Community Relations Strategy

2014-2015 to 2016-2017
Mission: Inform, communicate and engage the community.
Introduction

This strategy has been developed to guide the community relations team for the period 2014-2015 to 2016-2017.

The strategy identifies visions for three critical activities undertaken by the team – customer focus, community engagement and media relations – and sets out objectives, strategies and action plans to achieve these visions. It identifies the important links between these activities and shows how the teams can best work together to produce a better outcome for the community.

The team also has an important role to play with internal engagement, however this has been addressed in a separate plan.

The strategy and associated planning is important so the council can:

- Consider the financial implications of implementing, maintaining and enhancing relationships with its community;
- Put systems in place to ensure council officers can provide timely and meaningful responses to feedback, questions, customer requests and media enquiries which are received;
- Measure and evaluate the ways it communicates and engages;
- Look for opportunities to improve the ways it communicates and engages; and
- Stay abreast of developments in communication, customer focus and community engagement.

Strategic context

The Wodonga Council Plan 2013-2014 to 2016-2017 outlines the key strategic priorities that the council will deliver over the life of the plan.

It is used to plan for the community – its priorities, major projects, services and budget allocations.

The council plan was developed around three key areas:
1. Our city – Planning for growth and development;
2. Our people – Providing a great lifestyle; and
3. Our future – Managing our business to support our community.

This strategy supports the implementation of a large number of key priority activities identified in the council plan, as well as directly addressing the following:

- Review and implement a community engagement strategy;
- Review and update the council’s communication strategy, using a wide range of mediums to convey messages in a timely and appropriate way;
- Develop a social media plan which maximises the interaction between council and the community; and
- Develop a customer focus strategy for the delivery of outcomes and services to the community.

For the purposes of this strategy, the four actions above have been covered in the community strategy to maximise use of resourcing and community benefit.
Our mission

We will strengthen the community in all that we do.

Our vision

Our city, our people, our future

Our community values

- Compassion;
- Growth with a conscience;
- Family connection;
- Safety and freedom;
- Sense of community;
- Learning and education;
- Creative;
- Tolerance and respect; and
- Fairness.

\(^1\) These are the values that were determined by the community leaders in 2008 at a community leadership summit and various other community engagement activities held in the city.
Our organisational values

Trust

Talk straight - say what you mean and mean what you say;
Create transparency - do not withhold information unnecessarily or inappropriately;
Right wrongs;
Practice accountability - take responsibility for results without excuses; and
Extend trust - show a willingness to trust others, even when it involves a measure of risk.

Respect

Treat other people with courtesy, politeness and kindness, no matter what their position or opinion; and
Listen first - seek to understand others before trying to diagnose, influence or prescribe.

Integrity

Tell the truth in an appropriate and helpful manner that does not compromise the organisation’s objectives and values;
Keep confidences;
Do what you say you will do to the best of your ability;
Be open about mistakes; and
Speak of those that are absent only in a positive way.

Learning

Work together and learn from each other;
Continuously improve and innovate;
Be open to change; and
There is a high degree of responsibility for results - delivery without excuses.
Our community

Wodonga’s demographics

- As at June 30, 2012, Wodonga had an estimated resident population of 36,629;
- In 2031, the population of Wodonga is forecast to be 54,777, an increase of 20,481 persons (59.72 per cent) from 2006. This represents an average annual growth rate of 1.89 per cent;
- Wodonga is the largest and fastest growing centre in North East Victoria and the third fastest growing of the Regional Cities Victoria group, with an annual growth rate of 1.6 per cent between the 2011 and 2012 financial years;
- 26.1 per cent of the Wodonga population is aged between 0 and 17, and 17.4 per cent are aged 60 years and over;
- Wodonga has a higher percentage of population aged 24 and under (37 per cent) than regional Victoria (31.5 per cent), Victoria (32 per cent) and Australia (32.6 per cent);
- In 2011, the dominant household type in Wodonga was couples with children, which accounted for 29.4 per cent of all households;
- Wodonga has a higher percentage of couples and single parents with young children (23.9 per cent) than regional Victoria (19.1 per cent), Victoria (20.6 per cent) and Australia (20.9 per cent);
- 96.4 per cent of Wodonga residents speak English as their first language, or speak English well or very well;
- Only 0.6 per cent of Wodonga residents do not speak English or do not speak English well;
- Wodonga’s median weekly household income of $1075 is the highest of the Regional Cities Victoria group;
- 73.5 per cent of Wodonga residents have an internet connection in their home, compared to 68.4 per cent in regional Victoria, 74.3 per cent in Victoria and 73.9 per cent in Australia. This has risen from 58.4 per cent since 2006; and
- 66.1 per cent of residents have a broadband connection in their home, compared to 60.9 per cent in regional Victoria, 67.6 in Victoria and 67.1 per cent in Australia.

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3 This group comprises the municipalities of Ballarat, Bendigo, Geelong, Horsham, Latrobe, Mildura, Shepparton, Wangaratta, Warrnambool and Wodonga.
2013 Community satisfaction survey

A community-wide survey was conducted in 2013. Results of the survey relevant to this strategy include:

- 465 responses were received;
- 78.67 per cent of respondents were female;
- More responses were received from the 31 to 40 years age group than any other (29.59 per cent);
- 95 per cent of respondents live or work in Wodonga;
- 50.53 per cent volunteer for a community or sporting organisation or are involved in a committee or organisation where they give their time;
- 85.41 per cent would recommend Wodonga to their family and friends as a place to live;
- 68.66 per cent had contacted the council within the past 12 months;
- Phone was the most popular method of contact (42.95 per cent);
- 83.22 per cent were satisfied with their contact;
- 81.54 per cent were satisfied with the way their contact was handled, including the time it took staff to be back to them and how the issue was resolved;
- Community barbecues were the most well-known community engagement tool (60.53 per cent);
- 62.23 per cent were satisfied with the council’s community engagement efforts;
- Newspaper advertising was the most well-known communication tool (62.71 per cent);
- 65.86 per cent were satisfied in the way the council communicates with them;
- 56.93 per cent believe the council offers services with a strong customer focus;
- 62.38 per cent believe the council’s staff are responsive to the community; and
- 76.72 per cent were satisfied with the way the council is promoting Wodonga as a regional city.
Community engagement plan
Vision for community engagement

Wodonga Council uses community engagement to:

- Strengthen relationships between the council and the community by allowing for clear and honest communication, improving the understanding of each other’s opinions, concerns, restrictions and strengths;
- Help encourage ownership within the community over strategies, projects and decisions, to support long-term sustainability of projects and initiatives;
- Develop an understanding of the make-up, characteristics, needs and priorities of the community; and
- Search for solutions, information and opportunities that contribute to the development of strategies and policies.

Provide avenues for involvement that are inclusive, productive and cost-effective.
Situation analysis

What is community engagement

Community engagement is a planned process with the specific purpose of working with identified groups of people, whether they are connected by geographic location, special interest, affiliation or identity to address issues affecting their well-being. Effective community engagement allows the council to tap into wider perspectives, sources of information and potential solutions to improve decisions and services.

It also provides the basis for productive relationships, improved dialogue and deliberation, and ultimately, better democracy. More importantly, perhaps, those involved in the process may have had a new experience of positive involvement with the council and public decision-making which may have taught them to distinguish between their private interests and concerns and issues of the greater public good.

Community engagement is not the sole determinant in a decision-making process. There are many other stakeholders and factors that need to be taken into consideration. Some of these are shown in the chart below.

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9 Queensland Department of Emergency Services (2001) Charter for community engagement, Community Engagement Unit, Strategic and Executive Services
When is community engagement used

Community engagement is used in a variety of issues and situations, all requiring different engagement levels and methods. Some such situations are:

- **Site specific** – Matters about a particular site such as a change in use or sale of a property, excluding matters that need to be decided under the *Planning and Environment Act*;
- **Area improvement** – Matters that affect people in a specific area or neighbourhood, e.g. a change in service delivery, township strategy or structure plan;
- **Service planning for entire municipality** – To develop or improve a service that would see a significant change in the level of service;
- **Policy development** – To develop or improve policies or the council’s position on particular matters. This does not include internal operating matters;
- **Key strategic issues/major development** – A project that, because of its size, could impact on the finances or the future of the whole municipality;
- **Strategic plans for the city** – Establishing the decision-making framework for the council, e.g. the council plan; and
- **Legislative requirements** – This refers to all prescribed activity under the *Local Government Act (1989)* and any other relevant Acts.

The council **must** use community engagement methods when:

- It is required by legislation; and
- An issue may have potential impacts on the health, safety or well-being of any community member.

Wodonga Council **should** use community engagement methods when:

- Any proposed changes will impact on current users or customers of a council service or facility;
- Any proposed changes will affect the rights or entitlements of community members including minority groups;
- There is potential impact on surrounding neighbours;
- It wants to identify community issues, needs and priorities;
- Any proposed changes are inter-generational in nature;
- Any proposed changes impact the greater public good;
- It wants to monitor customer satisfaction with council’s services facilities; and
- There is a level of controversy, conflict or sensitivity about a particular issue.
What types of community engagement are there?

Wodonga Council has developed its own model of community engagement, based on the Organisation for Economic co-operation and Development’s three-level engagement model\(^\text{11}\). It places an important emphasis on talking to people in person, having conversations that are meaningful and actively listening and responding.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Objective</th>
<th>Critical factors</th>
<th>Desired outcome</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Provide information to the community</strong></td>
<td>To ensure community members have access to information that is accurate, relevant, appropriate, easy to access and easy to understand.</td>
<td>Community members must have easy, equitable and timely access to information and the method of delivery must be appropriate for the issue and the intended audience. Community members are better informed about the council’s policies, programs and services and about how to access information and services.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Engage the community in conversation</strong></td>
<td>To seek and receive the views of community members on issues that directly affect them or in which they may have a significant interest.</td>
<td>There must be clarity about the goals of seeking feedback, the roles and responsibilities of the council and community members, and their level of influence (if any). There should be stated mechanisms for feedback. Greater involvement of community members in the council’s activities, greater understanding of council policy and decision-making processes, and better community outcomes. More effective policies, programs and services that represent the diverse needs of community members.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Enable the community to influence decision-making</strong></td>
<td>To develop relationships that enable community members to influence the development and evaluation of policies, programs and services, but where the council retains the responsibility for final decisions.</td>
<td>There must be clarity about the extent to which the input of community members will be taken into account in decision-making processes. There should be stated mechanisms for feedback. Greater involvement of community members in the council’s activities, greater understanding of council policy and decision-making processes, and better community outcomes. More effective policies, programs and services that represent the diverse needs of citizens and communities.</td>
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\(^{11}\) Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (2005), Evaluating Public Participation in Policy Making
The framework above is a vital method of engaging. In the planning stage, it sets clear boundaries of what is expected and how we can best reach our audiences, which have been identified as part of the process. It allows us to plan carefully and allocate the required resources, use them well and then look at what we have done and determine how success it has been. In some instances, the process then starts again.
Strategic focus areas

Area one: Tools

Objective
Use community engagement tools that provide avenues for involvement that are inclusive, productive and cost-effective.

Strategies
• Provide community engagement tools for each of the three levels of community engagement.

Area two: Resources

Objective
Equip Wodonga Council staff to develop and implement effective community engagement plans.

Strategies
• Deliver training and development opportunities to all staff to assist them to understand the role of community engagement in developing and delivering projects and activities; and
• Provide support to staff in identifying, developing and delivering community engagement opportunities.

Area three: Policies and procedures

Objective
Adopt appropriate frameworks to support community engagement activities.

Strategies
• Maintain suitable community engagement procedures and frameworks.

12 This is a measure set out in the council plan that relates directly to this strategy.
### Action plans

#### Strategic focus area one: Tools

Objective: Use community engagement tools that provide avenues for involvement that are inclusive, productive and cost-effective.

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<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Year one</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Provide community engagement tools for each of the three levels of community engagement</td>
<td>Develop a community engagement tool kit that outlines appropriate tools and provides advice on developing a community engagement plan</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Review the community engagement tool kit annually to ensure it includes the latest technological developments and case studies</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Measures**

- 95 per cent participation by staff at a team leader level and above in community engagement training program;
## Strategic focus area two: Resources

Objective: Equip Wodonga Council staff to develop and implement effective community engagement plans.

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<tr>
<td>Deliver training and development opportunities to staff at a team leader level and above to assist them to understand the role of community engagement in developing and delivering projects and activities</td>
<td>Develop a comprehensive community engagement training program</td>
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<td>Conduct annual refresher training, focusing on new trends in community engagement and reviewing learnings from the previous years’ activities</td>
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<td>Provide support to staff in identifying, developing and delivering community engagement opportunities</td>
<td>Discuss with managers current and upcoming projects to determine where there may be community engagement opportunities</td>
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<td>Review all reports to executive and council to determine where there may be community engagement opportunities</td>
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<td>Conduct annual internal staff survey of the assistance provided in relation to community engagement</td>
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### Measures

- 95 per cent participation by staff at a team leader level and above in community engagement training program;
Strategic focus area two: Policies and procedures

Objective: Adopt appropriate frameworks to support community engagement activities.

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<tr>
<td>Maintain suitable community engagement frameworks</td>
<td>Review the Community Engagement Directive</td>
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<tr>
<td>Maintain suitable community engagement procedures</td>
<td>Develop a community engagement processs and checklist to ensure people are included in all engagement</td>
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Measures

- Community Engagement Directive reviewed every four years; and
- Processes and checklist developed by June, 2014.
Customer focus plan
Vision for customer focus

Wodonga Council achieves exceptional levels of customer focus by:
• Embracing new customer communication technologies;
• Continually looking to improve the way it communicates with its customers;
• Providing opportunities for customers to access its services at the time and place most convenient to them;
• Delivering messages to its customers in the most accessible format;
• Adequately resourcing and training staff to ensure they are capable of delivering exceptional customer focus; and
• Putting appropriate policies and procedures in place.
Situation analysis

How is customer focus achieved?

To achieve its commitment to customer focus, Wodonga Council asks all staff to always:

• Be honest, ethical and professional;
• Be helpful and courteous;
• Listen with respect and understand the customer’s issues;
• Meet commitments made;
• Keep the customer informed;
• Ensure that the customer clearly understands what is being said;
• Apologise if we make a mistake and attempt to make it right; and
• Assist customers with physical, sensory or intellectual disabilities, to achieve equitable access to our services.

Who are our customers?

Wodonga Council services a wide range of customers, both externally and within the organisation. These include:

• Residents;
• Businesses;
• Organisations;
• Community groups;
• Workers;
• Visitors;
• Other government bodies;
• Councillors; and
• Internal staff.

Wodonga Council customer focus standards for staff and volunteers, 2012
How do our customers interact with us now?

There are a wide variety of ways that we inform, communicate and interact with our customers. These include:
- CityLife newsletter;
- Community centre foyer television screens;
- Community meetings;
- Conventional mail;
- Council officer foyer television screens;
- Customer feedback surveys;
- Customer focus counter;
- E-newsletters;
- Facebook (Wodonga Council account);
- General council e-newsletter;
- Hard copy newsletters;
- Library foyer television screen;
- Make Wodonga Yours engagement portal;
- Online chat;
- Online services;
- Rates brochure;
- SMS;
- Snap Send Solve;
- Telephone incoming calls and on-hold messages;
- The Cube Wodonga foyer television screen;
- Twitter;
- Website; and
- YouTube.

A complete audit of the tools used by customers to interact with us, how effective they are and how these tools should be used in the future can be found in Appendix 1.

How will our customers interact with us in the future?

Wodonga Council’s customers are changing the way they want to interact.

They want to be able to access information and services in their own time, outside of normal business hours, often from their own home.

Social media is considered to be the future for effective customer relations.

Research conducted in 2012\(^5\) showed that 79 per cent of Australians aged 15 to 64 actively use an iOS or Android capable device (or Smart Device).

This places Australia fourth behind Singapore (92 per cent), Hong Kong (87 per cent) and Sweden (86 per cent), and ahead of the United States of America (78 per cent), South Korea (76 per cent) and the United Kingdom (74 per cent).

Facebook usage in Australia is approximately 55 per cent of the total population, and 70 per cent of the online population\(^6\).

Electronic communication allows information to be communicated and received immediately, and allows for two-way interaction between the council and the community.

The excessive use of printed materials is not only financially costly, but the cost to the environment is increasingly becoming an issue for the community.

This strategy has been developed with the future generation of ratepayers in mind and attempts to maximise opportunities to use social media and electronic communication.

The growing emphasis on new communication technologies will have far-reaching impacts for the implementation of this strategy and it should therefore be continually revised as new technologies emerge.

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\(^5\) Flurry Analytics, 2012, accessed from flurry.com
\(^6\) Social Bakers, 2012, accessed from socialbakers.com
Strategic focus areas

Area one: Tools

Objective
Provide easy and convenient tools for customers and the community to interact with Wodonga Council.

Strategies
- Increase usage of the council’s social media tools and ensure those tools are being used to communicate appropriate and effective messages;
- Improve the provision of information and online services functions on the Wodonga Council website;
- Make the most of opportunities to engage with customers when they attend or telephone a council facility; and
- Produce customer information publications in an appropriate, accessible and convenient format.

Area two: Resources

Objective
Equip Wodonga Council staff to deliver exceptional levels of customer service.

Strategies
- Ensure the skills of the customer focus team reflect current and future services requirements;
- Provide a safe and secure working environment for customer focus staff;
- Deliver training and development opportunities to all staff to assist them to understand the role of customer focus in achieving their individual outcomes;
- Proactively seek out ways to continuously improve the delivery of customer focus across the organisation; and
- Embrace the use of innovative customer focus software and techniques.

Area three: Policies and procedures

Objective
Adopt appropriate frameworks to support customer focus activities.

Strategies
- Maintain suitable customer focus policies; and
- Maintain suitable customer focus procedures.
## Action plans

**Strategic focus area one: Tools**

Objective: Provide easy and convenient tools for customers and the community to interact with Wodonga Council.

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<th>Year one</th>
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<th>Year three</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Increase usage of the council’s social media tools and ensure those tools are being used to communicate appropriate and effective messages</td>
<td>Establish the council’s Facebook page as the community voice of the council, to interact with the community in a friendly and informal manner</td>
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<td>Establish the council’s Twitter account as the corporate voice of the council, to interact with the community in an official and formal manner</td>
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<td>Give customer focus staff access to the council’s Facebook page and Twitter account to post and tweet information and to answer general enquiries received through those mediums</td>
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<td>Proactively like and follow other organisations on Facebook and Twitter and encourage them to do the same</td>
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<td>Regularly share and retweet information from other Facebook pages and Twitter accounts</td>
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<td>Run competitions on Facebook and Twitter to increase the numbers of likes and followers</td>
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<td>Use the Facebook timeline cover photo to promote projects or events (for example, in a similar way to the marketing scroll on the council website)</td>
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<td>Promote selected posts on Facebook to an audience wider than those who already like the council’s Facebook page (for example, by targeting Wodonga residents)</td>
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<td>Ensure posts and tweets on the council’s Facebook page and Twitter account are published at a time they are most likely to be seen by their intended audience (for example, not posting information directed at mothers during school drop-off or pick-up times)</td>
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<td>Introduce a bulk SMS service for disseminating important information to a large audience and as a reminder service for appointments and bookings (for example maternal and child health appointments)</td>
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<td>Identify and address gaps in the information available on the website</td>
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<td>Improve the provision of information and online services functions on the Wodonga Council website</td>
<td>Replace the current search function on the website with a Google search function</td>
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<td>Reformat and replace old forms on the website</td>
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<td>Convert relevant attachment forms on the website to online forms</td>
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<td>Promote the website online chat system as a tool for communicating with the council (alongside telephone, email etc.)</td>
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<td>Strategy</td>
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<td>Make proactive contact with users on the website through the online chat system to assist them with their enquiries</td>
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<td>Promote the ‘Report a problem’ page as the preferred method for issue notification (rather than Snap Send Solve)</td>
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<td>Place QR codes linking to the ‘Report a problem’ page on all parks, carparks, toilets and wayfinding signage and in other relevant locations around the city</td>
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<td>Introduce ‘Register a new animal’ to the ‘Online services’ page (rather than just a renewal)</td>
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<td>Introduce customer feedback surveys to all council facilities, focusing on that facility’s provision of customer service and train staff following results on areas for improvement</td>
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<td>Make the most of opportunities to engage with customers when they attend or telephone a council facility</td>
<td>Investigate the feasibility of installing computer kiosks at community centres to allow people to access the online services on the council website</td>
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<td>Record new content monthly for the incoming telephone call on-hold message</td>
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<td>Update the on-hold message in times of emergency or major issue so that customers telephoning the council for information can be advised of the correct organisation to contact (eg. in a major power outage situation provide the details of electricity providers)</td>
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<td>Conduct a detailed review of CityLife to determine its future format and distribution</td>
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<td>Produce customer information in an appropriate, accessible and convenient format</td>
<td>Produce an image-based information brochure to be distributed with rates notices that illustrates where rating income is spent</td>
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<td>Conduct an annual expo to demonstrate the services that council provides, open to all council staff, then to schools and the general public.</td>
<td>◇ ◇</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Measures**

- 70 per cent community satisfaction each year with customer interaction;
- Increase of five per cent each year over the life of the plan in the number of people engaging with the council using digital media;

7 and 8 This is a measure set out in the council plan that relates directly to this strategy.
Strategic focus area two: Resources

Objective: Equip Wodonga Council staff to deliver exceptional levels of customer service.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Actions</th>
<th>Year one</th>
<th>Year two</th>
<th>Year three</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ensure the structure and skills of the customer focus team reflect current and future services requirements</td>
<td>Develop annual individual training programs for customer focus staff that concentrate on the use of customer focus tools (particularly social media and basic planning and building inquiries)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Facilitate training for customer focus staff in friendly and informal written communication to assist with social media use</td>
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<tr>
<td>Provide a safe and secure working environment for customer focus staff</td>
<td>Review the layout of the customer focus foyer in the council office to improve security for staff, reduce customer waiting times and improve movement through the area</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deliver training and development opportunities to all staff to understand the role of customer focus in achieving council plan actions</td>
<td>Develop a customer focus standard training program to be rolled out across the organisation, which includes an annual refresher training program</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Develop a customer focus induction program for new staff, to be delivered within a month of their commencement of employment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Proactively seek out ways to continuously improve the delivery of customer focus across the organisation</td>
<td>Conduct annual customer focus benchmarking and mystery shopper activities</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Utilise the results of customer feedback surveys to identify training opportunities and requirements</td>
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<tr>
<td>Embrace the use of innovative customer focus delivery software and techniques</td>
<td>Conduct annual internal staff survey of the performance of the customer focus team</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ensure that the online chat system on the council’s website is fully utilised, including providing training for staff on how the best engage with customers via this channel</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Measures

- 65 per cent participation by staff in customer focus standard training program;
- Improvement of two per cent each year in results of customer focus benchmarking and mystery shopper activities;
- Improvement of two per cent each year in results of customer feedback surveys; and
- Improvement of two per cent each year in results of internal surveys.
Strategic focus area three: Policies and procedures

Objective: Adopt appropriate frameworks to support community focus activities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Actions</th>
<th>Year one</th>
<th>Year two</th>
<th>Year three</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maintain suitable customer focus frameworks</td>
<td>Update the customer focus standards for staff and volunteers to include reference to social media</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Develop a customer focus directive</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Maintain suitable customer focus procedures</td>
<td>Review and update existing procedures</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Develop new procedures where gaps exist</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Review and update existing service level agreements</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Develop service level agreements where they do not currently exist</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Complaints policy</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Measures**

- Customer focus standards for staff and volunteers updated;
- Customer focus directive developed; and
- Service level agreements adopted.
Media relations plan
Be approachable, responsive and co-operative when dealing with the media.

Vision for media relations

Wodonga Council:
- Enjoys strong, positive and productive relationships with the media;
- Responds to media requests and issues in a timely, accurate and appropriate manner;
- Delivers information to the media in a unique and engaging manner; and
- Proactively seeks out opportunities to promote its activities, events, programs and services.
Situation analysis

Why is the media important?

Gaining positive and consistent coverage in the media can have an incredible impact on the work the council does. Some of the benefits of media coverage include:

- It gets the council’s message across to a wide audience;
- It can help target the council’s message to the people we want to hear it;
- It provides free publicity and exposure;
- It can increase the council’s profile among the general public; and
- It can sway opinions.

The media is also an important tool for clarifying misconceptions within the community about council projects or activities.

Although social media is becoming an increasingly important source of news for the public, traditional media is also adapting to these technologies.

The majority of media outlets now have websites and social media accounts where information and stories are updated regularly.

Why do we currently work with the media?

There are a number of tools the council currently uses to distribute information to the media. These are:

- Media releases – Used to inform local and metropolitan media about council-related announcements, events and issues;
- Media alerts – Provide a brief description of an event which may be of interest to the media;
- Specific media opportunities – These are sometimes tailored for the most appropriate outlet in line with their demographics and likely interest in the topic;
- Media conferences and briefings – Used to brief media on issues where there is likely to be significant media interest; and
- Media interviews – One-on-one interviews are regularly held with the media, focusing on a specific announcement, event or issue.

All media enquiries are directed to the communications officer or community relations manager. This ensures that the most appropriate staff member responds to the enquiry and gives the staff member the opportunity to source information and discuss key messages with the communications team before responding.

On occasions, the CEO and Mayor meet with key personnel regarding media opportunities or to fully explain an issue and to ensure the media has full details on a topic.
Strategic focus areas

Area one: Media liaison

Objective
Be an approachable, responsive and co-operative organisation when dealing with the media.

Strategies
• Build strong, positive and proactive relationships with the media;
• Support council staff in their interactions with the media; and
• Improve the way information is distributed to the media.

Area two: Media opportunities

Objective
Use media opportunities to promote Wodonga on a local, regional, state and national level.

Strategy
• Increase the number of positive and proactive media opportunities.

Area three: Policies and procedures

Objective
Adopt appropriate frameworks to support media relations activities.

Strategies
• Maintain suitable media relations policies; and
• Maintain suitable media relations procedures.
# Action plans

## Strategic focus area one: Media liaison

Objective: Be an approachable, responsive and co-operative organisation when dealing with the media.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Actions</th>
<th>Year one</th>
<th>Year two</th>
<th>Year three</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Build strong, positive and proactive relationships with the media</td>
<td>Hold briefing sessions with media to discuss upcoming projects and programs in detail, hosted by the chief executive officer or directors and with relevant managers attending</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✗</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Meet twice yearly with the key staff at news organisations to discuss upcoming major projects and activities</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✗</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ensure interview and information requests are dealt with expeditiously and with respect to media deadlines</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✗</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conduct annual surveys of media representatives to determine where improvements could be made</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✗</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support council staff in their interactions with the media</td>
<td>Ensure new staff members receive information about the media policy upon commencement.</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✗</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ensure all staff members at team leader level and above, as well as selected staff who may be required to liaise with the media, receive full media training within three months of commencement and before dealing with the media</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✗</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conduct refresher training for selected staff who deal with the media</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✗</td>
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<tr>
<td>Improve the way information is distributed to the media</td>
<td>Record and upload to YouTube speeches from media opportunities and send a link to all media to access</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✗</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Provide visual information, including high resolution plans, photographs and images, where possible</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✗</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Measures**

- 75 per cent participation by relevant staff in full media training.
- Improvement of two per cent each year in results of media representative surveys.
Strategic focus area one: Media opportunities

Objective: Use media opportunities to promote Wodonga on a local, regional, state and national level.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Actions</th>
<th>Year one</th>
<th>Year two</th>
<th>Year three</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Increase the number of positive and proactive media opportunities</td>
<td>Regularly review relevant council reports to assist in identifying media opportunities</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Issue a list of upcoming media opportunities weekly, with links to relevant information</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Purchase an electronic media guide to assist identifying relevant media representatives</td>
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<td>◇</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Seek out opportunities to work with national media to promote Wodonga</td>
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<td>◇</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Seek out opportunities to work with industry publications (such as LG Focus, Australian Planning News, etc) to promote Wodonga and the council</td>
<td>◇</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Measures

- 95 per cent participation by relevant staff in full media training;
- Improvement of two per cent each year in results of media representative surveys.

Strategic focus area one: Policies and procedures

Objective: Adopt appropriate frameworks to support media relations activities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Actions</th>
<th>Year one</th>
<th>Year two</th>
<th>Year three</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maintain suitable media relations policies</td>
<td>Ensure media relations policy is reviewed each four years</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>◇</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintain suitable media relations procedures</td>
<td>Ensure media relations procedures are reviewed annually</td>
<td>◇</td>
<td>◇</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Measures

- Policies and procedures reviewed on basis specified.
## Appendix one: Customer focus tools audit

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tool</th>
<th>How do we use this tool now?</th>
<th>How effective is it?</th>
<th>How do we want to use this tool in the future?</th>
<th>How can we achieve this?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CityLife newsletter</td>
<td>Around 13,500 copies of CityLife are currently printed and delivered to every household in Wodonga monthly. Each edition is either 12 or 16 pages and contains information about council events, programs, projects, positions vacant and community events.</td>
<td>Past community surveys have shown good results for CityLife. The 2013 Community Satisfaction Survey showed CityLife as the third most known communication tool used by the council (behind the website and newspaper advertising).</td>
<td>Many councils have moved away from hardcopy newsletters to e-Newsletters, broken up into arts, library and events, as well as general news (Bayside an example). Difficulty in capturing emails and making people opt in, however, more sustainable without printing and delivering.</td>
<td>• Conduct a detailed review of CityLife to determine its future format and distribution.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Community centre foyer television screens | The television screens in the community centre foyers are used to display information on upcoming events, announcements, issues and programs. | The foyer screens are an effective means of communicating with people who come into the community centres. | The screens should continue to be used for the same information, however the amount of wording and timing of the slides needs to be reviewed to ensure people can read the information clearly. | • Reduce the amount of wording included on the slides; and  
  • Ensure the time of transition between slides gives people time to read them fully.                         |
| Community meetings           | These are generally held in response to a contentious issue or event.                        | They do not give the community the opportunity to have a clear voice - it is often the loudest person in the room who is heard, particularly as they are generally in response to a negative issue. | The community meetings should be held more proactively as a means of providing information to the community, not just to discuss negative issues or events. | • Actions for this tool are to be included as part of the community engagement plan.                          |
| Conventional mail            | Conventional mail is used for a variety of purposes across the council, particularly when hard copy attachments of documents need to be provided. | Conventional mail is an effective tool to communication information to customers in a timely and useful way. | This tool should continue to be used as is. | • No action required                                                                                         |
Council office foyer television screens

- The television screens in the council office foyer are used to display information on upcoming events, announcements, issues and programs. They are also used to advise which room a meeting that involves members of the public is being held.

- The television screens are an effective means of communicating with people who come into the council office for business.

- Reduce the amount of wording on the slides and review the timing (e.g., how many seconds between the transition of slides).

- Reduce the amount of wording included on the slides; and

- Ensure the time of transition between slides gives people time to read them fully.

Customer feedback surveys

- Some facilities, such as The Cube Wodonga and Arts Space Wodonga use surveys regularly.

- The surveys provide valuable feedback in identifying issues that customers may not raise unless they believe there is a serious issue.

- The surveys should be used at all facilities. They should be given to customers as they are leaving, with the option to leave the completed surveys in a box at the facilities or mail back in a reply-paid envelope.

- Customer feedback surveys should be used to identify any issues.

- Implement a 12-month trial for all facilities.

- Develop surveys for each facility.

- Collate results as they are returned.

- Review trial period after 12 months.

Customer focus counter

- All people who present to the council office must queue at the customer focus counter. Hard copy information is provided in this area and one of the foyer television screens is visible from the queue. A glassed-off, non-bookable room is provided for drop-in meetings with building and planning staff.

- The layout of the customer focus counter is problematic. Large queues often form through the centre of the room (during the regular opening times of the room), which makes movement difficult.

- The same services should continue to be provided from the customer service counter.

- The layout of the room needs to be reviewed to ensure it is easily visible for people waiting in the queue, and ensure all staff are informed of times when there may be large queues so they are not concerned about the amount of people waiting.

- Review the layout of the customer focus area.

- Review the layout of information provided in this area to ensure it is easily visible for people waiting in the queue.

- Ensure all staff are informed of times when there may be large queues so they are not concerned about the amount of people waiting.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tool</th>
<th>How do we use this tool now?</th>
<th>How effective is it?</th>
<th>How do we want to use this tool in the future?</th>
<th>How can we achieve this?</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>E-newsletters</td>
<td>Almost all newsletter distributed by council business units are now done electronically. The council website has the functionality to produce multiple e-newsletters. The internal process for developing an e-newsletter is that the staff member writes the content, the communications team reviews it and the marketing team designs the newsletter template.</td>
<td>E-newsletters reduce the resources spent collating and addressing hard copy newsletters and also allows information to be disseminated immediately.</td>
<td>E-newsletters should continue to be used however the internal process should be changed. Staff should be given greater ownership over their newsletter and given the responsibility of writing and reviewing the newsletters before they are distributed.</td>
<td>• Conduct audit of e-newsletters currently being distributed;  • Ensure staff developing those newsletters receive basic spelling, grammar and punctuation training; and  • Have the communications team continue to provide feedback to staff on e-newsletter drafts when requested.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expo</td>
<td>Not currently used.</td>
<td>Not currently used.</td>
<td>The expo would demonstrate the services that council provides. It would be open to all council staff, then to schools and the general public. The best time of the year to hold the expo would be around budget time so that the services council provides can be explained in terms of that year’s budget. This would also be an effective means of communicating where rates are spent.</td>
<td>• Develop project plan for expo;  • Hold expo; and  • Review outcomes of expo to determine whether it is held again.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facebook (Wodonga Council account)</td>
<td>Facebook is used to communicate a variety of messages, including corporate information, community information, events, services and emergency information. Communications staff are the only staff currently able to update the page.</td>
<td>The page has over 1100 ‘likes’, meaning it is an effective tool to communicate with the Wodonga community. The community-focused (rather than corporate focused) posts on the page get the most response (likes and comments), particularly when there is a photo included in the post.</td>
<td>The voice of the Facebook account should be as a community member talking to another community member, not as the official voice of council on social media. It should be used to interact with the community on a personal level.</td>
<td>• Train customer focus staff to use Facebook;  • Give customer focus staff the responsibility of answering general questions and posting timely and relevant information on the page;  • Provide training to council officers on the importance of responding appropriately to social media enquiries;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tool</td>
<td>How do we use this tool now?</td>
<td>How effective is it?</td>
<td>How do we want to use this tool in the future?</td>
<td>How can we achieve this?</td>
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</table>
| Facebook (Wodonga Council account) continued... | | | | • Proactively ‘like’ other organisations and ask them to do the same to increase our profile;  
  • Run competitions to get more likes;  
  • Share information from other Facebook pages;  
  • Look at features available through Facebook for advertising promoting posts etc. |
| Hard copy newsletters | There are still some business units who are distributing hard copy newsletters, rather than e-newsletters. | The hard copy newsletters take more time and resources than e-newsletters and do not allow for information to be communicated urgently. | All newsletters should be provided in the first instance in e-newsletter format. | • Review newsletters still provided in hard copy; and  
  • Work with relevant business unit to change this over to e-newsletter. |
| Kiosk in the foyer | A computer kiosk has previously been used in the foyer to give people who come in to the office the opportunity to conduct their business online, without needing to speak to a customer focus officer. | The kiosks were not used frequently in the past. | The opportunity to install a kiosk in the customer focus area should be considered in any redevelopment of this area. Kiosks could also be installed at the community centres so people coming in could do their business while also attending to other tasks. | • Ensure the brief for any redevelopment of the customer focus area includes the provision of kiosks; and  
  • Conduct a feasibility of installing kiosks at community centres. |
| Library foyer television screen | The television screens in the library foyer is used to display information on upcoming events, announcements, issues and programs. | The foyer screen is an effective means of communicating with people who come into the library. | The screens should continue to be used for the same information, however the amount of wording and timing of the slides needs to be reviewed to ensure people can read the information clearly. | • Reduce the amount of wording included on the slides; and  
  • Ensure the time of transition between slides gives people time to read them fully. |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tool</th>
<th>How do we use this tool now?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Make Wodonga Yours engagement portal</td>
<td>This portal is a page on the council website that details current community consultation programs. It provides information and allows people to provide feedback.</td>
<td>It is an effective means of giving people access to large documents that might be difficult and costly to print up and distribute. It also allows an easy means for people to provide their feedback as they do not need to attend a community meeting or event and can access to portal at any time.</td>
<td>The portal should continue to be used and promoted as the primary community engagement tool of the council.</td>
<td>• Actions for this tool are to be included as part of the community engagement plan.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Online chat</td>
<td>From 8.30am to 5pm a customer focus staff member is available to respond to queries on the online chat system. While it was initially designed as a feature to assist people to navigate around the website, it is now being used for all types of enquiries. Responses are currently short and direct and staff only respond to questions - they do not proactively seek out contact with people who are online.</td>
<td>The system is an effective way of assisting people with their enquiries as they are able to ask questions and receive an immediate response, without needing to call the council. In 2013 (to October 31st) there had been almost 400 online chats recorded.</td>
<td>The online chat should be seen as another communication tool, as important as the telephone and front counter enquiries. This is how people want to communicate and make enquiries now, not necessarily by speaking to someone. Responses need to be more chatty and conversational. Consideration should also be given to introducing an out-of-hours system where people can type in their enquiry and a search function brings up relevant pages.</td>
<td>• Introduce an out-of-hours function where the person can type their query and a list of potential pages shows up. If it is not what they want then they can leave a message and someone will get back to them the next day; and • Make proactive contact with people who are online to see if they require assistance; • Introduce a more conversational style of engaging with users so that responses are not as short and direct; • Look for opportunities to roster someone on to do the online chat, website updates and social media responses; • Ensure more than one computer at a time can access the back-end of the system so enquiries are responded to straight away; and • Look for opportunities to roster someone on to do the online chat, website updates and social media responses; • Ensure more than one computer at a time can access the back-end of the system so enquiries are responded to straight away; and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tool</td>
<td>How do we use this tool now?</td>
<td>How effective is it?</td>
<td>How do we want to use this tool in the future?</td>
<td>How can we achieve this?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Online chat</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Increase promotion of the service as a tool for communicating with the council.</td>
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<td>continued</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
| Online services     | The council website provides a number of online services, including invoice, fine and infringement payments, renewal of registrations, change of name and address details and reporting a problem or requesting a service. | The online services are effective as they are convenient for the user and at the back-end they go straight into the council’s Pathway program.                                                                                                                                                                                                 | There is an opportunity to increase the number of services provided. New animal registrations are not currently available online. Marketing of all of the services should be increased so people are aware of what they can do online.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | • Investigate opportunities for allowing people to complete new animal registrations online;  
• Place QR codes linking to the report a problem page on signage and other relevant locations around the city (in toilets etc.);  
• Promote the report a problem page instead of Snap Send Solve.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| Rates brochure      | The rates brochure is distributed with all rates notices to explain what the council spends rates on.                                            | The rates brochure is a relatively new concept and its effectiveness has not been tested, however rates brochures from other councils are believed to be most effective when the information is shown in a visual manner and not just words.                                                                 | Rates brochures from other councils should be looked at to determine an easy-to-read and effective format. A short film based on the brochure could also be developed and uploaded to YouTube.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | • Investigate what other councils do for their rates brochure; and  
• Develop a concept where an illustration could be completed for the brochure and the process of this uploaded to YouTube.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| SMS alerts          | Bulk SMS has been used on limited occasion to disseminate information.                                                                               | This tool has not been used enough to gauge its effectiveness by the council. It is however used by a large number of organisations to send information directly to clients.                                                                                                               | The costs for utilising bulk SMS should be explored further before any decision is made as to its future use. Costs could be prohibitive, however if they are deemed to be reasonable then bulk SMS should be incorporated into communications and marketing plans where relevant.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | • Investigate costs for utilising bulk SMS services; and  
• Investigate costs for using SMS as a reminder for meeting bookings (eg. with planners or maternal and child health nurses).                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tool</th>
<th>How do we use this tool now?</th>
<th>How effective is it?</th>
<th>How do we want to use this tool in the future?</th>
<th>How can we achieve this?</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SMS alerts</td>
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<td>The use of SMS as a reminder for appointments should be explored as this will reduce resource-wastage for missed appointments.</td>
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<td>continued</td>
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<td>The preference is for the community to utilise the ‘Report a problem’ feature on the council website.</td>
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<td>Snap Send Solve</td>
<td>This service is promoted on an ad hoc basis as a way of the community reporting issues directing to council from their smartphones.</td>
<td>The program does not integrate with the Pathway system so customer requests need to be manually entered. The geographic location is not always correctly identified, making it difficult to determine the site of the issue.</td>
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<td>• Stop promoting Snap Send Solve as an option for reporting issues to council; and</td>
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<td>• Continue to enter Snap Send Solve requests into Pathway as they arrive.</td>
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<td>Telephone incoming calls and on-hold messages</td>
<td>Incoming telephone calls are either dealt with by a customer focus staff member or transferred through to another staff member. The current on-hold message contains generic information about the services provided by the council.</td>
<td>The transfer of calls is intended to ensure the caller’s enquiry is dealt with effectively. Sometimes callers can be put on a ‘loop’ as the person they are referred to is not the person they need to speak to. The on-hold message is an effective means of communicating as the caller is waiting on hold to be answered as is highly likely to be listening to the information. In 2013 (to October 31st) there had been more than 47,000 incoming calls recorded.</td>
<td>The focus of incoming telephone calls should be on the quality of the information provided in the call, not how many people are waiting in the queue, how quickly their calls are put through to other staff or whether the call was abandoned. The ability to communicate with people while they are waiting to be assisted by a staff member provides great opportunities for disseminating relevant information. The on-hold message system should be reviewed so that timely messages can be broadcast, e.g., in the event of a power blackout to recommend that people contact their electricity service provider. This should reduce the number of calls going through to the community focus team during these events.</td>
<td>• Implement a system where calls are put on hold for 30 seconds before being answered by customer focus staff; • Ensure the first 30 seconds of the on-hold message provides important and timely information to customers; and • Ensure the on-hold message is updated in times of emergency so that people in the queue can find out who they should be contacting when it is not the council (e.g., in a power outage situation).</td>
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<td>Telephone incoming calls and on-hold messages continued</td>
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<td></td>
<td>The regular on-hold message should also contain more detail about the online services available in a further effort to reduce the number of calls going through and to promote the services available.</td>
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| The Cube Wodonga foyer screen | The television screen in The Cube Wodonga foyer is used to display information on upcoming events, announcements, issues and programs. | The foyer screen is an effective means of communicating with people who come into The Cube Wodonga. | The screen should continue to be used for the same information, however the amount of wording and timing of the slides needs to be reviewed to ensure people can read the information clearly. | • Reduce the amount of wording included on the slides; and  
• Ensure the time of transition between slides gives people time to read them fully. |
| Twitter | The content included on this account reflects the content on the Facebook page. | This account currently has more than 1606 (November, 2013) followers, up from 300 in July, 2011. | The Twitter account should be used as the official social media voice of the council. It should not be a direct copy of the information provided on Facebook and instead should focus on corporate messages. Information from other sources should also be retweeted more. The account should also be used to provide immediate information on emergency situations or situations where the community may be affected, eg. a car accident or felled tree. | • Train customer focus staff to use Twitter;  
• Give customer focus staff the posting timely and relevant information to the account; and  
• Retweet information from other organisations. |
| Website | The website was redeveloped in 2012. It is promoted on all council marketing materials and is used to communicate a wide range of information to the community. The new website consistent with the council’s branding and is vastly improved in terms of functionality and usability compared to the old website. It is still difficult to find information if you don’t know where to look. Some old forms still need to be replaced. The use of the website should continue as is, however the location of some content should be reviewed to ensure it can be easily found. • Review the information available on the site and determine what else needs to be uploaded; • Review the search functionality and determine whether it should be a Google search and not just a search of the website content; • Review the structure and content of the website every 12 months; and • Continue to reformat and replace old forms. |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| YouTube | The YouTube account is used sporadically for media conferences, announcements and movie files. The 72 videos that currently feature on this YouTube channel have been viewed more than 44,604 times. The YouTube channel provides a unique opportunity to package information related to council plans and strategies and to present it in a unique and engaging way. It is particularly effective when there is visual information available. The council has the software internally to develop professional YouTube content. • Ensure the use of YouTube is considered when preparing information for community engagement or to the media; and • Proactively seek out opportunities to upload content to the YouTube channel. |