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Ten Content Ideas for Your Website

With technology so prevalent and literally at our fingertips, website users are becoming more savvy and more demanding. Having easy navigation, a clean look, and fast load times are now considered bare minimums. Even being mobile-friendly is now expected instead of a perk. However, all of that interface does not matter if you don't have anything good to say. What you put in your site -- your content --is as important as how you present it. In no particular order, here are ten great content ideas specifically for your RWD and small city website:

1. Guidance for a Process

This type of page serves to take the user step by step through a process, such as an online form for application for water service. It can be a "what to do" or "at a glance" type presentation. It can be a single page, with items scrolling down the page, or a single

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page with tabs, or a set of pages with next buttons. The idea is to walk them through something you need them to do, making something complicated or long be a guided, easy task.

2. Resources

One of the advantages of a website is instant linking to other websites. If you often refer your users to external resources, having a "helpful links" or "where to find" page can save you time and your users frustration. Make sure to review your external links periodically to avoid broken URLs.

3. Contact Information

One of the most basic pieces of content that is surprisingly overlooked is basic contact information. You should list the name of your entity, your physical address, your mailing address, a phone number, and email address. Many users expect at least an email or phone number to appear readily, for example, in the bottom footer or in a top right bar in your header, appearing in every page. In addition, if you split responsibilities and would like your users to contact the right person immediately, you might consider having a dedicated contact page directing them to the right department, or for example, an "after hours" phone number. An embedded map showing location and hours is also appropriate for a dedicated contact page or even on your homepage.

4. News & Information

Most people visit your site only when they are searching for something specific for an immediate need. However, while they are there, you have an opportunity to be proactive in public relations and informing them of news you want them to see. If they realize your content is timely and relevant, they are more likely to visit again without that specific need. For example, on your homepage you should prominently display images and explanations of "good" news happening in your RWD or city. If you have these news pieces automatically archived in a news type module, your content will be enriched and enlarged, your visibility more palatable to search engines, and your users offered a historical account of your accomplishments.

5. History

Speaking of history, a dedicated page highlighting the beginnings and history of your RWD or city is a nice touch that can support your image in your community and with your users online. Supplementing historical data with photographs draws attention and provides an enjoyable experience.

6. Online Bill Pay

Nowadays, web users simply expect that your site will allow them to pay online. Fortunately, it's easier now than

ever to accommodate. Having your entire billing system online with individual user login and historical data available is the best user experience both for your customers and for your office. However, with those functions also comes the expense. You can offer online bill pay in the simplest method as just a link to a payment provider, where the user enters their own amount from their bill. The expense for this type of functionality is nominal, although it requires staff time on the back end to reconcile payments with invoices.

7. Community and Business

While users may log in just to complete a payment or find a resource, you can help promote your community by showing them community resources or events from which they might benefit. If you have an economic development committee, the committee could have its own page. Or you might list out businesses in the area, schools, churches, or parks. Partnering in this way spreads the word about your community and sheds a positive light.

8. Minutes & Meeting Agendas

Your constituents are likely to value transparency and communication. Having all of your meeting minutes online and archived is one way to provide this to them. In addition, on the same page you could have a snippet of text saying when and where your regular meetings are held. One agenda, the one for the next upcoming meeting, is an suitable addition to this page.

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9. Documents & Forms

Every entity has a repository of forms and instructions on how to fill out those forms. Any of your regular paper forms could easily be saved as a pdf and put into one place on your website. This allows users to more quickly access needed paperwork. This also saves staff time in person and on the phone explaining processes and directing users. It can even save cost of printing if many of your users are able to print out on their own or even email you the completed paperwork. Even more convenient for the user is a fillable pdf form, which you can create with software such as Adobe or Foxit on an existing pdf.

10. Fees and Rates

A comprehensive list and explanation of fees and rates is something most customers want to see, and having that online allows staff to easily refer users to a visual. Many users can find this information online and save a phone call.

These ten content ideas are easy to implement for your website and

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provide a much better experience for the user. Once you cover these basics, you may be inspired to explore even more ways to shore up the quality of content you provide website visitors. You are sure to see better communication and a more positive image of your entity as a result.

Since 1997, Jen Sharp (JenSharp.com) has served business and government across Kansas and the US and even internationally, specializing in Web development, design & programming including e-Learning, ecommerce, content management systems, and other small business solutions.