

**Comprehensive
Communications Program
Town of Sullivan's Island**

11:30am – 12:00Noon

Tuesday, March 30, 2010

MASC, Columbia

Sullivan's Island – A Residential Community

- Small residential community of approximately 1900 residents
- Hurricane prone barrier Island
- Small municipal staff of 45

Sullivan's Island – Committed to Communications

CHALLENGE:

- Keep residents informed of:
 - Municipal News
 - Public Safety/Emergency Matters
 - Community Events and Meetings

Accurately and Quickly

Sullivan's Island: Communications Program Goals

Successful Initiatives Must Be:

- **EFFECTIVE**
- **ECONOMICAL**
- **EFFICIENT**
- **EASY**
- **PORTABLE**

Sullivan's Island- Team Approach

- Public feedback on citizen needs;
- Council and key staff prioritize and budget:
 - **New Website- 1st Priority**
 - **Emergency/Public Safety Alert**
 - **Newsletters to Public**

Town had been using: Local Cable Access channel, paid/free newspaper articles and ads, electronic bulletin boards and posted flyers in municipal locations.
- Different departments took enhancement projects.

Sullivan's Island- New Website

(Fall 2008-Launched January 2009)

- **FOUNDATION of Communications**
- **NEED:** Staff content control for immediate changes. Ability to enhance site based upon citizen feedback/needs.
- **PROCESS:**

Gathered feedback from public & staff on site:

- Design
- Features
- Primary Target Audience

Website designed primarily for residents.

Includes important information for visitors.

Sullivan's Island

New Website

(Fall 2008 – Launched January 2009)

Highlights:

■ EFFECTIVE:

- Customized to Town's needs and specifications
- Tracks traffic volume and popular sites

■ ECONOMICAL:

\$8,000 (start up to launch)

annual expense: \$420.00 (web hosting)

- Start up company: Design
- In-house Staff: Development

Sullivan's Island- New Website

(Fall 2008 – Launched January 2009)

- EFFICIENT:
 - Town has full content management of site from web based log-in. (Sitefinity CMS)
 - Instantaneous updates instead of days
 - Town can add/subtract pages “at will”
- EASY: Windows driven updates; no need to know programming code.
- PORTABLE: Updates done from any computer at any location with internet access.

240,000+ visits in 1st year

Sullivan's Island

Emergency/Public Alerts

(May 2009 – Launched August 2009)

- Need: communicate public safety or emergency alerts to residents
 - Immediately
 - Resident either “on” or “off” Island at time.
- Types of Alerts:
 - Traffic: accident on bridge
 - Swim advisories: rip tides
 - Weather alerts: hurricane levels
 - Crime alerts: suspicious activity

SOLUTION: Email and cell phone text messages through Nixle Municipal Wire.

Sullivan's Island

Emergency/Public Alerts

(May 2009 – Launched Aug 2009)

- **EFFECTIVE:** Immediate text phone alerts and/or emails.
- **ECONOMICAL: FREE.**
Nixle Municipal Wire is a consortium of corporations donating service to municipalities.
- **EFFICIENT:** Designated Staff keys in alerts and Nixle does rest. Can blanket Island or target blocks. Subscribers join/drop directly through Nixle "at will."

Sullivan's Island Emergency/Public Alerts

(May 2009 – Launched Aug 2009)

- EASY:

Any Staff member with log-in and password can manage alerts. Currently Police and Water/Sewer managers. No special software knowledge required.

- PORTABLE:

Can be done from any computer with internet access.

Subscribers (first 6 months): 350+

Sullivan's Island E-Newsletter

(Oct 2009 – Launched Nov 2009)

- Many residents were helping Town spread information on website through big email chains.
- Town sent its own periodic email through a large address book: time consuming and unwieldy (especially maintaining correct email address drops/adds).
- **NEED:** Way for Town to efficiently email interested residents with information that would complement website and drive residents to the website for most current and accurate information.

SOLUTION: E-Newsletters through Constant Contact (on-line marketing vendor).

Sullivan's Island E-Newsletter

(Oct 2009 – Launched Nov 2009)

- **EFFECTIVE:** Tailor newsletters and news to Town needs. Vendor provides strong spam/bounce back management and reports that show subscription activity and most popular links.
- **ECONOMICAL:** \$10.50/mo (\$126/yr)
Send 1-1000+ emails/month for 1 fee.
- **EFFICIENT:** 3-4 hours/publication Staff time; subscribers on/off at will through Constant Contact.

Sullivan's Island E-Newsletter

(Oct 2009 – Launched Nov 2009)

- **EASY:**

Windows driven program with many “help” features and templates. No need to know software code.

E-Newsletter was launched in less than two weeks from first call to vendor.

- **PORTABLE:**

Can be created and sent from any computer with internet access.

**SUBSCRIBERS (first 4 months) 326
(30%+ Island households).**

Sullivan's Island: Call Back Service (Launched January 2009)

CHALLENGE: Water Dept spent money/manpower hanging door notices and mailing bill notices to Delinquent account holders.

Average: 40 shut-offs/month

Cost \$150-\$200/mo for notices (\$3-5/notice)

Compliance: Still shut off approx 20-30 accounts.

NEED: More economical way to get account notices to residents as early as possible for lowest cost.

ANSWER: Call back service with CallingPost.com

Sullivan's Island: Call Back Service (Launched January 2009)

Calling Post.Com is web based telephone call back service. Staff pre-records phone message that is sent vendor (on-line).

Complements Nixle messages. Can be used to call one or all residents.

Can be used to call one or all residents.

With CallingPost.Com & Nixle, Town has a more complete emergency/public safety alert system.

Sullivan's Island: Call Back Service (Launched 2009)

- **EFFECTIVE:**
System calls 10 times before leaving message;
Town gets report of calls received/not received.
- **ECONOMICAL:**
\$.12/call instead of \$2-\$5/notice.
- **EFFICIENT:** One (1) staff member in
5 minutes accomplishes what required 6 staff
members to do in a whole work-day.

Sullivan's Island: Call Back Service (Launched 2009)

- **EASY:** Any staff member can accomplish; Windows menu driven instructions.
- **PORTABLE:** Calls can be made from any computer with internet access.

SUCCESSFUL:

Reduced billing costs by 90%+

Compliance increased 50% +

Sullivan's Island: Traditional Newsletters (Launched Spring 2009)

- Water Dept reformatted bill to a standardized size (8.5" x 11" paper).
 - Provide all account information at one time.
 - Reduced one extra mailing cycle (late notices).
- New bills enabled Town to include traditional paper newsletters/flyers each month with water bills.
- Reaches out to multi-generational residents or those who do not use computers or cell phones.
- Ensures 900+ account holders get important news.

SUMMARY

Different platforms and initiatives (5)

GOOD FOR TOWN & STAFF

- Complements other new and existing initiatives.
- Creates an integrated communication program covering all "bases."
- Inexpensive: Total annual commitment = \$618.00
- EFFECTIVE, ECONOMICAL, EFFICIENT, EASY, PORTABLE = SUCCESSFUL

SUMMARY

WINNING PROGRAM FOR CITIZENS:

- Residents appreciate increased transparency
- Better informed citizenry
- Enhances meaningful dialogue between residents/elected officials
- Assists Staff in better serving residents
- Opportunity to increase citizen service to the Town (boards, commissions, community groups, etc)