SOCIAL MEDIA UPDATE

Recommendations

That the Social Media Working Committee, in consultation with the City Manager recommends:

1. That Council approve a phased-in approach to utilizing social media as described in this report

Contribution to Sustainability

Social media applications will facilitate the use of alternative communications vehicles which will contribute to sustainability by supporting ongoing community engagement.

Economic Impact

N/A

Communications Plan

Communication strategies will be developed by respective departments as they rollout social media applications.

Purpose

This report is being presented for approval of the phased-in approach to social media rollout in the Corporation.

Background - Analysis and Options

Council approved a report November 24, 2009 on "Enhancing Public Engagement and Electronic Communication through the use of Social Media." One of the recommendations was to establish a staff working committee to evaluate appropriate opportunities for using social media, and create a strategic direction as required to guide social media implementation in the Corporation. The Director of Corporate Communications and the Senior Manager of Strategic Planning Co-Chair the Committee. Key City departments are represented on the committee including Corporate Communications, Information and Technology Management, City Clerks, Recreation and Culture, Public Works, Economic Development and Access Vaughan. The Committee has held three meetings to discuss the key goals, objectives and required guidelines for consideration in the use and possible implementation of social media across the organization.

Understanding Social Media
Social media can be defined as primarily internet and mobile-based tools which are used for sharing and discussing information among users. These online technologies and practices allow people to share opinions, insights, experiences, and perspectives with each other. A characteristic of all social media is User-Generated Content (UGC) which allows users to post their own information. A sample of tools currently available include: Facebook, Twitter, Linked-in, YouTube, Flickr, Wiki's, blogs, online survey's and discussion boards.

The following are social media strategic objectives identified by the staff committee:

1. Public engagement
2. Communicating to stakeholders beyond Vaughan borders to promote initiatives such as tourism etc.,

3. Internal communications
4. External communications
5. Education and informing all relevant stakeholders
6. Promoting and marketing the City and its initiatives
7. Communication to the business community

To meet these objectives, consideration should be given to matching the appropriate social media application with the issue at hand and in the roll-out strategies.

Pros and Cons of Social Media

The Committee contacted a number of regions and municipalities currently using social media to review best practices and to gain a better understanding of how social media is being utilized. The Region of Waterloo has effectively launched a social media campaign using Facebook to reach and engage rapid transit users. The Region selected youth as their target market and determined that popular social media vehicles could be used to reach youth to communicate transit initiatives.

They now promote events such as open houses, public consultations and council meetings on the Facebook site. They also offer the opportunity for those who cannot attend these events to fill out an online comment sheet. Users can access documents pertaining to rapid transit initiatives and local newspaper articles on the site.

Social media can be useful in communicating outbound information messages on City accomplishments or events. However, staff resources must be in place to manage content posted on the sites. In some cases uncontrolled social media has caused an increased *polarization* of political discussion and values, rather than aiding in bringing people together.

There is often an expectation when using social media tools that there will be an immediate response provided to an enquiry or question. This raises issues concerning having resources in place to be able to respond in a timely manner. Also, processes must be put in place to ensure that any responses which are provided are appropriate and properly represent the City.

Social media can be used as a tactical outreach and engagement vehicle. The City's new website Vaughan Online (VOL) will offer many new applications such as online chat rooms, group forums, online surveys, blogs, podcasts and live streaming video. These can be used to drive the message for projects including Vaughan Vision 2020, Vaughan Tomorrow, Green Directions and the Budget process and provide a forum for feedback and input.

The Corporation can also utilize Twitter, Facebook, and email to disseminate information to promote City events which could be made available through the VOL website where applicable. It would be an efficient and effective way to engage, garner feedback, and mobilize public opinion.

Overall, the goal initially is to use 'social media' type applications for outbound information purposes only while gathering qualitative strategic information through creative methods such as online surveys and group forums. It is recommended that all social media applications be administered through the VOL system.

Next Steps

The Committee has identified three phases for the implementation of social media:

1. An information tool to promote time-specific events, programs and services;
2. A tactical tool for mobilizing public engagement and feedback regarding City projects and initiatives; and
3. To create a Virtual Town Hall, by incorporating social media software packages.

Each phase is discussed in greater detail below:

Phase 1: Social media as an information tool

Social media can be used for outbound messaging in order to promote upcoming corporate events (e.g. Winterfest) or to advertise programs and services offered by City departments and groups (e.g. registration for recreation programs). At this level, social media would be used strictly for one-way communication purposes only, with little or no opportunity for public feedback or discussion. It is recommended this phase be implemented upon approval.

Phase 2: Social media and public engagement

In addition to providing information about corporate events and services, various social media sites may be used to mobilize and engage residents in open discussions about City-wide projects and initiatives. However, providing such a platform would require daily management and monitoring regarding user-generated content posted to the City's social media sites. This would require additional resources to managing the sites. Corporate policies would need to be developed to ensure consistency across the Corporation. It is recommended this phase be considered for implementation after assessing and getting feedback from phase 1.

Phase 3: Social media and a Virtual Town Hall

There is also an opportunity to incorporate social media technologies into the City's main website VOL. Such mechanisms may include online chat rooms, group forums, online surveys, blogs, podcasts and live streaming video that allow for public discussion, feedback and comments regarding City projects and initiatives. Incorporating these mechanisms into a single source on the City's website would still require a sufficient amount of staff monitoring to ensure any content posted is consistent with City policies. In addition, a marketing program will be required to promote the programs. It is recommended this phase be considered for implementation after the VOL internet site has been established in 2011.

Recommended Approach

It is recommended that the first phase for the use of social media as an information tool be implemented upon approval. City departments interested in testing various social media tools include:

> ➢ the City Clerk's Office using Twitter to disseminate information on the 2010 election and announcements pertaining to Council and Committee information (i.e. meeting rescheduling, addenda, public notices),
> ➢ Emergency Planning using Twitter for emergency preparedness, and
> ➢ Corporate Communications using Facebook to promote City events.

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Relationship to Vaughan Vision 2020/Strategic Plan

This report is linked with strategic initiative "Ensure citizen-focused communication initiatives: establish and implement a more effective model for civic engagement and enhance our public consultation strategy."

Regional Implications

Staff will monitor social media trends occurring throughout York Region.

Conclusion

New technologies can be used to improve civic engagement and public communication. Implemented in the most effective manner, social media can be a useful tool for outbound messaging to support City departments including Clerks, Corporate Communications, Recreation and Culture, etc. As the VOL website is implemented, public forums for the Budget, Vaughan Tomorrow and Vaughan Vision 2020 can be considered by using new tools which offer the opportunity for a creative public engagement approach.

Attachments

N/A

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