

CONTENT STRATEGY: A GUIDE FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT LEADERS

Including 5 Ways Your Website Can Boost Citizen Satisfaction

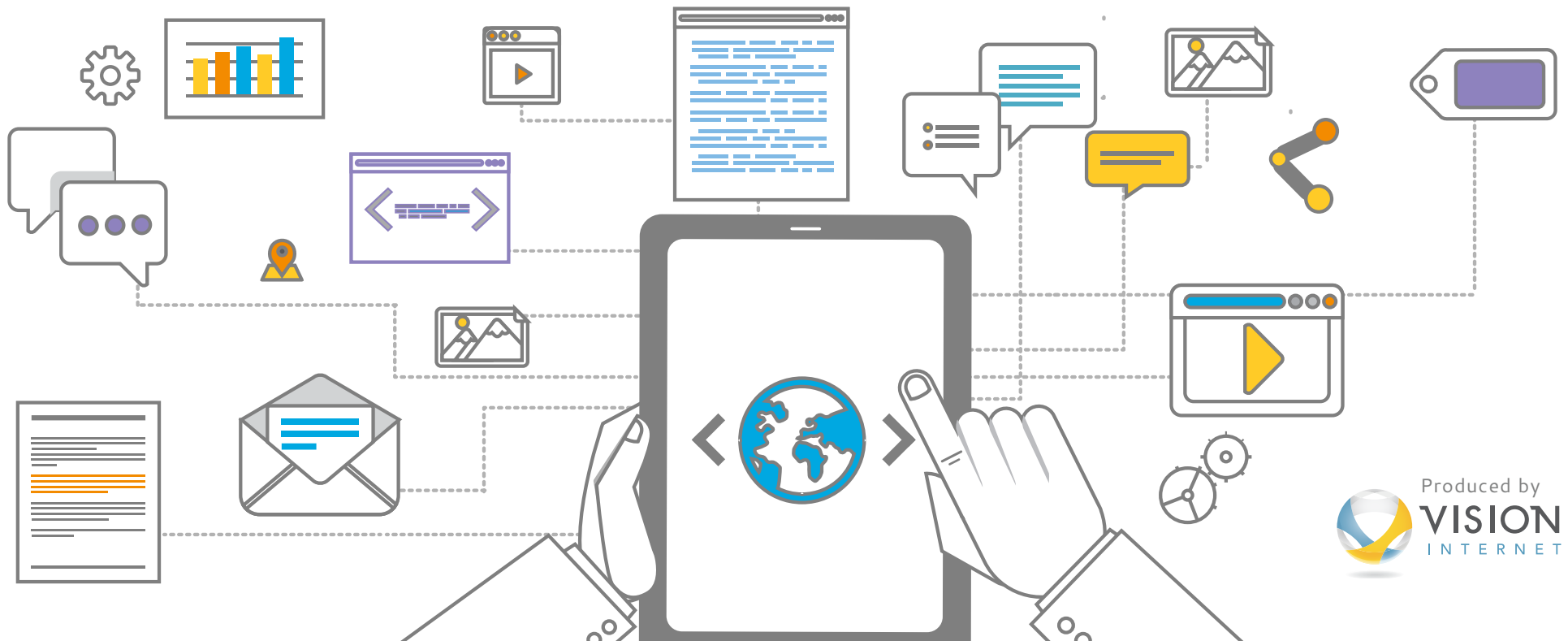


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CONTENT: THE FOUNDATION OF AN EFFECTIVE WEBSITE

Is your organization's website effective?

When administrators are asked this question, the answer typically involves the site's aesthetics or functionality. *"The design looks good,"* they will say. *"We have a brand new content management system."*

Design and technology are certainly important components of a successful website. However, the most often overlooked and undervalued part of the website is arguably the most important: **Content**. Every page of information on your website, every agenda, every document, is content.

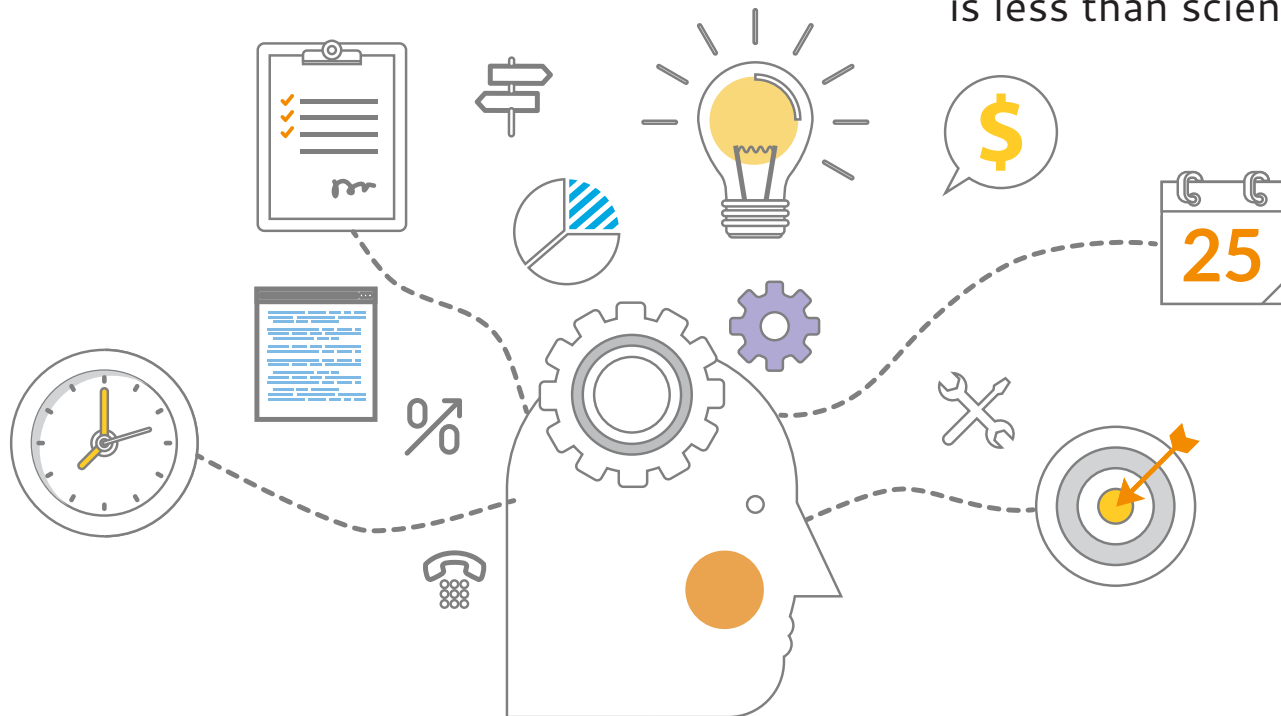
"Oh, our departments handle that," is a common response. The fact that you have a content management system that technically enables staff to make changes is a start. But, does your team have a strategy to help plan what content belongs on your website at all? **Why should you care?**



WHAT IS CONTENT STRATEGY?

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 know if the content on your website is the right content?** If you're like most local government agencies, the process is less than scientific.



COMMON CHALLENGES

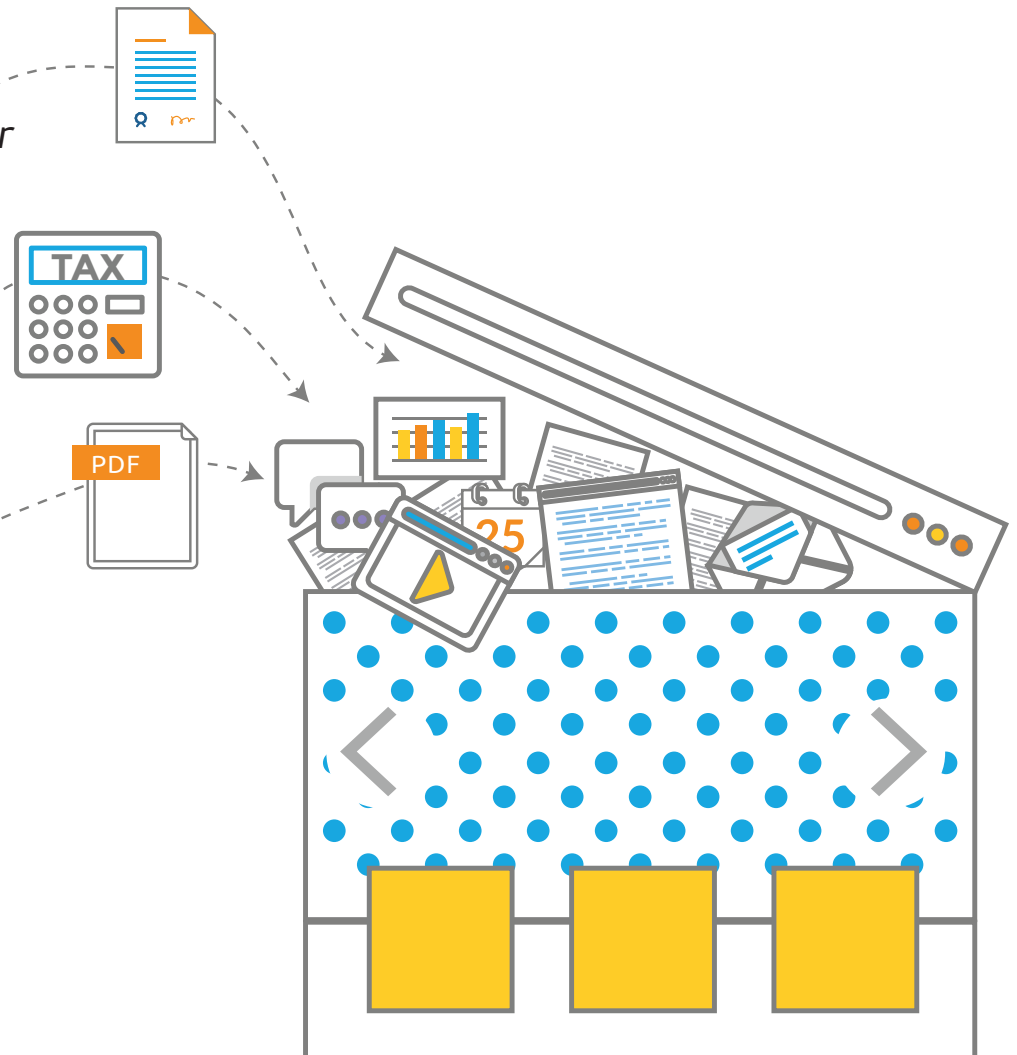
Do any of these sound familiar?

"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"

The result of this approach is the website equivalent of a house that receives addition after addition without a master architectural plan – a "Franken-house." It may have a lot of rooms, but there can be competing elements that would have been eliminated if there had been a strategy from the beginning.

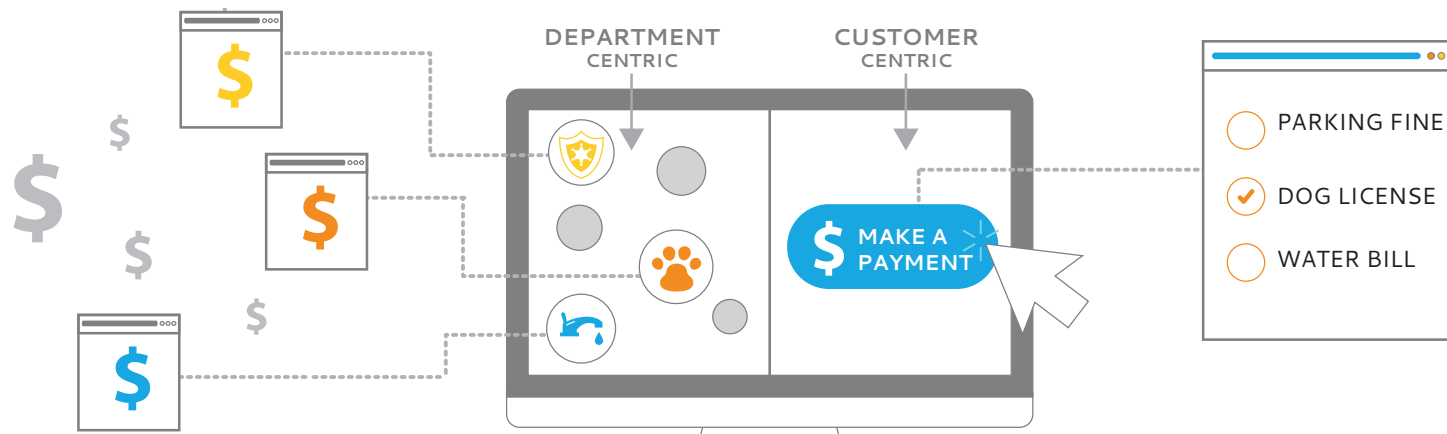


WHAT CONTENT LOOKS LIKE WITH AND WITHOUT SILOS

Think about the “Franken-house” metaphor when considering a common task citizens pursue on your website – something like making a payment. In a distributed department managed model, it can be easy for content to become siloed. The Police Department wants to add a way for customers to pay parking fines online, so they add a page. The Water Department has a new billing system, so they, too, add a page. And it goes on. Throughout your website, there may be four

different places to make payments, but it requires knowing which department handles each function for customers to know these functions exist.

Alternatively, having a content strategy in place would force a discussion to identify all the places in the website where payments can be made, then creating a single path for customers to be able to more intuitively access this important information.

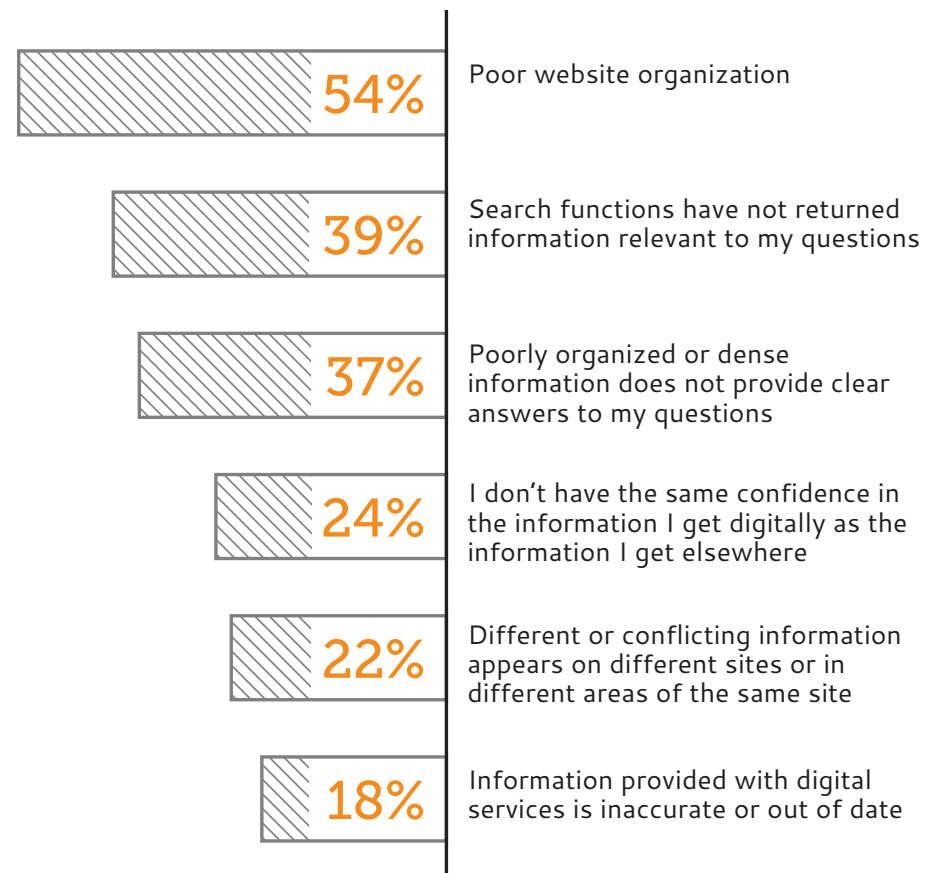


QUALITY COUNTS WHEN IT COMES TO CONTENT

Beyond affecting the structure of your website, a content strategy can also help improve the quality of the information itself. How many times have you visited a government website to find information and come away more confused than you started? You're not alone. A December 2015 Accenture study uncovered that citizens see disorganization and lack of clarity as top usability barriers with government digital services.

This situation isn't surprising. Just as the organization of content suffers without a strategy, the content itself will not be effective without thought and planning.

What obstacles have you encountered as you use digital services from government?



Accenture Public Service Insights, December 2015.

THE ADMINISTRATOR'S REWARD

For most local agencies, taking a step back and rethinking how they approach content on their websites can be daunting. Most websites are comprised of hundreds, if not thousands of pages of content that have been haphazardly created over several years by content editors from varied rank and department.

While it's not uncommon for administrators to be removed from the day-to-day creation of web content and how it's handled, initiating this effort is in your best interest. Your website's content can directly impact initiatives you likely are a part of everyday 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.



5 WAYS CONTENT STRATEGY HELPS YOU BOOST CITIZEN APPROVAL WHILE LOWERING COSTS

1

Can instantly improve the quality and effectiveness of your website

2

Encourages self-service, reducing staff time needed to field and respond to requests

3

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

4

Ensures content is written with the citizen in mind, improving usability

5

Leads to improved communication with citizens, fostering engagement



ABOUT VISION INTERNET

Headquartered in El Segundo, Calif., Vision Internet 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 nearly 20 years, the company has earned hundreds of prestigious awards for its unique websites. Vision Internet's visionCMS™ is a powerful, easy-to-use content management system developed with feedback from hundreds of municipal clients. For more information about Vision Internet's transformative government website technology, please call 888.263.8847 or visit visioninternet.com/inforequest.