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Why the City of Las Vegas Turns to Social Media to Increase Citizen Engagement

59%	23%	380,000+
YOY increase in Instagram engagement	YOY increase in Twitter engagement	unique interactions on Facebook and Twitter

Since its founding 112 years ago, Las Vegas has evolved from an oasis of neon lights amidst a backdrop of desert into a mature, global city with over 600,000 residents. And, like any community, Las Vegas relies on its local government to provide it with the services and resources it depends on.

In an era when fewer than **3 in 10 Americans** express trust in the federal government, Las Vegas employees are faced with the challenges of connecting with, informing and supporting the city and its people.

“People don’t expect the government to be listening,” said Jennifer Davies, Social Media Manager for the City of Las Vegas. “They feel disenfranchised with the political process.”

But the City of Las Vegas is changing the way citizens think about engaging with their local government by investing in social media to connect with the residents, business owners and organizations that call Sin City home. Vegas’ social team began as a team of one and has quickly flourished into a group of five communications professionals with one primary goal: increasing citizen engagement.

At the center of the team’s efforts are Twitter, Facebook and Instagram, because that’s where the vast majority of the city’s constituents are present. Within one year, the City of Las Vegas engaged with more than 380,000 unique users on Facebook and Twitter (half of the city’s population) increased Instagram engagement by 59% and saw a 26% spike in organic Twitter impressions.

Across all three platforms, the city has implemented a strategy focused on humanizing government, fostering transparency, being agile and raising awareness around initiatives contributing to the city’s growth.

> “Social media has completely changed the way we communicate.”

Jennifer Davies
Social Media Manager
@cityoflasvegas

Humanizing Government

Diversity and inclusion have become immediate, hot-button issues for local municipalities and representatives across the country. When the president announced his first executive order on immigration, Americans immediately took to Twitter to show their support, voice concern, provide commentary and everything in between. The City of Las Vegas was quick to follow suit with a pinned, 140-character statement that defined its position on the issue.

City of Las Vegas
@CityOfLasVegas

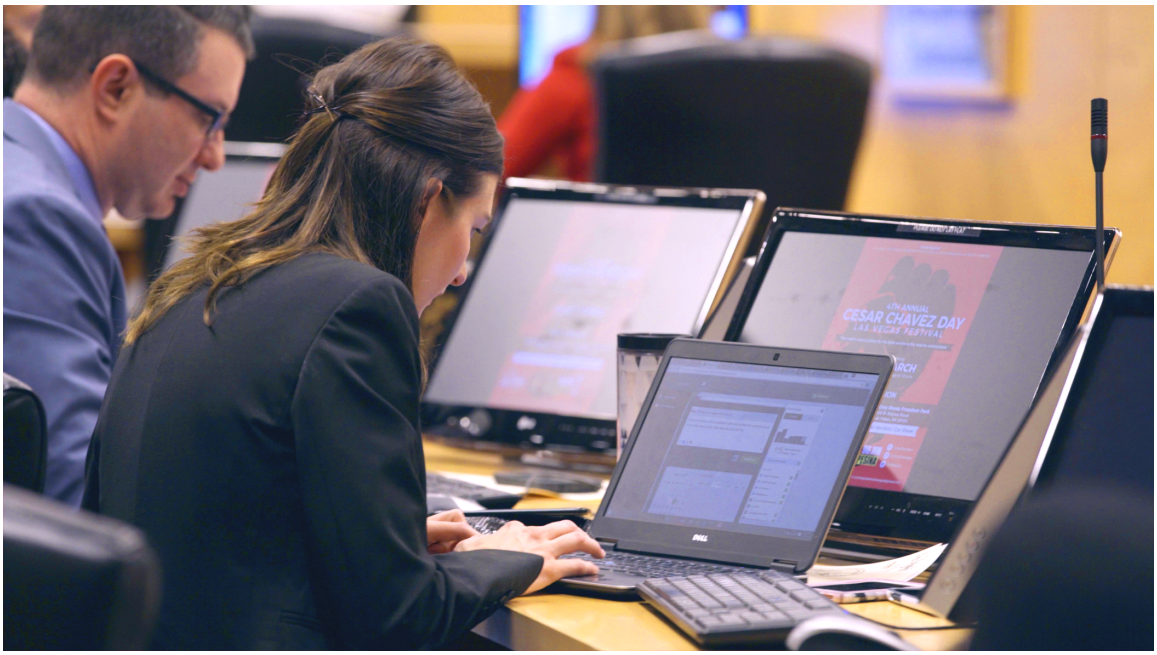
We remain committed to fostering, cultivating and preserving a culture of diversity and inclusion: bit.ly/2jLW3Ab

1:17 PM - Jan 30, 2017

122 69 people are talking about this

Using social media as a megaphone to take a stance and offer clarity to newsworthy and often controversial issues is something the city does often. But unlike a press release, social platforms are more conversational and accessible. Because of this, social media has become the modern version of a town hall meeting between officials and constituents.

“Social media has completely changed the way we communicate. We’re able to engage in a dialogue with people that are happy and mad at the city,” said Jennifer Davies. “I truly believe that we are able to change hearts and minds one Tweet at a time.”



But government for the people, by the people doesn’t end at representation or messaging. The methods a city adapts to connect with its constituents are central to humanizing government.

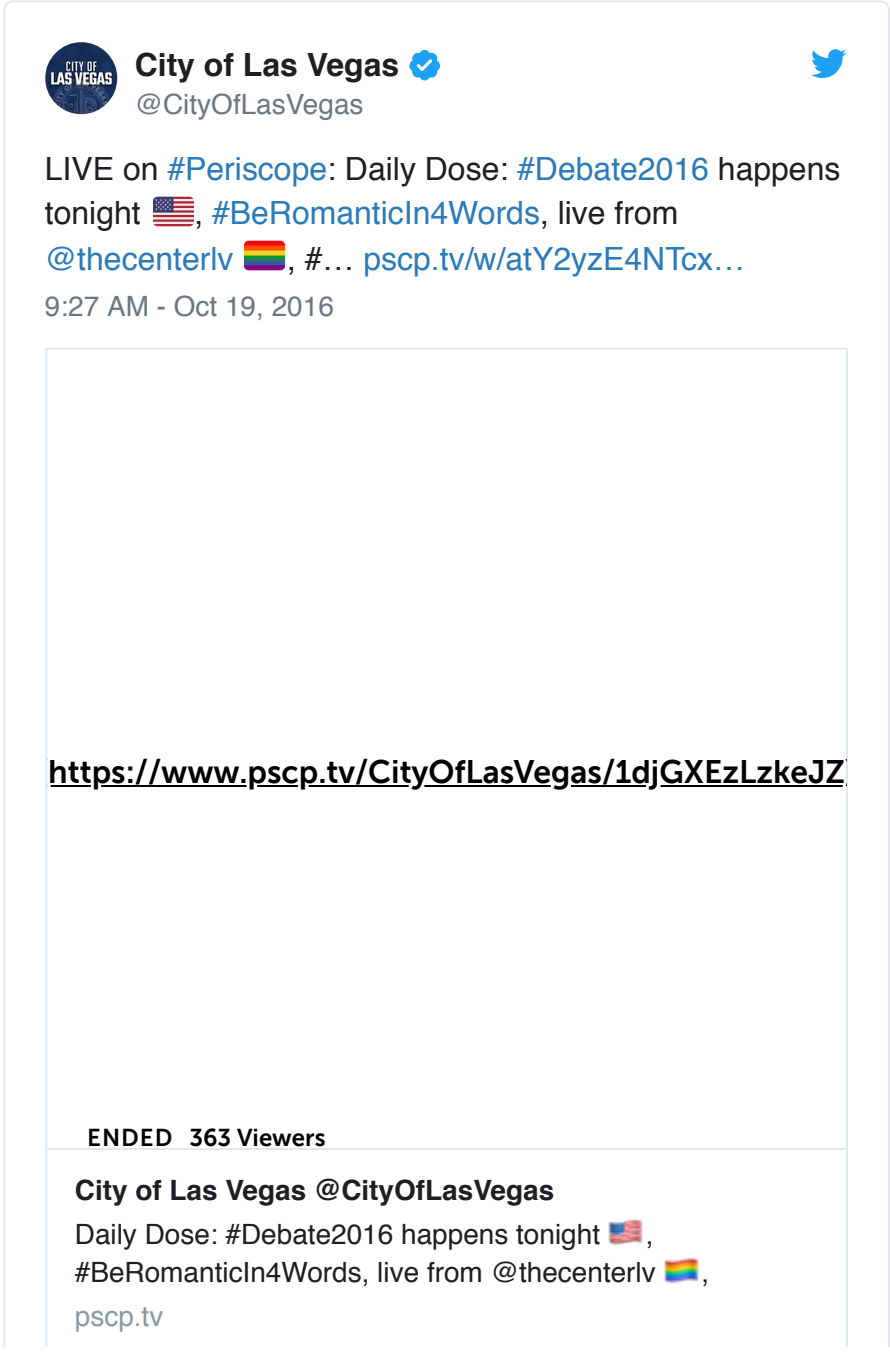
“Residents can communicate with us in the same way they would talk to friends and family,” said Natasha Shahani, Public Information Officer at the City of Las Vegas. “We use GIFs, we use emojis.”

This casual, relatable demeanor is seen every Monday through Thursday morning when the social media team steps in front of the smartphone camera to broadcast Daily Dose, a short news segment on Facebook Live and Periscope.

> “Social media allows us to present accurate information directly to the public.”

Shane Savanapridi
Public Information Officer
@cityoflasvegas

The team covers topics ranging from local road closures to the season finale of the popular NBC drama, This Is Us. To keep viewers invested, the team ventures into the broader community to raise awareness of organizations like The Center LV, a nonprofit that provides services to LGBTQ residents.



15 See City of Las Vegas's other Tweets

Transparency as the Backbone of Success

Having control over your organization's narrative is more important than ever–especially for government. That's why the City of Las Vegas relies on Twitter and Facebook to distribute accurate information about government policies and local news.

"Social media allows us to present accurate information directly to the public," said Shane Savanapridi, Public Information Officer at the City of Las Vegas. "We don't have to rely on traditional news agencies."

For instance, in late March 2017, Las Vegas experienced an unexpected wind storm that prompted some news outlets to report that the airport was closed. The city's social media team was quick to set the record straight with a Retweet from McCarran Airport's official Twitter account and the hashtag #VegasWind.

Keeping the public informed about what's really going on in City Hall and throughout Las Vegas helps build trust and positions the government as reliable and reputable.

Tapping into existing government employees through a formal social ambassadors program is just another way that the city aims to foster a transparent relationship with the public. With 84% of people citing recommendations from those they know as the most trusted form of marketing, it makes sense that Las Vegas would leverage its workforce to disseminate its most important messages.

Advocates like Christy Beckwith, Business Specialist at the City of Las Vegas, share curated content about the municipality with their personal social communities.

Las Vegas believes that everyone wins when government employees amplify factual information on their own social platforms. Because unlike many businesses in the private sector, government organizations are unique in the fact that they measure success based on citizen engagement vs. ROI.

“We want to see our likes, comments and shares go up,” said Jennifer Davies. “That means people are interested in what we’re doing and they’re talking to us–which is always our number one priority.”

By sharing content with their personal communities, government employees are supporting the communications team’s goals and helping the city reach a larger audience.

Cutting the Red Tape

When the public thinks of government, the impression is often of bureaucratic red tape and antiquated processes–basically everything social media isn’t. But that doesn’t mean that managing multiple social platforms, corresponding strategies and best practices doesn’t come without its own set of challenges. The City of Las Vegas’ communications team uses a social media management tool to streamline processes and deliver real-time content to its followers during City Council meetings.

A single feed aggregates inbound messages across all of the city’s social platforms and enables the team to respond to constituent comments and questions as feedback comes in. The team is also able to share live updates from City Council and group them together on Twitter using the hashtag #lvcouncil.

City of Las Vegas
@CityOfLasVegas

Get the agenda for today's #lvcouncil meeting: bit.ly/2n0Y0eB Watch live starting at 9 a.m. --> bit.ly/2mBX2ma

9:15 AM - Mar 15, 2017

4 See City of Las Vegas's other Tweets

The city can attest to the fact that when you cut the red tape, your constituents are more eager to pay attention and take action. In 2016 Las Vegas increased Twitter engagement by 23% and saw a 26% rise in organic impressions on the platform.

Propelling a Community Forward

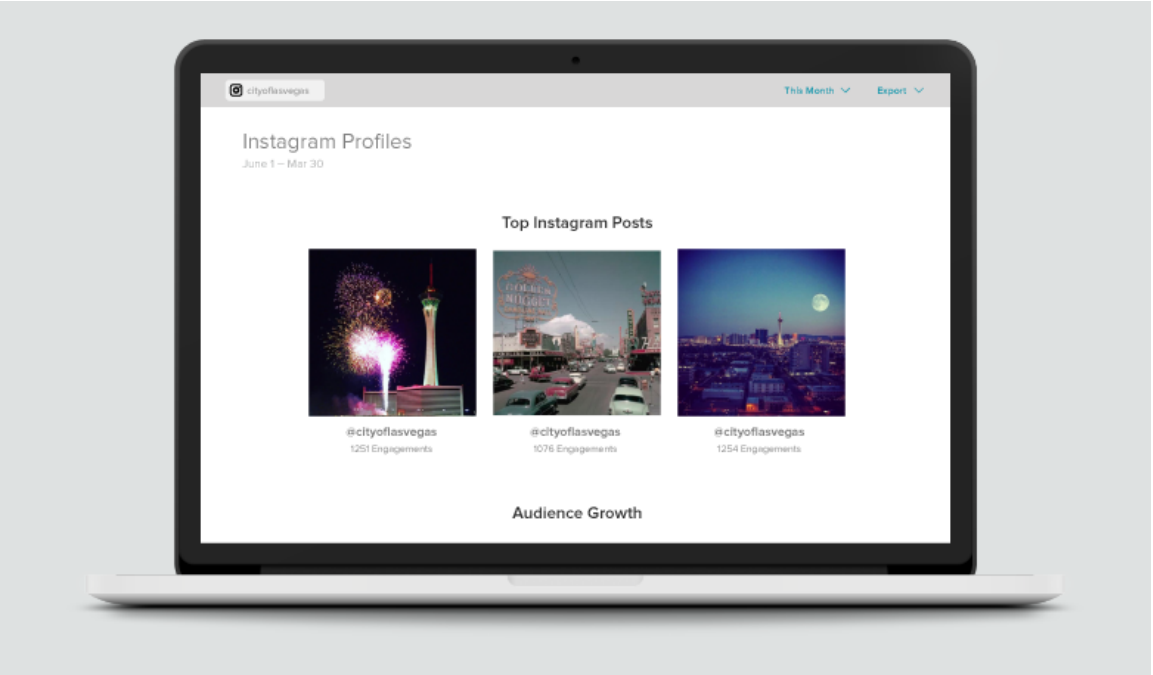
The City of Las Vegas is constantly reinventing itself through infrastructure projects and cultural initiatives. One of the city's recent redevelopment initiatives is focused on bringing new businesses to downtown and boosting time and spend in the area. To raise awareness and increase public interest, the city turns to Instagram.

> "As the world of social media develops, the communications strategy for the city is going to develop right along with it."

Natasha Shahani
Public Information Officer
@cityoflasvegas

The mobile photo sharing app is the city's preferred communication method when it comes to paying homage to downtown Las Vegas' iconic past, highlighting the murals located throughout the area and celebrating successful businesses.

The city drives awareness for the its downtown initiatives with a branded Instagram hashtag (#DTLV) that saw a 75% spike in usage in 2016. And, overall, Vegas' streamlined and focused **Instagram strategy** increased engagement on the platform by 56%.



When asked what's next for the City of Las Vegas and social media, Natasha Shahani and her colleagues are eager to continue to reinvent their strategy.

"It's really about what our constituents are on and how we can connect with them," said Shahani. "As the world of social media develops, the communications strategy for the city is going to develop right along with it."