1 - 10 of 1949

Pageview - total number of times the page was viewed.

Unique pageview - de-duplicates pageviews to show how many sessions contained a view of the page

Bounce Rate - the percentage of views where the user did not interact with the website any further Average

time - the average amount of time users spent viewing the page or screen

Entrances - the number of times this page was the first page in a session: e.g. as a bookmark or google search

%Exit - percent of pageviews that were the final page in a session

Page Value - N/A (applies to e-commerce sites)



City of Ashland
Communication Plan
Introduction
(updated 2010)

The City of Ashland recognizes the value of citizen involvement and the wealth of good information and resources the citizens of Ashland possess. It is important to increase the city's understanding of citizen concerns, ideas and values so they can be utilized to make better decisions. The City must identify, create and budget adequate resources to engage citizens and citizen groups to enable them to effectively become a part of the city's decision making process.

Much of the city's overall success is shaped by the quality of its communication efforts. Therefore, a proactive approach is needed to foster effective two-way communication.

Values Statement

The City of Ashland takes pride in providing quality service with professionalism, integrity and honesty. The City of Ashland values citizen input and believes citizens should have a say in decisions about actions that could affect their lives. The City of Ashland respects the dignity, diversity and uniqueness of our citizens, the community and the environment. The principals of effectiveness, fiscal responsibility and safety guide us in enhancing the well-being of the community.

Key Messages

- City activities and services have positive results for our community
- City services are essential to the quality of life in Ashland
- The City listens to its residents and values community input
- The City spends money wisely

Guiding Principals

Open Two-Way Communication □ Ensure information is shared throughout the community and the organization emphasizing two-way informational flow.

Community Problem Solving □ Provide citizens with complete, accurate and timely information enabling them to make informed judgments. This will help the City to make the best decisions.

Proactive □ The plan attempts to give the City the opportunity to tell its story rather than rely exclusively on others to interpret the City's actions, issues and decisions.

Decentralized □ Strengthen direct communication between elected officials, City departments and citizens rather than trying to funnel all information through a central point of contact or department.

This provides for more knowledgeable discourse, strengthens accountability and also makes it easier to access or provide information on City activities.

Inclusive □ Including everyone in the process builds teamwork and a feeling of belonging, breaking down feelings of us vs. them, which are common in many city governments and in many relationships of city government with citizens. The goal is to include everyone who cares to participate and to motivate those who are not currently engaged.

Strong and Consistent Messages □ A successful communication plan is built on strong themes and is more effective than one with unrelated and scattered messages. The communication plan should support, reinforce and reflect the goals of the City government as established by the City Council and City management, thus underscoring the idea of an organization with one common purpose: the citizens.

Goals of the Communication Plan

- Ensure the Mayor and City Council are an active and integral part of the overall City Communication Plan.
- Improve City communication to and from Ashland citizens, businesses and organizations
- Improve two-way communication within the City organization
- Enhance and improve community and media relations
- Increase awareness, interest and participation of the citizens of Ashland in government goals and activities.
- Break down feelings of “us vs. them” between city government and the residents of Ashland, between elected officials and staff and between departments and agencies.
- Increase awareness, interest and participation of City employees in the goals and activities of the City.
- Build organizational pride among employees and positive identification with the City government as a whole.

Targeted Audiences

Identifying and prioritizing target audiences are key components of a communication plan. Without such identification, a communication plan can slip into a “read-fire-aim” approach rather than a planned “ready-aim-fire approach.

Primary Target Audiences

- Citizens of Ashland
Citizens of Ashland are the highest priority targeted audience. Strengthening the relationship between city government and 20,000 residents is the starting point of a sound communication plan.
- Identify segments of Ashland citizens
Often, city projects, issues and programs directly affect a segment of Ashland citizens thus requiring specific targeted outreach to those citizens.
- Members of City boards, commissions and committees.
While these people are covered under the broad umbrella of #1, Citizens of Ashland, the

work they do on behalf of the community and government makes them a distinct and specific target audience.

- City Employees
People employed by the City of Ashland in its various departments are an integral part of the success of the communication plan. Each individual reflects the organization in their daily work.
- News media
The media are important because their coverage of the City government can have significant influence on the image of government by the public. Media includes a variety of print and broadcast.

Secondary Audiences

- People outside of Ashland, including area residents who primarily work and visit in Ashland
- Other local governments in the Rogue Valley, Oregon and beyond
- City government associations and organizations.

Strategies and Actions

Strategies

- Expand our communication research program, using both quantitative and qualitative research methods to measure attitudes and opinions.
- Continue to employ a multimedia and multilevel communication approach and monitor and fine-tune the existing communication tools and seek additional tools. What worked in the past may have outlived its usefulness and need to be abandoned and replaced with something else. Some people absorb information audibly and others absorb information visually. Be sure the communication tools are diverse in order to reach various segments of the targeted audiences.
- Use interactive communication tools and techniques wherever and whenever possible to involve target audiences in the communication process and increase their commitment to community problem solving.

Actions

- Research
Conduct attitudinal surveys and focus groups. The method of implementation should include a diverse set of tools rather than just one form (random telephone surveys) as in years past. The implementation must reach a broad spectrum of Ashland citizens so that the results accurately reflect the demographic make-up of the community.
- Communication Audit
Conduct a communication audit. It is useful to review the tools we have in place and our overall communication efforts in order to determine what more we could be doing. Use an outside firm to conduct a communication audit of the City's outreach tools to determine tools that may be outdated and tools that need to be added.

- **Communication Training**
Provide communication counseling and training for City officials and staff. This tactic includes communication counseling/training with the Mayor, Council Members, City Administrator and Department Heads as well as mid-managers and members of City commissions, committees and boards. We all think we do a good job of communicating, but without the benefit of others telling us their perception of how well we communicate we may never improve.