



the bushland shire

creating a living environment

LATE ITEM INFORMATION MEMO

ORDINARY MEETING

**Wednesday, 21 April, 2010
at 6.30pm**

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ITEM 21 GM7/10 - Online Community Engagement

Additional information with NO CHANGE to Recommendation

Please find below an updated version of GM Report No. 7/10. Please disregard the previous version of the Report that was published in the Business Papers.

Please note there are no changes to the recommendation.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report has been prepared in response to Notice of Motion (NOM) 13/09 from Council's Ordinary Meeting of 9 December 2009.

The Notice of Motion stated *“THAT: A working party consisting of key staff and interested Councillors be formed to consider Council's approach to on-line community engagement and that a report containing the recommendations from the working party be provided for Council's consideration by the April 2010 Ordinary Meeting. The report should contain an evaluation of opportunities to use services like You Tube, Facebook, Twitter and other online media to promote Council services and activities at a minimal cost. The report should also contain comment on issues associated with the generation and moderation of content for these online communication forums.”*

This report is not an exhaustive review of web-based information sharing facilities. It has been limited to the most well-known Web 2.0 services that are currently used by other councils in metropolitan Sydney. The research of Web 2.0 services was also limited to those services that did not impact on identified time or budget constraints.

This report recommends that Hornsby Shire Council establish and manage a corporate presence using three social media mediums for a trial period of six months, and that the trial be administered by Council's Web Services Coordinator. This report also recommends that a further report be presented to Council at the end of the trial period, documenting the findings from the trial and recommending future actions.

The six months trial is to be separate and distinct from the current social media used at the libraries by Council's Library team. The social media recommended for trial are:

- Twitter
- Flickr
- Vimeo

PURPOSE/OBJECTIVE

This report delivers Councils Online Community Engagement Working Party's recommendations regarding Council's approach to online community engagement (in addition to current Library practices).

It is written in response to NOM13/09 of the 9 December 2009 Ordinary Meeting of Council.

The research was conducted by key staff of Hornsby Shire Council and interested Councillors who formed the Online Community Engagement Working Party. Working party participants are listed later in this report.

DISCUSSION

The primary objective of utilising social media (Web 2.0 services) is to complement present communication methods and extend the reach of existing corporate messages online by building relationships with relevant audiences including the community, ratepayers, key stakeholders and key influencers such as journalists and bloggers. In effect, social media provide an informal, 'human' voice of the organisation to promote understanding of, and engagement with, the community.

Social media also offer a cost effective alternative to some traditional methods of communication, and research has shown them to be particularly effective in communicating with 25 to 40 year olds.

Hornsby Shire Council's current use

The members of the working party were aware of the following existing Council use of online community engagement sites:

Council Division / Branch	Site	Précis	Council contact
Library	Flickr	Videos of story time, school holiday activities, NAIDOC celebrations, refurbishments and more	Cheryl Etheridge
Library	Del.icio.us	Predominantly for high school students' projects	Cheryl Etheridge
Library	Vimeo	Videos of author talks	Cheryl Etheridge
Library	Reader's Advisory Wiki	Internal / staff use only	Cheryl Etheridge
Library	Technovisionaries Blog	Internal / staff use only	Cheryl Etheridge
Library	Technovisionaries Ning	Internal / staff use only	Cheryl Etheridge

Although not a true social networking tool in the perspective of this report, Council's use of the Bounceback SMS service was discussed as it is a relatively new form of communication used by Council and it so far demonstrates success. This service, which requires a community member to SMS a code to a specified mobile telephone number in order to receive information from Hornsby Shire Council, has thus far proven to be of value to those who use it. This service is currently provided free of charge to Council, is used by Parks and Landscape Team for oval closure information and Community Relations for upcoming event information, and demonstrates Council's success in utilising 'new' methods of communication with our community.

Evaluation of social media opportunities available

There are hundreds of social media / networking sites, which are places on the internet where people meet to chat, socialise, debate, and network. All sites share the same feature of helping people connect with others who have similar interests. These sites are immensely popular and each visitor has a screen name that protects their identity.

The working party reviewed and evaluated only a small portion (ten) of social networking sites. The conclusions of this report are based on a review of those ten service providers, according to the known experiences with our own and other councils, and taking account of cost effectiveness and ease of content generation and moderation.

A précis of each of the ten social media is included below.

1. Blogs

A blog (short for "web log") is a type of website, usually maintained by an individual with regular entries of commentary, descriptions of events, or other material such as graphics or video. Many blogs provide commentary or news on a particular subject; others function as more personal online diaries. A typical blog combines text, images, and links to other blogs, web pages, and other media related to its topic. The ability of readers to leave comments in an interactive format is an important part of many blogs. Most blogs are primarily textual, although some focus on art (art blog), photographs (photoblog), videos (video blogging), music (MP3 blog), and audio (podcasting) (Source: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blog>).

- Content generation: timely and for best for incorporating words, photos and videos
- Moderation: can be difficult, defamatory / unsavoury remarks may be permanent
- Used by Manly Council's library for local studies and North Sydney Council
- Cannot be effectively evaluated through statistical means.

2. Del.icio.us

Delicious (formerly del.icio.us, pronounced "delicious") is a social bookmarking web service for storing, sharing, and discovering web bookmarks. Delicious uses a non-hierarchical classification system in which users can tag each of their bookmarks with freely chosen index terms (generating a kind of folksonomy). Its collective nature makes it possible to view bookmarks added by other users. (Source: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Del.icio.us>)

- Content generation: can be time-consuming
- Moderation: manageable, but not immediately straight-forward
- Hornsby Library uses primarily for high school student homework
- Cannot be evaluated through statistical means.

3. Facebook

Facebook is a social networking website whose target audience is more an adult demographic than a youth demographic. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Facebook_-_cite_note-4#cite_note-4 Users can add friends and send them messages, and update their personal profiles to notify friends about themselves. Additionally, users can join networks organized by workplace, school, or college. (Source: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Facebook>)

- Content generation: time consuming and for best utilisation incorporates words, photos and videos

- Moderation: very difficult; reviews can't be deleted: only reported through to Facebook. Also hard to remove 'graffiti'
- Used by City Of Sydney - grant submission information, Chinese New Year prizes, YouTube videos etc. Also have albums (photos) and list events
- Used by National Library of Australia
- Can be time and resource intensive
- Doesn't attract younger audience

4. Flickr

Flickr is an image and video hosting website, web services suite, and online community. In addition to being a popular website for users to share and embed personal photographs, the service is widely used by bloggers to host images that they embed in blogs and social media. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flickr> - [cite note-flickr-photo-use-by-bloggers-1#cite_note-flickr-photo-use-by-bloggers-1](#) As of October 2009, it claims to host more than 4 billion images (Source: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flickr>).

- Content generation: comparatively effortless and quick
- Moderation: three safety levels - safe (for global audience), moderate (when unsure) and restricted
- Successfully used by Hornsby Library
- Can be measured through statistical means.
- Low impact on human resources
- Comparatively easiest medium to promote events, services and opportunities via photos and photo albums

5. My Space

MySpace is a social networking website whose main competitor is Facebook.

- Content generation: time consuming and for best utilisation incorporates words, photos and videos
- Moderation: pre and post moderation is difficult, but possible. Can't moderate fan updates (live feed) that roll on the front page
- Used by Camden Council's Library
- Is less popular than Facebook

6. Nings

A ning is an online platform for people to create their own social networks.

- Content generation: reasonable
- Moderation: manageable
- Used by Hornsby Library staff
- Used by Mosman Council's Library

7. Twitter.com

Twitter is a mass communication and social networking application that allows participants to post short messages, known as 'Tweets', limited to 140 characters in length, and to converse with other users via their phones or web browsers. Unlike email or text messaging, these

conversations take place in the open. The platform is experiencing a phenomenal adoption curve and is being used increasingly by government departments.

- Content generation: simple and fast
- Moderation: can moderate comments before authorising a person to post more
- Used by other councils for business including Mosman City Council, Wyong Council, Wagga Wagga Council and Hurstville Council
- Used by LGSA, Kevin Rudd PM, BigPond, Dell, General Motors and more
- Can be measured through statistical means
- Low impact on human resources

8. Vimeo

Vimeo is a video-centric social networking site which supports embedding, sharing, video storage, and allows user-commenting on each video page. Vimeo has gained a reputation as catering to a high end, artistic crowd because of its high bitrate, resolution and relative HD support (Source <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vimeo>).

- Content generation: comparatively simple and quick
- Moderation: Vimeo does not allow commercial videos, gaming videos, pornography, or anything not created by the user to be hosted on the site
- Hornsby Library uses Vimeo (for Author Talks) and prefers it to YouTube
- Often associated more with music

9. Webcasting Council Meetings

A webcast is a media file distributed over the Internet using streaming media technology to distribute a single content source to many simultaneous listeners/viewers. A webcast may either be distributed live or on demand. Essentially, webcasting is “broadcasting” over the Internet (Source: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Webcasting>).

- Content generation: direct from Council meeting
- Moderation: can be achieved but would defeat the purpose
- Used by Botany Bay Council
- Possible privacy implications
- Value to community yet to be proven worthy of time and expense required to do this properly

10. YouTube

YouTube is a video sharing website on which users can upload, share, and view videos. Most of the content on YouTube has been uploaded by individuals, although media corporations including CBS, the BBC and other organisations offer some of their material via the site, as part of the YouTube partnership program (Source: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/YouTube>).

- Content generation: straight forward and relatively quick (few minutes to an hour)
- Moderation: allows comments only to be flagged as ‘spam’ rather than the ‘inappropriate’, which is reserved for videos only
- Council’s Library prefers to use Vimeo rather than YouTube
- YouTube is seen more as a home video collection

Outcome from the evaluation

The working party, having reviewed existing social media practices at Hornsby Council and investigated other social media mediums, concluded that a trial period of six months was the most appropriate way to move forward. It was also agreed that Council should start with social media that are not time-intensive and are comparatively easy to manage and report upon.

Therefore the following three products are recommended for use in a six month trial. The products are:

- Twitter
- Flickr
- Vimeo

The trial period

The parameters for the trial period include:

- Online communication generation to be managed by Council's Web Services Coordinator, with endorsement from Council's Manager, Community Relations. Approval from the General Manager would be sought for newly generated topics in a trial period.
- Council restrict its use of communication to one way where practical. Where 'conversations' are required to build a relationship, the Web Services Coordinator should do so after obtaining endorsement of the Manager, Community Relations.
- Conversations via traditional media should be managed like media enquiries where the relevant officer is contacted for a response, and where necessary, endorsement sought from the relevant manager / executive.
- Council's Code of Conduct and guidelines will apply to working with online media in the same way as when participating in any public forum.
- Council officers should observe good practice by disclosing their position and advising that they are representing Council. Council's Web Services Coordinator should not disclose information, make commitments or engage in activities unless authorised to do so. Council's Web Services Coordinator must also be aware that comments may also be made publically available or reproduced in any other media.
- It must be very clear who is posting a comment and how to contact them. Any comment that is deemed unlawful, abusive, defamatory, invasive of another's privacy or obscene to a reasonable person will not be published.
- Site must be web standards compliant (W3C)
- Posts should be regular, up to date and clear

Opportunities available

Opportunities for Council to utilise social media for non-library business include, but are not limited to the following. (Note: this list is primarily based on recent display advertising).

Council function	Site	Précis	Council contact
Events	Twitter	Upcoming events - one month out, one week out and stalls, activities, entertainment available	Community Relations
News / press releases	Twitter	Dissemination of information	Community Relations
Footpath / road closures	Twitter	Notification of dates / areas effected	Works
Learner Driver workshops	Twitter	Notification, contact for bookings	Traffic
Events	Flickr	Sell participation to prospective stall holders and ride providers	Community Relations and Community Services
Mall activities	Flickr	Sell participation to prospective stall holders and other users	Admin/Property
Parks	Flickr	Promote key attributes of parks	Environment
Clean Up Australia Day	Flickr	Promote event and past achievements	Environment
Clean Up Australia Day	Twitter	Communicate locations for event / registration details	Environment
Information Sessions (e.g. Indian myna birds)	Twitter	Communicate time, location RSVP details of session/s	All who hold information sessions
Promotions (e.g. February Fiesta / Coronation Street)	Twitter	Communicate promotion dates and details	All who hold promotions
Australia Day events	Twitter	Locations of events happening across the shire to celebrate Australia Day	Community Relations
Australia Day events	Flickr	Promote Council's celebrations of Australia Day (pre and post event)	Community Relations
Swimming lessons	Twitter	Fill class vacancies / promote programs	Works
Committee member sourcing	Twitter	For seeking local residents and interested community members to participate in the management of meeting rooms, community centres etc	All who need to establish community committees
Public Notices	Twitter	Enhance existing communication methods	All who need to publicise public notices
Slow down on local roads	Twitter	Augment existing campaigns	Traffic
Bushcare Volunteers	Flickr	Promotional video of benefits of being a volunteer	Environment
Bushcare Volunteers	Twitter	Recruitment appeals	Environment

Emergency use

Communication mediums should always be appropriate for the task, which means that there is a place for social media in communicating emergency information.

Council, like other government organisations, could use Twitter to communicate bushfire warnings, flood warnings or other emergency information relevant to the community.

From <http://www.govtech.com/gt/579338>: *The most practical government applications for Twitter are in public safety and emergency notification. citizens near a wildfire in Griffith Park in 2007 tweeted to the LAFD about wind direction and smouldering hot spots, which helped fire fighters control the 800-acre blaze.*

Considering the low bandwidth requirements of SMS and Twitter, it makes sense to use them during times of emergency when networks are likely to be congested.

It is understood that emergency services in Victoria are investigating this method of communication given the failures surrounding Black Saturday.

Hornsby Council would need to evaluate and determine the use of social media in emergency situations following the implementation, and successful building of relationships, via online media.

BUDGET

This report recommends a trial period of some Web 2.0 services using existing resources, and therefore there are no budget implications.

POLICY

A draft social media policy will be developed prior to the commencement of the trial period. It would be evaluated and refined during the trial period.

CONSULTATION

A working party of key staff and interested Councillors was formed and charged with evaluating opportunities to use social media to promote Council services and activities at minimum cost. The working party members included the following persons:

- Ms Michelle Edmunds (Manager - Community Relations) - **convenor**.
- Mr David Johnston (Manager - Community Services Branch)
- Mr Craig Munns (Manager - Information Systems Branch)
- Ms Julie Williams (Manager - Corporate Strategy Branch)
- Ms Liz Berger (Graphic Designer)
- Ms Lisa Cahill (Community Development Manager)
- Ms Cheryl Etheridge (Manager - Library and Information Services Branch)
- Mr David Hayes (Media Coordinator)
- Ms Sharon Mizzi (Coordinator, Youth Services)
- Ms Laura Plini (Graphic Designer)
- Mr Michael Hutchence (Councillor)
- Mayor Nick Berman (Councillor)

Members of the working party also met with Mosman City Council's Internet Coordinator for advice based on their experience in utilising social media.

Other internal and external consultation occurred as research to prepare for meetings and to finalise this report.

TRIPLE BOTTOM LINE SUMMARY

Triple Bottom Line is a framework for improving Council's decisions ensuring accountability and transparency on social, environmental and economic factors. It does this by reporting upon Council's strategic themes. If Council was to proceed with the recommendations proposed in the Report, Council's endorsement of the use of online community engagement to promote Council's services and activities would contribute to Council's strategic themes:

Working with our Community

On line media provides an opportunity to engage a significant proportion of our community quickly and effectively than is possible using traditional media.

Conserving our natural environment

The use of on-line media may reduce the need to use paper base products to deliver a range of messages to residents within the shire. This will be evaluated as part of the trial.

Contributing to community development through sustainable facilities and services

Not applicable.

Fulfilling our community's vision in planning for the future of the shire

Not applicable.

Supporting our diverse economy

Not applicable.

Maintaining sound corporate financial management

The trial of the selected on line media will not incur additional expenditure. The media is free and the trial will be introduced and evaluated by current staff.

Other sustainability considerations

Not applicable.

RESPONSIBLE OFFICER

Michelle Edmunds, Manager, Community Relations, phone 9847 6702 between 8.30am – 5pm, Monday to Friday.

RECOMMENDATION

THAT:

1. Council trial Twitter for six months as a tool to communicate and build relationships with the community.
2. Council trial Flickr for six months as a tool to promote Council events, services and activities.

3. Council trial Vimeo for six months to inform and educate the community about Council's services and activities.
4. A further report on social media be presented to Council at the end of the trial period.

ROBERT STEPHENS
Acting General Manager

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