Association of Local Government Information Management Inc

A Roadmap to E-democracy in New Zealand Local Government ©

ALGIM E-Democracy Research Paper 2009

Association of Local Government Information Management Inc

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INTRODUCTION

The way in which we access information and interact with communities has changed significantly over the last few years. There is a new interest in civic participation around the world as more engaged citizens expect greater local government transparency. The rapidly growing use of Web 2.0 tools and huge changes in digital technology mean that information is now available in a wide range of formats to suit citizens' different needs.

However, even with this wealth of new information, members of the general public expect more.

Padraig Reidy, news editor for Index on Censorship magazine, says, "There is an impulse among web users that as soon as they are told they cannot know about something, they seek out the details."

This change has also transformed public expectations of local democracy and requires a more transparent and open way of working which local government needs to adapt to.

A survey carried out in 2007 by AUT identified that 78% of New Zealanders use the internet and 71% of users rate the internet as a more important source of information than family and friends.

The same survey identified that 28% of users participate in social networking sites such as MySpace or Facebook every week, and 65% say the internet has increased their contact with other people, especially those overseas.

More recent studies have shown that social networking sites are no longer just for younger people, with the largest growth of users aged in their 30's or 40's.

This creates opportunities for New Zealand local authorities to start using digital technology and the internet as an opportunity to build relationships with local residents by improving access to information and providing opportunities for engagement outside formal consultation processes.

Many councils are already starting to recognise the potential of e-democracy and this paper is intended to provide support in identifying opportunities, managing risks and resources, and building an ongoing relationship with local residents.

Case studies are provided to help share ideas and experiences, while other examples from around the world are highlighted to demonstrate a more comprehensive picture of the lessons learned and opportunities available within the evolving area of e-democracy.

WHAT IS E-DEMOCRACY?

"E-government will increasingly allow people to feed their views, ideas and information back to government, through formal consultation, or, less formally, through wikis, blogs or online forums. The collective wisdom of the public is valuable – after all, the people who are affected by government policy are in the best position to suggest how to make it better," - the New Zealand digital strategy

E-democracy can be described as a way for the public to engage online with democratic issues that may be of interest or importance to them.

E-democracy activities can be:

- Top-down – being managed and facilitated by government agencies or their representatives within set frameworks or boundaries, or

- Bottom-up – being initiated mainly by the public with less formal boundaries, but with the intention of fitting them into decision-making processes

For the purposes of this paper, we have divided e-democracy into four categories:

- General Information Dissemination (council to public)
- Direct Information Dissemination (council to public)
- Information gathering (public to council)
- Interactive communication (between council and public)

E-Democracy In New Zealand Local Government

During July – August 2009, ALGIM invited all New Zealand local authorities to participate in a survey about the types of e-democracy activities or initiatives they were involved with, and how their use of e-democracy related to local government structures.

SUMMARY OF ALGIM SURVEY RESULTS

Council areas most likely to take a lead in implementing e-democracy tools or activities were identified as:

- Communications / PR 86%
- Strategy / Policy 57%
- IT 46%
- Regulatory 30%
- Mayor/ Councillors 27%
- Youth Development 24%
- Committee Administration 24%

Of the councils that responded to the survey, 46% stated that they were part of the Aotearoa People's Network Kaharoa (APNK) but only a small percentage (10%) had over 30 computers within that network.

Outside of the APNK, 19% of respondents provided free public internet access in customer service centres and 25% through libraries, although some restrictions were noted, including charges for using social media sites.

Some councils provide digital facilities (e.g. an online presence), or training for community organisations or businesses, sometimes through networks of community practitioners.

E-Democracy tools used by councils to facilitate engagement or communication with the public

General Information Dissemination (Council to Public)		**Infrequent Use**	**Regularly Use**	**Plan to Use in the next 2 yrs**
	Online bulletin board (e-bulletins)	5%	27%	24%
	Web broadcasting (audio or video)	5%	0%	35%
	Blogs by councillors or senior officers	14%	5%	19%
	Social media sites (e.g. Twitter, Facebook groups, MySpace etc.)	14%	8%	30%
	RSS feeds for Website Content Changes	3%	22%	30%
	Other RSS feeds, such as Press Releases	3%	30%	35%
Directed Information Dissemination (Council to Public)				
	Email alerts (e.g. updates of building permission status)	11%	16%	35%
	SMS alerts (e.g. dog impounding alerts for a dog owner)	14%	3%	38%
Information Gathering (Public to Council)				
	Online submissions on consultations	14%	57%	22%
	Online opinion polls on planning and	3%	5%	41%

	legislation			
	Online surveys	19%	19%	32%
	Voting handsets (for public meetings)	0%	0%	5%
	Tablets or handheld devices for on street surveys	8%	8%	14%
	E-democracy games or simulations	0%	0%	16%
	E-petitions	0%	0%	27%
Interactive Communication (between Council and Public)				
	Online forums	19%	3%	38%
	Online chat	3%	3%	16%

NB: regular use indicates ongoing recurring use, whereas infrequent use denotes sporadic use on one-off projects.

Although local authorities serving larger populations (particularly those serving populations over 100,000) tend to be more likely to facilitate regular e-democracy activities, many activities are also widely taken up by smaller authorities, but on a less regular basis. For example, 56% of local authorities serving a population of over 100,000 people provide e-bulletins. However, local authorities regularly utilising social media for e-democracy are more likely to be serving small to medium-sized populations.

Some activities outlined above are not widely used in New Zealand at this time, most likely due to a lack of locally provided software and support. However, local case studies and software opportunities are increasing as the market for e-democracy initiatives grows.

From the social media sites specified within the survey, YouTube and Facebook are the most commonly used at 22% each, followed by Twitter (11%), MySpace (5%) and Bebo (5%). Flickr and blogs were also specified as social media activities carried out by some local authorities.

The areas of a council that are most likely to use e-democracy tools are:

General Information Dissemination

- Communications 81%
- Strategy & Policy 58%
- Committee Administration 53%
- Mayor and/or Councillors 44%

Directed Information Dissemination Tools

- Strategy or policy 61%
- Regulatory 61%
- Communications 58%

Information Gathering Tools

- Strategy or policy 64%
- Communications 44%
- Regulatory 25%
- Youth Development 25%

Interactive Communication Tools

- Communications 53%
- Strategy or policy 50%
- Youth Development 42%
- Mayor and/or Councillors 31%

Most councils (59%) do not have a strategy in place for the implementation and management of e-democracy activities. For those councils that do have a strategy, a variety of approaches are taken in terms of who initiates and manages them including cross-organisational teams.

In regards to operating separate budgets for the installation and/or operation of e-democracy tools, the activities most likely to have a specific budget allocated are online submissions and online surveys. Activities are much more likely to be funded as part of larger projects within the council.

Very few councils have spent more than $50,000 on e-democracy tools or activities within the last year. Those spending more were more likely to be large authorities serving a population over 100,000, but 78% of these councils were still spending less than $50,000.

In managing e-democracy activities, 46% carried out the work using a mixture of in-house and outsourced resources – 38% managed e-democracy activities mainly in-house, with only a small percentage (8%) mostly outsourcing the work.

The key constraints to implementing e-democracy were specified as:

Moderate Constraints

- Lack of senior management / political support 49%
- Costs 46%
- Lack of knowledge 41%
- Lack of staff resources 38%

Major Constraints

- Costs 35%
- Lack of knowledge 35%
- Lack of IT resources 35%
- Lack of community support 24%

Other constraints specified included public apathy about local government, lack of broadband capability, transition to Auckland Council, and a lack of internal access to these resources as “they are often not seen as core business tools.”

GENERAL INFORMATION DISSEMINATION

Predominantly led by communications and public relations staff, general information dissemination includes activities such as online bulletins, web broadcasting by audio or video, blogs by councillors or senior officers, social media sites, and RSS feeds either for website content changes or for specific activities such as news releases.

Council areas most likely to lead these types of e-democracy activities were:

- Communications 81%
- Strategy or policy 58%
- Committee Administration 53%
- Mayor and /or Councillors 44%

The most common e-democracy tool currently used either regularly or for specific projects was:

- RSS feeds (e.g. for press releases) 34%
- Online bulletin board (e-bulletins) 31%
- RSS feeds for website content changes 25%
- Blogs by councillors or senior officers 20%
- Social media sites 20%
- Web broadcasting (audio or video) 6%

The case studies included with the appendices of this paper highlight information from Hurunui District Council which is using blogs as a way of encouraging greater participation and keeping the community informed. This works particularly well for project based information, both for the working party and for the wider community.

Opportunities

Looking forward, 36% of councils intend to implement web broadcasting in the next two years; 36% and 31% intend to implement RSS feeds – either for specific content such as press releases, or for website content changes; 25% intend to implement an online bulletin board, and 19% are aiming for social media sites and blogs.

Video usage is becoming more commonly used, with many councils seeing the advantages of using this medium to get a specific message across or to reach a different audience.

In the UK, a growing number of local authorities regularly webcast council meetings. This is carried out by installing cameras and using specialised software that enables easy archiving, streaming of video, and indexing of meetings so that viewers can watch at their convenience whichever parts of the meeting are of interest to them. However, in New Zealand, a similar low-cost, easy-to-use option is not yet apparent.

The use of social media by public sector agencies is growing. This provides a low-cost way of improving the reach of communication activities. However, consideration needs to be given to the types of social media tools that are appropriate for the target audience. Although social media tools can be used to improve general communications, participants may have an expectation that there will be at least some interaction or opportunities to comment. This is discussed in greater detail in the section on interactive communications.

RSS feeds are a simple and easy way of syndicating content. Although some individuals will use RSS feeds as a way of keeping track of content they are specifically interested in, there are other ways of targeting content at less technically advanced users. Once RSS feeds are available for news items or public notices, local community or media websites could be encouraged and supported to publish appropriate feeds.

Aspects to Consider

Digital communications need to be managed just as much as more traditional communications activities. Availability of the right technology does not mean that everyone should be able to use it. Councils may wish to develop policies covering video, social media and email bulletins, to enable different areas of the council to implement or get involved in general communication activities, but with guidance and structure as to what is appropriate.

Links and Resources

UK Government guidance and template for use of Twitter
http://blogs.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/digitalengagement/post/2009/07/21/Template-Twitter-strategy-for-Government-Departments.aspx

Sun Microsystems blogging policy
http://www.sun.com/communities/guidelines.jsp

Social media and web 2.0 in government
http://www.usa.gov/webcontent/technology/other_tech.shtml

Social media policies – over 100 examples
http://socialmediagovernance.com/policies.php

DIRECT INFORMATION DISSEMINATION

Predominantly led by strategy and policy or regulatory areas of council, activities related to direct information dissemination could include emergency alerts or updates on progress of licence or consents applications. This could also include communication to stakeholder groups such as resident and ratepayer associations, the local business community, or respondents to public consultations.

In Porirua, an email newsletter on the Village Planning Programme is sent four times a year to communities providing an update with work being undertaken. An email tracking system provides information on who has opened it and which links have been clicked on. It has received positive feedback from the community and saved time and distribution costs of sending by mail.

At present many authorities focus on more generalised information dissemination, such as email updates for new consents received, specific project information, or committee meeting agenda papers. 28% of local authorities that participated in the e-democracy survey use email alerts while 14% use SMS alerts.

In the appendices, additional information is provided on the use of email newsletters and specific advice about how to implement them.

Opportunities

There is an intention that usage of direct information dissemination will grow over the coming years, with 38% of councils expecting to introduce SMS alerts and 35% looking to introduce email alerts over the next two years.

This will meet customer expectations for more “opt-in” or targeted communications to manage the ever-growing and potentially overwhelming availability of information.

Links and Resources

Introduction to SMS use in Government
http://blog.e.govt.nz/wp-content/uploads/2009/06/an-introduction-to-government-use-of-sms.pdf

Common Tools Used

- USuite
- Smartmail
- Touchpoint
- OPTN Ltd – used by some councils for emergency SMS updates
- Datasquirt – SMS, email or multi-channel alerts

Further feedback on mailing list tools and on social media use is available in the appendices.

INFORMATION GATHERING

Information gathering is led predominantly by strategy or policy teams.

The most commonly used tools for information gathering are online submissions on consultations (69%) followed by online surveys (36%). A smaller percent of mainly larger councils are also using online polls on planning and legislation, or carrying out on-street surveys using hand held devices.

Opportunities

Councils have indicated that over the next two years they are most likely to implement:

- Online opinion polls on planning and legislation 39%
- Online surveys 33%
- E-petitions 25%
- Online submissions on consultations 22%

The case studies highlight numerous examples of how these types of tools could be used. For example:

- Rodney District Council has established an e-panel using online surveys for ongoing consultation and communication with local residents, with an intention to gather representative feedback from a cross-section of the local community.

- Selwyn District Council show how straightforward it is to run online surveys as part of consultation exercises and

- Wellington City Council highlight more innovative uses of technology through a budget simulator, which gives local citizens a greater understanding of the diverse range of services provided by the Council and the challenges of balancing budgets. Wellington City Council also provide insight into their e-petitions which is one of the methods used to help the public engage with the Council and have a voice in relation to the decisions that councillors make about their city.

A quarter of councils are considering implementing e-petitions over the coming two years. This will give the public an easy way of raising issues with the council. E-petitions can also provide an opportunity for the council to improve understanding of its role and decision-making procedures by publishing the outcomes of petitions received, or an explanation of why a petition is not appropriate to council business.

In the UK, Consultation Finder is a common tool used by many councils which also enables the publication of results and feedback for interested parties. The tool is a searchable database, often incorporating email alerts containing information about past, present and future consultations.
Voting handsets are also often used in the UK for public meetings as a way of increasing balanced and more representative public participation. They can be linked to power point presentations so that the audience can participate and see the results as they are collated.

Links and Resources

E-petitions guide
http://www.icele.org/site/scripts/documents.php?categoryID=11

Petitioning the Scottish Parliament http://scottishparliamentpetitions.blogspot.com/

Common Survey Tools Used

- Go-forms (for online submissions)
- LGOL online survey
- USuite
- Survey Monkey
- Touch Poll

Other Tools Used

- Budget simulator – Delib (UK), Bang the Table (Au)
- Consultation finder – Delib (UK), iNovem (UK), Community People (UK)
- Voting handsets – IML innovative audience response (Au)

NB: further information about online survey tools is available in the appendices.

INTERACTIVE COMMUNICATIONS

Interactive communications is most likely to be led by:
- Communications 53%
- Strategy or policy 50%
- Youth Development 42%
- Mayor and/or Councillors 31%

The types of activities that interactive communications cover include online forums and online chat. Social media can also provide a mechanism for engaging with the public in an interactive way.

Opportunities

A third of councils taking part in the survey have identified a desire to introduce online forums in the near future. Manukau City Council have provided a case study about their use of Google Groups, initially as part of their LTCCP consultation process to feed in to the discussions that politicians were having about priorities for the city.

Whakatane District Council are also using online forums to gain qualitative input into specific issues being consulted on, while a more community led approach is taking place in Canterbury through a Canterbury issues forum.

Another case study features Palmerston North City Council, which is using online chat to manage issues raised by the public. The Council has also developed a community issues register to provide a centralised point where it can publish answers to questions raised either online or through community meetings.

Additionally, several of the case studies mention the use of social media, which provides an opportunity for interactive communications as well as general information dissemination. In particular, several councils are using Bebo as a way of engaging youth and Twitter has also been seen as a useful tool to gain some informal feedback.

Rodney District Council also highlights work that is being done by one of their local councillors to inform and engage local residents in council and community activities.

Other Issues to Consider

As mentioned in the general information dissemination section, some consideration needs to be given to the types of tools and activities that are appropriate for the intended purpose. Using interactive tools can also provide a greater risk through less controlled public involvement, so more preparation and thought of how the activity will be managed is needed before implementation.

Links and Resources

Canterbury Local Issues forum
http://forums.e-democracy.org/groups/canterburyissues

Bristol City Council (UK) multimedia discussion forum
www.askbristol.com/viewfinder.php

Tools Used

- Bang the Table (Au)
- Google Groups
- e.democracy.org issues forum (US)

IMPROVING ACCESS TO DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY

The survey results highlighted that only 19% of councils felt that over 50% of their population would be likely to participate in e-democracy activities. Some specified a lack of broadband access for their community.

Over the coming years, this will be improved through the rural broadband strategy and access will also be improved in urban areas through the ultra fast broadband initiative. This will increase the opportunities available for councils to use digital media as a way of improving communication and engagement.

At present, the Aotearoa People's Network Kaharoa (APNK) is available in over 120 public libraries around New Zealand. It provides free access to broadband internet so that New Zealanders can benefit from accessing, experiencing and creating digital content.

Almost half of the councils who responded to the e-democracy survey provide free internet and wireless access through APNK. Others provide some free internet access either through libraries, i-sites or customer service centres, although there are often charges applied or restrictions on the sites available for viewing.

The amount of support available directly through councils is limited but some councils provide resources through business organisations, community networks and community grants. There are some nationally run initiatives, such as Community Net, which provide a national online resource for community organisations. Also available is Senior Net, a network of community run support and training aimed at older adults.

Links and Resources:

APNK
http://www.aotearoapeoplesnetwork.org

Community resources
www.seniornet.org.nz
www.community.net.nz

Other related sites

UK online centres provide people with access to computers and the internet, together with help and advice on how to use them
http://www.ukonlinecentres.com/

MyGuide – provides online training to help people take their first steps with computing
www.myguide.gov.uk

CONCLUSION

The key constraints to implementing e-democracy in local authorities were identified as costs (81%), lack of knowledge (76%), lack of IT resources (70%), and a lack of senior management/political support (68%).

However, many people who were featured in the case studies indicated that they did not spend a large amount of money or have advanced technical skills. This shows that a lot can be done with a limited budget, provided someone has the willingness and good communication skills required to implement a low-cost e-democracy tool.

In addition many content management systems now incorporate e-democracy tools such as blogs, online surveys or discussion forums. However, having some funding available allows more innovative use of the technology, or can pay for experienced facilitators to manage the process and provide expert support.

A lack of knowledge is being addressed by this paper, which was intended to share knowledge of e-democracy developments both in New Zealand and internationally. By using examples of other local authorities who have used e-democracy tools to aid decision-making processes, we can help persuade senior management and politicians that the benefits of e-democracy far outweigh the risks, as long as the implementation and ongoing management of these activities is well-considered.

Some work may still need to be done by local authorities to improve access to digital technology. As more services go online, and communication efforts are focused on digital technology to lower costs and improve efficiency, consideration needs to be given to those who do not have internet access.

E-democracy should not be considered the only solution to improve citizen engagement and communication. However, it can be seen as an excellent way of improving and enhancing existing activities, and a low cost way of building a strong relationship with a wide audience.

Importantly, e-democracy should be seen as an opportunity to change the way we deliver services and engage our local residents. Openness is a key factor in building trust in that relationship – it is better to be honest than it is to be seen as perfect. Most importantly, e-democracy is about communicating and engaging with local residents rather than at them.

FURTHER READING

New Zealand resources
E-government in New Zealand - http://www.e.govt.nz/

E-participation - http://www.e.govt.nz/policy/participation

Progress towards transformation - http://www.e.govt.nz/resources/research/progress

Digital New Zealand - http://www.digitalnz.org/

Digital strategy - http://www.digitalstrategy.govt.nz/

Participation wiki, including a guide to online participation - http://wiki.participation.e.govt.nz/wiki/Main_Page

UK-based resources
International Centre of Excellence for Local eDemocracy (organisation now discontinued but website resources remain) - www.icele.org

Digital dialogues - an independent review of ways in which central government can use information and communication technology (ICT) to enable and enhance public engagement - http://www.digitaldialogues.org.uk

Director of Digital Engagement -
http://blogs.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/digitalengagement/

US-based resources
Democracies online – connecting experts, practitioners, journalists and citizens across the world -
http://www.dowire.org/

Promising practices in online engagement -
http://www.publicagenda.org/pages/promising-practices-in-online-engagement

Australian resources
E-government resource centre -
http://www.egov.vic.gov.au/

International resources
OECD resources on policy issues related to internet governance -
http://www.oecd.org/internetgovernance

APPENDICES

Full survey results

Case studies:

- General information dissemination
  - Hurunui District Council

- Information gathering
  - Rodney District Council
  - Selwyn District Council
  - Wellington City Council

- Interactive communications
  - Manukau City Council
  - Palmerston North City Council
  - Whakatane District Council

Additional information on online surveys

Additional information on email newsletters

Additional information on use of social media

FULL SURVEY RESULTS

Responses from:

Council

Hurunui District Council	Queenstown Lakes District Council
Greater Wellington Regional Council	Selwyn District Council
Matamata-Piako District Council	Hawke's Bay Regional Council
Waimate District Council	North Shore City Council
Environment Southland	Gisborne District Council
Otago Regional Council	Stratford District Council
Kawerau District Council	Kapiti Coast District Council
Northland Regional Council	Upper Hutt City Council
Tasman District Council	Ashburton District Council
Hastings District Council	Far North District Council
Marlborough District Council	Buller District Council
Potorohanga District Council	Environment Canterbury
Christchurch City Council	Waitakere City Council
Whangarei District Council	Wairoa District Council
Western Bay of Plenty District Council	Rangitikei District Council
Rotorua District Council	Whakatane District Council
Napier City Council	Manukau City Council
Hutt City Council	Palmerston North City Council
Rodney District Council	

Q4. Population Served

Very Small (<10,000)	16%
Small (10,000 to 50,000)	35%
Medium (50,000 to 100,000)	24%
Large (>100,000)	24%

Percentage of Councils Responding
Councils Types

Regional	16%
City / District	81%
Unitary	3%

Q5. Estimated Population Participation Rate

0-5%	5%
5-10%	22%
10-30%	35%
30-50%	19%
50-70%	14%
>70%	5%

Q6 Council areas most likely to take a lead in adopting e-democracy services

Communications/Public Relations	86%
Strategy & Policy	57%
IT	46%
Regulatory	30%
Mayor / Council	27%
Committee Administration	24%
Youth Development	24%

Q7 If your libraries are part of the Aotearoa People's Network Kaharoa, in how many locations are computers made available through the network to allow public internet access?

0 or n/a	54%
1	11%
2 to 3	16%
> 3	19%

Q8 If your libraries are part of the Aotearoa People's Network Kaharoa, how many computers in total are available to allow public internet access through this network?

0 or n/a	54%
1 to 10	22%
11 to 30	14%
31 to 50	5%
> 50	5%

Q9 Other than the Aotearoa People's Network Kaharoa, is free public internet access available in any of the following council office areas?

Customer service points	19%
Library	25%

Other comments

- We provide free wifi in all libraries
- Cached reference sites only (for library and cust serv pts)
- Council funded free wireless Access
- Internet access is free on our library computers, however we do charge for access to social media sites such as Bebo, and mail sites (eg Yahoo)
- Library charges for the use of its 'Cyber-Space' web browsing computers.

Q10 Does your Council fund internet access, other than at Council offices, for any of the following groups?

- Mayor/Council	35%
- Sen. Officers	38%

Q11 Does your council fund any e-democracy activities that are managed externally such as through community groups or business organisations? Please indicate the e-democracy activity and community group or organisation

- None, Fundview is made available free in three i-site venues and the public library
- By Far North website
- Not specifically. However, the Council provides more than $28million p.a. in community funding to a wide variety of community groups, many of whom engage in activities that could be deemed to be related to e-democracy
- Waitakere Online Portal (free web presence for any group/business in Waitakere - feedback form for comments; potential for forums)
- Eco Matters Trust through partnership agreement, events, web, learning on sustainability. Waitakere Online, community groups and small businesses
- Training for community groups that promote e-democracy. Funding for community board website
- Huttcity.com

Q12 Does your council train any community groups in the use of e-democracy tools? Please indicate the community group and e-democracy tool

- The Libraries offer training on internet I believe.
- Yes, through the Waitakere Online portal. I know someone from sport Waitakere was trained through this scheme by an external provider.
- Training on free social media tools to Manukau Community Practitioner's Network
- Huttcity.com

Q13 Which of the following e-democracy tools does your Council use or plan to use to facilitate engagement or communication with the public?

General Information Dissemination (Council to Public)		**Infrequent Use**	**Regularly Use**	**Plan to Use in the next 2 yrs**
	Online bulletin board (e-bulletins)	5%	27%	24%
	Web broadcasting (audio or video)	5%	0%	35%
	Blogs by councillors or senior officers	14%	5%	19%
	Social media sites (e.g. Twitter, Facebook groups, MySpace etc.)	14%	8%	30%
	RSS feeds for Website Content Changes	3%	22%	30%
	Other RSS feeds, such as Press Releases	3%	30%	35%
Directed Information Dissemination (Council to Public)				
	Email alerts (e.g. updates of building permission status)	11%	16%	35%
	SMS alerts (e.g. dog impounding alerts for a dog owner)	14%	3%	38%

Information Gathering (Public to Council)				
	Online submissions on consultations	14%	57%	22%
	Online opinion polls on planning and legislation	3%	5%	41%
	Online surveys	19%	19%	32%
	Voting handsets (for public meetings)	0%	0%	5%
	Tablets or handheld devices for on street surveys	8%	8%	14%
	E-democracy games or simulations	0%	0%	16%
	E-petitions	0%	0%	27%
Interactive Communication (between Council and Public)				
	Online forums	19%	3%	38%
	Online chat	3%	3%	16%

NB regular use indicates ongoing recurring use, whereas infrequent use denotes sporadic use on one-off projects.

Q14. If you have indicated in the previous question that you use social media sites, please give further information about which ones:

- Youtube 22%
- Facebook 22%
- Twitter 11%
- Bebo 5%
- MySpace 5%

Other activities mentioned were flickr and blogs

Q15. Were there any tools that your council uses to facilitate engagement with the public that are not identified in the previous question?

- Customer initiated text updates (e.g. text keyword spas for opening hours and admission prices)
- Touch poll surveys (on a tablet) at facilities
- We use usuite mail to manage our e-newsletter and regular email groups for engagement purposes
- E-subscriptions to topics of interest on our website
- No, just survey tablets and counter tops
- Online forms via website
- Google groups

Q16. Applying the tool categories from Question 13, please indicate which areas of council you think will make the MOST use of the different kinds of e-democracy tools in the long term.

	General Information Dissemination Tools	Directed Information Dissemination Tools	Information Gathering Tools	Interactive Communication Tools
Committee Administration	53%	36%	19%	8%
Communications / Public Relations	81%	58%	44%	53%
Strategy or Policy	58%	64%	67%	53%
Information Technology	14%	17%	17%	17%
Regulatory	33%	64%	25%	25%
Youth Development	33%	33%	28%	44%
Mayor and/or Councillors	44%	22%	22%	33%

Q17. Does your council have a strategy in place for the introduction and management of e-democracy activities?

- Yes 39%
- No 61%

If yes, please describe the group(s) responsible for implementing elements of the strategy and the elements themselves.

- Secretariat, Communications
- Somewhat. Some elements of e-democracy (such as opinion polls and blogs) are in our web strategy to be developed over the next two years. Our web team is a team of two - one from Communications, in charge of the content and direction of the site, and one from IT in charge of any technical development.
- Customer and Information Service Division has responsibility to implement the Customer Service Improvement Strategy, the engagement plan and the marketing and communications plan
- Communications
- Community Relations
- Will be developed as part of ISSP
- Website redevelopment group
- Currently under development by Public Affairs Group
- For LTCCP we do but not across the board. We have a strategy but not the tools or permission to execute it, given planned changes to Auckland governance and the impact of budgets and business as usual activities.
- IT, communications and democracy services

- We have a Web Strategy and a Steering Group (comprising Communications, Information Management and Customer Relations). They look at new initiatives in the e-democracy space and fit into the wider Information Management work programme.
- Web development group led by Information Management, Communications and Strategy which includes representatives from across the council.

Q18. Does your council operate a separate budget for the installation and/or operation of any of the following e-democracy tools?

Online bulletin board (e-bulletins)	5%
Web broadcasting (audio or video)	3%
Blogs by councillors or senior officers	0%
Social media sites (e.g. Twitter, Facebook groups, MySpace etc.)	3%
RSS feeds for Website Content Changes	8%
Other RSS feeds, such as Press Releases	11%
Email alerts (e.g. updates of building permission status)	5%
SMS alerts (e.g. dog impounding alerts for a dog owner)	8%
Online submissions on consultations	22%
Online opinion polls on planning and legislation	5%
Online surveys	16%
Voting handsets (for public meetings)	0%
Tablets or handheld devices for on street surveys	5%
E-democracy games or simulations	5%
E-petitions	3%
Online forums	5%
Online chat	0%

Q19. Are the installation and/or operation of any of the following e-democracy tools budgeted for as part of larger budgetary activities or projects in your council?

Online bulletin board (e-bulletins)	14%
Web broadcasting (audio or video)	19%
Blogs by councillors or senior officers	8%
Social media sites (e.g. Twitter, Facebook groups, MySpace etc.)	19%
RSS feeds for Website Content Changes	33%
Other RSS feeds, such as Press Releases	36%
Email alerts (e.g. updates of building permission status)	25%
SMS alerts (e.g. dog impounding alerts for a dog owner)	22%
Online submissions on consultations	47%
Online opinion polls on planning and legislation	17%
Online surveys	36%
Voting handsets (for public meetings)	6%
Tablets or handheld devices for on street surveys	14%
E-democracy games or simulations	3%
E-petitions	11%
Online forums	25%
Online chat	8%

Q20. Please estimate the total annual expenditure on e-democracy tools by your council:

		Very Small	Small	Medium	Large
	All	<10k	10k to 50k	50k to 100k	>100k
0 to $50k	73%	50%	69%	89%	78%
$50k to $150k	5%	0%	8%	0%	11%
$150k to $350k	3%	0%	0%	0%	11%
> $350k	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

Q21. If you implement e-democracy activities, is the work likely to be carried out in-house or outsourced?

		Very Small	Small	Medium	Large
	All	<10k	10k to 50k	50k to 100k	>100k
In-house	38%	0%	38%	56%	44%
Outsourced	8%	17%	8%	11%	0%
Mixed	46%	50%	46%	33%	56%

Q22. Does your council employ any of the following activities to directly engage the public or interest group?

- Community boards or ward committees 58%
- Market research surveys 69%
- Focus groups 47%
- Citizens panels 14%
- Customer feedback surveys 72%

Other (please specify)

- Annual resident satisfaction survey
- Call centre and web enquiry monitoring
- Website online Fix-it-Form

Q23. If your council currently uses some e-democracy tools, please specify the software used below

- u-suite mail, u-suite survey, youtube, self developed submission solution, achieveforms
- All done in-house.
- MySource Matrix
- DIY using asp
- Community server, in-house apps
- TouchPoll tablets. No one software utilised, but have used TouchPoll market research software extensively to get a number of surveys done.
- Expert CMS, MS Outlook
- Joomla and twitter
- Ubiquity – Usuite for mailing list / email newsletters and online surveys

Q24. In your council, what do you think the key constraints are to implementing e-democracy initiatives to facilitate engagement with the public?

Constraint Type	Moderate Implementation Constraint	Major Implementation Constraint
Costs	46%	35%
Lack of knowledge	41%	35%
Risks too high	30%	8%
Lack of staff resources	38%	14%
Lack of IT resources	35%	35%
Lack of senior management/political support	49%	19%
Lack of community support	30%	24%
Don't see benefit	35%	14%

Q25. Please identify any key constraints to implementing e-democracy initiatives that apply to your council that are not mentioned above. Please include whether they are moderate or major constraints.

- Apathy is the biggest constraint - public apathy about local government. Most people will not be interested in using any consultation tool. Those who are, are already well-served by the local newspapers which are free and go to 90+ percent of households. Availability is another. Two thirds of our houses have the internet - the richer ones. Our libraries have free internet access, but a library with a crowd of kids breathing down your neck waiting to play games is hardly the place to read turgid council notices and make considered responses. In short, we are not confident that e-democracy would significantly improve democratic participation in the district. We like the idea and are happy to implement low cost (in time and resources) e-democracy initiatives, a step at a time, but simply cannot see the cost-benefit equation favouring a major investment at this time.
- Only about 50% of population are within range of broadband. Satellite is available, but is too expensive for most.
- Transition to Auckland council
- Lack of our community access to ICT and broadband
- I would buy into an initiative by ALGIM to produce a centralised method of implementing a range of e-Democracy services.
- Moderate - lack of access to broadband throughout whole region, so not everyone can see or use what we put on the website.
- Moderate - cost/benefit of developing e-systems doesn't show net benefits
- Supercity has meant a pull-back in e-governance budgets for web/email initiatives. Constraints exist on funding, so though e-engagement system was approved for use in LTCCP engagement, the tool wasn't assessed or implemented in time for submission period by IM department, then later budget was pulled. This meant budget and systems are major constraint for Public Affairs team, who would like to use the tool now for other projects.
- Cellphone and internet coverage in the district
- Access to a lot of these tools, as they are blocked for internal use. This is a major constraint. They are also often not seen as core business tools' (this is slowly changing however). Lack of awareness/knowledge in council around the effectiveness of these tools (moderate constraint). Concern around risk that if these tools are not managed effectively, it is a brand reputation issue (major constraint).

- Time and resources to scope, setup and maintain the initiatives on the part of the business owners of best fit. A general lack of top-level engagement and support to do so. A lack of buy-in at an executive level. It's just seen as web rather than a broader business/organisational effort and importance.

CASE STUDIES

General Information Dissemination

Hurunui District Council

Sam Lynn, Youth Programme Coordinator and Amelia Dalley, Policy Planner

RE: use of social media – Bebo site, Youth Voices blog, Waipara River Management blog

1. **When did you start these initiatives?**

   Sam - The Bebo site was started in September last year when the Council's youth programme was set up.

   Amelia - The Youth Voices blog was set up in February this year. I also manage another blog - the Waipara River Management blog - for a working party group that the Council has established.

2. **Why did you start these initiatives?**

   Sam - We started a Bebo site because we set up a youth programme – we were trying to link to youth and trying to meet them at their level.

   Amelia - The Youth Voices blog was set up as part of a youth consultation strategy for encouraging youth to submit on the LTCCP. The Waipara River Management blog was set up as a means of communication for the working party to keep the conversations going between meetings.

3. **Who is responsible for managing them on a day-to-day basis?**

   Sam - I manage the Bebo site.

   Amelia - I manage the Youth Voices blog and the Waipara blog.

4. **How does your use of e-democracy initiatives fit into council policies and planning?**

   Sam - I am not entirely sure about that because I'm not really involved with the Council's policies and planning. But the youth are having an input through the youth programme. So by having the Bebo page they are able to comment on things that are coming up and have their say through that.

   Amelia - The Youth blog is to encourage greater participation from young people in the district, which fits in with the Council's goals of encouraging public participation and promoting democracy. The Waipara River blog fits in with our planning process and is

an extra tool in making sure that the working party communicates to work through management issues and come up with a consensus on a management strategy.

5. **What was the initial set up cost of your e-democracy initiatives?**

   Sam - There was no cost for the Bebo site. I am unsure about the blog but I don't think there was a set-up cost.

   Amelia - The blogs are hosted on Blogspot, which doesn't cost anything.

6. **If your e-democracy initiatives were built or set up in-house, how much time was needed to establish them?**

   Sam - It took me approximately half an hour to an hour to set it all up to start with.

   Amelia - In house, it took me about an hour to set up the Youth blog. The Waipara River blog was set up by someone else.

7. **What types of skills were needed?**

   Sam - You needed to know your way around Bebo to be able to set the site up. Basic computer skills were also needed.

   Amelia - Just knowledge of the availability of the service and basic computer skills. I use some html coding a bit but that is just extra tools.

8. **How much time is needed to manage the day-to-day operations of your e-democracy initiatives?**

   Sam - I check in on the Bebo site not necessarily daily but at least weekly to see who has been on it and what comments have been added etc. In terms of uploading photos, that can take a while depending on what computer you are on. On average it takes half an hour a week to manage the site.

   Amelia - I check the stats about once a week. And it only takes about quarter of an hour to write a post.

9. **Are there any terms and conditions of use?**

   Sam - There are basic terms and conditions of use re language use, no R18 material, etc. Bebo do have terms and conditions when you sign up. I think they are fairly standard.

   Amelia - I haven't applied any beyond the terms of use of the Blogspot site itself.

10. **Do you have a plan in place to deal with difficult issues raised as a result of your e-democracy?**

    Sam - Not really. Basically it's just keeping the page censored. Occasionally a child will add something that has swearing in it and I will go through and delete it. But apart from that there's not really a plan in place.

Amelia - There are a number of different issues that could arise. One issue is the recording of public information so I make sure never to erase or edit over old posts and they remain in the database. As far as people being inappropriate, I have full control over what is on the blog and can easily delete inappropriate comments. The terms and conditions of use of Blogspot provide some protection from this also.

11. How often are your e-democracy initiatives used (e.g. daily, weekly, monthly, etc)?

Sam - I would say probably weekly. If, for example, photos have just been uploaded to the site it will get a higher usage as the kids go on there to look at the photos. But it's usually used weekly not daily.

Amelia - The Youth Voices blog is not very well used, it is viewed weekly, but no feedback has been received through it. The Waipara River blog is better used and has had posts made by members of the public. Usage goes up when a new post has been made.

12. Who is the audience of your e-democracy initiatives? Please provide the number of people who use them along with other demographic information (e.g. age, gender, location).

Sam - Mainly youth. There is a page that people can access without being on Bebo which is given out as information. The membership of people to the group page changes. At the moment it is at 98. Bebo has lost its popularity so as people have deleted their pages that has declined membership, but it fluctuates between 90-100 members. There has probably been 150 members in total but because the initiative has been around for a year the numbers have changed as people have come and gone. In terms of age, it would be mostly 12-15 year olds, with the occasional older user. There is a mix of genders – probably slightly more girls than boys. All users are located within Hurunui because that is where the youth programme is held.

Amelia - The Youth Voices blog is for anyone who identifies themselves as a young person in the district and feels more comfortable with using a blog. The Waipara River blog is for the working party and other interested people follow it as well. In that respect it is also useful in keeping the community informed.

13. How do participants know what is being done with their comments?

Sam - Basically comments come up on the page and I tend to respond either directly or on the page. They know things are being done because as things happen with the programme they can see results.

Amelia - I haven't had any comments on the Waipara River blog since taking it on and no comments have been received through Blogspot. For the Youth blog, if comments are posted to specific consultation items then it will be treated like a submission, although they are encouraged to submit through email. And comments on the Waipara River blog can be discussed at meetings.

14. What kind of feedback have you had from participants?

Sam - There has been a lot of comments on the photos. The polls haven't really been accessed. But the comments section has had quite a few comments over the year. I think it is a good way for people to give positive feedback.

Amelia - The Waipara River blog has received good feedback.

Additional Notes:

Sam - I'm finding that when I first started the Bebo site it was quite popular. Now I know – especially through my own personal use – that Bebo is not the "in thing" anymore. Most people have gone to Facebook and I am in the process of setting up a Facebook, but then it is mostly the older people that have gone to Facebook. I am also looking at doing something like a blog that youth can access in school, because of course a lot of schools block Bebo. So I'm in the process of working out something that can be accessed through schools to increase awareness.

Amelia - The Youth Blog probably needs more awareness, it is not picked up by search engines and I don't expect that many young people will visit the Council website to find the link. I am setting up an online survey using Survey Monkey for a consultation item going out in about a week. This is another free service and will be targeted at anyone interested in responding. I see it as a trial to gauge interest in this type of initiative in our district. One thing to keep in mind is that access to broadband in homes in the Hurunui district is limited due to many remote areas making it difficult to access data on the internet. Therefore it is not expected that e-democracy forums are going to get a huge response but it's more about providing a greater range of ways that people can communicate with us.

Information Gathering

Rodney District Council

Carol Hayward, Research Manager

RE: social media, e-panel

1. **When did you start these initiatives?**

   April 2009

2. **Why did you start these initiatives?**

   On my first day in the office (at the beginning of March), the Chief Executive said he'd like us to set up a Facebook group as a way of engaging with a wider audience than the usual suspects. We haven't yet started a general Rodney District Facebook group but we have started other activities to improve our communications and to start an ongoing dialogue with local residents.

3. **Who is responsible for managing them on a day-to-day basis?**

   Different people are responsible for different activities. We felt this was better as it means that the activity can be 'owned' by the right team. This helps with credibility. For example, our Rodney youth Bebo and Facebook groups are being managed by our Youth Development Worker. She is in the best position to be able to engage with young people, keep them informed of what's happening and get them involved. Our twitter account and email newsletters are being managed by the Communications team and the e-panel is being managed by me from within the Strategy team. This also means that the same information is not being repeated across the different social networking sites and is more targeted towards the particular audience.

4. **How does your use of e-democracy initiatives fit into council policies and planning?**

   The Rodney Youth Bebo and Facebook groups were set up to help gain feedback on the draft youth strategy. It's also an action within the strategy that we need to improve the way we inform and involve young people in Council issues. That provides the purpose of those groups. Twitter and email newsletters are key tools to improve communications quickly and cheaply and they enhance our off-line activities. The e-panel is being used to gain feedback on a number of Council areas of work so that we can feed that into policies and ensure that our service is meeting customers' needs.

5. **What was the initial set up cost of your e-democracy initiatives?**

   The social media activities were free – our Web Communications Advisor spent some time creating a design for them and some time has been spent in promoting them but there's been no external cost. The email newsletter and e-panel are initially costing us $500 a month to manage mailing lists and run online surveys. We've also spent about

$1,000 on some marketing material plus quite a bit of time in selecting a sample of people to promote the e-panel to, and sending a postal mail-out for recruitment. On the whole social media activities have been a lot cheaper to conduct than more traditional forms of communication.

6. **If your e-democracy initiatives were built or set up in-house, how much time was needed to establish them?**

   Time spent in designing the social media sites was probably around half a day for each from our Web Communications Advisor. Time carrying out the postal mailout for the e-panel was several days as the mail-out went to around 5,000 people.

7. **What types of skills were needed?**

   Good communication skills, some design skills are helpful but not an essential. The key is that who-ever is responsible, needs to be able to spend some time communicating with residents / members and to make sure they're able to respond to queries or issues raised. It's more about being open and responsive rather than needing any special skills.

8. **How much time is needed to manage the day-to-day operations of your e-democracy initiatives?**

   Half an hour a day for each social media activity is useful to be able to post comments and deal with any comments / responses made. If there are 'hot topics' that are attracting more questions / comments, more time is needed to keep on top of things. For the e-panel, the management of it is fairly straightforward. I'm currently expecting to carry out a survey every two months which means I'll be sending an email out about once a fortnight which usually generates a bit of direct feedback. The analysis of the results or setting up surveys takes longer. So, most weeks, I'd suggest about half a day a week but analysis can take several days or a week depending on the complexity of the survey.

9. **Are there any terms and conditions of use?**

   Not at this stage. When we set up online forums there will be though.

10. **Do you have a plan in place to deal with difficult issues raised as a result of your e-democracy?**

    Not formally but again we will need one before we launch the online forums.

11. **How often are your e-democracy initiatives used (e.g. daily, weekly, monthly, etc)?**

    Twitter is used several times a week (not quite daily), the Rodney Youth Facebook and Bebo groups are updated with new information at least once a month but the manager of those sites interacts with them most days. The e-panel is being sent surveys every two months at present.

12. **Who is the audience of your e-democracy initiatives? Please provide the number of people who use them along with other demographic information (e.g. age, gender, location**).

    Rodney Youth Bebo and Facebook groups have 100 / 187 members respectively. Twitter has 130 followers. Email newsletters have over 200 subscribers and there are 440 e-panel members. For the social media groups we don't have any demographic information. For email newsletters we ask for their ward or town and that's divided up into Central ward – 4%, Hibiscus Coast – 44%, Northern ward - 20%, Western ward – 20% plus 12% who aren't in Rodney or don't know - this isn't too far off our census data. The e-panel has good participation from people over 35 but we are actively marketing it to younger people to make it more representative.

13. **How do participants know what is being done with their comments?**

    For the e-panel we are sending them the results of surveys and also expect to send them follow-up emails letting them know what's being done as a result of their feedback.

14. **What kind of feedback have you had from participants?**

    It's early days yet but we have had some positive comments from participants. For the e-panel, a few people have said they're pleased to have been asked and think it's a good start in improving our communications. People were also impressed to see us making use of Twitter, something that they thought would be too outside the norm for us.

Additional Notes:

One of our councillors has set up a Hibiscus Coast Facebook group and attracted over 2,000 members. It is being used as a way of keeping local people informed and involved in council and community issues. Discussions have covered council activities such as pay and display, local projects and issues relating to the new Auckland governance arrangements. One of the ways he encourages people to stay in touch is by sending out regular emails with the latest news and issues.

Selwyn District Council

Rowan Taylor, Policy and Communication Advisor

RE: online surveys

1. **When did you start these initiatives?**

   About three years ago.

2. **Why did you start these initiatives?**

   As a way of getting ideas on issues – though I fear that the recent uptake of Survey Monkey by some staff may herald their mis-use as a survey tool rather than a consultation tool.

3. **Who is responsible for managing them on a day-to-day basis?**

   Everyone and no-one. Our Website Administrator, Deb Webb, has technical hands-on control, but the content, duration, data analysis etc is up to whichever staff member is running that project.

4. **How does your use of e-democracy initiatives fit into council policies and planning?**

   No explicit connection. It is just one more tool for getting the job done.

5. **What was the initial set up cost of your e-democracy initiatives?**

   Negligible. Our IT staff designed a simple online questionnaire. Our communication staff advertised it in the newspaper. Our project management staff analysed the results.

6. **If your e-democracy initiatives were built or set up in-house, how much time was needed to establish them?**

   Turning the questionnaire into an online tool took a few hours.

7. **What types of skills were needed?**

   Knowledge of HTML and PHP.

8. **How much time is needed to manage the day-to-day operations of your e-democracy initiatives?**

   Very little.

9. **Are there any terms and conditions of use?**

   No.

10. Do you have a plan in place to deal with difficult issues raised as a result of your e-democracy?

No.

11. How often are your e-democracy initiatives used (e.g. daily, weekly, monthly, etc)?

Ad hoc – on average, monthly.

12. Who is the audience of your e-democracy initiatives? Please provide the number of people who use them along with other demographic information (e.g. age, gender, location).

Unsure. To date, online questionnaires (I refuse to call them surveys as they are self-selecting samples which are not representative of the broader community) are used for consultation on specific projects, generally plan changes, reserve designs, township layout designs etc.

13. How do participants know what is being done with their comments?

They get the same general information that they get in any other consultation exercise, explaining how the information will be used and the timeframe for reporting it and making decisions based on it, as well as (if applicable) the opportunity to make future submissions.

14. What kind of feedback have you had from participants?

Respondents send in their responses to the questions, but I personally am unaware of them commenting on the online questionnaire itself. The staff using the method haven't commented majorly to my knowledge either. Occasionally, where online questionnaires have not been used in a consultation project, we have received one or two complaints from people expecting that option.

Wellington City Council

Svea Cunliffe-Steel, City Secretary

RE: e-petitions

1. When did you start these initiatives?

ePetitions was launched in early 2007.

2. Why did you start these initiatives?

In the interests of facilitating public participation in the democratic process, and promoting engagement.

3. Who is responsible for managing them on a day-to-day basis?

Administrative support of the ePetitions system is provided by the City Secretary and her Committee Advisors from Democratic Services. They provide procedural support and advice to petitioners, and manage the process of approving and confirming a new petition, as well as scheduling closed petitions for their presentation to Councillors.

4. How does your use of e-democracy initiatives fit into council policies and planning?

Delivering trust and confidence in civic decision-making includes seeking input from residents and engaging them in our decision-making. Our Strategic approach in relation to engagement and governance is focused on a number of areas, including:

- providing residents with high quality, relevant information about the city and Council decisions
- being open and transparent
- involving residents and groups early in the decision-making process
- involving a wide range of community advisory groups in the decision-making process
- seeking new, more relevant or meaningful ways to engage with residents and involve them in decision-making.

We believe that ePetitions provide a simple, easy to use mechanism for the public to engage with the Council and have a voice in relation to the decisions that councillors make about their city.

5. What was the initial set up cost of your e-democracy initiatives?

In-house.

6. If your e-democracy initiatives were built or set up in-house, how much time was needed to establish them?

Hard to say as it was done as part of an ongoing project in addition to other work, but it is estimated that it would have taken at least 6 weeks fulltime work for two web staff.

7. What types of skills were needed?

It had a Web Project Manager and information architect – responsible for the structure, flow and design of the module pages, and working with Democratic Services to establish requirements. The Web Centre also ran user testing and had one Web Coder responsible for the module built and functionality.

Skills required:
Project Management
Experienced web information architect and page designer
Senior php web coder.

8. How much time is needed to manage the day-to-day operations of your e-democracy initiatives?

The administration of ePetitions requires between five and ten hours per week. This time includes contact with applicants, petitioners, liaising with Council Directors and Officers, and with Elected Members, as well as ongoing monitoring for incoming applications and printing reports and petitions.

9. Are there any terms and conditions of use?

Petitions are subject to approval from the City Secretary and/or an appropriate Director of Wellington City Council. Petitions are subject to the criteria for declining an ePetition as follows:

To participate in the Wellington City Council ePetitions service, we require you to read and accept the following Conditions of Use.

In creating an ePetition, you acknowledge that you meet the following conditions:

- the contact details you provide are correct and true
- your petition does not contain false or defamatory information or groundless allegations
- your petition does not contain objectionable language
- your petition is not used for self promotion, political or otherwise
- your petition is not founded on personal slander or attack
- your petition is within the jurisdiction of the Council
- your petition takes into account the legal processes that the Council must follow (e.g. the resource consent application and approval processes).

The Wellington City Council reserves the right to decline an ePetition and will publish the reason for its refusal on the website. The Council also reserves the right to amend these conditions of use at any time.

The Council does not accept any responsibility or liability for the ePetitions posted on the website.

10. Do you have a plan in place to deal with difficult issues raised as a result of your e-democracy?

Wellington City Council has clear guidelines around escalating difficult issues. The City Secretary works closely with Directors and the Council's Policy Manager. When complex issues arise, the City Secretary seeks advice from the leading Director and, if necessary, the General Counsel. The majority of issues are jurisdictional.

Occasionally, the Council also gets user complaints. When these occur, the City Secretary works with the Web Manager and, if necessary, seeks advice from the Council's dedicated Issues Resolutions Office.

11. How often are your e-democracy initiatives used (e.g. daily, weekly, monthly, etc)?

Democratic Services receives, on average, three ePetition applications per week. Note that this number is steadily growing and that not all applications received are accepted.

Online visitors to the system are able to access petitions on a 24/7 basis and signatures are constantly being added to petitions.

12. Who is the audience of your e-democracy initiatives? Please provide the number of people who use them along with other demographic information (e.g. age, gender, location).

The system does not record specific information.

Generally, the ePetition system was established to allow another form of access for citizens and ratepayers of Wellington to raise issues with Councillors. However, ePetitions can be initiated and/or signed by any person with a valid email address.

13. How do participants know what is being done with their comments?

The steps for signing an ePetition include information on what information will be released and in what form(s). The information provided by petitioners and signatories will only be used for the intended purpose.

14. What kind of feedback have you had from participants?

Nearly all feedback received by Democratic Services is positive. The service is administered in a way that provides users with an enjoyable and user-friendly system.

Some users have provided negative, but constructive, criticism. This is acknowledged and noted for use in reviewing the system.

Where a negative experience does occur, it is predominantly due to user-error and/or technical failures. In these situations, the reasons are clearly explained and, if the Council is at fault, the problems are remedied as a priority.

Wellington City Council

Jaime Dyhrberg, Senior Strategic Analyst

RE: budget simulator

1. **When did you start these initiatives?**

   Planning and procurement began in late November 2008. Budget simulator went live in February 2009

2. **Why did you start these initiatives?**

   We wanted to roll-out a comprehensive early engagement programme for our LTCCP (getting community input before we released the draft plan for consultation) and we thought that among the suite of e-engagement initiatives (we had standalone discussion boards, a Facebook group, and the budget simulator) it would be useful to provide the opportunity for people to indicate their broad spending priorities and then capture the results in relation to an average rates impact.

3. **Who is responsible for managing them on a day-to-day basis?**

   The budget simulator is essentially an "off the shelf" product we purchased from Delib, a UK company. One of our LTCCP engagement team members was responsible for initial set-up (which followed at template), promotion of the website, and managing the reporting of results.

4. **How does your use of e-democracy initiatives fit into council policies and planning?**

   The results were reported as part of the feedback on the LTCCP early engagement programme.

5. **What was the initial set up cost of your e-democracy initiatives?**

   Around $11k to purchase the 1-year licence from Delib and then officer time. We had a fair amount of set-up work because the standard product has the starting rates increase at 0% and we wanted the starting point to be a rates increase of 4.5%. The initial programming created a reporting glitch and it took quite a lot of testing at our end to work out the cause of the glitch.

6. **If your e-democracy initiatives were built or set up in-house, how much time was needed to establish them?**

   N/A

7. **What types of skills were needed?**

   As an off the shelf product, the inputs required from us were all templated. Our tasks included:

- Working out meaningful budget categories – developing descriptions for each category and getting the relevant financial information.
- Developing consequences information for increases and decreases in each expenditure category.
- Providing text for the opening page – on what is the budget simulator and what the council will do with the information.

The outputs came in the form of an Excel spreadsheet so some knowledge in data analysis is required.

8. How much time is needed to manage the day-to-day operations of your e-democracy initiatives?

The budget simulator was live for two periods – four weeks in February and again for four weeks in April-May.

During this time there were no day-to-day maintenance tasks but we did spend some time promoting the budget simulator.

9. Are there any terms and conditions of use?

Not for the budget simulator. We were able to track the IP address so we were able to remove multiple submissions from the same address. This means that legitimate submissions from different people at the same IP address (like from the Council) had the potential to be deleted if they provided the same demographic information as other submissions, or provided no demographic information or supporting comments, to allow us to discern whether it was a unique posting.

There is the potential that a particularly determined individual could submit multiple budgets from unique IP addresses but given that the results were not binding we would say good luck to them.

10. Do you have a plan in place to deal with difficult issues raised as a result of your e-democracy?

For the budget simulator there was no way for people to make visible postings so there was no need to create a risk management strategy.

Comments (both positive and negative) on the budget simulator did appear on other e-engagement activities – but our approach for these was to be very light-handed in moderating comments and we relied on self-moderation.

11. How often are your e-democracy initiatives used (e.g. daily, weekly, monthly, etc)?

The budget simulator was live for two periods – four week in February and again for four weeks in April-May. It was actively used at all times – but was particularly well used on weekdays during business hours.

12. Who is the audience of your e-democracy initiatives? Please provide the number of people who use them along with other demographic information (e.g. age, gender, location).

For the early engagement round in February – we had 318 budgets submitted – but counted only 168 as unique (i.e. unique IP address with unique results).

31 people left demographic information (so is not quite a valid sample size) as follows:

Gender:
Male 19, Female 12

Age:
15-24 yrs 2, 25-34 7, 35-44 14, 45-54 6, 55-64 0, 65+ 2

Ethnicity:
NZ Euro 23, Māori 2, Other 6

13. How do participants know what is being done with their comments?

We outlined on the introduction page how the information would be used and directed them to our LTCCP website.

14. What kind of feedback have you had from participants?

A number of people chose to post in the comments section positive things about the simulator. It was particularly heartening that some people had a more sympathetic view of councillors having "walked in their shoes" for a few minutes and developed a better impression that budgeting was much more difficult than increasing services but decreasing rates. There were also some posts on the discussion boards (both positive and negative) about the simulator.

Additional Notes:

The information we received from the submissions provided a useful indication on spending priorities and overall rates increases. In a totally coincidental way, the average preferred rates increase from submitted budgets was the exact rates increase we consulted on in the draft LTCCP.

The comments were particularly helpful as we found that people articulated how they really grappled with finding the right balance in the diverse services provided by the council. If we were to do the budget simulator again we would provide greater encouragement for people to provide comments.

Interactive communications

Manukau City Council

Kylie Gibbon, Web Strategy Editor, Communications and Events Group

RE: Google groups, Twitter

1. **When did you start these initiatives?**

   Google groups were set up in November 2008. That was prior to us going out with our LTCCP consultation process. The idea behind that was that we let people start having discussions around what their priorities were for Manukau city over the next ten years before the politicians started debating this, so that people could have their input right from the start into discussions around where the money was going to go and what we were going to spend it on.

   We set up our Twitter account earlier this year, around March/April. At the moment we are using it predominantly as an information channel. So it is just another way for us to get our key messages out.

2. **Why did you start these initiatives?**

   See above.

3. **Who is responsible for managing them on a day-to-day basis?**

   The communications team is responsible for managing all of these different channels. We do that from the perspective of moderating and administration – so setting them up and looking after them and making sure they are running, as well as promoting discussion and debate. So we actually post questions to get the discussion started.

4. **How does your use of e-democracy initiatives fit into council policies and planning?**

   We are just "dipping our toe in the water" at the moment. It is really early days for us. But basically we are just using it as part of the engagement process when we go out with things around policies and planning, particularly with the Google groups. That was all about getting people involved with the LTCCP so that they can have their say. But we have starting using Twitter as well to pose questions to people about what they would like to see. For example, we were proposing to introduce wheelie bins into Manukau city because we don't have them at the moment. So we put the question on Twitter and said "What do you think about having wheelie bins?" We got some people "tweeting" back what they thought so our use of e-democracy is really around that engagement process. It is another channel for us to engage with people.

5. **What was the initial set up cost of your e-democracy initiatives?**

   The set up cost was actually really low because the tools are on the web so you do not have to pay for licensing or anything like that. The main cost is just around time and people's resources.

6. **If your e-democracy initiatives were built or set up in-house, how much time was needed to establish them?**

   It took about two hours to get them set up and to put our branding onto them. Then we probably spend around half an hour to an hour a day on daily maintenance – checking, moderating, posting questions, etc.

7. **What types of skills were needed?**

   From our perspective I guess it is communications skills because our e-democracy is being run by the communications team. So it's the ability to be able to write really clearly and concisely, particularly with Twitter because you've only got 140 characters. You also need good judgement as well when it comes to moderation, to be able to know whether comments are appropriate or should be moderated, etc.

8. **How much time is needed to manage the day-to-day operations of your e-democracy initiatives?**

   Half an hour to an hour a day.

9. **Are there any terms and conditions of use?**

   To start with we thought that we'd set our e-democracy up and see how it goes. But we are rapidly realising that we do need some policy around it. We are doing the obvious things, like moderating for inappropriate language and potentially defamatory statements. But we are definitely now thinking that we need to have policy around what we are doing, what information we are going to share and what we are expecting people to do. For example, with Twitter, are we going to actually open up and use it as a full on customer channel, or are we going to just use it purely as a communications channel. At the moment we are having these discussions and we have set up a working group to have a look at policy and procedure and getting some terms of use together.

10. **Do you have a plan in place to deal with difficult issues raised as a result of your e-democracy?**

    See above.

11. **How often are your e-democracy initiatives used (e.g. daily, weekly, monthly, etc)?**

    We use them on a daily basis. With the discussion forums, they're specifically based around campaigns. So the Google groups were specifically around the LTCCP and

we are working on another initiative at the moment for that. But with Twitter we are actually using it on a daily basis. So it just depends what we are doing really.

12. Who is the audience of your e-democracy initiatives? Please provide the number of people who use them along with other demographic information (e.g. age, gender, location).

It is hard to tell because they are on the web. We are not really sure where these people are. But from the comments that they are putting and the interaction that they are having with us, I would probably say that 85% of them are local residents and ratepayers. We do occasionally get people from America following us on Twitter but by and large most people, from what I can tell, are residents of Manukau. We seem to have a total mix of males and females using our e-democracy. Age is right across the board as well, from what I can tell by looking at people's pictures etc. I think if we were starting to get on Bebo or something like that then we would probably be looking at the youth demographic. But Google groups and Twitter are general, so it's a mix.

13. How do participants know what is being done with their comments?

With the Google groups, we said straight up front, right from the start, that all of the comments and feedback would be given to councillors during the LTCCP process. So we made it quite clear that anything people said in this online space would be given to the councillors before and during debate surrounding the LTCCP process. We did this in conjunction with an online feedback form as well and there were a number of different initiatives.

14. What kind of feedback have you had from participants?

We haven't had huge amounts of feedback but the feedback that we've had has been really good. I think people quite like the opportunity to have their say. With the Twitter channel people have been quite complimentary, which is great. For instance, we have a residents newsletter, Manukau Matters, that goes out once a fortnight, and we have posted on Twitter when the new edition is coming out, and people have "tweeted" back comments like "great, I really look forward to receiving Manukau Matters in my letterbox" – things that you wouldn't normally expect, which has been really nice.

Additional Notes:

The only thing that I would say about the Google groups to watch out for is that I think you need to promote it really widely to get people interested, other than just the "squeaky wheels". Otherwise, you tend to get three or four people that dominate it with their pet issues – people that are known. So to combat that we post a really wide range of questions. When things have started to go down a particular line and we have known that it's the "squeaky wheels" dominating the space, we have posted some new questions to get some fresh people involved and some fresh ideas and thinking, rather than just the same things that we know certain people try all the time.

Palmerston North City Council

Hamish Richardson, Web Manager

RE: online chat, rss and social media

1. **When did you start these initiatives?**

   Basically it was 2008, with the re-launch of what is the current website. Some initiatives had been planned prior to that and a couple of initiatives came along afterwards, such as social media (e.g. our Facebook page, etc). But online chat and rss were part of the project scope for the website re-launch.

2. **Why did you start these initiatives?**

   It was a response to customer demands and new trends. Other council sites were doing similar things, not just in New Zealand but also beyond, like in the UK, which is where we looked to for a lot of our ideas in terms of functionality and what we could add to the site, and the best practice approaches that other councils have taken overseas.

3. **Who is responsible for managing them on a day-to-day basis?**

   Essentially it is me. But there are other people who contribute to the process with regards to online chat, which is supported by call centre staff/customer service call centre representatives. They basically field any enquiries and direct them to the appropriate people – that is both for the contact us email forms and live chat. Otherwise I manage our e-democracy along with our vendor in Auckland, Terabyte. We look at ways of enhancing or adding to the functionality that we have, and we do that from time to time. We actually have a project coming up soon regarding a full re-design of the site, to augment a few issues which are outstanding.

4. **How does your use of e-democracy initiatives fit into council policies and planning?**

   That is a good question. At the moment there has been some reluctance to venture into that area from the people who would be responsible for it ultimately. In terms of having e-democracy type functionality, I am particularly interested in progressing e-petitions. That has been on my planning spreadsheet as a future project for about a year and a half, and there has been reluctance from certain groups within the Council to go down that road. I think this is related to lack of resources and not a lack of understanding, or not because it is not a good idea in their view. It is to do with how they are going to manage and maintain it. There is more pressure from above now to look at those initiatives and get them running. Hopefully that will mean the buy-in and support required to manage it will be put in place so that it will be a success and not a failure. So, some initiatives have been identified but for whatever reasons – resourcing, funding, etc – they have not really kicked off yet. But a lot of thought has been put into e-petitions in particular and we have talked with Wellington City Council in regards to their implementation, so it is definitely a hot topic and hopefully we can make it happen soon.

5. **What was the initial set up cost of your e-democracy initiatives?**

   They were part of an overall re-design project two years ago.

6. **If your e-democracy initiatives were built or set up in-house, how much time was needed to establish them?**

   There was a small amount of set up time required for online chat but everything else was basically done by the vendor. The module itself was something we had internally and IM/call centre staff got that up and running. But the vendor worked with the interface. There was definitely some input from the IM team and the analyst programmers within the Council to make that happen.

7. **What types of skills were needed?**

   Mainly the specialist skills of the IM team and the analyst programmers.

8. **How much time is needed to manage the day-to-day operations of your e-democracy initiatives?**

   At this stage it depends on what activities the Council is engaged in at the time. For example, when there is an LTCCP draft going out for consultation, or any other sort of consultation, we get various amounts of feedback during those phases, online and offline. So it is essentially "seasonal" in effect, and dependant on what is happening within the Council in terms of what initiatives are going on and what projects are about to start.

9. **Are there any terms and conditions of use?**

   Yes but they are general and follow the standard terms and conditions that are set by other councils and e-govt who use the same types of functionality. Terms and conditions depend on the specific application but are basically covered in the broader terms and conditions on the website.

10. **Do you have a plan in place to deal with difficult issues raised as a result of your e-democracy?**

    Yes – the community issues register. That is basically the main plan we have at the moment. It is not quite e-petitions but it is a mixture of offline and online interactivity. We actually run community meetings in different neighbourhoods on a regular basis and part of the feedback loop is to include e-questions and the responses from Council staff on the website so that people can refer to them and actually see progress. It is basic, in the form of an online table with data put into it. But it is the process of getting the data from key people and inputting it that requires effort. It has worked really well and we have had positive feedback. There have been some difficult issues raised in that forum.

11. How often are your e-democracy initiatives used (e.g. daily, weekly, monthly, etc)?

Again it depends on what the issue is at hand. Online chat gets used daily. We get email coming in daily as well. Most initiatives seem to be used daily. They are used consistently.

12. Who is the audience of your e-democracy initiatives? Please provide the number of people who use them along with other demographic information (e.g. age, gender, location).

Currently we have no survey mechanism in place because of our budget but that is something I would like to progress towards. I know that a lot of UK council sites such as SOCITM and Manchester City Council have online pop-up surveys. That is something that I would like to progress towards. I would like to provide a module that other councils can use.

13. How do participants know what is being done with their comments?

Again we provide online feedback and in many instances key staff will actually phone people who make a request. If someone has an issue with the online community meeting issues register we do not put their phone number on the website but we keep that information confidentially so that key staff can make contact with the people who have actually raised issues and address them.

14. What kind of feedback have you had from participants?

Largely it has been positive in regards to the actual process. Possibly a few people may think that we have not responded quickly enough on some issues. That is probably due mainly to people not being available at the right time. But generally we get back to everyone on every issue, even if it has taken a bit of time. Other than that, it has worked out really well – so much so that in a few of the meetings no issues have been raised subsequently because we addressed them in the first round, which is good. That allows a lot of time for broader issues to be discussed so it has been quite positive. The people that go to those meetings have found that to be quite a refreshing change as opposed to being on the defensive. Now people actually talk about really positive things.

Additional Notes:

The key thing is looking for crossovers and linkages between what you do offline and what you do online, and seeing at what point in the process you can join those mediums together to yield the best for yourself as an organisation and for ratepayers and residents as clients and customers. I guess the big thing is working with others in the Council to help them realise the opportunity that merging the two actually provides in terms of streamlining the business. In terms of resources, online interactivity does offer a lot of time saving. A big part of my role involves helping people look at what they do now offline and how they can merge that into an online proposition.

Whakatane District Council

Barney Dzowa, Communications Manager

RE: online forums

1. **When did you start these initiatives?**

   They were initiated as part of the LTCCP 2009-19 consultation process.

2. **Why did you start these initiatives?**

   Web discussion forum: key issues identified during preparation of the draft LTCCP were posted on the forum for feedback and general discussion among participants. During the formal consultation period, online forms were developed using a GoForms template. This was designed to and targeted at the more computer savvy submitters, especially youth and young adults.

3. **Who is responsible for managing them on a day-to-day basis?**

   We have developed a distributed model of managing the web forum among the key units.

4. **How does your use of e-democracy initiatives fit into council policies and planning?**

   The Council seek to engage with its community in a variety of ways and online consultation is one of those channels, albeit in its infancy.

5. **What was the initial set up cost of your e-democracy initiatives?**

   Beyond the initial cost of setting up and web forum hosting fees the costs are not significant. However, staff time is necessary to monitor, moderate and respond to issues raised on the forum.

6. **If your e-democracy initiatives were built or set up in-house, how much time was needed to establish them?**

   4-5 days.

7. **What types of skills were needed?**

   Web development skills.

8. **How much time is needed to manage the day-to-day operations of your e-democracy initiatives?**

   1-2 hours.

9. Are there any terms and conditions of use?

For the web forum – a valid email address, and for submission forms personal details are mandatory.

10. Do you have a plan in place to deal with difficult issues raised as a result of your e-democracy?

No formal plan, but processes are in place to respond to such situations.

11. How often are your e-democracy initiatives used (e.g. daily, weekly, monthly, etc)?

They are issues based.

12. Who is the audience of your e-democracy initiatives? Please provide the number of people who use them along with other demographic information (e.g. age, gender, location).

No overall analysis has been done and generally we do not capture most of this demographic information.

13. How do participants know what is being done with their comments?

Participants have an option to ask for a formal response from the Council. In such cases a formal response is prepared and sent either by email or posted by mail.

For formal consultation where submissions online forms are used, letters acknowledging receipt of the submission are sent out and these are followed up with letters advising submitters of the Council's decision(s) at the end of the process.

14. What kind of feedback have you had from participants?

These are generally based around issues. The more controversial or high impact a proposal has, the higher the response rate and vice versa. The challenge is around making technical issues understandable and interesting for people to engage with the Council.

Follow-up questions:

1. What software or tool do you use for your online forums?

We have adapted the GOForms solution which are only available when there's a specific consultation taking place.

2. Do you have any information about the topics you've covered so far - which business areas have used it and how useful have they found it?

LTCCP and Alcohol Policy

Additional Information on Online Surveys

Survey Tools Used:
Summary of information collated by Katy Hurd, Hauraki District Council (July / August 2009)

Online Survey Tool	Usability	Annual subscription $	Pro's	Con's
Survey monkey	Easy to input questions and extract results. Free version limited to 100 respondents and 10 questions	Pay as you go or annual fee US$200 + US$100 for added security.	Relatively cheap and easy to use. Have heard that online help is quick to respond. For the level of questionnaire likely to be done through this medium, most likely to be the most cost effective method. You can unsubscribe when you're not using it much and you've still got a basic tool that could be used internally without the need for logos or many questions. You can download summaries and graphs from survey monkey which has been really useful	Functionality when it comes to detailed analysis
USuite	Fair to good usability for low to medium end users	Pay as you go rate or $500 per month for as many surveys and mailing lists as we like	Excellent support from the provider. WYSWIG editor which Simplifies survey design and deployment. Options to add / change style sheets - 100% customisable look and feel including unique URL Integration with the mail out tool (a	Advanced users (developers) may find they can't create some complicated question types, but this is a same con for survey monkey No automated response (I don't think Survey Monkey does this

			big plus, and something survey monkey can do). Live reporting Three reporting options – individual view, statistical view and downloadable view Add filters to results Secure login (available 24 /7) Very high stability (down for less than a few hours each year) Full data back up Conditional branching for advanced surveys Email notification of individual results	either) Can't automatically produce PDF of results, but you can export to PDF from statistical or individual view Slightly more complicated setting things up than survey monkey plus not able to download a summary of the survey results as you are with survey monkey.
LGOL survey tool		Free	Free to users Works fine, and is easy to use	Very little reporting options, and once you have a survey it can't be copied and renamed. May not work with all browsers – firefox an initial problem but this has now been fixed. Not very user friendly.

Other comments

"I came across this Australian company that facilitates online community engagement. They have done quite a bit with local government. I found their live consultations page to be the most interesting – one of which was Wellingtons LTCCP. Obviously this method of consultation is still in its infancy, judging by the number of comments received, but may be a model for the future?"

"We are currently not using an online survey tool. In the recent past we have used Touch Poll system."

Additional Information on Email Newsletters

COUNCIL ONLINE NEWSLETTERS

Summary of information collated by Dale Hartle, Porirua City Council – April 2009

The Question:

Can you please reply with information about whether your Council uses online newsletters to communicate with community groups, ratepayers, business groups etc, and what system you are using.

At Porirua, we do not use any Council online newsletters. If any go out, they go from an individual person's email account. This of course means they are untrackable and unreportable in terms of how many were received, opened, any links clicked etc.

There have been many attempts to get online newsletters going using web based systems, but they just dont seem to get any traction.

Responses:

Manukau City Council

At Manukau City Council we started using Smartmail last year to send out some of our email newsletters (there are however a few different companies out there that do it) - so far we have a mayoral newsletter, one for our LTCCP campaign, one for a partnership called Tomorrow's Manukau and we also facilitated getting our Leisure facilities set-up.

It's great for all the things you mention - ability to be tracked and reported on, but also for maintaining consistency of branding. Part of the package is that they test the design in a wide number of email clients to ensure the design doesn't corrupt. They also have a relationship with ISP's so we don't have to worry about non-delivery due to it being classified as spam. Also as it's done external to our IT system there's no load on our network (sorry for the non-techie explanations!) Another plus is we don't have to worry about subscription management and obligations under anti-spam legislation - recipients can go in at any time and subscribe/unsubscribe without us having to look at it (as part of the business case we worked out that it was taking a staff member up to 2 hours a week to manage this for one newsletter so this adds up over a year!)

Downside is of course there is a cost associated with set up and per send so it depends on what you can afford.

We still have some email newsletters that go out from individuals via Outlook, but it's a bit of a problem because often they don't understand that it isn't great to send out an email with a 10MB image attached, plus of course there is the issue around all the contacts being kept in their Outlook contact file and when they leave sometimes this isn't passed on so institutional knowledge is lost...

[To promote it] We put a link to sign-up on the website, put info about it in the fortnightly newsletter that goes to all residents, the mayor himself publicised it when he was out and about, and the community advisors spread the word amongst their networks. We have around 550 signed up now from memory..

Auckland City Council

At Auckland City Council we partner with a company called Touchpoint to deliver our e-Newsletters. They charge 6c per email plus the usual costs for development, maintenance, changes etc. It's all worth it though, customers who visit our site from an e-Newsletter view more pages per visit than from any other source.

Touchpoint develop the email templates, manage all subscriptions and provide the web-based broadcasting and reporting interface. We populate the templates with the content, images etc and press the big green button. Same benefits as described so well by Kylie, above.

You can see the various e-Newsletters at www.aucklandcity.govt.nz/subscribe. We have approx 11,000 subscribers all up.

Northland Regional Council

We have a subscription service operating at the moment instead of newsletters.

The subscribe and unsubscribe features are managed online automatically.

People can sign up to receive updates to particular sections and nominate how often they get the updates. They can sign up to get updates for just one particular section.

It doesn't give us the same functionality as newsletters but does enable us to automatically notify people when agendas, press releases, education news, jobs, consultations, consents, tenders etc are updated on the site.
http://www.nrc.govt.nz/Your-Council/Subscriptions/

In a previous life I also used Smartmail and was very happy with it as an email newsletter distribution product.

Additional Information on the Use of Social Networking Sites

Use of social networking sites
Information collated by Anne Rose, Porirua City Council – July 2009

Reasons for Councils Currently Not Using Social Networking (eg for 2009-19 LTCCP):

- Yes – we considered Facebook, however thought that since we could not have controlled what people wrote to us/about us this was not a good idea.
- We considered social networking sites, but do not use them. We block them on the firewall because they fall outside our reasonable use policy for staff. We are reviewing the hosting and design of our network and may include them on our council web site if it is hosted by another supplier, e.g. Intergen, because their bandwidth would be able to cater for such tools. Our council bandwidth is relatively small.
- Yes, lack of resources. We started with a youth group of staff and it went well but ran out of steam as we got busier.
- Social networking was not considered. [We have] one of the lowest rates of people with access to internet and internet services due to the size and diversity of our district.
- Facebook and Bebo were considered but it was decided not to tackle their use for LTCCP consultation. Challenges identified included ensuring our IT network was secure and the need for someone to monitor and update the site in a timely manner whilst ensuring information integrity. Currently staff use these sites is blocked.

Councils Assessing Future Use of Social Networking Sites:

- [We have] just started looking at the possible use of social networking sites, initially considering using it as a mechanism for youth engagement, pending initial consultation with this group to ascertain what its potential might be. I am aware of local government overseas using social networking sites, particularly the UK.
- We will be looking at using similar tools in future for consultation
- Yes. Still under consideration. Currently info gathering. Possibly Facebook and or Twitter. Raise profile of issues and refer traffic to website
- Currently assessing suite of social networking tools, for possible future use (involving Council's Youth Advisory Group in our Project Team).
- Would possibly use for Consultation and youth
- If the Council was to use these sites the purpose would be for public consultation. In particular would be used if Youth were the target of the information Council sought.

Council's currently using Social Networking:

- Twitter - to enhance council communications
- Facebook & Bebo to directly engage young people (Youth groups set up)
- Councillor has established a facebook group based on his ward which he uses to gain public feedback and to share information

- We used a branded forum to complement our LTCCP consultation process and we have a Facebook page.
- We use Facebook mainly for its social networking capabilities - letting people know about our planning processes, events (library), and the like. That said, you need to take the good with the bad and we acknowledge that people will set up discussion threads and we do keep an eye on the feedback.
- [We plan] to launch a couple of Facebook pages in the coming months -- one for recruitment/alumni liaison purposes and a second for our sustainability/resilience programme that Facebook can take global for us!
- This is a learning experience for us. If these pages don't work for us, we'll take them down. Facebook pages are hardly "unsafe", judging by a trawl we've done through similar cause-related pages on there -- We have American Internet site owners to thank for that!
- If you're thinking about a Facebook presence I suggest like us you just wade on in there. What's the worst that could happen? (he said rhetorically...)

General Feedback about Advantages and Disadvantages:

- Although some demographic groupings are appearing in terms of usage of the major sites (Facebook - significant growth in the 35-54 demo. Bebo - 16-25 demo, You Tube - broad demo, All demographics show - as far as I can tell - a (variable) female predominance), difficult to source reliable usage data. Any advice on market research sources would be welcomed.
- Monitoring has the potential to require significant time/staff resource
- Deciding how to use it is a little like training an octopus to walk - which leg first?
- It's immediate, inexpensive, current, popular, high profile and widespread.
- Think it's important to engage those people already working for Council who are existing users.
- Social networking sites are great for reaching youth, people around 20-35, business people and the technology savvy. Unfortunately the District has the terrain that many people do not have access to internet, and a lot of people who have not made the change to the world of email and social networking, yet.

Association of Local Government Information Management Inc

FURTHER EVALUATION MATERIAL / INFORMATION

Further evaluation material from the Bristol Local eDemocracy National Project is located at www.bristol.gov.uk/edemocracy

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