GOVERNMENT WITHOUT WALLS

WEB STRATEGIC PLAN

MECKLENBURG COUNTY

Government Without Walls
Mecklenburg County Web Strategic Plan

Executive Summary

CharMeck.org began in the early 1990s as individual departmental sites on the old Charlotte's Web community Internet presence. Today the site contains in excess of 15,000 pages of information. It serves up over 110,960,000 page views per year and provides 24/7 access to County services for over 740,000 visitors per month. The City and County are currently migrating the entire site to a new software and hardware platform. The project completion date is early 2010.

The website is a great source for local government information, services, and applications, but untapped potential remains. To realize this potential and provide a strategic direction for the future, John McGillicuddy, General Manager, charged Information Services & Technology and Public Service & Information with developing a web strategic plan. The team is pleased to present its work for consideration.

The Webmasters and members of the IT Management Committee (ITMC) evaluated the current site's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats in separate SWOT sessions. The web strategic planning committee conducted numerous focus groups over several months. These groups included County department directors, citizen advisory committees, the ITMC, Carolinas HealthCare, 311 staff, students, and others.

The web strategic planning team then used the SWOT results, information gathered during focus groups, and trends research to develop a set of goals, objectives, and strategies.

During these processes and subsequent analysis, the need for structural elements became apparent. This document includes proposals for a web governance structure and a web organizational structure, two of the key requirements for success.

A web governance structure is critical to a successful website for Mecklenburg County. It must become an organizational body that can effectively oversee web planning, implementation, operation, and management. A logical web governance structure for Mecklenburg County would include the following positions:

- Public Service & Information (PS&I) Director
- eGovernment/Customer Service Director
- Information Services & Technology (IST) Director
- Representative From Growth Management & Environment Focus Area Leadership Team (FALT)
- Representative From Community Health & Safety FALT

The plan calls for the formation of a Web Services Team that will perform the day-to-day website operational tasks. The team would consist of the following positions:

- Web Manager
- Webmasters (5)
- Web Writer/Editor

- Graphics Specialist

By repurposing positions, realigning existing staff, and dedicating positions, the recommended approach to web management should result in no new staff costs to Mecklenburg County during the first year.

The benefits of these recommendations include:

- Improved Public Awareness Index
- Reduced or Avoided Service Delivery Costs
- Expanded Access to Key Services via the Web
- Improved Customer Service
- Improved Communication
- Improved Service Delivery and Efficiency

The web strategic planning team appreciates the consideration of its recommendations.

Start-up Site

The CharMeck.org website has been around nearly as long as the World Wide Web. Beginning in the early 1990s as individual departmental sites on the old Charlotte's Web community Internet presence, the idea caught on with forward thinking individuals in both the City of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County. The City registered the CharMeck.org and ci.charlotte.nc.us domains among others, while Mecklenburg County registered co.mecklenburg.nc.us.

The City and County operated and maintained separate sites for several years. By 1996 the CharMeck.org domain owned by the City housed a directory site that linked to the many independent City and County websites.

In these early days, each web page was hand made and compiled into individual custom-built sites. As the volume of web content grew, it became increasingly difficult to coordinate links and update content. When a change was made to one page, it had to be manually updated and synchronized across all websites. There was no direct integration of content and no mechanism to share management. The City and County internal networks were not connected. Content sharing between the websites was via floppy disk over our "sneaker net," meaning site content was hand delivered to one another. The City and County maintained contracts with an external company to provide, maintain, and host the servers for these websites.

Content Management

To effectively manage the large website, a few City and County visionaries began a movement during the year 2000 to consolidate our many independent sites into one centrally managed, template-based website using Content Management Software (CMS). The effort required a relatively large budget in a lean year. Combining the City and County hosting contracts cut costs in half, generating annual savings to both organizations sufficient to fund the purchase and maintenance of hardware and software for the new site. Functionally combining the sites and sharing the management required a shift in enterprise politics. The City and County eventually overcame these obstacles and selected a product and migration partner after an extensive RFP process. County infrastructure and experience made the County the logical choice to support and maintain the hardware and software required to host the growing website.

The shift to a centrally managed website provided many advantages such as enforced consistency across all content and rapid iteration of changes. The most notable change was in how web content was created. Content Management empowered non-technical content experts to manage their own content. This resulted in tremendous savings in web editing software purchases, training, maintenance, and error troubleshooting. It also shortened the time to market of time sensitive content, enabled the distribution of content responsibilities widely throughout the enterprise, and maintained behind-the-scenes enforcement of enterprise policies and standards.

Microsoft Content Management Server has proven to be an excellent investment, operating flawlessly over seven years and never requiring a support call to Microsoft. With the exception of one minor software modification, the County and City avoided expending any funds on hardware or software.

Current Website Status

The success of the CharMeck.org website continues to grow. Today the site contains in excess of 15,000 pages and serves up over 110,960,000 page views per year to over 740,000 visitors per month. In 2006 the growth exceeded the viable capacity of the County provided servers and Microsoft ceased supporting the version of CMS being used. The time had come to migrate content to a new platform.

The City and County decided in late 2007 to move web content to the latest version of CMS now known as Web Content Management (WCM). WCM is an element of Microsoft Office SharePoint Server 2007. The City of Charlotte will provide, support, and maintain the software, hardware, hosting, and site management for the Internet. Mecklenburg County is currently working in conjunction with the City of Charlotte and Microsoft Consulting Services to prepare web content for migration to the City managed system and infrastructure. The project completion date is early 2010.

Web Strategic Planning Process

While the website is a great source of information about organizational and department-specific activities and services, there is still a great deal of untapped potential. To realize this potential and provide a strategic direction for the future, John McGillicuddy, General Manager, charged Information Services & Technology and Public Service & Information with developing a web strategic plan.

A web strategic planning team was assembled with the following employees:

- Dwayne Campbell   Information Services & Technology
- Eric Cavanaugh   Public Service & Information
- Gerry Davis   Information Services & Technology
- Tammy Dixon   Information Services & Technology
- Emerson Morrison   Public Service & Information
- Sheila Sommers   Land Use and Environmental Services Agency
- Crystal Stilwell   Health Department

A project kick-off was held on March 26, 2008 followed by meetings every two weeks. The team accomplished the following:

- Researched web trends.
- Researched web activities of other organizations.
- Developed a mission and vision for the web.
- Developed a framework/template for conducting a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) analysis.
- Conducted a SWOT analysis with Webmasters and the IT Management Committee (ITMC).
- Developed three sets of questions for focus groups and conducted internal and external focus groups.
- Developed goals, objectives, and strategies.
- Developed a web governance structure.
- Developed a web organizational structure.
- Developed a web action plan.
- Developed a funding, marketing, and communications plan.

The web strategic planning team is pleased to present its work for consideration. The team believes the recommendations are absolutely necessary in order to have a world-class web presence and a site that provides value to the citizens of Mecklenburg County.

Trends in Web Technology

Over the past few years the media has declared Web 2.0 as the next generation of the Internet. It is a paradigm shift in the way the Internet is used. According to Wikipedia, "Web 2.0 is a term describing the trend in the use of World Wide Web technology and web design that aims to enhance creativity, information sharing, and, most notably, collaboration among users."

Web 2.0 moves beyond the traditional one-way release of services and information and establishes a framework of collaborative government in which stakeholders have not only the ability to become informed about governmental decisions but rather have at their disposal more and easily facilitated participation in such decisions. Web 2.0 also strives to provide a richer and interactive experience in conducting transactions with government based on a user's preferences.

Web 2.0 is still very new in local government, but it is likely to become essential for residents to interact and communicate in a bi-directional fashion with government. Web 2.0 is much more than just technology. It promises to transform the way a government interacts with its stakeholders. Mecklenburg County needs to meet and engage citizens where they are online (in social network sites and online communities) rather than expect them to approach us. To build a framework to successfully launch a Web 2.0 campaign, the following are important items to consider.

- Web initiatives require the support of qualified people to make them successful. Mecklenburg County must have the resources in place to plan, strategize, implement, and support social media efforts, blogs, mashups, etc.
- It is important to have an overarching strategy driving web initiatives. It is essential that it is part of a wider communications strategy and not the segregated domain of individual programs or people.
- Initiating small-scale pilot projects is a controllable means to understand and experiment with social computing.
- There are legal risks associated with bi-directional online communication, including those of taking some or no editorial actions on public comments and feedback in online forums or blogs.
- There are risks associated with protecting your public image in a social computing environment.
- To manage risk and quality, the County must develop policies to document responsibilities and best practices related to Web 2.0.
- It is essential to identify the audience the County is trying to reach and use the appropriate channel. It is important to be mindful that not everyone has an account on MySpace, Facebook, or LinkedIn. It is critical to know who is being excluded and plan for this.

Web 2.0 is opening up new opportunities for local governments to provide more citizen-centric services using cost effective technologies. Mecklenburg County has the opportunity to interact with residents and employees to obtain their feedback on policies, issues, services, and plans.

The web strategic planning team started its efforts by developing a mission and vision for the web. The mission and vision became the basis for the remainder of the strategic planning activities:

- **Mission:** To leverage innovative approaches to deliver online services and information to our community intuitively and seamlessly.
- **Vision:** To make the website the primary source of information and services for Mecklenburg County.

Fact Finding

SWOT Analysis

A SWOT analysis is a strategic planning tool used to evaluate strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. The Webmasters and members of the ITMC (IT Management Committee) participated in separate SWOT sessions. The results of both sessions are summarized below.

		Helpful to achieving the objective	*Harmful to achieving the objective*
Internal Origin		*Strengths* • County staff have good web skills and experience. • There is an abundance of web content. • County web pages have a consistent look and feel. • There is a short cycle time to update/publish content. • Control of the site occurs via templates. • Management is showing greater interest in the web.	*Weaknesses* • There is not a web manager or single point of accountability. • There are very few dedicated web resources. • Dedicated web resources have inappropriate job classifications. • There are limited resources to develop web content. • The web is not part of employee work plans. • Staff are not empowered to impact the direction of the web. • County is lacking policies to direct web activities. • Staff do not have the authority to initiate policy changes. • There is limited funding for the web. • Site navigation is difficult. • Content is outdated. • Content is organized by departments rather than services. • City and County web pages have inconsistent design. • There are inconsistencies in design, applications, and data. • There are broken links.

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		• County's business model is antiquated and focuses on printed media rather than the web. • There is not much room for creativity and innovation. • Departments often duplicate web efforts due to lack of coordination. • There are limited web training opportunities for employees. • Departments do not realize the value of the web for conducting business. • The web is often an after thought in marketing campaigns. • The web is not mandated for conducting County business. Using the web is optional.
External Origin	***Opportunities*** • How we conduct business can be given a fresh look with the web in mind. • The website can be branded. • Increased self service and live chat could provide improved service. • Location of web applications could be reviewed to determine location(s) for easier access.	***Threats*** • Moving from Content Management to MOSS 2007 is a challenge. • Mecklenburg County does not own the CharMeck.org domain.

Focus Group Results

The web strategic planning committee conducted numerous focus groups over several months. These groups included County department directors, citizen advisory committees, the ITMC, Carolinas HealthCare, 311 staff, students, and others. Interviews revealed a number of recurring themes, which are presented below. Detailed focus group findings are provided in Appendix A.

Quality and Accessibility of Information

Those surveyed discussed a desire to have the website simplified and streamlined to allow residents to more easily find information -- not structured around City and County departments. It was noted that many pages have outdated information such as e-mail addresses, physical addresses, and advertisements for events that already occurred. Many links are currently broken. Also of note were concerns with the search engine not returning relevant results.

Web Design

Groups discussed that web pages should be more consistent and present a cohesive experience for the citizens with seamless services between the City and the County on CharMeck.org. At present, it was noted the site seems disjointed and fragmented.

Web 2.0

It was suggested that the sites be made much more interactive with wikis, blogs, social networking, etc. Of particular interest was investigating using Facebook, MySpace, and blogs to educate others on outreach, safety, and health issues.

Resources

Those interviewed stressed the need to dedicate additional staff to the website. At present only 1.5 FTEs are dedicated to the external website. This is holding the County back from realizing the full potential of the web.

Marketing

CharMeck.org is not well marketed or well branded. Many residents go to the individually branded pages from departments/divisions such as Park and Recreation, LUESA, Board of Elections, and others. The need to promote County services available through the web was identified. Those interviewed emphasized the need to make the web the primary communications vehicle of the County. Many felt that providing information through the web is an after thought. Individuals prefer to access information regarding the County through the web as opposed to print and media.

Additional Services

- Many forms and information exist online. In many cases, however, it requires that the end user fill out the form, print it, and then bring it to a County facility. Forms should be submitted electronically with an online payment if applicable.
- The County should investigate adding a live chat feature. This would allow a resident to interact with a County representative if he/she is having problems finding important information.
- Those interviewed suggested the County provide a mechanism where citizens not only view Board of County Commissioner meetings, but they can interact by asking questions via YouTube as an example.
- Interviewees suggested the County provide educational videos for employees and the public for various services within Mecklenburg County.

Goals, Objectives, and Strategies

The web strategic planning team used the SWOT results, information gathered during focus groups, and trends research to develop goals, objectives, and strategies. This is a critical piece in the strategic planning process.

GOAL: Provide website that allows visitors to conduct critical business easily and quickly online.

Strategy: Provide an easy to use website with information that is easily retrieved by visitors.

Objectives	• Establish and maintain site navigation that reflects needs of visitors -- not organizational structure. • Maintain effective search tool(s). • Keep web content current, well edited, and organized. • Make web content consistent across the site. • Follow branding strategy, limit unique URLs, and expand the use of sub domains.

Strategy: Offer more services and perform more business functions online.

Objectives	• Work proactively with departments and programs to identify service processes, which can be efficiently shifted to online delivery. • Research on a regular basis how other jurisdictions are using the web to deliver services. • Integrate a centralized marketing strategy into the design and rollout of new online services. • Establish a web applications clearinghouse to exchange information related to development. • Actively search for and promote economy of scale when funding, designing, and building web applications. • Embrace Web 2.0 to offer different ways of interacting with Mecklenburg County residents. • Promote the sharing of a secure electronic payment system that visitors can trust.

GOAL: Provide visitors with access to timely, accurate, and understandable online information they can trust.

Strategy: Support publication of highest quality content.

Objectives	• Establish Web Writer/Editor position. • Establish consistency standards for web content. • Market consistency standards. • Provide web writing training. • Streamline web publishing workflow. • Eliminate duplication of effort. • Encourage data sharing and information exchange. • Promote and enforce web standards.

Strategy: Maintain effective content, which is well presented and addresses customer needs.

Objectives	• Adjust content creation, review, and editing processes to respond to changing customer needs. • Ensure content is accurate, relevant, and timely. • Ensure content is current. • Build publication process that supports timely responses to customer needs. • Leverage the CharMeck.org brand to make content easy to find.

Strategy: Comply with legislation.

Objectives	• Review policies and procedures with respect to legislation, including accessibility requirements. • Educate content contributors, web editors, and designers. • Utilize automated processes (i.e. templates, site design, and software) to enforce standards everywhere possible.

GOAL: Give visitors the means to interact with their government online.

Strategy: Promote a sense of community and provide a strong basis for developing communication between County leadership, staff, and residents.	
Objectives	• Use social media, Web 2.0, and other tools and techniques to connect to internal and external audiences. • Ensure continuous improvement based on visitor feedback. • Establish trained and dedicated roles within agencies tasked with interacting with local residents where they gather online.

GOAL: Establish strong governance.

Strategy: Build web team of dedicated and qualified professionals with defined roles, responsibilities, and authority.	
Objectives	• Acquire clearly defined authority from County Manager's Office. • Establish Web Executive Team. • Define and communicate roles and responsibilities of Web Executive Team and select chairperson. • Assemble Web Services Team. • Define roles and responsibilities for all web positions. • Identify dedicated departmental staff to fill content contributor roles. • Publish clearly defined web governance roles and responsibilities. • Define and implement workflow and staff interaction processes.

Web Governance Structure

A web governance structure is critical to a successful website for Mecklenburg County. It must become an organizational body that can effectively oversee web planning, implementation, operation, and management.

Web governance is the structure of people, positions, authorities, roles, responsibilities, relationships, and rules involved in managing an organization's website. The governance structure defines:

- Who can make what decisions
- Who is accountable for what
- How each of the participants must work together to operate a website and manage it effectively

Lack of web governance leads to:

- Lack of site and content ownership
- Lack of strategic vision
- Lack of efficient and effective content management practices
- Low customer satisfaction

A logical web governance structure for Mecklenburg County would include the following positions:

- Public Service & Information (PS&I) Director
- eGovernment/Customer Service Director
- Information Services & Technology (IST) Director
- Representative From Growth Management & Environment Focus Area Leadership Team (FALT)
- Representative From Community Health & Safety FALT

The PS&I Director, eGovernment/Customer Service Director, and IST Director are members of the Effective & Efficient Government (EEG) FALT and would represent the interests of the EEG FALT while focusing on other interests (i.e. communications, eGovernment, technology infrastructure, etc.). The positions would form the County's new Web Executive Team.

> **Web Executive Team**
>
> **PS&I Director**
> **eGovernment/Customer Service Director**
> **IST Director**
> **FALT Representatives**
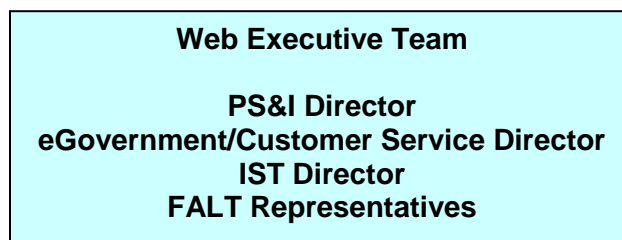
The Web Executive Team would be expected to accomplish the following:

- Articulate a united vision for the web.
- Develop operating procedures that dictate how they will conduct business and make decisions.
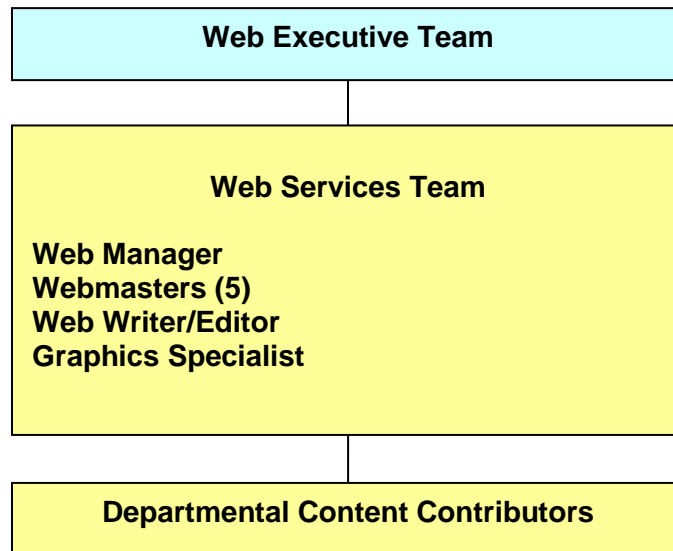- Determine how conflicts/difficulties will be resolved.
- Select a chairperson.

The Web Executive Team would assume the following responsibilities:

- Identify legal, policy, administrative, funding, technical, and other obstacles to achieving the vision.
- Act as a decision-maker for all legal matters, budgetary issues, and items escalated by web staff.
- Promote the use of the web to:
  - Improve and increase communications.
  - Market services.
  - Conduct business online.
  - Improve business processes.
  - Market important County activities, events, and campaigns.
  - Provide opportunities for residents to interact with government.
- Ensure website availability.
- Establish performance measures.
- Make recommendations concerning web improvements, enhancements, and next steps.

In order to effectively use the web to communicate information, provide online services, and improve opportunities for residents to communicate with Mecklenburg County, a dedicated web staff consisting of full-time resources is essential. The Web Executive Team would oversee the activities of a newly formed Web Services Team. The following is a summary of key positions, roles, and responsibilities, which are required to build and maintain a world class web presence.

Positions, Roles, and Responsibilities

Web Executive Team

Web Services Team **Web Manager** **Webmasters (5)** **Web Writer/Editor** **Graphics Specialist**

Departmental Content Contributors

- *Web Manager*
    - Manage day-to-day web operations.
    - Oversee development and maintenance of website.
    - Direct activities of web personnel.
    - Facilitate and encourage innovation.
    - Analyze organizational web needs.
    - Lead team to determine departmental needs, strategies, and goals; oversee implementation of the solutions to meet those needs.
    - Oversee the operation of the County's web presence.
    - Evaluate social networking technologies to address County needs.
    - Design web pages/sites to address resident requests for additional web services.
    - Develop and disseminate web policies, guidelines, and standards and ensure they are adhered to.
    - Research new and emerging web technologies.
    - Develop the strategic direction for the web.
    - Meet regularly with County departments to determine web strategies to address business needs.
    - Collaborate with City of Charlotte web manager.

- *Webmaster (5)*
    - Manage daily operations of departmental websites within:
        1. Effective & Efficient Government
        2. Growth Management & Environment
        3. Social, Education, & Economic Opportunity

4. Community Health & Safety
- o Perform web design and implementation of approved website changes.
- o Work individually with departments in FALTs to identify needs that can be addressed online.
- o Oversee development of additional services and content by content contributors in the FALTs.
- o Determine training needs.
- o Document community feedback, requested services, and proposed site enhancements.
- o Propose solutions and designs to Web Manager.
- o Promote the benefits of using a web-based delivery mechanism for marketing.
- o Coordinate and promote the use of the web in all County marketing campaigns.
- o Develop and implement regular web usability studies with key consumers of web services and recommend changes to the website based upon study results.
- o Analyze web usage data and provide regular web usage statistics to departments to enable them to make informed decisions.
- o Collaborate with City of Charlotte web staff.

- *Web Writer/Editor*
  - o Write key communications for the web following web writing standards.
  - o Edit all site content for grammar, style, consistency, and adherence to web standards.
  - o Perform continual quality assurance reviews of web content.
  - o Promote web usage through regular workshops and interaction with managers and staff.
  - o Create "Meck U," a program to educate content contributors using a series of classes aimed at proficiency in web writing and adherence to standards.
  - o Collaborate with City of Charlotte web staff.

- *Graphics Specialist*
  - o Create graphics for the web.
  - o Edit web images.
  - o Enforce graphics standards.
  - o Coordinate photography.
  - o Manage online videos.
  - o Collaborate with City of Charlotte web staff.

Web Services Team

Mecklenburg County should establish a Web Services Team responsible for filling the roles described above and performing County web activities and functions. This recommendation suggests organizing these positions into a dedicated work team reporting to the Web Executive Team.

The team approach to Web Services encourages cooperation, synergy of ideas, knowledge sharing, and communication.

Action Plan

A web action plan was developed to ensure achievement of the goals in the strategic plan. Each goal has numerous actions to complete in order to achieve success.

GOAL: Provide website that allows visitors to conduct critical business easily and quickly online.

Actions
- Market online functionality and make highly visible and thus easily accessible.
- Poll departments and provide assistance with strategies for identifying online capabilities.
- Reorganize web content by service categories.
- Establish Countywide online payment standard and make available for departments to use when service involves payment.
- Add web addresses to printed materials when online capability is available.
- Create "one-stop shopping" for online County services.

GOAL: Provide visitors with access to timely, accurate, and understandable information online that they can trust.

Actions
- Develop web authoring directory to include web authors and the areas of the web, which they are responsible for.
- Develop and conduct web authoring training to include: web standards, use of content management, writing for the web, and basic graphics editing.
- Formalize policies for web content and post for access by content contributors.
- Educate departmental leadership on web accountability requirements.
- Hold regular informational sessions for content contributors to discuss policies and best practices.
- Make use of expiry features for content that is dated.

GOAL: Give visitors the means to interact with their government online.

Actions
- Establish strategy to leverage online communication and outreach opportunities with the public.
- Establish social media strategy.
- Establish social media policy, guide, and registry.
- Establish a documented public feedback process.
- Embark on pilot projects to understand and experiment with social computing in the Web 2.0 environment.
- Track and analyze public feedback.
- Track and analyze website statistics.
- Use feedback and usage analysis to guide improvement priorities.
- Investigate opportunities for online help and live chat.
- Develop communications/marketing plan.

GOAL: Establish strong governance.

Actions

- Obtain Web Strategic Plan support from County Manager's Office.
- Develop position descriptions.
- Acquire staff.
- Publish clearly defined web governance roles and responsibilities.
- Define and implement workflow and staff interaction processes.
- Develop communications/marketing plan.
- Develop and implement policies:
  - Accessibility
  - Style
  - Custom Sites
  - Social Media
  - Best Practices
  - Understanding Your Audience
  - How to Write for the Web
  - Usability
  - Consistency
  - Performance
  - Identity and Branding

Funding, Marketing, and Communications Plans

The foundational purpose of the funding, marketing, and communications plan is to clearly articulate and bring to fruition the following goals:

- Provide website that allows visitors to conduct critical business easily and quickly online.
- Provide visitors with access to timely, accurate, and understandable information online that they can trust.
- Give visitors the means to interact with their government online.
- Establish strong governance.

Objectives

The objectives include the following:

- Develop funding policies which foster innovation and performance throughout the County.
- Address web-based needs in the following areas: service delivery, collaboration between stakeholders in the local community, and the use of emerging technologies.
- Ensure a clear understanding of the purpose of the Web Services Team as well as the goals of this team.
- Articulate the vision, mission, and modus operandi of the newly-created Web Services Team.
- Execute a deliberate marketing and communications strategy that will conform to Mecklenburg County departmental needs as well as the Web Services Team's capacity.

Year One

During year one the Web Services Team will be constructed using existing positions. By repurposing positions, realigning existing staff, and dedicating positions, the recommended approach to web management should not result in new staff costs to Mecklenburg County during the first year.

The initial focus of the team's effort will be constructing the Web Services Team, providing daily support of existing CharMeck.org websites, and establishing policies and procedures. The balance of the work will result from direct project requests. These will fall into the team's screening process for qualifying assignments.

A budget will be crafted to fund web positions and web initiatives at a level sufficient to meet enterprise demand.

The marketing and communications approach will focus on reputation building through execution and branding. No proactive advertising will be implemented during the first year. The team's communication plan will consist of low-key marketing, exhibited mainly through performance excellence.

Branding

Branding is a foundational piece in the marketing and communications plan and is a vital step in creating and sustaining the team's identity. Closely linked to reputation, brand identity will be repeatedly communicated in multiple ways within customer and stakeholder circles.

The following variables contribute to the Web Services Team's brand formation in year one:

- Services offered
- Quality of services
- Customer satisfaction
- Accurate diagnosis of web-related issues
- Determination of web needs
- Effective prioritization of web assignments
- Core competencies of Web Services Team
- Demonstrated teamwork and enthusiasm of Web Services Team
- Ability of team members to clearly articulate the team's mission, vision, and processes
- Execution of communications strategy:
    - Presentations to department directors
    - Meetings with departmental representatives
    - Lunch and learn sessions
    - E-newsletters and e-mail announcements

Year Two

Year two is an ideal time to take advantage of an established brand as well as grow the team through the budget impact process. Funding justification for the budget impact process will be derived from projected versus actual cost analysis during year one. It is

during this phase that successes are celebrated and recounted. Backed by qualitative (and in some cases quantitative) data, the Web Services Team can clearly communicate its customers' return on their investment (ROI) in web services initiatives. This is measured by tracking cost savings and staff efficiencies realized at the individual department level associated with changes implemented by Web Services Team initiatives.

Marketing and communications during year two are proactive. The Web Services Team will have earned a reputation that will highlight the team's credibility. Year two marketing and communications activities include:

- Study of more targeted customers and their needs
- Review and validation of services and service quality
- Differentiation between internal, external, and customer facing services
- Development of marketing and communications tools

Benefits

The benefits of implementing the recommendations in this strategic plan include:

- Improved Public Awareness Index
- Reduced or Avoided Service Delivery Costs
- Expanded Access to Key Services via the Web
- Improved Customer Service
- Improved Communication
- Improved Service Delivery and Efficiency
- Single Point of Accountability (Web Manager)
- Dedicated Full-time Positions
- Emphasis on Necessary Web Roles and Responsibilities
- Improved Mecklenburg County Reputation for Innovation and eGovernment
- Greater Emphasis on the Web for Conducting Business
- Enhanced Departmental Internet Utilization
- More Focus on Services and Less Emphasis on Departments
- Consistent Presentation of Web Content
- Adherence to Web Policies, Guidelines, and Standards
- An Improved Mecklenburg County Website for Residents, Businesses, and Employees

Web 2.0 Terminology

- ***Wiki*** – A wiki is a type of website that allows users to easily create, edit, and organize web pages. Many wikis allow anyone to create and edit any page, often anonymously. A wiki keeps a record of every revision made to every page, so if a page is vandalized by an anonymous user it can be quickly reverted back to its previous state. Wikipedia, "The Free Encyclopedia," is the world's largest and most popular wiki with millions of pages on almost every topic.
- ***Blog*** – A blog, which is short for weblog, is a type of website that contains multiple entries or posts. The entries are always dated and are usually in reverse chronological order (i.e. the newest posts are found at the top). Many blogs feature news stories but often inject more opinion into the news items than a newspaper.
- ***Social Networking*** – This refers to a broad class of websites and services that allow you to connect with friends, family, and colleagues online, as well as meet people with similar interests or hobbies. Examples include MySpace, Facebook, and LinkedIn.
- ***MySpace*** – This is a popular social networking website offering an interactive, user-submitted network of friends, personal profiles, blogs, groups, photos, music, and videos for teenagers and adults internationally.
- ***Facebook*** – This is a free-access website that is owned and operated by Facebook, Inc. Users can join networks organized by city, workplace, school, and region to connect and interact with other people. People can also add friends and send them messages and update their personal profile to notify friends about themselves.
- ***LinkedIn*** – This is an online network of more than 25 million experienced professionals from around the world, representing approximately 150 industries.
- ***Podcasts and Vlogs*** – These are online audio and video blogs that can be downloaded to devices such as PCs or handheld devices (i.e. wireless phones, MP3 players, and iPods). Podcasts and vlogs can be subscription based or free.
- ***RSS (Really Simple Syndication)*** – This is a family of web-feed formats used to push frequently updated content such as blog entries, news headlines, or podcasts to users' PCs or devices. An RSS document, which is called a feed, web feed, or channel, contains either a summary of content from an associated website or the full text. RSS makes it possible for people to keep up with their favorite websites in an automated manner that is easier than checking them manually.
- ***Mashup*** – This is a web application that combines data from more than one source into a single integrated tool. An example might be the use of map data from Google Maps to add location information to real estate data from Craigslist, thereby creating a new and distinct web service that was not originally provided by either source.
- ***Tagging and Social Bookmarking*** – These are methods that help Internet users to store, organize, search, and manage bookmarks or web pages. These applications allow users to create tags or descriptions of the web pages using their own key words, thus creating their own metadata (data about data). These tags and bookmarks can be shared among users.
- ***Folksonomy*** – The word folksonomy is a combination of folks, meaning people, and onomy meaning management. Users create informal social categories using tags to organize content, so that others may easily find and share it.

SWOT Analysis

A SWOT analysis involves defining an objective and identifying internal and external factors that are favorable and unfavorable to achieving that objective.

A SWOT analysis identifies the following:

- *Strengths* – attributes of the organization that are helpful to achieving the objective.
- *Weaknesses* – attributes of the organization that are harmful to achieving the objective.
- *Opportunities* – external conditions that are helpful to achieving the objective.
- *Threats* – external conditions that are harmful to achieving the objective.

The purpose of a SWOT analysis is to identify the key internal and external factors that are important to achieving the objective. SWOT analysis groups key information into two main categories:

- *Internal factors* – the strengths and weaknesses internal to the organization.
- *External factors* – the opportunities and threats presented by the external environment.

An internal analysis helps plan for the future by identifying how the organization operates right now. It can reveal trends, irregularities, limitations, and opportunities. When performing an internal analysis, it is important to gather information about the organization's strengths and weaknesses, services, programs, activities, staffing, and finances.

An external analysis helps an organization understand how it is perceived externally and what societal factors may affect its future. External factors may include the economy, funding trends, demographics, technology changes, and public opinion.

Developing a full awareness of internal and external factors can help with both strategic planning and decision-making.

Complete Focus Group Results

Existing Site Comments

- The current site has too many layers and requires too many clicks to navigate and find information.
- Many links are currently broken.
- Many pages have outdated information such as e-mail addresses, physical addresses, etc.
- Search engine is not very refined; searches return everything and very seldom what you are looking for.
- Current site is not cohesive and seems very disjointed and fragmented.
- On the CharMeck.org site, the current skyline graphic is not the best image to present to the community. The image uses dark, dreary colors and makes the city look as if the sky if filled with industrial smog.
- Applying for an employment opportunity at Mecklenburg County is very difficult. For instance, you can attach a resume, but then you are required to "build a resume online" answering many of the same questions that are present in the resume.
- Pages are inconsistent. The site looks like many different authors have created the pages.
- CharMeck.org is not well marketed or well branded. Many residents go to the individually branded pages from departments/divisions such as Park and Recreation, LUESA, Board of Elections, and others.
- Streaming video is loaded on the main page, which slows down the entire page until the video completely loads.

Web Design and Layout Suggestions

- Services should be seamless between the City and the County on CharMeck.org.
- CharMeck.org should be simplified and streamlined to allow residents to find information quickly and easily.
- Keep it simple. Less information may be better.
- The website should be intuitive for the user -- not structured around City and County departments.
- Web pages should be consistent.
- Many users expressed frustration that they are asked for their address, phone number, or other pertinent information several times while scheduling or requesting County services via the web.
- Seasonal information should be rotated to the front page.
- The site should provide links to other pertinent sites such as Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, real estate associations, and other popular Charlotte area sites.
- Many forms and information exist online. In many cases, however, it requires that the end user fill out the form, print it, and then bring it to a County facility. Forms should be submitted electronically with an online payment if applicable.

Web 2.0 and Social Media Opportunities

- Make sure the County accomplishes the following before moving forward with additional Web 2.0 services:
    - responds to all e-mails sent via e-mail links.
    - ensures that all telephone numbers are correct.
    - fixes all broken links.
    - ensures content itself is correct.
- Investigate adding a 24x7 live chat feature. This would allow a resident to interact with a County representative if he/she is having problems finding important information.
- Provide a mechanism where citizens not only view the County Board meetings, but they can interact by asking questions via YouTube as an example.
- Provide educational videos for employees and the public for various services within Mecklenburg County.
- Improve the turnaround time to produce videos internally. This would allow online videos to be updated and placed on the web in a timelier fashion.
- Investigate using Facebook, MySpace, and blogs to educate others on public health issues.
- Make site much more interactive with wikis, blogs, social networking, etc.

Other Suggestions

- Centralize Internet development and maintenance activities. External advisory groups mentioned that their current Internet development environments are centralized.
- Dedicate additional staff to the website. At present only 1.5 FTEs are dedicated to the external website. This is holding the County back from realizing the full potential of the web.
- Partner with 311 to help determine what areas of the web need to be corrected first and redevelop those pages per comments.
- Market County services available through the web.
- Make the web the primary communications vehicle of the County. Many felt that providing information through the web is an after thought. Individuals prefer to access information regarding the County through the web as opposed to print and media.
- Investigate providing multiple languages, since the Charlotte region is becoming more culturally diverse.