

IN THEIR OWN VOICES: LOCAL GOVERNMENT LEADERS' ADVICE ABOUT SOCIAL MEDIA

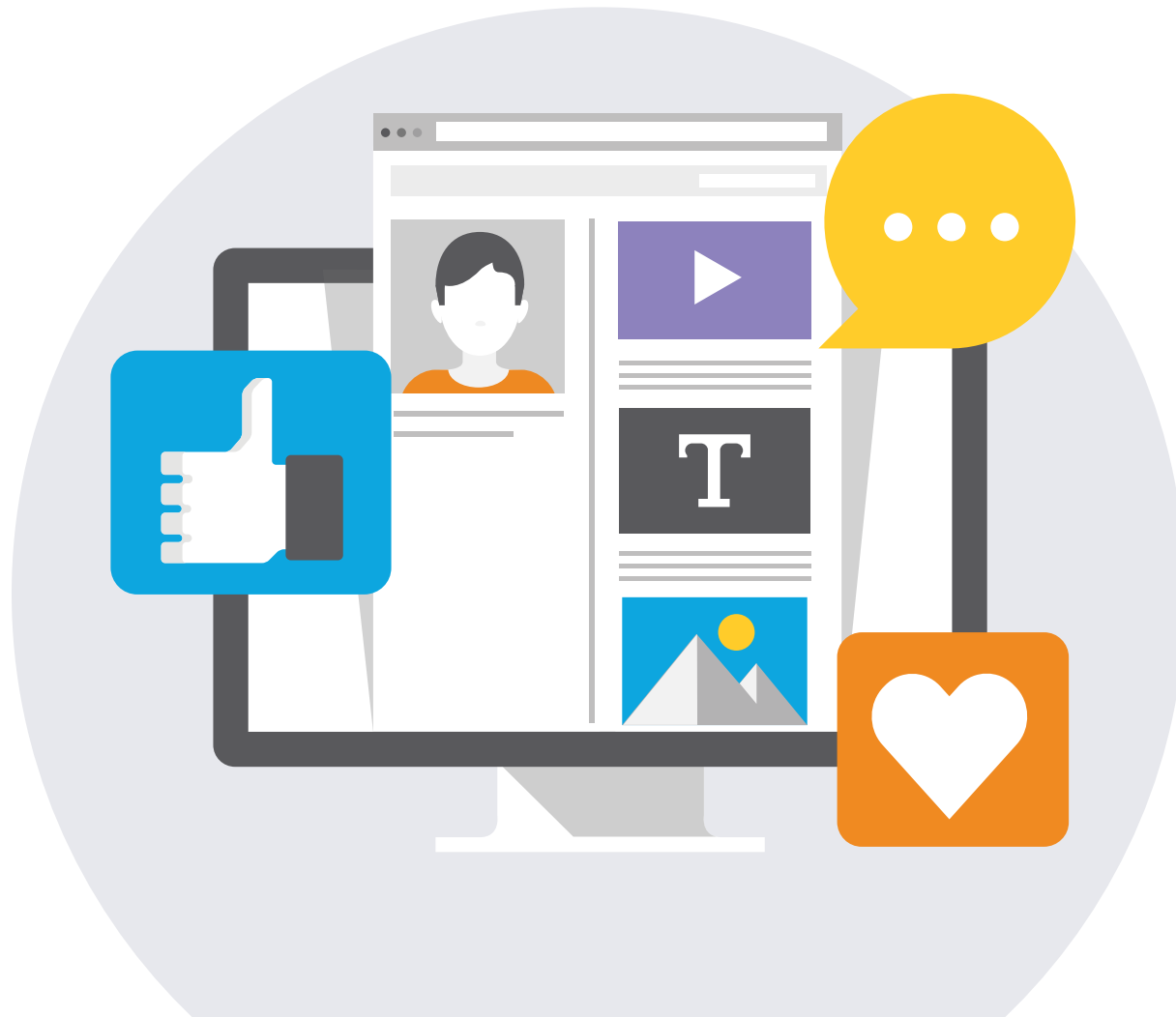


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INTRODUCTION

In the latest “What’s Next in Digital Communications” survey of local government leaders, nearly all respondents thought social media would have a significant impact on their organization by 2020, yet only 42% felt their current social media presence was “highly effective” today. Getting ahead of the curve on social media presents a unique challenge for organizations because platforms, best-practices and user expectations shift so quickly. Imagine how different the conversation would have been just 3 years ago.

Agencies across North America have met this challenge head on, and now we’d like to share their wisdom with you. We asked leaders: **what is the best piece of advice you would have for a local government agency just starting out with social media?**

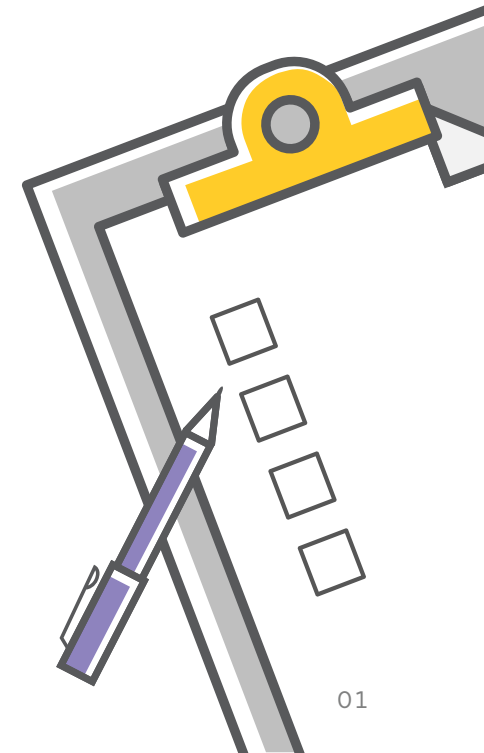
This book contains their compiled answers, ranging from tips and tricks, to best practices and lessons learned.

Key Themes

Interestingly, the compiled advice essentially boiled down to four key themes.

These themes include:

- Focus Your Efforts
- Have a Plan
- Make it a Conversation
- Commit to Progress not Perfection



1. FOCUS YOUR EFFORTS

As you jump into the social media world, don't fall into the trap of doing too much in the beginning by launching on multiple platforms at once and creating accounts for numerous departments within your organization. Instead, keep your efforts focused in order to improve your effectiveness.

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Don't bite off more than you can chew. It's tempting to want to set up accounts on a number of social media platforms all at once, but don't. Only take on what you can consistently tend and cultivate. This is definitely an area where it's more about quality than quantity.

– **Public Health Communications Specialist**

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Don't create accounts for every social media service available. Start first with one or two you KNOW your residents are using. Learn how to manage a small number of pages first then branch out later if the demand exists.

– **Communications Specialist**

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“ Limit your organization to one Facebook page. Otherwise, you fracture the audience and limit people from receiving information they want and need... even if they don't realize they want and need that information.

– Public Information Officer ”

“ Don't have multiple Facebook accounts for each department. There is no consistency or quality and it's very hard to monitor. The ones you should have are Police, Fire and City Hall that encompasses all the other departments.

– Media Coordinator ”

“ Start with Facebook – the highest used social media platform – and have a strategy on what it will be used for, what content you can generate, how often you can post, and who you want to reach. This will ensure that once you launch your Facebook page you have a list of goals to accomplish. Once you get really good at using the platform, you can look to expand to others.

– Communications Specialist ”



Pro Tip: If there is a platform you're considering using in the future, go ahead and register your organization's official name so you have it locked down when you are ready to proceed.

2. HAVE A PLAN

Social media can be a powerful communication tool to have in your arsenal but will be less impactful if you use haphazardly. Make sure you have a clear strategy, governance policy and use guide in place before beginning.

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Have a set of use policies and procedures in place before you allow public sector employee social media interaction that can be vetted as part daily work activity.

- County Manager

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Have goals, develop a strategy, and implement policies that guide and empower users.

- Information Officer

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Understand the public records implications; build a strong policy for employees incorporating NLRB (National Labor Relations Board) guidance; and have the tools in place to see what people say about your entity across the social media space.

- Vice President of Corporate Services

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Make sure that the person that controls the “voice” of your organization on social media truly understands the mission of your organization and what message you want sent to the public. Nothing worse than having someone push out information and then get into a social media “fight” with a consumer/citizen and disrupt the message of the organization.

– **Executive Director of Economic Development**”

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Don’t be afraid of it. If you’re worrying about the worse-case scenario, you will miss valuable opportunities to connect with your residents. Create a social media and comment policy, make it public and hold your users to it. However, don’t let it keep you from interacting.

– **Communications Coordinator**”

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Have a vision and plan in place before starting, have a policy and buy-in from top management. Be committed to posting something at least once a day and to responding quickly to questions/comments. Limit the number of accounts representing the agency and who has access/authorization to accounts and speak for the organization.

– **Communications Manager**”

3. MAKE IT A CONVERSATION

Social media gives agencies a unique opportunity to push information out to the public, but make sure you plan to maximize its give-and-take nature and engage in conversations with your followers.

“ Don't use it to just push information out. Make it a two-way communications tool. And don't be scared by negative comments or trolling.

– **Communications Specialist** ”

“ It's not so much about how many people are following the conversation, it's how many people are engaging your conversation.

– **Communications Director** ”

“ Look at social media as an extension of the front desk in your reception area. Interaction with the public via social media is just like interaction with the public over the counter in the office. The same rules apply – be open, honest, respectful and helpful – but in this case, everyone else in town is (potentially) standing behind the person who has come into the office.

– **Director of Web and Digital Media** ”

RESPOND. To every question and comment. If they are not asking a question at least like their comment. If they have incorrect information correct them. If they ask a question, answer it. Even it if makes you uncomfortable. Be honest. Apologize when you are wrong.

- **Communications Coordinator**

Be a person, don't be a building. People crave connection, and the more they see a local government at a holistic level, and not at the corporate level, they will be more engaged. Answer their questions directly; post photos of what makes your City proud; share videos of employees during an employee picnic, etc. The more ways you can show we are 'normal' people the better.

- **Web & Marketing Specialist**

The most important thing is to be present and be responsive. You aren't going to have a million followers overnight and you may receive negative comments – but if you post relevant content and participate in conversation, you can begin to build trust and become a source of information. Whether you are relaying news updates or directing a citizen to the appropriate resource, you are humanizing local government and making information accessible.

This trust and humanization is paramount if you ever need to relay information in a crisis scenario. If you wait to begin when the crisis happens, it's already too late.

- **Communications Specialist**

4. COMMIT TO PROGRESS NOT PERFECTION

Getting up to speed with social media can be daunting, but each day you will learn what works for you and your organization. Track your progress, test different approaches, and pivot where needed.

“ Don't lock yourself into a set schedule for posting (i.e. at a certain time each day). Be creative with your tone (it's meant to be a little less "harsh") and do NOT engage with angry haters! Limit the number of people who are administrators so you aren't tripping on each other.

- Director, Communications & Public Affairs ”

“ Learn and use the analytics tools available on your chosen platforms. You'll see when and what kinds of posts are most effective as well as who your audience might be.

- Assistant to the Village Manager ”

“ Start small with something you can commit to sustaining on a regular basis.

- Communications Manager ”

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As Baby Boomers continue to exit the workforce and the next generation follows, government must embrace technology, which includes social media as the mechanism for dissemination of information. Start small, such as News and Events, key items that target the younger generation. Be willing to invest in the technology as well as dedicating resources committed to marketing the KPI's defined by your organization. The investment is well worth it!

- Business Analyst/Project Manager

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Take everything on social media with a grain of salt. It can be easy to get overwhelmed by a few negative comments. Keep perspective.

- Communications Coordinator

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Consistency with posting on a daily basis – don't do it if you are going to not keep it going. Collaborate with your team and tell the story of your agency. Quick videos and pictures are a plus. Partner with others in your community – share, like, pin and tweet!

- Communication Specialist

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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. For more than 20 years, Vision has created cost-effective solutions that increase government efficiency, transparency and interactive communications with citizens. The company's powerful, easy-to-use visionLive™ content management system continues to evolve with feedback from hundreds of municipal clients. In 2016, Vision was named to Government Technology magazine's GovTech 100, a listing of leading companies developing innovative or disruptive offerings to improve or transform government. For more information please call 888.263.8847 or visit visioninternet.com/inforequest

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