

Caledon Business Matters

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Consistent communication and ongoing promotion are key to brand awareness and, ultimately, sales.

At its foundation are two words: customer service. You have to meet your customers where they are. That's why it's important to promote and communicate your message through the channels your customers use. This applies to business and government.

At the Town of Caledon, we communicate with residents in many ways: newspaper ads, direct mail, signage, public meetings and of course our website, caledon.ca

But with the growth of social media in recent years, we knew there were other channels that would help us reach Caledon residents. In January 2015, we launched two social media channels: @YourCaledon on Facebook and @YourCaledon on Twitter. Since then, our followers have grown steadily and social media has become a standard part of our communications to residents.

Lessons learned?

? Go slow. Build slowly. Experiment with different types of content, frequency and format until you find a style or voice that works for you.

? Create. Go beyond copying and pasting. Don't be afraid of doing your own writing, photography, video or graphic design. If you keep it simple, direct and honest, your users will appreciate your authenticity.

? Stay with it. It takes time to nurture your social media channels. Producing original content that is relevant to your audiences takes time. So does interacting with fellow users, responding to comments, monitoring mentions and following other users.

? Adapt. Each platform has its own style, etiquette and publishing features. Try to follow the conventions ? hashtags are a great way to categorize topics on Twitter for example.

? Trust. There are trolls, critics and spammers out there that can make your life miserable in the short run. Resist the temptation to fire off angry replies that can easily inflame the situation. Over time, the user community tends to police itself: others will jump in with different viewpoints that tend to balance things out.

? Extend. Be aware of which platform your key audience is using. We set up an Instagram account last year for the Pan Am Games to complement our other social media channels. And we established a Town of Caledon channel on Vimeo to host our videos. Just be sure you have the capacity to keep your channels populated with content. Easier said than done!

? Link. Try to ensure you are providing a benefit to your followers by sharing useful ? or entertaining ? links to other sources. Or, if you are promoting yourself, at least ask the ?what's in it for me? question from your readers' perspective.

? Delete. To borrow from Strunk and White's classic *Elements of Style*: omit needless words. Attention spans are short on social media. Make sure you say what you want to say in as few words as possible.

? Tell. Your readers shouldn't have to guess what you want them to do. Make sure your call to action is clear. If you're hosting an event, for example, use active verbs in your promotions: register, attend, buy, learn!

In the end, whether social media works for you is a question only you can answer. At the Town, we are pleased with the response. For little expense, we can reach out to Caledon residents in new ways.

But social media isn't everything. We continue to look for new and different ways to interact and engage.

Last year at this time, we surveyed residents about our communications and a large majority said they would like to receive Town news by email.

In response, we launched a weekly email which in four short months already has more than 900 subscribers. Subscribe at caledon.ca/enews!

Final thoughts: Be open to change, don't be afraid to experiment and above all, listen to your audience and try to benefit them through fresh, relevant and engaging content.