SUMMARY

The City of Redwood City has renewed its focus on expanding citywide communications, public information, community building and engagement (both offline and online with social media), branding, and marketing.

The following Marketing and Communications plan provides a set of strategies and tactics to accomplish the City’s goals in this regard. The plan will act as a road map for expanding our communications efforts, maximizing and promoting access to city information and services and reinforcing the city’s brand.

The plan is organized in the following way:

1. SWOT
2. Communications, Marketing and Branding Goals
3. Strategies and Tactics
4. Performance Measures

COMMUNICATIONS, MARKETING AND BRANDING GOALS

The City of Redwood City’s Communications, Marketing and Branding goals are:

1. Reinforce the City’s Brand
2. Inform the public and engage the community
3. Create and communicate Downtown’s brand identity
4. Establish internal standards and procedures
5. Measure performance
STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES, OPPORTUNITIES AND THREATS

Strengths

- Connected community hungry to engage with the City
- Progressive City operations and community leadership
- Strong and aligned city leadership
- Strong economy and stable budget outlook
- Desirable location in the heart of the Bay Area/Silicon Valley
- Downtown growing as the County hub for culture and entertainment
- Known as a start-up hub
- Growth in restaurants and retail downtown is helping to reinforce the City’s investment in Downtown

Weaknesses

- Lack of city voice in online discussions for a long time
- Loudest community voices seem to be negative
- Downtown growth without the city sharing the story about Downtown
- Communications strategies up to now did not take advantage of multimedia/rich media channels; lack quality photo, quality graphics, quality video to build from
- Lack of brand ambassadors

Opportunities

- New website being developed
- New communications and marketing team established
- City Neighborhood survey results can be used to tailor or change city approaches including how we communicate
- New online tools in the works to share planning and building information
- City-disseminated information quickly goes viral within Redwood City-specific online communities; good continuing opportunities for conversations with the public
- Many dedicated ambassadors in the public and on social media who want to promote positive things about the city, especially on Facebook
- New emergency alert system

Threats

- Some disconnect and dissention about city growth via a loud minority of residents on social media
- Political environment as a result of an election year
- Outdates communications protocols, policies and procedures, including social media policy
- Lack of city brand and marketing focus for a long time has caused other outside forces to create the city’s brand for the city
1. RE-ESTABLISH REDWOOD CITY’S BRAND

As an initial effort to re-position and re-establish the City’s marketing and communications efforts, branding for this fiscal year means re-establishing and reinforcing Redwood City’s brand through creating a baseline marketing focus, using much of the existing framework (i.e. logos, current tagline, etc.) to further the city’s marketing, advertising, communications and social media efforts.

The City has an established tagline “Best Climate by Government Test” that is well known by the general public, regional partners, and business leaders. The City’s logo needed a refresh. Currently the city lacks a citywide style guide and other centralized tools to help the broader city team and partners market the city. The city’s downtown lacks a brand identity. The city’s website is undergoing a relaunch which will help brand the city and become a major resource to market city programs, services and create a social spring board for further engagement with the community.

Branding strategies and tactics include:

- Revise the city’s boilerplate
- Communicate and reinforce the city’s brand
- Establish general messaging about the city and manage issues as they arise to help reinforce the city’s brand identity
- Create a style guide and branding colors
- Refresh the city’s logo (in conjunction with the website launch where the logo has a prominent position on each webpage)
- Create a brand for Downtown Redwood City (a separate priority but related goal)
- Launch the city’s new website
- Centralize graphic design services
- Citywide photos and photo gallery
- Establish a more engaging, personable, informative “voice” for Redwood City in appropriate channels with the public

Redwood City New Boilerplate

Renew the City’s boilerplate and elevator pitch.

The City of Redwood City is a San Francisco Bay Area community located in the heart of Silicon Valley, the technology-rich region extending from the San Francisco Peninsula to the foothills of the Santa Cruz Mountains. Redwood City is the third largest city within the County of San Mateo, with 82,881 residents. The city enjoys an average of 255 sunny days a year, which it boasts via the city slogan: “Climate Best by Government Test”. Incorporated in 1867, Redwood City is home to the San Mateo County History Museum (located in the county’s old courthouse) and the only active deep water port within the south bay of San Francisco. The city’s vibrant downtown, quickly becoming known as the entertainment hub of the San Francisco Peninsula, offers residents, visitors, and businesses a unique retail, entertainment, and restaurant experience. For more information, visit the City of Redwood City’s website at www.redwoodcity.org, or follow @RedwoodCity on Twitter and http://facebook.com/CityofRedwoodCity.
Redwood City General Messaging

In partnership with Department Heads, we will establish ongoing messaging about city operations and issues management to help align the internal team around a set of talking points. The goal is to help manage a unified voice across the city so that the city’s brand and city’s position on items is clear. Part of the opportunity with this cohesive alignment is that over time we can create brand ambassadors both internally and externally.

City Branded Colors, Style Guide, and Logo Refresh

Currently, the City does not have a style guide or branded colors for the internal team to use. This resource provides a clear branding style for communications and marketing teams to go to as they create new marketing and communications materials. In advance of the final development and design of the City’s new website, we have an opportunity to create a style guide, with branded colors and a refreshed logo to ensure that the new website design is fresh and new.

New logo

Use of the city logo has not been standardized up to now. As of July 1, the new logo is required to be used by all departments.

Other efforts include:

- Developing a new email signature that maximizes the city’s communications efforts with buttons to the city’s social media accounts
- The city’s new website will showcase the City’s logo on each webpage
- The new modern logo includes the city’s updated branding colors

New City Government Website

The City has a tremendous opportunity to increase public information through a new city website. The City website ranked number 2 in a recent city satisfaction survey where residents weighed in on how they’d prefer to receive information. The website continues to be a powerful tool for Redwood City's brand, and it helps achieve the City's priority of creating a virtual city hall where the public can pay a bill online, apply for permits, and gain easy access to other City services.

The City partnered with Vision Internet to develop a new and updated city portal to share information, communicate more effectively and offer more online resources than ever before. The new website uses the City’s existing URL www.redwoodcity.org and features a refreshed design, showcasing Redwood City's status as the cultural and entertainment hub of the Peninsula and the start-up tech center of Silicon Valley.

The vibrant and colorful redesign improves site navigation, offering easy access to the City information most requested by residents and the public, such as "Apply for a Job," "News," "Hot Topics," "Events," and "Connect with Us". The new design is also responsive for mobile and tablet users, and recognizes the community's diversity with an array of language translation options. Many pages are further integrated with the City's social media accounts, creating a social network "springboard" to invite easy participation in the City's online community.
Other web related tools include:

- City Department home pages
- Specially designed themed pages to showcase Parks, Events and Library
- Use of icon and buttons designed to get users where they need to go faster
- Frequently Asked Questions to help answer the public’s most asked questions about specific topics
- Centralized RFP page
- New Newsroom for City information sharing that links together city documents, city’s online newsletters, news releases, news articles, city construction news, and the city’s blog

Website Design and Management

As part of the website launch, the City Manager’s Office created content managers responsible for each department’s website content, which will ensure relevant content on the city’s website. The City Manager’s Communications and Marketing team will manage the creative design and management of the website, assisting departments with the design and content of their website when needed.

Citywide Graphic Design Services

To reinforce the city’s brand and further the city’s style guide and branding colors, there is a need for graphic design services. We have a contract with a graphic designer that each department may choose to use based on their level of graphic design needs.

Citywide Photos and Shared Photo Gallery

To share Redwood City’s story, a robust photo library is helpful to visually demonstrate the city’s progress, engaged community, various city services and programs and celebrate successes. Photos also help ensure that the city’s website stays current.

To ensure the City has updated photography, it will be necessary to hire a photographer to assist us with creating new photos. In addition, the city is currently lacking a shared photo gallery for internal use by all city departments. As it stands, all departments have their own folders and when someone retires, many of those photos are lost with that individual. A shared photo gallery will ensure that the city’s investment in photography will not be lost and will provide the internal team with additional photography to use for marketing and communications purposes.

2. CREATE AND COMMUNICATE DOWNTOWN’S BRAND IDENTITY

The City of Redwood City’s downtown is lacking an online presence so as part of the communications and marketing plan, a number of strategies will be employed to create an online resource for the public to gain information and bridge the information gap that exists.
To bridge the gap with the lack of Downtown information, the following strategies will be implemented:

- Schedule a photo shoot to create downtown photography for marketing purposes.
- Creation of a microsite to share downtown information, establish a downtown brand and create an online resource to showcase downtown as a fun, exciting place to visit.
- Design of a printed downtown guide will be created to share more about downtown’s location, signature events, restaurants, parking and more.
  - This guide will be distributed to downtown businesses to share information with visitors and patrons. It will also be distributed to all city facilities, posted online and shared with the public through social media.
- Design of a monthly e-newsletter focused on Downtown Redwood City to put a face and a voice to this thriving area
  - The digital newsletter will include a video series called Voices of Downtown to introduce the public to downtown businesses, restaurants, retailers, etc.
  - The monthly e-news is in addition to regular social media efforts to share more about downtown with the public.

3. INFORM THE PUBLIC AND ENGAGE THE COMMUNITY

The communications strategies developed, in partnership with Department Heads, are critical to expand the city’s communications efforts citywide with the goal to share information, engage the community, educate and inform about city events, services, and programs. Engagement through social media, online and the website are each important means of sharing information with the public. Traditional means of communicating will also be utilized including mailing notices and newsletters, launching a neighborhood survey, and other resources to share and gain information.

Re-establish the City’s Mailed Newsletter

Through this year’s budget process, the Mayor and City Council gave direction to develop a newsletter that is mailed to each resident in the city. The newsletter will be mailed twice a year in November and May and provide residents with information about programs, services and events coming up within the next six months. It will also be a way to direct the public to the city’s new website for more details.

Centralized Citywide Website Calendar

With the launch of the new city website, the city has an opportunity maximize the use of the citywide website calendar. The City Manager’s Office will manage the calendar and ensure that city events are included and up-to-date, working in partnership with city departments. The calendar is also a tool for free community-driven events and a resource for the public to promote these events. The City Manager’s Office developed calendar guidelines and has the right to decline a community’s request to publish an event based on these guidelines and standards.
Media Relations and Public Relations

Working in partnership with the City Manager and Department Heads, the Public Communications Manager will work with media to share city information and announcements to gain media coverage through traditional media and blogs. Ongoing media list management and media monitoring will be key to maximize the city’s exposure and share articles and information on the city’s website.

Build Digital Communities through Expanded Social Media Presence and Focus

A pivotal area of focus for the City Manager’s Office is to build and expand a digital community to engage our residents through social media. This strategy includes utilizing various social media channels and marketing tactics to accomplish this goal.

Five tactics we are focused on this year include:

1. Expansion of the city’s official social media accounts. Adding Facebook and Instagram. Re-engagement of Next Door, Twitter, LinkedIn and mysidewalk.
2. Creation and management of an official city blog
3. Development of videos to help tell our story online and via social media
4. Expansion of e-news, a digital newsletter
5. Creation of campaigns to engage the community and gain input

Expand the City’s Social Media and Online Presence

In January of 2015, the city’s only official social media focus was the use of Twitter and it was not regularly updated. Since January, the city’s official Twitter account has gained many followers and has seen tremendous engagement. In addition, a strategic evaluation of all social media channels was completed to understand what social media avenues our residents are using most.

Over a three month period, staff discovered that while Twitter is useful to share information, our residents use Facebook and Next Door more frequently to share and gain information. A few city departments are also on Facebook, providing an opportunity to help further these departments’ communication efforts.

Facebook

In July, the City launched an official Facebook account. In addition, staff started to advertise on Facebook to grow supporters, increase page likes, and share event information and updates to a broader audience.

Nextdoor

Residents also utilize Next Door to share information. This platform is slightly limited in that users are separated into neighborhoods. Those neighborhoods each have public forums where users can talk to one another; the City, however, cannot access these forums. Instead, the City has a government agency page that it can use to message and receive feedback.

Still, Nextdoor represents the most significant online communications opportunity to which the City has access. All of our Nextdoor messages can be seen by up to 10,000 people.
Twitter

The City Manager’s office will continue to use Twitter to share information and engage residents and the community. Generally Twitter numbers are growing at a slow rate (~100-200 per month), while Facebook users are increasing more quickly. This is likely due to the overall decline in the use of Twitter as a social network, which continues to suffer poor active monthly user counts (compared to other social networks).

Engagement is strong, however, on Twitter, with both followers and non-followers. Many residents use Twitter to provide feedback to the City, and to ask the City questions. A number of media professionals also continue to favor Twitter, which in itself justifies our use of the network.

mysidewalk

mySidewalk is a polling/survey platform with whom the City has a two year contract. (The platform was formerly called “Mindmixer”.) Staff are still evaluating the value of using mySidewalk, which has low traffic compared to other similar platforms. As the contract with mySidewalk gets closer to expiring, we will evaluate the effectiveness of this platform. With our new website, much of the tools offered by mySidewalk can now be offered through our new website.

Linkedin

The City of Redwood City has a LinkedIn profile. We have reengaged our profile and have begun sharing city information including city employment opportunities and major announcements to stay relevant in this space.

Other Social Networks

The City also maintains profiles on Instagram and Youtube, and has plans to experiment with Snapchat. We will evaluate the use of these and other social networking opportunities on an ongoing basis.

City E-BLASTS

Historically, City-issued newsletters are our most popular communication tool with the public; with them, we reach an engagement audience who has “opted in” to receive our updates. In an effort to rebrand and reposition the City, staff has reformatted and redesigned the City’s enews. In addition, we have redesigned enews to combine announcements and information into one weekly eblast, versus multiple eblasts in one week (as it was previously). This has maximized our message, limit the amount of times we communicate in a weekly period to subscribers and likely ensure subscribers continue opt in versus opt out as a result of over communication. Staff still have the option to send other City Enews as stand-alone messages, sparingly when needed. All e-blasts are posted to Twitter and Facebook to enhance the opportunity for new followers. The weekly E-news digest, including information on local events and City programs and resources, regularly performs above industry standards with an average click through of 30%.

City Construction Updates

In addition, we will continue to provide construction updates to share information about parking and downtown project information as in the past.
City Blog- Redwood City Voice

With the evolution of the website, staff has an opportunity to move away from the previous blog like format called Setting the Record Straight, to a more inclusive open communication blog. This will provide an opportunity for the City to share more information, provide a place to set the record straight when needed and encourage different audiences to learn about the City of Redwood City. In May, staff launched a new Redwood City Voice blog on www.Medium.com. The blog provides the city an opportunity to partner with community leaders and residents as guest authors/voices. We also engaged Jim Clifford with the San Mateo Daily Journal, a history columnist, to be a guest author/voice regularly to provide a RWC historical perspective.

Code Red (emergency network) and SMC Alert

The city currently uses Code Red for emergency alerts and partners with the County to send emergency alerts through SMC Alert. The County just moved to Everbridge. The city will be moving to this new platform for emergency alerts and end its contract with Code Red. Everbridge also just purchased Nixle, another online tool to share both community and emergency updates and is a social media resource that the Police Department uses. Everbridge offers more tools for the city to share emergency information than Code Red. In addition, it provides opportunities to have a closer partnership with San Mateo County Emergency Operations while continuing to offer direct local control over subscribers.

Campaigns to Engage the Community

Various campaigns will be created to engage the community and gain input on important issues facing the City of Redwood City. These campaigns will use all forms of communication tools to encourage input and educate the community, including:

- Videos
- Printed and digital flyers for distribution online and mailed to residential and business addresses, copies for city facilities, community events, etc.
- Special emails created for direct input
- Online e-blasts, direct email updates, blogs, social media communications
- Town Hall and/or other community meetings (potentially televised and broadcast online)
- Media announcements
- City Website tools including surveys and polls

Campaigns completed or in progress include:

- Join the Conversation
- Farm Hill Blvd. Pilot Program
- Mail-In Ballot Election Initiative
PenTV

Through an expanded partnership with PenTV, the City Manager’s Office will utilize the local community TV partner to share information with the local community. Resources include: creation of videos (in addition to those we create in-house), information posted on PenTV bulletin board, social media channels and website. In addition, PenTV will stream two events live for the City of Redwood City and create a welcome message from our Mayor.

4. ESTABLISH INTERNAL STANDARDS AND PROCEDURES

There are a number of internal standards and procedures needed to align the city around communications, branding and marketing. In conjunction with the development of the marketing and communications plan, there is the need to develop a number of standards to help support citywide communications.

Specific standards and procedures we will develop and implement, include:

- A media protocol
- Citywide Social media policy
- Citywide website calendar guidelines
- A citywide style guide
- A city council meeting presentation template
- Citywide marketing and communications working group
- Establish a citywide web content group focused on the web launch
- Evaluate the city’s crisis communications plan and update as needed

TRACK GOALS AND REPORT PERFORMANCE

In addition to accomplishing the many strategies above, there is an opportunity to report on performance on a regular basis. Performance reports will be created to share successes and accomplishments and monitor overall effectiveness of communications and marketing strategies. As this year is the first year in tracking, we will monitor a number of performance measures and will look to establish goals and track to those goals next year.

**Twitter:** Overall, it is anticipated that Twitter followers will stay the same or decline over time, as use of this social network declines.

**Facebook:** It is anticipated that Facebook followers, likes and shares will increase. We are well over 1,000 page likes in just three months since beginning an official Facebook account.

**Nextdoor:** Next Door is a useful, targeted way to share information with engaged community members. We will track followers, questions received, and engagement overall.

**mySidewalk:** We are still evaluating this social media resource. Many county colleagues are moving away from mySidewalk to other more established surveying and polling tools.
Redwood City VOICE, medium.com blog: We began the blog in May and have seen an increase in followers since then. We’ve added regular historical blogs, Tell a Friend Thursdays- a blog to answer questions received in email or through social media and used the blog space to share city updates like parking, affordable housing, water conservation, Inner Harbor Strategic Plan, etc. We will continue tracking followers and views of blog posts.

Enews open rates and click-through’s: Our new Downtown-focused newsletters for June and July broke records for Enews success, achieving ~37% open rates and ~20% click-through rates. Regular City Enews is also seeing much higher open rates than average government Constant Contact clients. We will continue to monitor open rates, click-through’s, and subscriber numbers.

Videos: Many of our videos (uploaded to Youtube) have successfully informed the public about new restaurants and businesses, and City projects. Our video about the controversial Farm Hill Blvd. restriping was viewed ~2000 times.

Website: We will track website success through Google statistics including unique website visitors, most read pages, and other results.

Evolving Editorial Calendar: An editorial calendar will be an added resource to share information internally and track news announcements, updates, blogs, social media campaigns and other marketing efforts.

Daily Article Report: A daily article report will be created to track articles secured by the City Manager’s Office and Departments and other article created about the City of Redwood City and city partners that are relevant to city operations and services.

CONCLUSION

Overall, we believe that the City of Redwood City is well poised to build upon previous successes and engage the public in greater numbers over the following calendar year. With new best practices, City-wide standards, and richer media strategies firmly in place, the City can take full advantage of all available opportunities to promote the positive aspects of the Redwood City community, and the ways in which the City serves this community.

We also believe that data-driven, best-in-class communications strategies are an essential component of open government. We are dedicated to building and maintaining the public’s trust using social networks, media relations, and other channels to promote transparency, information sharing, and two-way engagement.