Oakland County Board of Commissioners

Six Month Facebook Social Media Plan

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INTRODUCTION

Located in metro Detroit, Oakland County is Michigan's second largest county. Its government structure includes the County Executive's Office, the Board of Commissioners (made up of 21 elected officials that each represent a different district of the county) and five county-wide elected officials. Each office operates separately from each other to ensure a system of checks and balances, and the Board has a dedicated team of communication staff. The Oakland County Board of Commissioners' Facebook page is a key component of a larger communication strategy that includes the Board's website, media materials, events and more. The role of the Facebook page in this broader strategy is to serve as a place to give quick updates on the Board in a way that is convenient to its constituents, which according to a survey done by Facebook, is why 42 percent of people use social media apps to connect with government (Meta, 2022). By using the current literature on social media and society, pragmatically applying those findings to the role of the Board's Facebook page and creating SMART goals, the following Facebook social media plan has been created.

Drawing on a presentation by Gisele Neuls, this social media plan has been developed through consideration of the Board's Facebook audience; the objective for the page, goals and measurements to reach that objective, a timeframe and key messages for the organization, plus an

understanding that social media is always changing and this plan may be tweaked at any time (2022).

OBJECTIVE, GOALS AND MEASUREMENT

As a governmental organization, the objective of the Board's Facebook page is not to sell something but to inform residents (Neuls, How to create a social media plan - Part 2). Further, based on a formal survey and quantitative data from staff, commissioners and the public that I have gathered throughout my tenure working for the Commission, we know that the public has little awareness about the Board's role within the county. To reach more constituents with content that teaches the public about the Board, this plan includes several goals that are specific, measurable, attainable, relevant and time-based.

The Oakland County Board of Commissioners' Facebook audience is Oakland County residents and stakeholders —including nonprofit organizations, local governments and businesses— on that platform. The page has 2,463 followers, 73 percent identify as women. There are more than 1.2 million residents in Oakland County, which demonstrates a huge potential for growth when it comes to followers.

To connect with more constituents on Facebook, the page aims to grow its followers by 50 percent and increase its engagement by 30 percent compared to the previous six months. By increasing followers and engagement, we can measure whether more people are being reached by our messaging. Although engagement is not a measure of whether the Board's reputation has improved, it is a measure of how many followers are interacting and digesting our content, and therefore learning more about the Board. By increasing engagement, the page will also reach more people due to how Facebook's algorithm prioritizes content (Jacoby et al., 2018). This is important because teaching constituents about how their government is working for them and how to access

the Board's services will help raise awareness of the Board's role, build trust between commissioners and constituents, demonstrate to constituents how to use the Board more efficiently and explain the role the Board plays in constituents' lives.

Beyond increasing the number of people who see and interact with the Board's content, over the next six months, another goal of the Facebook page will be to create content that explains the Board's role. Progress to this goal will be measured by coding the content of the previous six months based on the objective it serves and comparing it to the content of the six months of the social media plan. Any increase in the number of posts that act purely to "inform the public about the Board's role and duties" will be considered a success.

With advertising money and a focus on creative content development (outlined in the "Content" section), these metrics are attainable and relevant to the organization's goal of informing the public. Additionally, the social media plan will be in place from September 1, 2022 through February 28, 2023, giving staff a timeframe to stay on track toward our goal.

KEY MESSAGES

The Board's key messages will be developed into diverse posts (outlined in the "Content" section) that serve a purpose for the page's followers. Generally speaking, the page will share its key messages using semi-formal organizational voice, as that is part of an appropriate personality for a governmental organization, which commissioners have come to expect. Those key messages include:

- The powers and responsibilities of the Board
- The structure of the Board
- The Board's role in managing the county budget
- Who the commissioners are

One way to incorporate these messages into engaging content is by determining what purpose the content serves followers, and which of those purposes are most engaging (Nguyen, 2020). Based on a review of the page and careful monitoring of the page for the past two years, I have found that the most engaging content serves the following purposes for its followers:

- "Tells me something about my local community"
  - Constituents prefer hearing about what is happening where they live, not on the other side of the county
- "Shows the Board/a commissioner taking action on an item I have strong feelings about" - Controversial or popular topics get shared by commissioners and constituents alike
- "Shows a partnership between a group I am involved in/follow and the Board of Commissioners" - Seeing an organization that a constituent is involved with in the context of the Board's work helps make it more relatable for the follower

To have the greatest impact, the Board's key messages will be incorporated into posts that serve the above purposes for its followers. Additionally, based on guidance from Sprout Social, the Board will limit itself to 1-2 posts a day whenever possible to maximize visibility in its followers' newsfeed (Aboulhosn, 2022). These posts will be included in a monthly calendar that is developed by the social media manager and approved by the marketing and communications supervisor. This is one aspect of the plan that may be tweaked on a regular basis based on additional observations on how frequency impacts the number of views a post receives. Additionally, to keep the page looking fresh and prevent its audience from growing blind to its content (Song, 2013), the Board of Commissioners will vary the look of its posts through the examples of varied engaging content outlined below.

CONTENT

Brand followers of the Board want not only to see content that serves the above purposes, but also to see content with which they can identify (Piazza, 2021). This will be key to the Board's content creation moving forward. Although the key messages of the page may seem very dry, the communication team (including a dedicated social media manager, who is a critical resource in the implementation of this plan) will combat this by creating diverse content. Examples include:

- A video series, each involving an individual commissioner, which shows the commissioner in his/her/their community talking about what makes the place special. Staff will record these videos and help commissioners appear in a more informal setting than a typical Board meeting. This is an opportunity to connect with followers authentically, as the commissioners contribute to the brand of the Board. Staff will help guide commissioners to help them share an authentic balance of their front and backstage behaviors.

- A graphic series of single infographic images with single numbers that give viewers a better idea of what the Board does, such as how many county districts there are or the dollar amount of the county's budget. By visually jazzing up a plain number, which usually just appears in a block of text on a website, followers' feeds will be broken up with a unique graphic that catches their attention and sticks out from other pieces of content from the Board. This will teach followers about the Board's general responsibilities and appeal to their desire to learn something about their local community.

- Sharing news releases with images that tell a story, which is different from the Board's current strategy of using commissioner headshots with these posts. The image will help contextualize the written aspect of the post. This will appeal to followers' desire to learn more about Board action and programming, plus adheres to the best practice to vary content.

- Keeping posts directly related to the Board's role in county government while limiting the sharing of general county news, plus contextualizing general county news with how the Board was involved where applicable, to reduce confusion on the Board's role. This will directly drive toward the objective to teach followers more about the Board.

- Tagging outside entities where possible to encourage them to share the posts and allow the Board to reach a broader audience. This will appeal to followers' desires to see more about how the Board is working with groups that they know.

- Running Facebook "Page like" ads to increase new followers. With a six-month budget of $3,000, these ads will feature a call to action to like the Board's Facebook page, which will drive the goal of more followers. Additionally, as the page grows in follows, it is reasonable to expect that the larger audience will drive increased engagement metrics.

By creating parameters and brainstorming alternative storytelling formats for the type of content and purposes it serves, the communication team will be practicing mindful storytelling. The content that the page ultimately ends up posting will exist to do more than fill a content calendar and will instead propel the team toward its goals.

UNDERSTANDING RISK/RESPONDING TO COMMENTS AND MESSAGES

In this political climate, posts from government entities are subject to go viral when followers share content because they feel morally outraged, which is an important motivation for people to share and engage in social media (Crockett, 2017). Additionally, a study from the Pew Research Center has found that most Americans believe social media platforms are important for getting elected officials to pay attention to issues or for initiating sustained social movements (Anderson et al 2018). Couple these two concepts with the design of social media, in which algorithms bring

engaging content to the top of someone's newsfeed, causing it to gain even more traction, and there are many risks to being on social media as a governmental body.

The risks of staying active in the social media space, however, are far outweighed by the risks of NOT staying active in the social media space. Social media is a news source for 67 percent of Americans (Shearer & Gottfried, 2017), so the Board of Commissioners must be on Facebook as part of a comprehensive communication plan to reach residents. Because of this, the Board's social media plan includes guidelines for how to respond to comments and messages, plus when to hide comments. This allows the Board to remain on social media while also adhering to retention policies set forth by the county, State and federal governments.

The Board will only respond to comments that include a direct question related to the original topic in the post and messages that ask direct questions. Due to retention policies and caselaw, the Board will not delete any comments. It will only hide comments that go against its guidelines, which are listed on the page's About – Details section.

CONCLUSION

In today's digital world and shifting political landscape, social media is an important tool for government organizations wishing to reach their constituents. With careful planning, the Oakland County Board of Commissioners will leverage its Facebook page to reach constituents with intention messaging that teaches them about the role of the legislative branch of the county's government. By setting forth goals that are specific, measurable, attainable, relevant and timebound, the communication team has clearly outline objectives that will keep the group moving toward progress.

WORD COUNT: 1994

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