

Memo



Date: December 3, 2010

To: City Manager

From: Carla Stephens, Director of Community & Media Relations

Subject: E-mail and Digital Subscription Management

Recommendation

THAT Council direct staff to enter a one-year contract with GovDelivery to determine effectiveness of its product for e-mail and digital subscription management for dissemination of City information.

AND THAT Council direct staff to submit a supplemental for ongoing service charges in the 2012 budget if the pilot proves to be effective.

Purpose

To inform the maximum number of residents about City business and decisions and increase traffic to kelowna.ca as a preferred communications channel.

Background

The City of Kelowna is continually looking for cost-effective ways to keep its citizens informed. E-Mail and Digital Subscription Management (EDSM) is an important component of a municipal communications and customer service strategy.

To enhance communications, staff has been using manual e-mail databases for specific projects including the Official Community Plan, Rutland Revitalization and Bernard Avenue Streetscaping. These databases are time consuming to create and maintain. Manual maintenance of email databases often result in errors as validation standards are not utilized. This results in citizens not receiving information they were expecting. Currently Policy & Planning has an email database specifically for the Official Community Plan of approximately 1400 email addresses. GovDelivery would allow citizens to self-subscribe and unsubscribe to the Official Community Plan web page directly and receive automatic updates, a much more efficient method then what is currently used.

GovDelivery, the proposed EDSM software, is expected to improve communication and enhance civic engagement.

GovDelivery will allow the City of Kelowna to provide its residents:

- Real-time distribution of information updates and alerts on specific topics.
- Ensured delivery of messages to residents' inbox (not SPAM folders).
- Personalized choice; residents receive the information they want, when they want it.

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GovDelivery provides the City a robust, yet easy-to-use EDSM solution that:

- Simplifies and improves communication.
- Automates the composing, sending and deliverability of email, text messaging and RSS notifications.
- Decreases need for direct mail, phone calls and other administrative overhead.

Every visitor to kelowna.ca can build a "My City of Kelowna" profile of information or topics of interest they wish to receive automatically by email, RSS or text messaging.

City of Kelowna residents can stay informed of updates to news releases, meeting minutes and agendas, newsletters, employment opportunities, budget plans, annual reports, volunteer opportunities, events, and any other announcements and information published to the City website.

The system would also allow staff to send manual alerts which could be used in an emergency. Some municipalities have used this feature during a crises or during a significant weather event.

Lastly, as resources permit, the City could send out a general e-bulletin on City programs, services and initiatives that traditionally are cost prohibitive using other mediums. This medium allows for relevant and timely information to be disseminated.

GovDelivery takes care of the maintenance, support, training and upgrades and is responsible for all hardware, networking, storage, database, security, administration and other costs associated with the delivery of its EDSM solution.

Assured Deliverability

Email deliverability becomes exponentially more challenging as the ever-growing amount of unsolicited mail continues to flood inboxes. Internet Service Providers, such as Shaw, Rogers, and Telus, and company email servers are combating the onslaught of unwanted mail by developing increasingly sophisticated methods of weeding out the "good" mail from the "bad." According to Jupiter Research, *25% of legitimate email never reaches their intended recipients, even though they've opted in to receive them.* GovDelivery stays at the forefront of deliverability issues to ensure emails land in inboxes and not in junk folders. In fact, 98% of emails sent through GovDelivery make it to recipients' inboxes.

Measurement

GovDelivery provides measurement tools to track number of users, percentage of opened e-mails, who opens and clicks through, which links generated the most click throughs and which subscribers, and how many, opted out of future updates. These tools would be used to help measure effectiveness of the e-subscribe service to determine if the City should continue with the service and if so where to expand the service.

The product has been reviewed by Corporate Services, Strategic Initiatives and Community & Media Relations staff. In general the three departments agree it's a good way to enhance community engagement and customer service in a cost-effective and efficient manner.

Financial/Budgetary Considerations:

The set-up costs are \$12,000 and annual service fee \$14,400. Information Services has sufficient budget to cover a one year trial but is not in a position to continue funding the ongoing annual

service fee. If the trial were to proceed and be successful, staff would need to submit a 2012 budget supplemental for ongoing services charges.

Personnel Implications:

Community & Media Relations will be the software administrators. The project is expected to be able to be completed with existing resources by reprioritizing other work.

Considerations not applicable to this report:

Internal Circulation:

Legal/Statutory Authority:

Existing Policy:

External Agency/Public Comments:

Carla Stephens

Submitted by:

C. Stephens, Director Community & Media Relations

P. Macklem, General Manager Corporate Sustainability

Approved for inclusion:

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