

Web for Government and Public Safety

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Web presence today: Trends in the online community

- Online community wants interaction and constantly updated information
- They want YOU to give them the information they want, when they want it, in the format they prefer
- The basics of providing public information, especially in emergency response, is to get the right information, to the right people, so it can be used in the right places

Your Websites:

- You Organization's Official Website: (most formal and trusted online communication)

Good examples: www.auburnwa.gov

www.vrfa.org | www.southkingfire.org | www.universityplacefiredepartment.com

- Keep it professional (live citizen comments often discouraged)
 - Make sure it is ALWAYS up to date!
 - Frequently change home page content and images to keep people coming back
 - Navigation and content geared toward your customers, not YOU! Site structure does not have to follow your businesses' org chart – in fact, it shouldn't
 - Every visit is a conversation. Visitors click to ask questions, your copy should answer those questions.
 - Make sure it is available in event of worst case scenario (during a natural disaster or emergency, will your site remain online and can it be updated by PIO)
 - Needs to be accessible by mobile devices and ADA compliant (avoid Flash or less conventional software that aren't read by web crawlers)
 - You can add links to social media sites so people can get their information in their preferred format (see bottom of www.auburnwa.gov)
- Some suggested features:
 - Recent news (preferably on home page)
 - Upcoming events
 - Emergency Information (make it stand out)
 - Shortcuts to popular areas of the site
 - Photo gallery
 - Media section

Social Media: (web 2.0 sites)

Social Media sites are websites whose content is user driven. The popular ones have a very high loyal follower rate. Most are free to use.

- **Blogs:** (can be used for one-way informal communication or allow feedback)
 - <http://jeremyandimmer.blogspot.com/> (My personal family blog)
 - <http://morethanyouimagined.blogspot.com/> (Auburn Tourism Blog – see website link below)
 - <http://www.auburntourism.com/> (blog being fed into home page and news section of website)
 - <http://www.newcastle411.com/> (Newcastle’s Blog – maintained by Communications Specialist)
 - Nice for chief or president, PIO or other single person within an organization to post about the going-ons of the department or business. Keep it personal and directed toward a specific audience.
 - Network among other bloggers – visit other bloggers and “follow” their sites. Invite people to follow yours
 - Needs frequent content to be successful (daily preferable, multiple times a week minimal)
 - www.Blogspot.com by Google is an easy way to set up a blog. Only requires an email account and setting up a google profile.
 - LOTS of pre made features available to bloggers like slide shows, templates,
- **Facebook:** “MySpace for grown-ups” (great for continual contact. Less formal, loyally viewed)
 - <http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=51338076769> (over 1 billion visits per/mo!)
 - Pages vs Groups –
 - Groups: interactions will come from you as an individual. Allows open conversation and emailing to all “members” who have joined the group. Some controls over joining.
 - Pages: interactions are anonymous (come from behalf of the organization) and do not link to your profile are for organizations to highlight themselves. Possible solutions for organizations without a website
 - Easily maintained by “non-technical” staff
 - Has simple “discussion board” features. Nothing fancy but allows people to publicly discuss topics
- **Twitter:** (great for emergencies and alerting local media agencies)
 - <http://twitter.com/coaupdates> (Over 50 million visits per/mo)
 - Can be managed via text message from cell phone (cool feature if you don’t have computer access)
 - Requires occasional posts to keep people interested.
- **Others:** YouTube, Flickr, Bulletin Boards (Forums), etc.

Common Social Media Questions:

- I have a website, why use social media?
- Sounds scary, how do we keep people from leaving rude/obscene comments?
- What about misinformation? Fake accounts as well as general public can post inaccurate statements and should be monitored. There is no verification on any of the social networking or blogging sites that communication is coming from an official source.
- How do you keep track of it for public disclosure (records keeping)?
- Is this going to be a ton of extra work?

Sounds great, now what?

- Double check your organizations' website
 - Does it achieve your goals?
 - Is it up-to-date and aesthetically pleasing?
 - Navigation - Can visitors find the stuff they are looking for?
 - How is your traffic - Are your visitors returning? How are they finding you? Are you even tracking this?
- Decide who is going to maintain the online communication tools
- Determine what other Social Media tools will help you accomplish your goals and set them up (or have someone set them up for you)
- Carry a digital camera – always. Its true, pictures speak louder than words and you might end up with additional media coverage thanks to a good photo
- Remember that traditional mass media and media relations strategies should still be employed. These are tools to allow for additional transparency and alternative outlets to release and/or provide accurate information to the public. We no longer rely solely on TV, newspaper or radio to deliver our messages, but they are still valuable tools.