

Learn to Use All the Tools to Market Your Fire and EMS Department

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By: Robert Avsec

Do you remember when your department launched its first website? (You do have a website, don't you?). Having a website was going to dramatically enhance the way you and your department interacted with the public and bring recognition to the good works being done every day by your Fire & EMS department, right? So how's that working for you? (My apologies to Dr. Phil for the unauthorized use of his "tag line").

In our previous post, [Getting Customers to Buy: Marketing for Fire & EMS](#), Michelle Nitsch introduced us to four key components of an effective marketing strategy. Here's a quick reminder of what they were:

- Product
- Place
- Promotion
- Price

Today, I'd like to focus in on those middle two, Place and Promotion, and get you thinking about how to use all of the Internet communication tools at your disposal to create "two-way" communication with your stakeholders. (Web 1.0 is a term frequently used to describe that earlier Internet communications environment that only used a website with static pages. The communication was pretty much "one-way" from the website owner to the viewer on the other end).

Your department's website still needs to be the bedrock for your Internet presence, but with Web 2.0 there is so much more. Let's take a look at some of the tools in the toolbox, shall we?



Folks in your community are searching for information about your, e.g., services you provide, fire safety programs, how to get a burn permit, etc., and to meet that demand—which helps increase the visibility of your organization—you’re going to need more than just your website.]

Website: This is your “base of operations” and the focal point for your other



tools (coming up). Make that existing website more effective by giving it a “make over” so that it becomes the “storefront” for your department. Today, people don’t want get in their cars and drive to a physical location to do business with local government. Increasingly their expectation is that they should be able to do that business over the Internet. Just like they do when ordering from Amazon.com or getting the results of a medical test from their physician’s patient portal.

Website content: Ever heard of “content marketing”? It’s a commonly accepted concept in social media marketing circles.

In essence, what it means is you create a blog on your website’s homepage, write blogs on a regular basis and post them on your website to give people a reason to visit your site, and more importantly, view more than just your home page.

It also gives them a reason to subscribe to your website so that they’ll get an email or text message as soon as you update content.

You’re probably thinking: How can I “crank out” that kind of content? And what kind of content should I write about? When will I have the time? (First of all, remember there is no “I” in “TEAM”, right?).

You’re probably sitting on a veritable “goldmine” of content. Think of all the fresh material that can come from your people who work in:

- Emergency Operations
- Fire Prevention
- Fire Investigations
- Public Education
- Emergency Medical Services

Who can write more persuasively or passionately on a topic than the person who’s working with it every day? When you keep the content fresh you increase your “find-ability” when people search for you on Internet search engines. People appreciate fresh content—especially if it helps them and their families to be safer—and they will “reward” you with a higher possibility of showing up on a search engine results page.

Twitter: If someone I trust—like for example my local Fire & EMS department?—sends out a tweet with information about a post on their website, I’m going to give it a look.



Think of Twitter as a “headline” generator that moves people to see what you’re “talking” about.

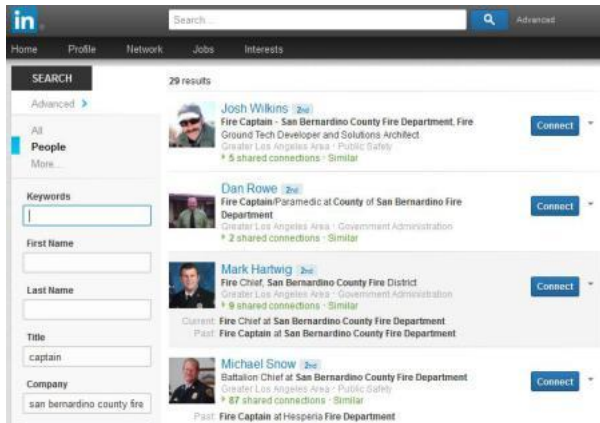
Facebook: A well-designed Facebook page should serve as the **Marketing**



and Public Relations tool for you department.

You want people to go to your website to find the information they seek. You want them to visit your Facebook page to become more informed and educated and excited about your department and your people.

Example: You promote a Childhood Injury Prevention Saturday on your FB page with information, photos of last year’s event, links back to your website pages that address injury prevention and fire safety. You do this for a couple of weeks prior to the event by “counting down” to the event day using FB page Status Updates. After the event, you post new photos along with plenty of platitudes for all the people and organizations who contributed to its success.



LinkedIn: In organizations large and small, in the public and private sectors, professional networking today is spelled, L-i-n-k-e-d-I-n. Think of LinkedIn as a 24/7/365 Chamber of Commerce or Kiwanis Club meeting; it gives you connection with community and business leaders in your locality. (Shoot, it can connect you with those kinds of people around the world!). Make sure your department has a company profile page on LinkedIn and that every member of your organization has a fully complete LinkedIn profile. (Yes, I said everyone. Your firefighters have personal social media accounts, e.g., Twitter, Instagram, etc., right? Give them a professional networking tool and show them how to use it).

YouTube: If a picture is worth a thousand words, how much word value is there for a video? Huge, right? Post videos on YouTube that show what your people do, how they do it, and why they do it. Don't just hand out fire safety pamphlets, broadcast video clips on YouTube of your people talking about fire safety or any one of thousands of different topics. Use videos that other Fire and EMS departments and allied agencies have posted on YouTube (today's version of "don't reinvent the wheel").



Here's one of your future stakeholders. Are you designing your marketing efforts to reach him and his family today? Tomorrow?

Mobile: The number of people who are accessing the Internet using a desktop computer at home or work is dwindling. Wireless devices like tablet PCs and smartphones are fueling the demand for mobile applications. (Who hasn't heard or used the phrase, "There's an app for that"?). Your department needs a customized agency mobile app. Seriously.



Text: The average teenager sends over 4,000 text messages a month. Text is how a growing number of your prospects and clients communicate—not just with friends but with everyone. What are you doing to make text a communication option for your clients?

Feeling overwhelmed?

Social media professionals recommend that you spend 30 minutes each day working on mastering your Internet presence. Make a list of what is the most important for your agency and simply begin the process. It is more important for you to start than to worry about making everything perfect. You will make mistakes. Some items won't work well for you. That's OK. Learn and keep moving forward.