Social Media: What’s in it for us?

CALLAN PASKE, ASSOCIATE CONSULTANT
Font Public Relations

Social media is on the tip of everyone’s tongue in every sector of every industry. Rather than being a disease to steer clear of, ‘Going Viral’ is now something major corporations are striving for with YouTube videos garnering hit, after hit, after hit. But what does this mean for Local Government and how can councils harness the power of these exciting new media?

There are hundreds of social media sites and applications on the Internet, with many more currently in development. With so much on offer, it can be hard for small organisations to decide which ones to utilise. The key questions councils need to ask are: what do we want to achieve from this; and which medium will offer the best outcomes?

The key to understanding social media is that each application has a specified use. For instance, if the aim is to make people aware of something visual that is happening in the region, Facebook may be the best application as it allows for easy sharing of pictures and is an extremely visual medium. If you are after constant and precise conversation then Twitter may be the best form of communication as it offers constant contact with your social community.

If you are thinking that it will take too much time, or that you might get negative feedback, then consider not knowing about that feedback, and the potential damage it can do by going unaddressed. One of the major arguments for being online in the social media sphere is simply to listen. As councils and government bodies are attempting to connect with rate payers and constituents on an ongoing basis, social media is another chance to listen and engage.

Social media is also a great way to connect internally with employees as a way of sharing information and fostering a good working environment. With many employees working out of office or away from the main workplace, these social media applications offer an easy way for people to interact with their co-workers on a personal level.

Smart phones, the Internet and new media continue to change the way we communicate, with social media often seen as a time wasting tool for bored office workers. By recognising the potential for building relationships and communities through these media, councils and government can communicate more effectively with a wide range of audiences.

A great example of how to utilise social media in an integrated approach can be illustrated by looking at Sydney City Council. The Council is active on a variety of platforms including YouTube, Flickr, Facebook and Twitter, and is using these tools to engage with the Sydney community in promoting events and local businesses, as well as communicating its own agenda.

At the time of writing this article Sydney Council has over 3,000 followers on Twitter and 3,500 ‘likes’ on Facebook. To see what Sydney City Council are doing check them out on twitter@cityofsydney and on Facebook at www.facebook.com/City-of-Sydney.

Font Public Relations is currently running courses on the implementation of social media communications, including a Twitter 101 course that contains a basic how to use and set up as well as approaches to policy and procedure.

For more information, please contact Sarah on (03) 6223 3333 or email sarahs@fontpr.com.au.

Font Public Relations’ newest recruit, Callan Paske, is a University of Tasmania Graduate and a keen entrepreneurial talent. Callan holds a sound knowledge of social networking mediums, such as Facebook and Twitter, and his understanding of how to create messages to successfully engage these mediums helps to build effective online communication strategies.
pitt&sherry offer professional services to local government throughout Australia

pitt&sherry is a multi-disciplined engineering and consulting company that provides integrated, sustainable and innovative solutions for transport and community infrastructure, climate change and sustainability. Make pitt&sherry your first point of reference for your next project.

Transport Infrastructure: Road and bridge engineering, traffic engineering and transport planning, road and bridge asset management through dedicated programs such as AssetAsyst™ and BridgeAsyst™.

Community Infrastructure: Land use planning, environmental science, water and wastewater, WSUD, buildings and structures.

Climate change and sustainability: Life cycle analysis, energy efficiency, energy and carbon accounting, and adaptation strategies.

At Erncorp, every dollar counts. So when Ern discovered he could reduce operating costs for at least three years by upgrading his fixed phone system, he didn’t hesitate. With features like message bank, call waiting, and caller records displayed on the computer screen, the new system is already helping Erncorp impress clients with its professionalism and efficiency.

ERN IMPROVED HIS BOTTOM LINE WITH FREE LOCAL CALLS

FREE LOCAL CALLS FOR THREE YEARS ON A MINIMUM 36-MONTH CONTRACT

Telstra Business Centre Northern Tasmania
185 Invermay Road Invermay
Call 6334 4800

Telstra Store Devonport
69 Rooke Street Devonport
Call 6424 1788

Telstra Store

FREE LOCAL CALLS FOR THREE YEARS ON A MINIMUM 36-MONTH CONTRACT

THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW: Offer ends 30/11/10 with a nominated connection date before 31/12/10. Credit management approvals apply. ®Registered trade mark of Telstra Corporation Limited. ABN 33 051 775 556 BWMTBU0802

Brisbane (+617) 3832 7455
Canberra (+612) 6295 2100
Devonport (+613) 6424 1641
Hobart (+613) 6210 1400
Launceston (+613) 6323 1900
Melbourne (+613) 9682 5290

www.pittsh.com.au

sustainablethinking
The world is changing at an ever faster rate but managing organisational change is nothing new. What is different is the speed at which leaders need to change their thinking to cope with new technologies and a changing environment. In many ways, these changes have disempowered leaders by making them much more dependent upon their senior managers and advisors. Many people now hold the key data inside council.

What differentiates successful leaders from not-so-successful leaders is their ability to understand, coordinate, influence and motivate their staff. These social competence skills, or the soft skills of leadership, are now seen as essential for leaders at all levels within council.

In assessing and developing skills and competencies within council leaders, we often break these into three groups: People Skills, Task Skills and Leadership Skills.

**People Skills** create the atmosphere or culture in which the team works; promoting harmony and trust:

- **Communication:** pacing staff, varying communication styles, engaging and questioning to enhance rapport
- **Active Listening:** paying attention/demonstrating interest, open questions, building on what they say, summarising
- **Team Relationships:** building and maintaining respect, understanding and trust within team members, interpersonal
- **Problem-solving & Counselling:** available, responsive, empathetic, questioning to understand, facilitating, collaborating, coaching
- **Participating decision making:** engaging staff, gaining opinions and ideas, level of authority clear, empowered, joint “ownership”
- **Interface management:** managing the links between internal team members as well as between internal and external stakeholders

**Task Skills** create a solid core or foundation on which the work of the team relies; they promote confidence and stability.

- **Work Allocation:** assigning tasks to team members based upon competence and preferences, balancing team strengths
- **Team Development:** planning ways of developing skills in areas that are not preferences, developing strengths/managing limitations
- **Delegation:** process of learning via experience and support at work to develop competencies, leads to confidence and trust
- **Clear Objectives:** outputs/outcomes focused, mutual agreement even when changing frequently, take ownership and pride in work, mileposts for measurement
- **Quality Standards:** strive for quality in all efforts, standards and procedures to support everyone’s quality, meet the expectations of the internal/external ‘customer’

**Leadership Skills** allow for articulation of a compelling vision of the team’s future; to ensure staffs give their best, staff need a clear picture of what lies ahead and then be regularly persuaded that the vision is worth pursuing.

- **Motivate:** inspiring staff towards the vision with clear goals, taking a stand on controversial issues, advocating for the team to senior management, understanding individual motivation
- **Strategic:** thinking/investing time discovering root causes and considering interaction of all elements in complex issues, thinking ahead, logical analysis, risk assessment/mitigation.

Leaders at all levels of council need to have these social competence skills assessed and developed to improve their performance and their team’s. People skills establish an atmosphere of harmony and trust, task skills prepare the ground for efficient outputs, and leadership skills provide inspiration and direction. Together, all three comprise the interpersonal skills needed for leadership excellence and outstanding team performance.

LG Performance Tasmania provides leadership assessment and development programs to advance the increased competencies required in council leaders. For enquiries, phone (03) 6236 9055, or email info@highpertraining.com.au.