City of Downey Social Media Audit

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Social Media Channels:
City of Downey Website (Active): https://www.downeyca.org
City of Downey Instagram (Active): https://www.instagram.com/cityofdowneyca/
City of Downey Twitter (Active): https://twitter.com/cityofdowney
City of Downey Facebook (Active): https://www.facebook.com/cityofdowney/

Introduction:

Social media is already an extremely useful tool for organizations, however, in times of a global crisis, such as COVID-19, it is absolutely crucial. The City of Downey's website and social media are the primary sources of communication for its residents, meaning that the content on their channel must be informative yet captivating. Research suggests that, "when it comes to emergencies, social media could literally be a life or death resource, directing citizens to the nearest disaster relief centers or educating them on the latest rescue efforts" (Cathers, 2018). Yet there is more to creating effective communication strategies than simply posting information; each social media platform must be individually crafted to fit different formats, to engage diverse audiences and to create brand awareness.

According to a study, "about 68% of adults in the U.S. get their news from social media" (Zantal-Winer, 2018). The 2016 election also greatly affected citizen's trust of government use of social media, making it even more important for these channels to appear presentable and accessible. By updating your social media, we believe the City of Downey can greatly improve the way it informs the public. This, in turn, lends the opportunity to recruit and attract potential employers, engage residents in events and elections and gain feedback in real-time so that the government can adapt to the needs of the public.

Branding:

The primary audience for the city are citizens and the secondary audience are those who engage with the city on a regular basis, such as those in commerce and those who use public facilities regularly. Your audiences can certainly benefit from strong social media strategy as "social media use has a positive relationship with engagement and its three sub-categories, that is, social capital, civic engagement and political participation" (Milde & Yawson, 2017, p. 25).

Your brand is moderately recognizable across all platforms (Facebook, Twitter & Instagram). Based on the website and banners across socials, main brand colors are navy, orange and white. The profile picture on each platform is the seal of the city. The website, however, features a vibrant orange graphic with a white "D" that seems to be an alternate logo. This logo is more vibrant, engaging and modern, and could easily replace the outdated seal logo.

On Facebook and Twitter, your handle is "@cityofdowney" while on Instagram it's "@cityofdowneyca." It's best to have the same handle across all platforms as a way of reinforcing brand image and creating consistency.

Your brief bio on Twitter and Instagram are the same in structure. They begin with "The official (Twitter/Instagram) for the City of Downey, CA" and encourage viewers to "check us out on Facebook, Twitter and visit our city website at www.downeyca.org." This message is uniform and generic and can be improved by creating a more engaging message that highlights the key features of Downey.

Your cover photo is an aerial shot of the city with the same orange square logo and the text, "City of Downey." While your cover photo represents the brand in terms of color and content, and each banner is correctly fitted for the platform it's on, there are a few key problems. Firstly, it says nothing about the city, its services or what makes it unique and thus lacks personality. Secondly, the quality of it is severely degraded as it is pixelated and low resolution.

Brand voice and visual aesthetic are consistent, but not engaging. It is very corporate in style, which is to say, professional and to-the-point. While this professional tone matches our target audience, it doesn't entice them to follow the accounts. Research demonstrates that "the hashtag measure is associated with significantly more retweets than when a hashtag is absent" (Saxton, Niyirora, Guo, & Waters, 2015, p. 165). At the same time, hashtags should not overwhelm posts that already have a lot of text, as is the case. Recent research shows that "focusing on the customers is a great way to understand what kind of content they might be looking for, and how to infuse personality in otherwise corporate content" (Riserbato, 2020). Simply including more nostalgia posts, key features of Downey, or things that demonstrate Downey pride, such as featuring local small-business owners, can make content seem more personal, real and relatable rather than corporate.

Overall, we recommend:
- Utilizing the more modern, engaging logo across all platforms.
- Creating a cover photo that includes graphics that can demonstrate the incredible offerings of the city to site visitors.
- Create a bio for all socials that highlights key features of the city rather than a generic bio.
- Ensure that all handles are the same by changing the Instagram handle to "@cityofdowney."
- Embed hashtags within the text of captions so that it's seamlessly included.
- Include more Downey pride and personality by highlighting key features of Downey, nostalgia posts or featuring small-business owners.

Instagram:
The City of Downey's Instagram, @cityofdowneyca, has approximately 9,000 followers. Though it is one of the social media platforms that we believe could use the most enhancement, this channel garners more attention and following than its surrounding cities. You do a great job at posting on-brand content frequently, something that should be continued in the future. However, the posts are typically text-heavy graphics with occasional videos of Mayor Blanca Pachecco speaking. People process visuals much faster than text, therefore, high-quality images of the community should be the majority of the content. Showcasing the city's offerings for current residents and visitors is immensely important for the months to come.

One way to increase engagement on Instagram is to schedule posts throughout the day. Though it is helpful to post often, you post 6-9 times a day which overloads the audience's feeds; other information can be saved for Instagram Stories. It also works against Instagram's algorithm

and is less likely to appear on a user's feed. As a result, the account's impressions decrease. Unfortunately, you are also not posting on days, or at times, that are ideal for guaranteeing engagement. Studies suggest that "times opposite of work-hours are most effective for stimulating engagement on Instagram" (Kolowich, 2019). For example, 7 a.m., 1 p.m. and 5 p.m. (before work, during lunch and at the end of the work day) are suggested to be the "best" times to post on Instagram on average. We suggest to schedule at most three posts throughout the day, following this guide.

We believe this account would also benefit from using hashtags on every post, ensuring that specific ones are used consistently. The City of Downey is a brand, so you should be using hashtags that encourage your followers to implement the tags themselves. Using on-brand hashtags on every post also ensures that your posts will be found in search. Besides hashtagging, the account would improve by taking advantage of Instagram's resources such as stories, highlights and IGTV. Posting an Instagram Story is another way to appear on the audience's homepage and they are now more useful than ever. We advise coordinating future posts with content for your stories. Stories are therefore formatted correctly and relevant to existing content. These can later be categorized into highlights, making it easier for users to navigate through the account.

One thing we applaud is that there is almost always a call to action (CTA) in the posts. This is a great way of redirecting online traffic to other social media platforms and the website. In the last few months, it has become extremely important to engage the audience and assure that they retain the information they are receiving.

Overall, we recommend:
- Scheduling three posts a day to not overwhelm your audience or the Instagram algorithm.
- Specify hashtags and use them consistently.
- Utilize Instagram to its full potential to directly increase engagement.
- Post images of the community and the City of Downey's opportunities.

Twitter:
The City of Downey has 4,131 followers on Twitter and has provided up-to-date information about the city since 2010. This platform is especially important for your target audience to receive the most pertinent information regarding COVID-19 updates. This following amount is on par with neighboring cities, such as City of Orange, which has 4,265 followers. While you are using this platform very well, we have some recommendations that would help improve the way you present the City of Downey on Twitter.

As your managers, we would begin with minor changes that would serve the interest of streamlining your Twitter persona and giving the most professional, credible image possible. Right now, while you are following a solid practice of posting images with your tweets, your images need to be of higher quality, feature more people and highlight more of the city itself. Part of this would be updating your banner photo to a higher resolution version. We also recommend changing your bio to have a message that says something about the values of the city, almost like a tagline for what Downey represents for the thousands of people who call it home. We believe these changes would show the human interaction of the city and represent what the community has built.

Regarding the formatting of tweets, we have a few recommendations to make. You should keep your use of hashtags to a minimum, using one to two hashtags instead of four to five. These hashtags should be highly relevant to the post and not have a confusing meaning. For example, one tweet regarding a cancelled commission meeting used "#Cancelled." This hashtag has other meanings in the realm of Twitter and so it would be best to avoid it. We also recommend tagging relevant partners such as "@CountyofLA" to increase interaction from other accounts. We recommend continuing to post multiple times throughout the day as this will increase the opportunities for your audience to see your tweets.

Our biggest recommendation is regarding your Twitter account's greatest weakness: it exists in isolation. Currently, your tweets receive little to no interaction with the most being seven likes and two retweets. As a city, you should focus your efforts to make your account more engaging for your audience. This can start by using this platform to interact with the community instead of simply putting out information. Like researchers, we "recommend asking questions, using one to two relevant hashtags, participating in trends, tagging other users and responding within five hours to all messages" (Nemeth, 2020). We also recommend a greater use of videos as they are six times more likely to be retweeted than an image. Lastly, we recommend doing more social listening to better understand the needs of your audience. Our research-based approach means we "recommend that you keep an eye out for what neighboring cities are posting about, visiting other platforms where your city is mentioned, finding out what people are saying about you and tracking the press about your city" (Chen, 2019).

Overall, we recommend:
- Using quality images that feature more of the city and people.
- Updating your banner photo and bio.
- Sticking to one to two relevant hashtags.
- Interacting more with your Twitter community.
- Engage in social listening to understand your audience's needs.

Facebook:

The City of Downey Facebook page has over 9,000 likes and 10,000 followers. However, their engagement rates do not reflect the numbers and can be improved. You currently post on-brand content and use hashtags consistently, however, the ratio between caption, text and photo text can be reduced. You do a great job of posting almost daily and should continue this practice. However, the posts should not repeat previous information and the number of hashtags should be reduced to optimize engagement.

A recent post on your Facebook page was an infographic on the importance of wearing a mask in public to protect others around us. A different strategy for this post would be an infographic video. Studies suggest that, "about 85% of videos watched on Facebook are without sound" (Patel, 2016). A short video is a great way to give variety to your page.

Another suggestion we recommend is to utilize live videos. Live streaming city council meetings can be a great way to use Facebook's tools in an effective way. Studies suggest that "viewers are three times more likely to tune into a live video rather than watch on-demand content" (Richards, 2018). Optimizing the usage of live streaming on Facebook allows the community to interact with council members, boosting engagement rates. Live streams can also be used in a Q&A format, inviting the community to ask an expert.

Majority of posts are resources available to community members and can be showcased in a different way, by sharing how they are being used. For example, the recent launch of a virtual Recreational Center post only received three likes and three shares and could be improved through future posts as the series progresses. By connecting with those who are using the resources, you can create short posts and videos displaying the usefulness of the Recreation Center, making this city stand out from neighboring cities. The City of Downey Facebook page could also post short how-to videos of crafts being made and tag "#DowneyAtHome" to encourage them to view your website for more upcoming content.

Overall, we recommend:
- Create infographic videos.
- Only post when the information is relevant and new to avoid spamming feeds.
- Utilize live streams.
- Showcase how Downey resources are being used by the community.

Website:

The City of Downey boasts an impressive website that is tailored for city residents and visitors. All of their social media channels are accurately represented and conveniently located at the footer of the website through the click of an icon button. They are easy to find and all links work. However, as users click on the social media platform they wish to visit, it does not open up on a new page or tab which is something we suggest adjusting. If you choose to have links open up on the same tab when people are visiting your website it can create back-button fatigue for users. If they decide to click the links on the other website, they have to hit the back button even more times to get back to your site. Opening links on the same tab also overworks the website. Every time the user goes back to your website it uses your site's resources to load the page.

The website does not have an Instagram or Twitter scroll located on their website, which is a feature we would recommend adding. Social media scrolls can go a long way in helping the city connect with your residents in a direct and personal way. Not all website visitors are well-acquainted with your social presence. Therefore, the smart way to build a massive online following is to embed feeds to your website.

Overall, we recommend:
- Social media links should open on a separate tab.
- There should be a seperate "See What We're Up To" page that's dedicated to displaying their social media platforms.
- Include an Instagram and Twitter scroll on the social media page mentioned above.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, while the City of Downey is doing an excellent job at informing its citizens through its website and social media, there are some changes that can be made to increase engagement and develop solid branding across all platforms. We recommend investing in a dedicated social media strategist team who will be able to research your audience and create optimized content for each respective platform. This team can put in the dedicated time needed to interact more with the community and make original content, such as videos and pictures of events and settings around the city. Making these improvements across your website, Instagram, Twitter and Facebook will allow you to be a stronger resource for the people who live, work and are interested in visiting the city of Downey.

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