IN THEIR OWN VOICES:
HOW TO BUILD BUY-IN FOR A STRONG DIGITAL PRESENCE
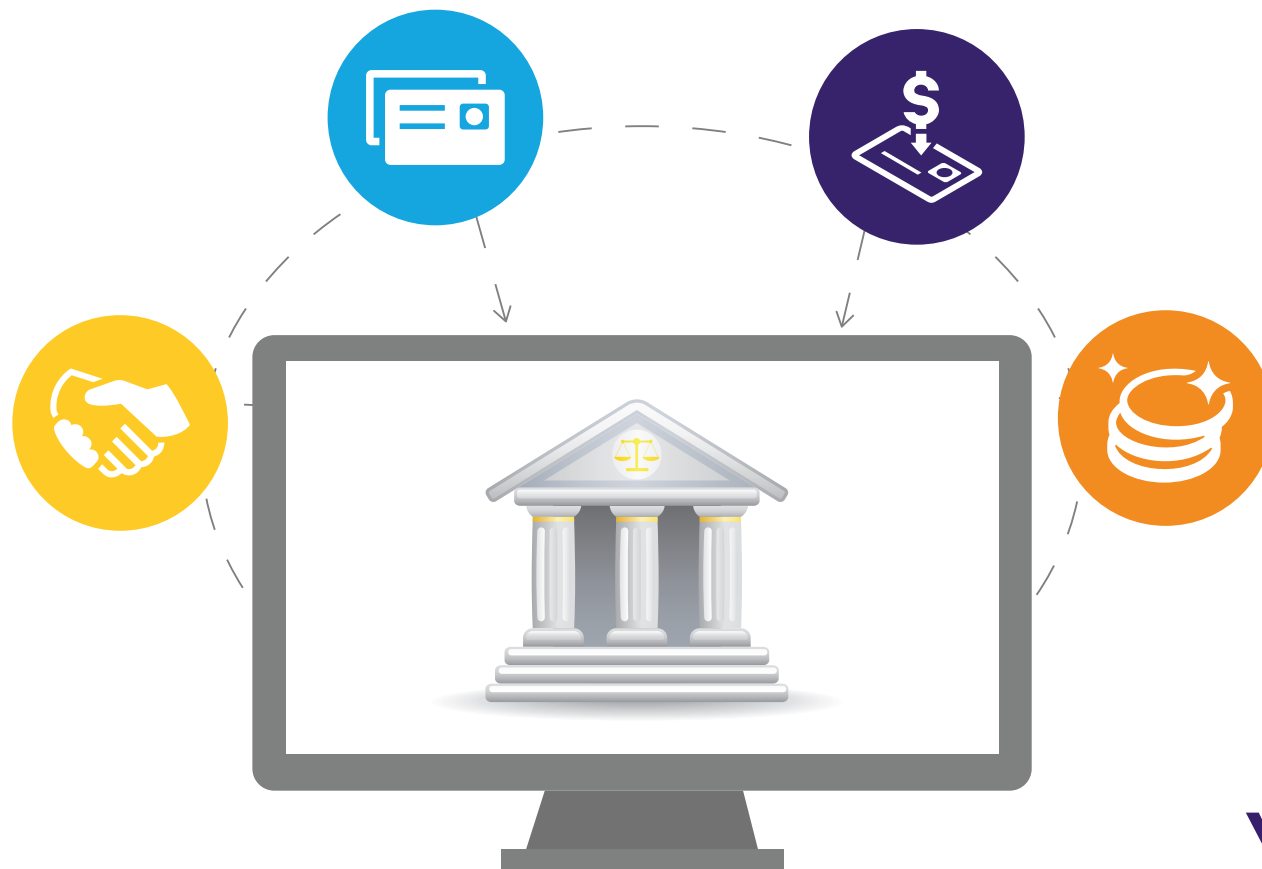
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INTRODUCTION

According to a recent Accenture study, 92% of citizens said "improved digital services would positively impact their view of government." Despite this evidence, local government professionals often face stiff resistance from internal stakeholders and elected officials who question the value of building a strong digital presence.

When you're ready to jump in, but need to get others on board, where do you begin? We sought answers from government leaders from across North America, by posing this question:

What's the best piece of advice you would give to someone struggling to demonstrate the importance of the web to their leadership?

This book contains their compiled answers, providing strategies and tactics for convincing leadership that the time for change is now.

Key Themes

Though we received a wide range of ideas, the advice boiled down to one overarching message: Focus on resident expectations. Drilling down, the respondents offered several key tactics that support this mission:

- Use data to drive decisions
- Focus on transparency
- Connect to your community
- Save time and money

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1. USE DATA TO DRIVE DECISIONS

How do you demonstrate the importance of your web presence? Take a look at the cold hard data. Many leaders use analytics to prove their case.

> " I would recommend having them obtain metrics from peer cities on how their digital presence is performing. We're a City of only 35,000 people. Our website gets 2,000,000 page views per year and our social media activity has a reach of over 300,000 per month. It's really hard to argue against the numbers.
>
> **– Digital Media Coordinator** "

> " Numbers don't lie. Show the demographics for their community and their Internet usage stats.
>
> **– Community Relations Manager** "

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"Go to an agency that has a user friendly website and/or Facebook page and ask for the number of hits. That demonstrates to the management where people are going to for information.

– Acting Deputy Director Community Services

"1. Get a Google Analytics account so you can set a baseline of your traffic and measure your efforts.
2. Survey your customers to see how the best like to communicate with you.

– Admin & Marketing Coordinator

"A website is the most commonly used go-to tool for customers. If a website is poorly designed, not maintained/updated, that reflects poorly on your business and puts you in a position where customers are going to go elsewhere. To show the importance of web to your leadership, perhaps do a survey through Survey Monkey, or run a Google Analytics report. A strong website is a must!

– Graphic Designer & Marketing Coordinator

"Look at your web analytics, identify your most visited page, kill the page for a week, and then monitor the number of calls that department receives. Direct.

– Communications Manager

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2. FOCUS ON TRANSPARENCY

Your municipal website can be an invaluable channel for building trust and promoting transparency through the effective sharing of information.

> " Using the web creates that trust between citizens and the local government. With all the uncertainty in government today, you need to start locally to create transparency.
>
> **– IT Trainer/Social Media Coordinator**

> " With "transparency" being the buzz word of the decade and at the forefront of all constituents' minds, intuitive municipal websites can effectively demonstrate what we do, how we work, and what we've accomplished by providing substantive (and compliant) information to, for, and on behalf of our citizens.
>
> **– City Clerk**

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" In the modern age – where everyone immediately looks to the Internet for information, answers, forms, etc. – our fire district has to maintain a web presence that is useful. We have to be as transparent about our revenue, expenditures and services as possible. The public demands it. The best way to meet that demand is to have an easy to navigate website. A side effect is that we receive fewer phone calls about general information because we have made it easily accessible to the public on our website. "

– Information Analyst

" A web presence can not only make the workplace more effective in helping people (because employees are not having to answer redundant questions), it can also improve your image when residents know you aren't trying hide anything because they can always see your policies and local meeting agendas online. "

– Web Content Developer

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3. CONNECT TO YOUR COMMUNITY

For many residents a website is their first stop to find vital information on everything from the local weather to utility bill payments. An effective website allows residents to connect to their government where and when they want to.

> "
> A website serves its citizens by providing a venue for them to express their concerns and communicate their requests. More importantly, it serves as a means of educating and informing. For example, a website streamlines communication between the City Council and their constituents, giving the public easy access to important issues facing the City while also directly linking to social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram thus promoting civic engagement. Additionally, the site also provides residents with useful information regarding local government services such as recreation centers, police and fire departments, and community events.
>
> **– Marketing Specialist**
> "

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"Everyone is on the web. You MUST have a web presence in order to reach your community members. It is just expected in this day and age.

– Communications Director"

"Because the web is the primary information source for citizens and others interested in the community, the website and online services need to be accessible, user friendly and intuitive. Staff can spend time on other issues when people can find the information they need online.

– Department Assistant"

"I would venture to ask your biggest critics how many of them carry mobile phones with them. From there, I would ask when the last time was that they searched for the answer to something – anything – whether it was the time a movie started, the location of a park, or how to pay their water bill. For local government, a website is the No. 1 most important piece of communication that exists. In today's digital age, people are relying on website searches to get the answers that they need. You can't search Facebook for information about obtaining a permit to put a fence around your back yard; you can't search Twitter. But you can search Google – or even ask Siri – and find information on a City's website.

– Community Outreach Manager"

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4. SAVE TIME AND MONEY

If your agency's website works well, it should help teams reduce costs and boost resident satisfaction — a win for all involved.

> It is the workhorse of your organization – it provides your organization with the platform to embrace transparency, customer service, and open government. A robust online presence reduces customer frustration and ultimately staff time.
>
> **– Communications Manager**

> Present the offsetting cost/time benefits and benefits to the public, such as reduced telephone calls to staff time when FAQs are answered on the web, better coverage as a global marketing tool, faster dissemination of information and updating capabilities for the public and open meeting law requirements, etc.
>
> **– Administrative Assistant**

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"

Governments employees have traditionally been big fans of pamphlets, fliers and reports. Anyone who has worked in government have seen boxes of old communications materials that cost thousands of dollars to print and never reached their intended audience. People are less interested in picking up printed materials than ever. Although digital communications tools may seem expensive to the traditionally minded, [our city] has saved thousands of dollars by transitioning away from physical communications.

– Web Developer and Multimedia Specialist

"

"

Clear concise information can save staff time and keep the public well informed about your jurisdiction's goals and objectives.

– Administrative Services Coordinator

"

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CONCLUSION

By focusing on the needs and expectations of the customers — and using data to support your assertions — you can demonstrate the importance of a healthy web presence.

Residents look to their agency website as their first stop for important information, whether it's about an upcoming council meeting or transparency practices. Having a modern, usable website also helps staff members cut costs on printing and save time on answering phones, boosting the bottom line along with resident satisfaction. As mentioned earlier, a strong digital presence is a win–win for residents and agencies alike.

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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