

Website operators don't see confusion with town site

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control the message," said Julie King, publisher of stouffvilleconnects.com. "The community is in charge of the message."

Ms King, who has been teaching organizations and individuals since 1997 about how to utilize the web and now social media, like Twitter and Facebook to its advantage, noted the town's official site could use some work.

The one critique she has for it is when you Google 'town of Stouffville,' the municipality's site - townofws.com - does come up, but you have no idea it is the official one because there is no mention of it in the description. Even its splash page fails to mention it is the town's official site.

David Mill, co-owner of stouffville.com, agreed the town's official site is in need of revamping. But like Mr. Lovatt and Ms King, he does not understand how his site can be confused for the town's.

"Stouffville.com, from the very inception, has made it very clear we are not the town website because it says it right there on our website," he said.

When the municipality hires its corporate communications officer in October, part of that person's mandate will be to revamp the town's website, according to Dave Cash, CAO for the town.

"We need to find out how we're going to get the information out that (residents) think we're hiding," the mayor said during Feb. 22 budget discussions regarding the new position.

That person will also be tasked with determining how the municipality will utilize social media, if at all.

'RESIDENTS MAKE UP OWN MIND'

"We're not going to get into, I believe, disputes within the social media. That is not our intention. It's to provide another outlet" for information, Mr. Cash said. "Then (residents) can make up their mind about what they're researching."

"Twitter and Facebook is essential because that is where the community is getting their information," Ms King said.

If the municipality remains on the fence about social media, perhaps it should take a cue from Industry Minister Tony Clement.

He recently used Twitter to announce the government's intention to force the CRTC to review a decision that allowed usage-based billing.



IAIN LOVATT: Former council candidate admits his website can be "slanted" and "blunt".

Mr. Clement has more than 12,000 followers.

"There is nothing different from articulating government policy via social media as compared to a news release, or a press conference or other means that have been traditionally available to politicians," he told MPs. "I don't think you should fear that. I would encourage you to open your arms to that."

There is even a Twitter account in Prime Minister Stephen Harper's name. And his spokesperson, Dimitri Soudas, recently used Twitter to provide updates on the evacuation of Canadians from Egypt and Libya.

During the town's budget meeting Feb. 22, Mr. Lovatt sat in the council chamber gallery and tweeted about what was happening in the meeting.

"I think it's just a brilliant tool," he said. Stouffvillepolitics.com currently has 31 Twitter followers.

When it comes to misinformation, that's just the way it is, according to Ms King.

"It's the media. (Mr. Emmerson's) not going to be able to control the online media any more than the off-line media," she said.

The websites are vastly different in the way they provide information on Stouffville.

Stouffvillepolitics.com started as Mr. Lovatt's personal website during his campaign for councillor of Ward 5.

It's now a blog with the disclaimer of "keeping Stouffville council accountable".

"It may be slanted and it may be a little bit more blunt in trying to hold council accountable for what they say," Mr. Lovatt said.

Stouffvilleconnects.com is billed as an online community for Whitchurch-Stouffville with information on events within the municipality, a local business directory, as well as information on deals and area jobs.

"I think stouffvilleconnects.com really stands apart," Ms King said.

Stouffville.com reads very much like a newspaper site with original stories based on town issues, as well as a business directory and events listing.

"We're a registered Ontario business, so

we have to be very careful we're not looked at as a blog," Mr. Mill said. "We're looking to become a resource for people to come and get factual information. ... We won't be voicing our opinion on any topic or issues."

CRITICAL OF TOWN SITE

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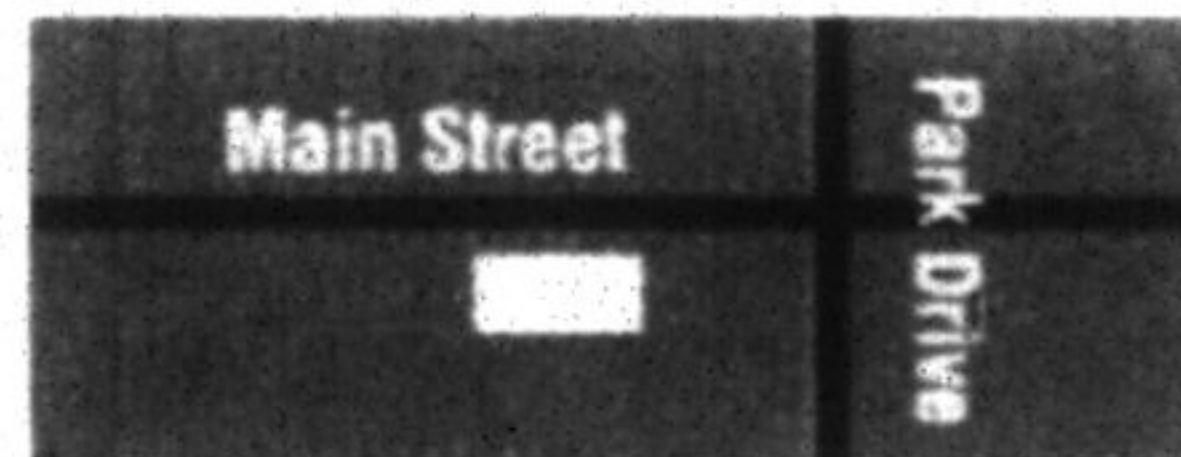
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