

To: Council in Committee of the Whole	Item: CM-09-45	Date of Report: September 23, 2009
From: Bob Duignan City Manager	File: A-5000	Date of Meeting: September 28, 2009
Subject: <i>Corporate E-Communications Strategy</i>		Ward(s): All
PUBLIC MEETING		

1.0 PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to seek Council's approval on a proposed corporate e-communications strategy.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended to City Council:

1. That the proposed corporate e-communications strategy as outlined in Section 5.0 of Report CM-09-45 be approved;
2. That staff report back in nine months outlining results of the corporate e-communications strategy including recommendations on a go-forward plan; and
3. That the Corporate Media Relations Policy be updated to include e-communication delivery options to disseminate news information.

3.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The role of communications has evolved and continues to progress with the exponential growth of social media and the continual advancement of technology. The growing popularity of smartphones (such as blackberries and iphones) and the increasing availability of wireless internet means that the public now has the ability to access, customize and forward information however, wherever and whenever they want. Individuals can choose to receive information and instant updates on topics they have decided are beneficial and relevant to them (e.g. news feeds on a specific topic, up-to-the-minute traffic reports, GO Train delay notifications, and weather alerts).

The ease of public access to information coupled with the ability to exponentially disseminate information presents challenges to communicators whose objectives are to provide key messages in a timely manner and manage information being communicated to target audiences.

As a result of the evolution of communications, many organizations and municipalities are using various e-communication mediums to manage messages and are reporting positive results. (Refer to Attachment No. 1 for information on e-communication mediums used by municipalities. These municipalities were chosen as a benchmark as several e-communication mediums have been implemented).

E-communication is a cost-effective medium for municipalities to provide relevant information to residents on news items, public service announcements, meeting and road closure notices, employment opportunities and city emergency situations/major incidents. It is also an effective communication tool to provide timely information to media on news items, as well as business updates to stakeholders who are located outside of the municipality (e.g. business developers).

It is proposed that the City of Oshawa undertake a corporate e-communications strategy for nine months. It would include three e-communication mediums: RSS Feed for City news, notices, events and meetings; City of Oshawa corporate Twitter account; and corporate eNews e-mail.

It is recommended that the creation and management of Facebook Fan pages be considered only for major initiatives as it requires significant staff resources to manage the content. One of the City's responsibilities in hosting a Community Olympic Torch Community Event is to manage the Oshawa Olympic Torch Relay Facebook Fan Page. The fan page would indicate that the purpose of the page is to promote the Torch Relay event; inquiries and comments would be directed to Service Oshawa.

At the conclusion of the nine-month pilot project, staff would report on results and recommend a long-term e-communications strategy.

4.0 INPUT FROM OTHER SOURCES

4.1 General

- This report has been prepared with input from the Corporate Leadership Team, Information Technology Services, Service Oshawa, Economic Development Services, Recreation Services and Legal Services.
- Municipalities that have been consulted include: Ajax, Burlington, Durham Region, Calgary, Clarington, Guelph, Kingston, Markham, Mississauga, Ottawa, Regina, Region of Peel, St. Catharines, Region of Waterloo and Winnipeg.

4.2 Auditor General

- Not applicable

5.0 ANALYSIS

5.1 E-Communication Background

- Oshawa residents identified increased public awareness of city programs, services and events and improving communications, cooperation and community engagement as key objectives in the City's Community Strategic Plan.
- Community stakeholders have also provided feedback that the City needs to be more proactive in promoting positive new stories about Oshawa to help improve our image and attract business development.
- E-communication is a cost-effective communication medium that enables organizations to easily connect with target audiences and provide relevant information.
- These communication mediums are permission-based meaning that individuals must subscribe and always have the option of unsubscribing should they wish to discontinue the service.
- E-communication can assist with: communicating time sensitive information (e.g. emergency news); providing timely responses to on-line public feedback; gathering information on how the public perceives an organization; proactively managing key messages; and, in the event of inaccurate reporting proactively disseminating factual information.
- The objectives of the corporate e-communications strategy are fivefold:
 1. Provide cost-effective and timely communication to target audiences;
 2. Gather information on topics that are of relevance and of interest to target audiences;
 3. Encourage and increase visitors to the City's website;
 4. Disseminate information on City of Oshawa initiatives and projects; and
 5. Enhance the image of Oshawa.
- Many media outlets are using e-mail alerts to notify subscribers about "breaking news" and daily news so that the public can have up-to-date information at their fingertips (e.g. 680 news, CP24, Toronto Star, GO Train, TTC, Weather Network, etc.).
- Similarly, organizations are offering Real Simple Syndication (RSS) Feed sign ups and have Twitter accounts to provide target audiences with requested information in a timely manner (e.g. University of Ontario Institute of Technology, Oshawa This Week, etc.). A growing number of municipalities have found that RSS and Twitter are cost-effective communication mediums because they require minimal staff time and content updates are generated from their websites.
- Many municipalities have initiated the use of Facebook, a social networking site. Although there are no costs associated with setting up and monitoring an account, Facebook is very time-consuming as the account manager must keep the content current (e.g. uploading photos, videos, posting links and writing status updates) in order to engage and keep their audience. Also, the subscriber base can view all comments (positive and negative) that have been posted.
- Currently, the Facebook site contravenes Canadian privacy laws; however, Facebook is in the process of reviewing their structure to comply with privacy laws and will soon implement measures that give users better control over their personal information.

5.2 City of Oshawa E-Communications

- It is recommended that the City of Oshawa implement e-communication mediums that would provide timely information to the City's target audiences (residents, media, developers, etc.).
- The e-communications strategy would implement a one-way communication approach as a means of disseminating information. Inquiries and/or responses would be directed to Service Oshawa to ensure consistency in maintaining customer service standards and to measure the results and impact of the corporate e-communications strategy.
- It is recommended that the City offer three e-communication mediums:
 1. RSS Feeds for City news, notices, events and meetings;
 2. City of Oshawa corporate Twitter account; and
 3. Corporate eNews.

5.2.1 RSS Feeds

- RSS stands for "really simple syndication" and is an efficient way to have text articles, videos and other content delivered to your computer or smartphone without having to visit numerous websites or continually check websites for updates.
- Organizations (e.g. municipalities, media, businesses, etc.) are increasingly offering this turn-key communications tool as content is generated automatically from website updates. Users subscribe to their own RSS feeds, by organization (e.g. City of Oshawa news) or by topic (e.g. H1N1). (Refer to Attachment No. 2 for the City of Ottawa's RSS page.)
- There is no cost to set-up a RSS Feed and it is a very effective communication medium to reach the City's target audiences.
- It is recommended that the City provide RSS Feeds for news, notices, events and meetings as it meets the objectives set out in Section 5.1.
- Using RSS, the City would also promote our corporate promotional videos and commercials to further communicate City initiatives.
- The RSS feeds would be seamless as content would be automatically generated from items posted on the City's website.
- Results would be monitored through feedback received by Service Oshawa and the number of visits to the RSS subscribe page.

5.2.2 Corporate Twitter Account

- There has been a dramatic increase in the number of corporations and municipalities using Twitter as a communication medium due to its ability to disseminate information in a timely manner to target audiences and because content is automatically generated from their websites. (Refer to Attachment No. 3 for the City of Ottawa's Twitter example.)
- Twitter is very efficient and turn-key as users have a maximum of 140 characters to communicate their message concisely. There is no cost to implement communications using a Twitter account.

- It is recommended that the City use Twitter to communicate news items (e.g. media releases) and for time sensitive information (e.g. emergency situation/significant incident information). The process would be seamless as the Twitter feed would be generated from news posted on the City's website and it would be a valuable addition to the City's media relations procedure to distribute information.
- Corporate Communications & Marketing would also use Twitter to disseminate positive news stories published in the print media (e.g. Toronto Star Real Estate, Homes magazine, etc.) and use it as a means to enhance the City's image (e.g. promote the City's commercials and videos).
- The City's Twitter profile would state that the purpose of the Twitter account is to provide timely, relevant information and encourage residents to contact Service Oshawa with their inquiries and comments.
- Results would be monitored through feedback received by Service Oshawa and by the number of Twitter "followers" or sign-ups.

5.2.3 Corporate eNews

- Many municipalities are using e-mail eNews updates to promote their programs, news initiatives, events and emergency news in a timely, cost-effective manner. Since the information is web-based, some of the additional benefits include measurement/analysis of topics of interest, as well as increased visitation to the municipality's website. (Refer to Attachment No. 4 for the City of Calgary's eNews.)
- It is recommended that the City implement an eNews seasonal update as it meets the objectives outlined previously in Section 5.1. The resident eNews would be coordinated through Corporate Communications & Marketing and would be distributed quarterly (March, June, September, December).
- The content of the June eNews would reflect the annual spring Inside Oshawa should Council choose to produce the printed publication in 2010. The June eNews would serve as another communication tool to further the distribution and reach of the annual publication. This will be subject of a future report.
- eNews would profile approximately four feature stories and contain links to the Councillor webpage, Oshawa Senior Citizens Centres, Oshawa Public Libraries and Leisure On-line. An event listing would also appear as a side bar.
- The balance of the eNews would be customized based on the individual's preferences. Subscribers would have the option to select from a list of information categories (e.g. waste collection, recreation updates, seasonal information, etc.).
- An eNews template would be designed to complement existing communication publications and support the look and feel of the City brand. It would meet Ontario's accessibility standards, as well as comply with Canada's privacy act.
- To launch the initiative, it is proposed that e-mails that exist in CLASS (database used for recreation initiatives) and LAGAN (database used for Service Oshawa) be used to advise individuals that eNews will be offered. Should individuals wish to receive information through the eNews communication medium, they would sign up and choose their topics of interest.

- Similar to corporate publications, in advance of distribution, Corporate Communications & Marketing would provide a draft to Council, the Corporate Leadership Team and Department Directors for information purposes.
- Results would be measured based on the number of subscribers, the number of articles that were clicked on/accessed and on topics of interest.

5.3 City of Oshawa E-Communications Implementation

- The City of Oshawa website home page would be modified to include promotion of the various e-communication mediums. To subscribe, users would click on the icon of their choice which would bring them to the City's e-communications webpage. (Refer to Attachment No. 5 for a draft of the home page and Attachment No. 6 for the e-communications webpage).
- Directing subscribers to the e-communications webpage would provide valuable website statistical information (e.g. number of visitors, preferred communication medium, etc.).
- It is anticipated that the pilot project would launch late 2009.

5.4 Olympic Torch Relay Facebook Fan Page

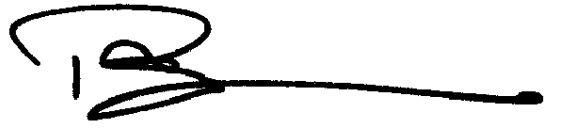
- One of the City's responsibilities in hosting a Community Olympic Torch Community Event is to manage an Olympic Torch Relay Celebration Event Facebook fan page.
- Corporate Communications & Marketing will maintain and post relevant information pertaining to the community event and will monitor and remove inappropriate comments if required. (Refer to Attachment No. 7 for the Torch Relay Facebook page.)
- The fan page would indicate that the purpose of the page is to promote the Torch Relay event; inquiries and comments would be directed to Service Oshawa to ensure customer service standards are maintained.
- Results of the Olympic Torch Relay Celebration Event Facebook Fan page would be measured through the number of "fans" or subscribers.

6.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- The approximate cost to implement a corporate e-communication strategy is approximately \$5,000 annually. Funding is available as the 2009 fall edition of Inside Oshawa was budgeted for but was not published.
- Funding is provided in the 2009 operating budget, in the Corporate Communications printing and reproduction account (01-012-21000).

7.0 RESPONSE TO THE COMMUNITY STRATEGIC PLAN

- Implementation of social media and e-communications is consistent with the Community Strategic Plan (Goal A – Improving Our Image and Goal C – A Caring and Responsive Community) as it enhances effective communications and provides an opportunity to further promote the City’s vision and initiatives.



Bob Duignan
City Manager

Attachments (7)

Municipality E-communication Summary

	Ajax	Calgary	Durham Region	Clarington	Mississauga	Guelph	Ottawa	Region of Waterloo
Facebook								
Use it?	Yes	Yes (on a program basis)	Yes (on a program basis)	Yes (on a program basis)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes (on a program basis)
Subscribers	1,459	119	221	54	13	41	166	409
Content	Events, photos, discussion boards	Plan It Calgary (open houses, planning documents, news releases, corporate videos)	Durham Tourism (events, photos, links to YouTube videos)	Clarington Tourism (photos, events)				Rapid Transit Initiative (open houses, council meetings, plan documents)
Twitter								
Use it?	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Followers		1,735			282	748	1,426	178
Content		city events, job postings, link to a visitor survey, programs				City event, news, public notices (automatically tweeted when posted on website)	City media releases and PSAs (automatically tweeted when posted on website)	road construction updates, transit
RSS								
Use it?	No	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
E-news								
Use it?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Subscribers	400	1,000	10,000	40,000	14,000	3,000	varies	varies
Content	Featured stories	Featured stories, videos, special events, employment	Upcoming events, features		Recreation, parks, transit, planning, news releases, events	Newspaper ads and new website content	A number of different e-news updates sent out per department	A number of different e-news updates sent out per department
Distribution	Monthly	Bi-weekly	Monthly	Quarterly	Quarterly	Weekly	Varies	Varies

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RSS Feeds

RSS (Really Simple Syndication) makes it easy for you to stay up-to-date with City of Ottawa news. Using an **RSS Reader**, you can have City of Ottawa content delivered to your own website, desktop reader, or news reader application. Simply subscribe to one of the feeds below, and your reader will automatically retrieve updates from the City as they are posted.

City of Ottawa RSS Feeds:

- [Ottawa Beaches](#)
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The image is a screenshot of a Twitter profile page for the account 'ottawacity'. At the top left, there is a logo for 'Ottawa' and the Twitter logo. The profile name is 'ottawacity' with a 'Follow' button below it. The bio includes the name 'The City of Ottawa', location 'Ottawa, Canada', and website 'http://www.ottawa.ca'. It shows 0 tweets and 1,426 followers. The main content area contains four tweets, all starting with 'PSA:' or 'MA:'. The first tweet is about meetings at Ottawa City Hall. The second is about a fall festival at Cumberland Museum. The third is about a community centre open house. The fourth is an update about the Ontario Chief Medical Officer of Health. On the right side, there are links for 'Tweets', 'Favorites', 'Actions', and 'Following'. An RSS feed link is also present.

twitter

Home Profile Find People Settings Help Sign out

Ottawa

ottawacity

Follow

Name The City of Ottawa
Location Ottawa, Canada
Web <http://www.ottawa.ca>

0 **1,426**
following followers

Tweets **483**

Favorites

Actions
block ottawacity

Following

RSS feed of ottawacity's tweets

MA: Meetings at Ottawa City Hall next week <http://bit.ly/RUZu5>
about 2 hours ago from @ottawacity

PSA: Discover 0 Fall's Finest Fun! at Cumberland Museum
<http://bit.ly/16IE4N>
about 2 hours ago from @ottawacity

PSA: Greenboro Community Centre to hold open house
<http://bit.ly/3LJXSw>
about 2 hours ago from @ottawacity

PSA. Council settles Light Rail litigation <http://bit.ly/3D0na4>
about 2 hours ago from @ottawacity

MA: UPDATE: Ontario's Chief Medical Officer of Health to participate in H1N1 briefing <http://bit.ly/Smm93>
about 2 hours ago from @ottawacity

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September 09, 2009

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- [Community arenas get a boost in funding](#)
- [Interested in being a landlord?](#)
- [Improving your trip: Inglewood to East Ring Road](#)
- [On the blog: Spax & neuter clinic opens](#)

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News

Notices

Events

Meetings

In The Spotlight

-  Continental Tire Canada opens new warehouse in Oshawa
Continental Tire Canada, Inc. (CTCI) celebrated the ope...
-  Doors Open Oshawa - September 26-27
Doors Open is a province-wide celebration of community ...
-  Oshawa to receive over \$3.5 million in stimulus funding
The City of Oshawa will benefit from more than \$3.5 mil...
-  Town Hall meeting on seniors issues on September 22
Dr. Colin Carrie, Member of Parliament for Oshawa and P...
-  Oshawa is one of the best places for young professionals
Oshawa has been named on a list of best places to live ...
-  Human Swine Influenza (H1N1)
For information on the Human Swine Influenza, contact t...

Receive the latest City of Oshawa announcements and news by e-mail, RSS or Twitter. You can also become a fan of the Oshawa Torch Relay Facebook page. [Find out more >>](#)



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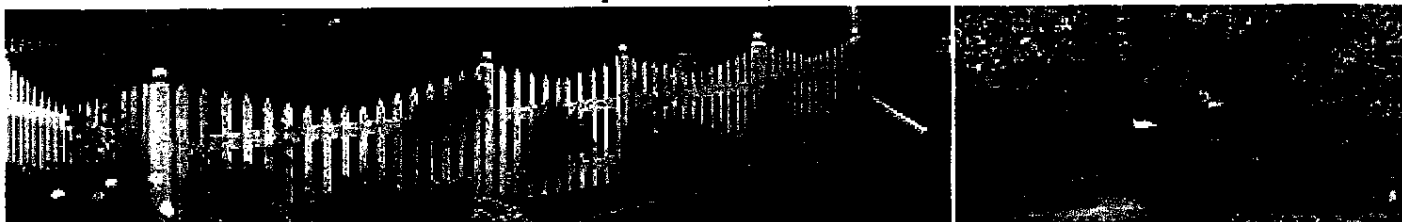
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e-communications

Stay connected with the City of Oshawa. Here are a few easy ways to receive city news and information to your e-mail account or smartphone.

RSS

Using RSS, City of Oshawa updates – including recent news, media releases, public service announcements, events, notices of meetings and road closures, emergency updates and links to videos – will be delivered to your e-mail or smartphone. Using a free RSS Reader, choose the City feeds you would like to receive, and RSS will automatically retrieve updates from the City website as they are posted.

[Subscribe >>](#)

Twitter

Follow the City of Oshawa on Twitter for links to media releases, public service announcements, online publications, videos and emergency updates. Each Twitter post is only 140 characters so followers receive a quick update and links to Oshawa's most recent news.

[Follow us >>](#)

Oshawa Torch Relay Facebook Fan Page

The Oshawa Torch Relay Community Event now has a Facebook Fan Page. Visit this page for links to local Olympic Torch events, Vancouver 2010 Winter Olympics videos, and more.

[Become a fan >>](#)

City eNews

City eNews is a quarterly online publication that includes feature articles on City of Oshawa programs and services, as well as seasonal updates, links to upcoming events and much more. To subscribe, simply select the areas of topics of interest to you and provide your e-mail address.

[Subscribe >>](#)

Business Connections Newsletter

The City of Oshawa's Economic Development Services branch now offers an online business newsletter.

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Oshawa | Torch Relay – Relais de la flamme

Wall Info Photos Video Events Route »

Oshawa | Torch Relay – Relais de la flamme Just Fans



Oshawa | Torch Relay – Relais de la flamme Don't miss the Oshawa Public Libraries Olympic-themed programs. Find out more details in the Events tab.
July 22 at 10:50am · Comment · Like



Oshawa | Torch Relay – Relais de la flamme



Oshawa Public Libraries - Sports Family Story Time

This Oshawa Public Libraries family program features stories, rhymes, and songs to get you excited for the arrival of the Olympic Torch in Oshawa on December 16. Free registration at any branch of the Oshawa Public Libraries.

Time: 2:00PM Sunday, October 4th
Location: McLaughlin Branch

July 21 at 5:02pm · Comment · Like · Share · RSVP to this event



Oshawa | Torch Relay – Relais de la flamme Welcome to the City of Oshawa's Torch Relay Community Event. The event will take place on Wednesday, December 16, 2009 at the General Motors Centre in downtown Oshawa.
July 15 at 1:53pm · Comment · Like

RECENT ACTIVITY

- Oshawa | Torch Relay – Relais de la flamme changed their Website.
- Oshawa | Torch Relay – Relais de la flamme edited their Website and Mission.