

Committee: Public Engagement Working Group

Date: 10 May 2018

Title: Social Media and Printed Media Trends

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Summary

1. This report summarises the trend in social media and how the council is using this to engage with customers.
2. It also gives an overview of the local printed media, including circulation of local newspapers and their affiliated websites.
3. The purpose of this report is to provide information which can be used as basis for determining any future methods of public engagement by the council.

Recommendations

4. None

Financial Implications

5. There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

Background Papers

6. None

Impact

- 7.

Communication/Consultation	This report covers the trends in social media operated by the Council
Community Safety	None
Equalities	None
Health and Safety	None
Human Rights/Legal Implications	None
Sustainability	None
Ward-specific impacts	All wards

Workforce/Workplace	None
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Situation

1. This report was requested by the working group and summarises the trends in social media and how the council is utilising Twitter and Facebook to engage with residents, businesses and partners.
2. The report also highlights the circulation trends of local printed media.

Social media

3. Uttlesford District Council entered the world of social media in 2011, opening both Twitter and Facebook accounts to allow residents of the district to interact with us in ways other than telephoning, emailing or visiting in person. Our social media accounts have grown to become, in some cases, the first port of call for many residents with a compliment, question, or complaint.
4. The council currently maintains the following accounts on Twitter:

[@UttlesfordDC](#) – Our main account which is used to share messages about council services, retweet partner organisations, and respond directly to residents who have questions or concerns. It is managed by the Communications Team.

[@UDCBusiness](#) – This account is managed by the Economic Development Team and is used to support local business.

[@UDCChairman](#) – This account was set up at the request of the current Chairman, and is monitored by him and the Communications Team. It is used to promote the Chairman's role within the district.

[@UDCCommunities](#) – Our newest account is monitored and managed by the Communities Team and is used to share their activities with partner organisations across the district and beyond.

[@UDCJobs](#) – This account is managed by the Communications Team and is used to publicise jobs and tender opportunities at the council.

[@UDCResilience](#) – Until recently this account was managed by our Emergency Planning officer. Its future will be explored when a replacement is recruited.

On Facebook the Communications Team manages the central [Uttlesford District Council page](#) and also oversees the [Audley Rooms page](#).

An additional Facebook page has been created for [UDC Housing Services](#) and is managed by members of the Housing Team. This is primarily aimed at council tenants and keeps them posted on events organised by Housing Services as well as allowing them to interact with officers.

The principal UDC Facebook and Twitter accounts are monitored during business hours. Updates and responses can be provided outside of those hours, although this is not standard practice and is currently in exceptional circumstances only. Response to this additional coverage, when applied, has been largely positive.

In addition, the council has an [Instagram account](#) which is used mainly for sharing images of the district. It is not used as a means of two-way communication with residents.

5. The number of followers on social media is a local performance indicator for the Communications Team. We have been monitoring followers of our main UDC Facebook and Twitter accounts since 2012/13 when the combined total of both accounts was 816 users. The most recent figure, provided for the end of 2017/18, was a combined 5,405, with the number of followers increasing at approximately 1,000 per year. This figure does not include the followers for any of the departmental or secondary accounts. The Team interacts with many more people than those who actively follow any of the Council's social media accounts. An average week can see more than 100 interactions across social media platforms.

6. The Communications Team post daily on both Facebook and Twitter on a variety of topics, from providing service status messages to sharing campaigns hosted by partner organisations and local groups, as well as publicising good news stories from departments within the council.

It is our aim to respond individually to all direct queries addressed to the council as quickly and efficiently as possible by liaising with colleagues to find answers and solutions to service specific questions. In highly dynamic situations (such as the snowfall at the end of 2017 that disrupted bin collections) both Facebook and Twitter are used extensively to provide regular and specific updates on the service, in a way that would not have been possible solely with website updates and email newsletters.

The accounts are monitored during opening hours Monday to Friday except in times of exceptional difficulty with service delivery, in which case this extends into the evening, weekends and early mornings.

7. Given the declining circulation of local printed newspapers, direct communication with residents is becoming increasingly important. The council's social media accounts are a key communications tool, and they provide a useful customer service function. For many people social media will be the first, and sometimes only, means of communicating with us. Due to the nature of the interactions and immediacy connected with social media, the Communications Team makes every effort to respond as quickly and efficiently as possible to customers.
8. As well as social media, direct communications channels also include the email Keep Me Posted service, which was introduced in December 2016 and from a subscriber base of zero has been built to 6,202 unique subscribers (more than double the Council's target) and more than 30,000 subscriptions (whereby subscribers sign up for multiple newsletter topics).

Local printed media

9. Members of the working group requested information on the current state of local print media, including the trends in local newspaper circulations.
10. There are now four local newspapers covering the district of Uttlesford – these are Saffron Walden Reporter, Dunmow Broadcast, Walden Local, and the

Herts & Essex Observer. The Reporter, Broadcast and Walden Local are free weekly titles; the Observer is a paid-for weekly title.

11. Over the last decade, two further papers have ceased circulating in the district. The Dunmow edition of the Braintree and Witham Times was discontinued in about 2009 and the Saffron Walden Weekly News ceased publication in 2015.
12. Local newspaper circulations are independently verified by the Audit Bureau of Circulations (ABC), an industry-recognised source of measuring circulation. According to ABC, the Reporter, Broadcast and Observer have been subject to year-on-year declines in printed circulation over the past few years.
13. Between January and December 2017, the Herts and Essex Observer's average circulation was 5,184; the average circulation between January and December 2016 was 6,909. Back in 2011, the newspaper was averaging 13,068 copies per week. As background detail, the Herts & Essex Observer's long-established office in Bishop's Stortford was closed in March 2016 and the newspaper operations moved to Hertford, the base of the Hertfordshire Mercury. The Observer continues to have a standalone Stansted & Dunmow newspaper title, albeit with significantly less Uttlesford-based content than previously.
14. At December 2017 the Saffron Walden Reporter's average circulation was 15,019; at December 2016 it was 16,590. The Dunmow Broadcast's average circulation at December 2017 was 11,182 compared to 12,251 in December 2016. As background, the Reporter/Broadcast retains an office in Saffron Walden.
15. The Walden Local's circulation is not audited by ABC and we are not aware of any official verification of its circulation. According to the newspaper's website, 14,000 copies are delivered to homes and businesses in Saffron Walden and 28 local villages. As background, the Walden Local retains an office in Saffron Walden.
16. As far as we are aware, there are no industry-verified measurements of readership for these local newspapers and it is therefore difficult to gauge how well read these newspapers are. In only one case are people making an active decision to obtain the paper, the rest are free papers.
17. All the titles have a digital and social media presence.
18. The Herts & Essex Observer no longer has its own website but is now part of the Hertfordshire Mercury website which contains regular Uttlesford-specific news updates. We have not been able to obtain the viewing figures for this website. The newspaper has 8,048 likes on Facebook and 1,255 Twitter followers.
19. According to Reporter/Broadcast publishers Archant, the Reporter website has 23,487 monthly unique views (people visiting the site) and 47,737 page views; the Broadcast has 16,858 monthly unique views and 31,601 page views. The

Reporter has 1,469 likes on Facebook and 496 Twitter followers. The Broadcast has 1,092 likes on Facebook and 107 Twitter followers.

20. The Walden Local's website is a place-holder website; it includes a link to the newspaper e-edition but does not have any updated news content. The newspaper has 194 likes on Facebook although posted in January 2017 that it would no longer be providing news on Facebook. It does not have a Twitter account.