

County aims to reach people how they want to be reached

By Hector Flores

For any large organization that impacts a large number of people, communicating information is critical to its success. In the case of county government, the measure of success is the health of the community. To accomplish this, we have a communications strategy that can be summed up as reaching people how they want to be reached. That could be traditional media, like television, radio and newspapers. It could be social media, our website, email or text messages, or in-person outreach. The challenge is to get the best return of investment on all these methods.

Because of its importance, we measure our communications efforts in multiple ways. Every two years, we conduct a citizen survey. One of the many questions asked is the quality of public information services. In the 2024 survey, respondents rated their satisfaction with our communication at 69%, nine percentage points higher than in the 2020 survey. That's a good result, but shows we have room to improve.

Last year, one of the moves we made was to change the Public Information Office to the Communications Department and develop a four-year plan to increase our investment in communications by adding personnel in key capacities. These changes will allow us to expand our external and internal communications.

We can also track improvements annually during the budget process. We use a process called performance-based budgeting. In it, we define levels of service departments aim to provide. In the case of communications, those service levels include the number of news releases distributed, the number of videos our local government television station, CC-TV, produces, viewership of government meeting videos, website visits and social media engagement. As with the citizen survey, the level of service metrics in the Communications Department budget all grew significantly in 2024.

Most of that data is collected annually in our Digital Communications Report, which includes outreach efforts by all our departments. I'd like to share some of the highlights from the report.

The two most effective ways we reach community members are our website and our social media platforms. In 2024, more than 1.4 million unique users visited our website, www.CharlotteCountyFL.gov, more than 5.6 million times. Those figures reflect the enormous interest of hurricane readiness and recovery due to the impacts from hurricanes Helen and Milton. On Oct. 7, 2024, the day Milton hit, the website received more than 387,000 views.

We saw the same surge of interest on our social media platforms. We saw user engagement (likes, comments, shares) rise 66% to more than 3.43 million. The number of video views hit more than 9 million.

It is easier to attract eyes to your content when everyone is focused on an imminent threat and a difficult recovery. We hope to transition those new users into regular consumers of our

communications content. An informed community is an important element of good governance. I am appreciative of the Sun's willingness to provide this valuable space each week to contribute to the community's education. Whether it's in this weekly column, on our website, social media, TV or any of the other methods we use to communicate, our goal is to reach you how you want to be reached.

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