

A HANDS-ON GUIDE TO CONTENT STRATEGY

For Content Editors, IT Managers, Public Information Officers and Anyone Else who Contributes to a Municipal Website – Includes 5 great ways to improve your website, boost citizen satisfaction and make your life easier

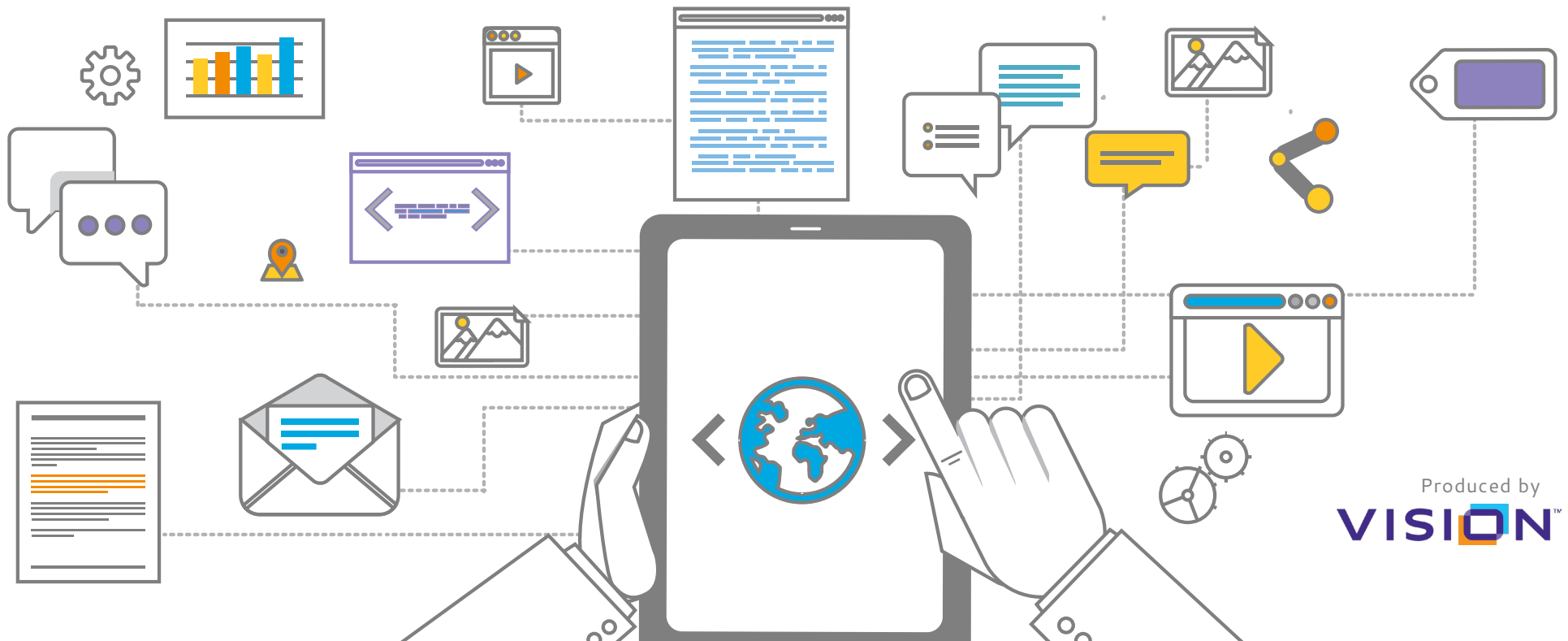


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CONTENT STRATEGY DEFINED

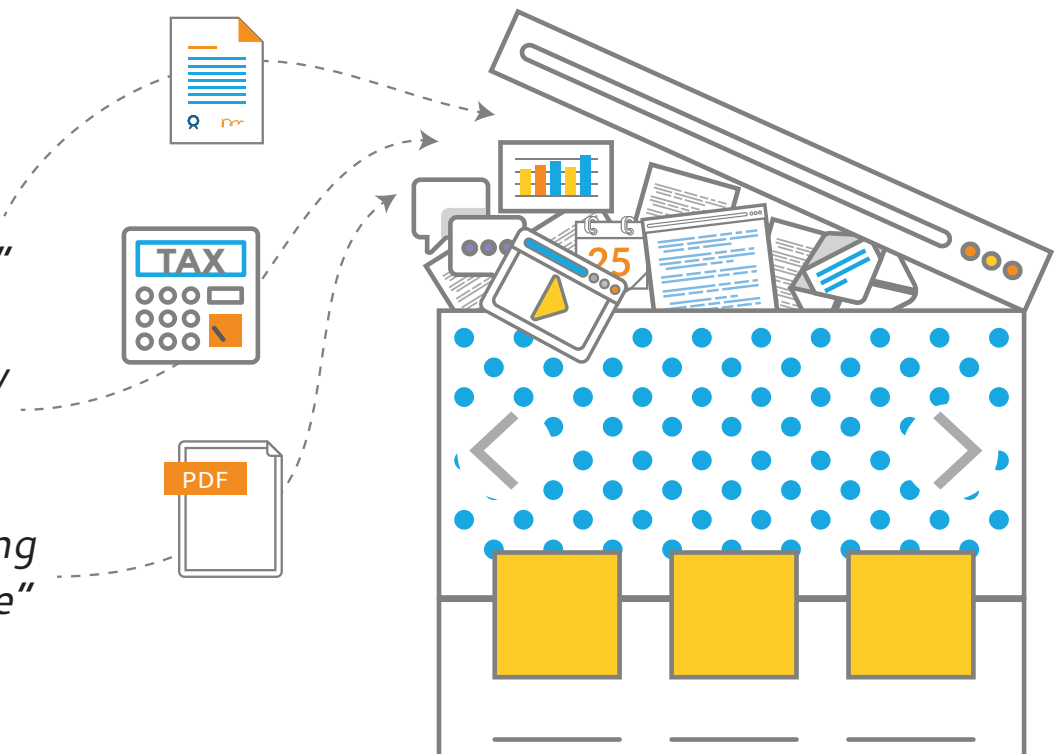
According to website usability expert Ginny Redish, content strategy involves bringing the **right content**, in the **right amount**, to the **right person**, at the **right time**. Think about this in terms of your website. Your website is comprised of many types of content: pages, PDF documents, charts, tables, and in some cases, social media posts. How do you decide which content is the right content? If you're like most local government agencies, the process is less than scientific.

Do any of these sound familiar?

"Council wants a link to a page explaining their new initiative added to the homepage"

"We just released a new process for county taxes, so we better add a new page"

"We have a PDF that explains where to bring recyclables, so we'll just add that to the site"



IN THE THICK OF IT

Whether you're writing content, posting it to the website or overseeing other editors you're on the front lines of an ongoing struggle to keep your site coherent and effective.

This challenging situation was born out of the widespread implementations of content management systems (CMS) which suddenly made it easy for even non-technical staff to edit the website. "Look! Now everyone can update their own information and we don't have to think about it!" people excitedly

exclaimed as they implemented their first CMS.

While having a technically functional website is vitally important to an effective online presence, this "delegated content management without a plan" approach overlooks Redish's recommendation for how to make your content effective. Delivering content in the right amount, to the right person, at the right time requires planning and coordination between your departments.



START BY ASKING THE RIGHT QUESTIONS

Before adding content to your site, start by asking – and answering a few key questions:

Why are you posting this content?

- We need to inform people about the tax assessment changes.
- There has been a change in building codes and the permit requirements.
- A new park has been opened that offers new services to the public.

Who is your audience?

- Business owners?
- Young adults?
- Parents?
- Retirees?
- Non-residents?



What kind of questions will they have?

- Why did my taxes go up and how do I file a dispute?
- Do I need a permit for the work I want to do on my house?
- Where is it and how can I reserve the new shelter for an event?

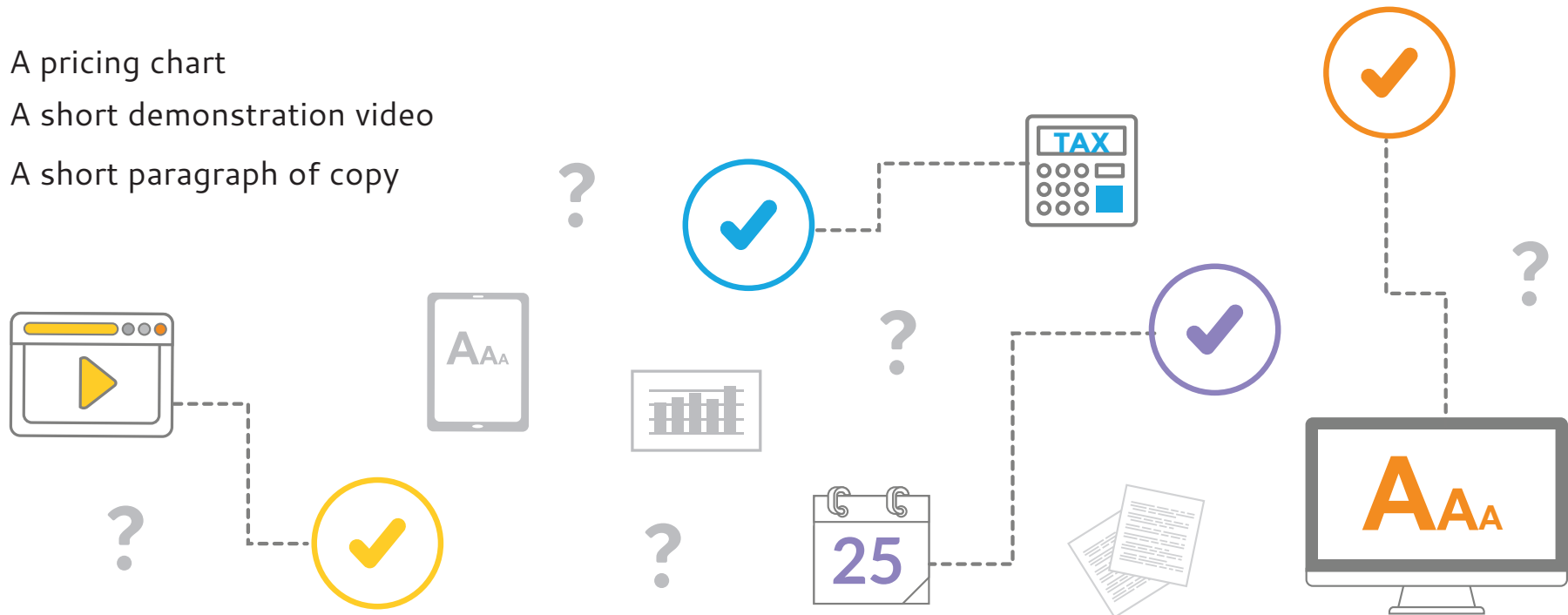
What content will answer their question?

- A pricing chart
- A short demonstration video
- A short paragraph of copy

How will they access your content?

- Desktop computer?
- Mobile phone?
- On the go?
- At home?

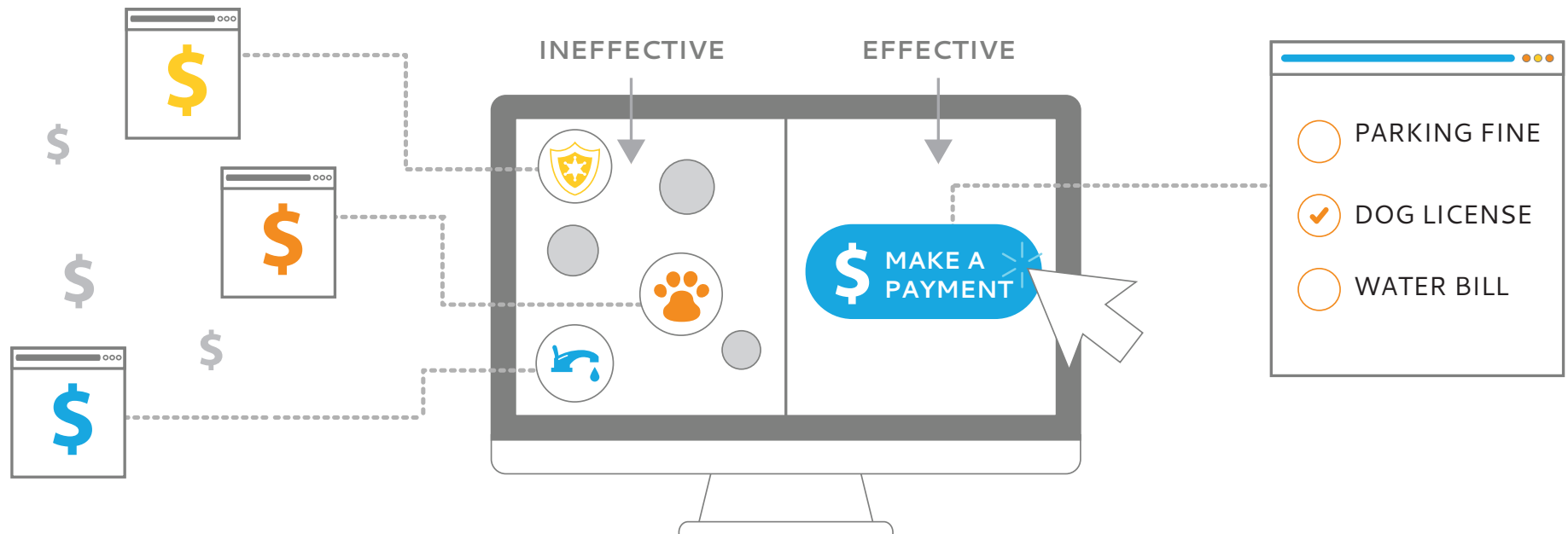
Having these answers will give you a basic understanding of what your content needs to accomplish.



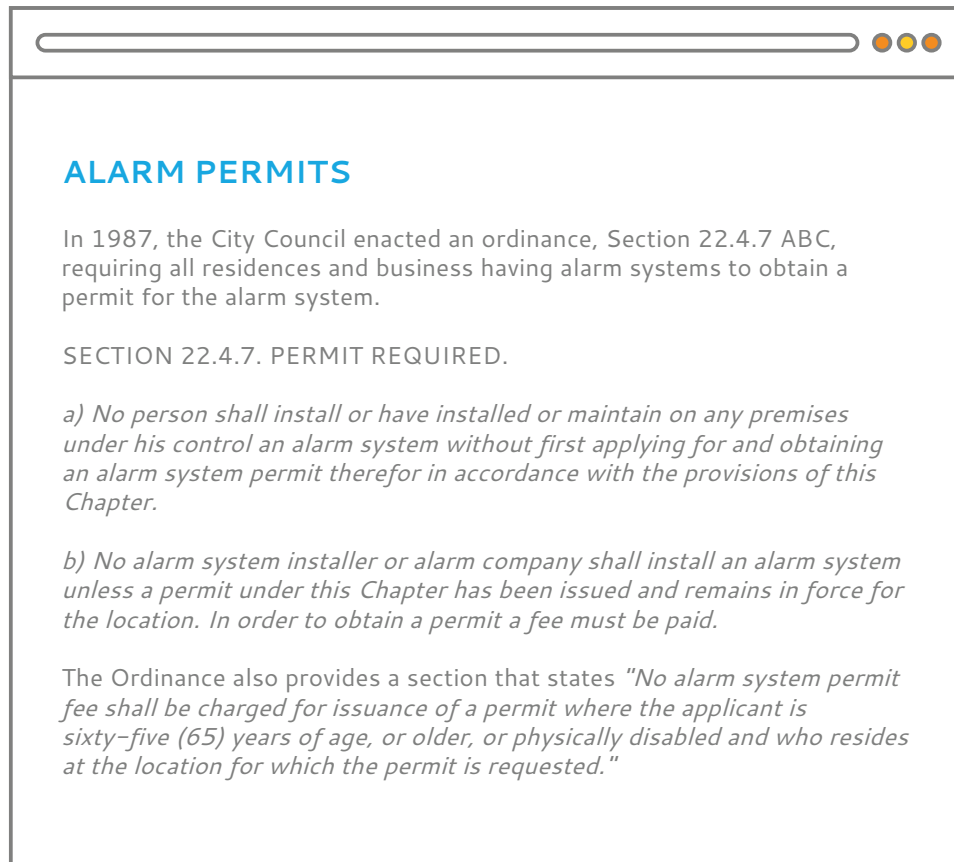
ONCE YOU HAVE THE ANSWERS BUILD THE EXPERIENCE

Armed with a basic understanding of who, what, why and how – you can work on the solution that will most effectively serve your audience. In short, your site visitors must be able to **find** what they need, **understand** what they find, then **act** appropriately on that

understanding. Content should be written in plain, easy-to-understand words that take into account the limited time citizens want to spend on a government site – and should also be displayed in a way that is easy to digest at-a-glance.



For example, if homeowners in your municipality need to renew their home alarm permits annually, you probably receive a steady stream of visitors wanting to accomplish this task online. They may not know where to look for that service.



In the absence of a clear direction, they'll probably start with the site navigation.

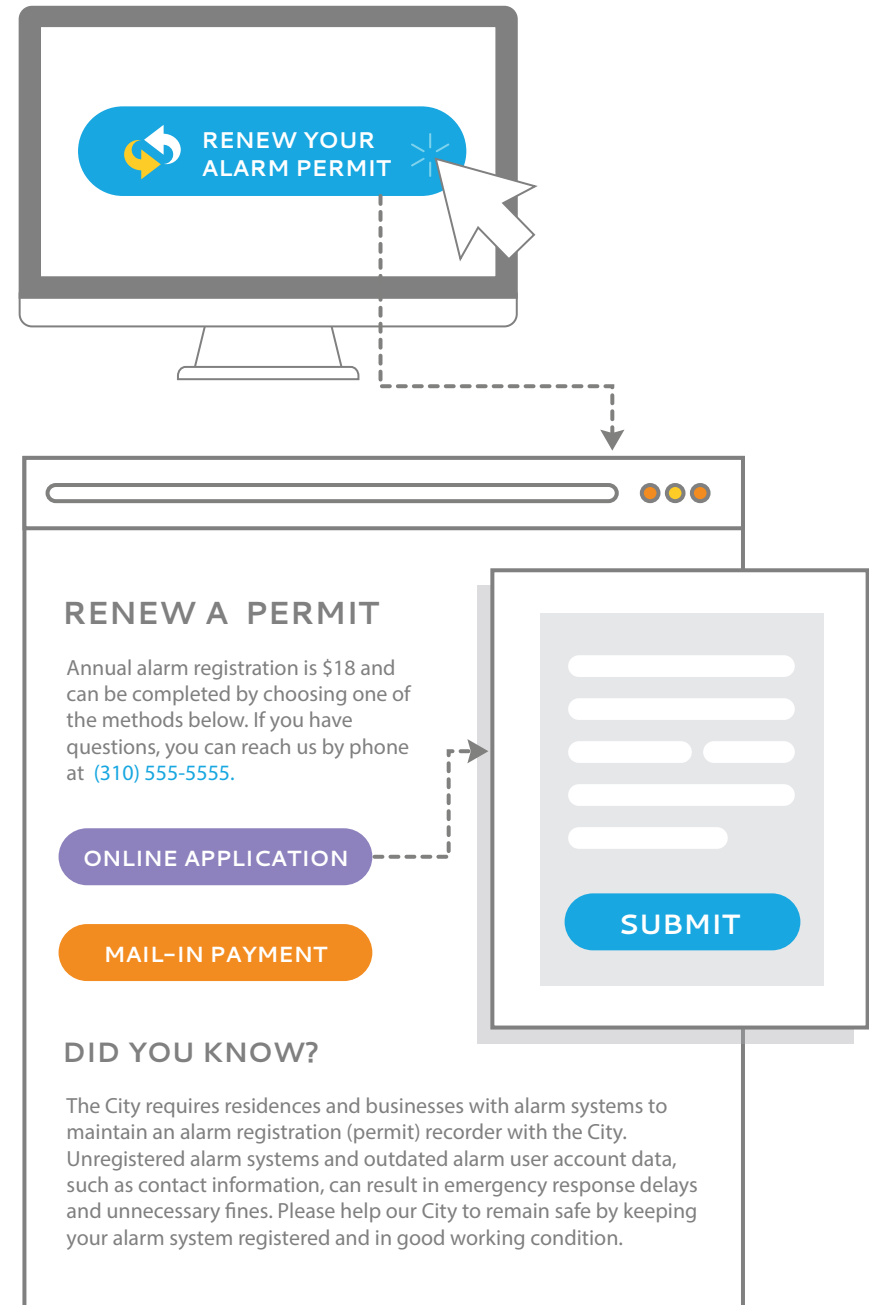
Maybe they click on City Services, the best out of several vague options, followed by a laundry list of options.

If by lucky chance they do find the right page under "P" for permits, they get a legalese-heavy explanation without an obvious next step.

How will the average user respond to this content? Is it written in a way that makes it easy for them to find and understand the information they need?

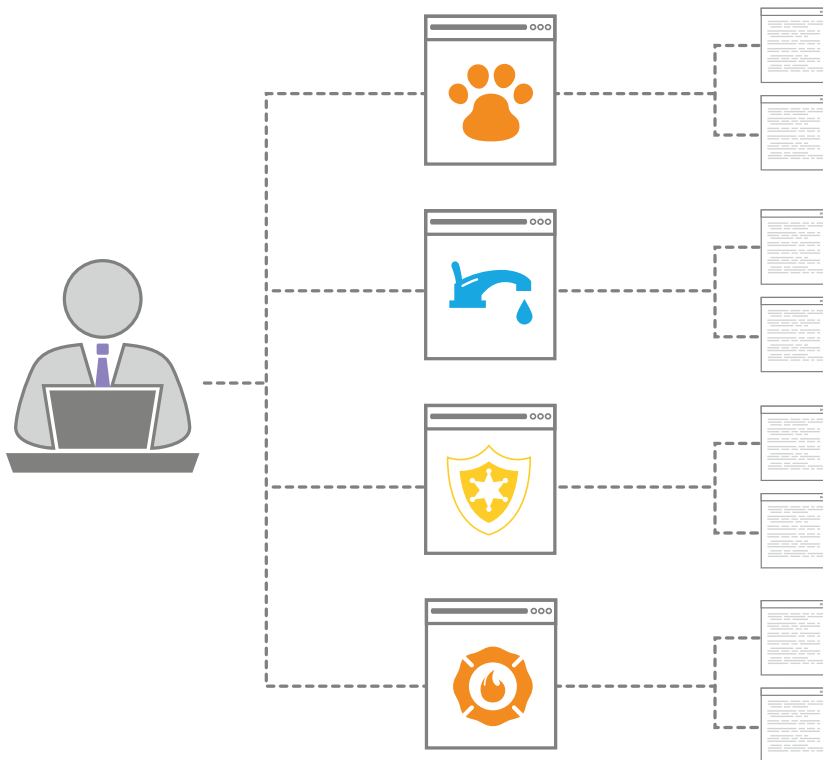
If you said “no”, what do you think could have been done differently to make this content more usable? Start with easy to **find**, **understand** and **act** upon, and imagine this alternate scenario:

1. The homepage shows a clear path to find the information from the resident’s perspective
2. A landing page that quickly explains the renewal process and allows residents to get started immediately
3. A summary of legal requirements broken up with subtitles that make it easier to scan, perhaps with a link to the full policy if legally required
4. An easy-to-complete form with a clear confirmation message that explains what happens next

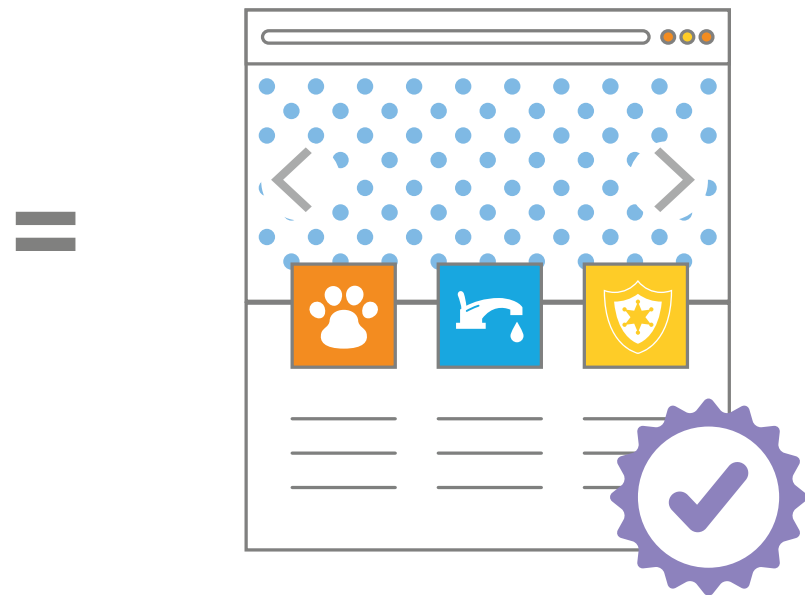


WHERE TO BEGIN?

While it can be daunting to think about how to improve hundreds of pages of content across a multitude of departments, initiating this effort with key processes like the one just described is a great way to start.



Your website's content can directly impact initiatives you are likely a part of every day by opening communication channels, answering common questions and establishing a trusted source of information. These are foundations you can build on for years to come, even if you need a little outside help to get you there.



IT'S WORTH IT

If you're considering rethinking your content approach, here are 5 benefits to taking the plunge:

1

Can instantly improve the quality and effectiveness of your website

2

Makes information easy to find and understand, showing your commitment to transparency

3

Leads to improved communication with citizens, fostering engagement

4

Promotes consistency and cooperation between departments, improving your internal processes

5

Better represents the organization as a whole, boosting the overall image of your community



ABOUT VISION

Headquartered in El Segundo, Calif., Vision is a national leader in government website development with more than 700 government, non-profit and education clients in U.S. and Canadian communities with populations that range from less than 1,000 residents to more than 5 million. The company creates cost-effective solutions that increase government efficiency, transparency and interactive communications with citizens. For more than 20 years, the company has earned hundreds of prestigious awards for its unique websites. Vision's CMS is a powerful, easy-to-use content management system developed with feedback from hundreds of municipal clients. For more information about Vision's transformative government website technology, please call 888.263.8847 or visit visioninternet.com/inforequest.

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