

Vision's ability to host Lacombe's site on the company's servers based in Canada was another plus.

"Canadian laws for the privacy and protection of information are different than the U.S.," Piché explained. "We must maintain control of our information and access it on Canadian soil. In addition, hosting our site at Vision's secure data center expanded our bandwidth and made accessing our site much faster."

During the development process for Lacombe's new website, Vision was putting the finishing touches on a new offering of its own. The company introduced visionLive™, a subscription-based service that provides secure hosting, unlimited technical support and automatic upgrades to its visionCMS™ content management system. As a result, Lacombe became the first municipality in Canada to subscribe to visionLive.

"Everything we want is included with visionLive," Piché said. "visionLive and CMS allow us to better manage a great deal of information. We can easily replace and connect files to keep the site current. Vision does all of our updates; the site is secure and it's backed-up regularly. I wouldn't go any other way."

Lacombe now takes advantage of the many visionCMS features. The website contains a huge collection of photos, video news, local maps, a city/community calendar, RFP posts, and an eNotification system. It also is home to directories of local businesses, City services, City officials and staff, as well as a multitude of City forms and surveys. Piché said the City plans to incorporate Vision's enhanced Job Application management feature within the next month.

"Vision cares about our City. If we have a need or concern, they bend over backwards for us. They are great partners," said Piché

Interactive areas of the new site make it easy for citizens to provide input, and new topics are being added continuously.

The site offers a feedback link near the top of every page, which encourages users to share their thoughts on topics that range from website content to city-related issues like recycling and zoning. The "Feedback" feature allows visitors to comment immediately by opening an email client window, which lets them type a message, click "send", close the window and still be on the same web page.

"Our new website has significantly boosted our ability to engage residents and support our local businesses," said Piché. "Both are key elements to achieving our vision for Imagine Lacombe."

In its quest to promote a healthy, active community, Lacombe leveraged the website during its three-week Winter Active Challenge to get citizens geared up to become active again. Forms for the challenge were set up on the website to make it easy for teams to submit their activities and qualify for prizes.

The website also is helping to promote a healthy local economy. According to Piché, over 130 businesses now are registered in the site's business directory. Many small businesses in Lacombe refer patrons to the City website if they do not have a web presence of their own, using their page in the business directory as a web portal to promote their businesses.

When Lacombe was preparing for its 2014 Census, Vision changed a button on the website's home page to make the City of Lacombe's Municipal Census available online for the first time.

A look at City website traffic, shows that Piché's enthusiasm for the new site is shared by residents and visitors alike. During the six-plus years of Lacombe's former website, the City had a total of 30,000 hits on some of its top-10 pages. In just the first six months, the new site has had over 12,000 visits and 35,000 page views.

"In less than six months, our new site has drawn more visitors than our old site did in six years," Piché said. "That's the community engagement we were looking for."