

Comprehensive Communications Audit

Burlington Police Department

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COM 312 Service-Learning Course

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Background

For over 100 years, The Burlington Police Department has been committed to protecting and serving the close to 55,000 diverse residents of Burlington, North Carolina. The BPD has been accredited for 30 years and is the 33rd department in the country to have the One Mind Pledge, a policy and training pledge for mental health first aid.

Currently, the BPD's main channels of communication are its comprehensive website and Facebook pages (English and Spanish). The BPD also has a Twitter page, but the Facebook page is utilized more often. After meeting with Greg Seel, internship and volunteer coordinator at the BPD, our team learned that the department is always looking to recruit new interns and volunteers. Setting intern and recruitment efforts as a main goal for the semester, our team set out to assist the BPD in their communications efforts.

The BPD does not currently have a person or position for managing communications and social media efforts. Multiple personnel post on the Facebook and Twitter pages and contribute to the website.

SWOT Analysis

Strengths

- Facebook and Twitter presence
- Facebook in Spanish and English
- The website has a consistent color scheme of teal and orange
- The mission statement is clearly defined on the homepage

- Circular icons on the bottom of the homepage are engaging and provide quick links to important pages.
- One icon links to a feedback page, which promotes two-way communication.
- Third department in North Carolina to have the One Mind Pledge. It is a policy and training for dealing with mentally ill individuals.
- Has been accredited for 30 years
- Created a program that creates IDs for undocumented immigrants to make sure they feel like they can come to the BPD if they have any problems.
- They debrief if tough things happen, as a whole police agency
- Has done six strategic planning meetings
- Officers wear body cams and have dash cams
- Has a comprehensive strategic plan on the website
- 15 percent female officers, 11 percent nationally
- Officers have formed relationships with community members, this was evident during a Ride-Along with one of the officers
- There is a website category dedicated to awards and recognitions

Weaknesses

- Presence on Facebook and Twitter could be stronger
- Does not have a position dedicated to social media or head of communications
- Dated pictures on website, Facebook, and Twitter
- The website is cluttered which can be difficult to navigate

- The contact information, volunteer, and internship pages on the website are hard to find which holds important information for the public.
- Improve direct communication with email-chain subscribers
- Create a blog platform to directly post stories about the police department for the public to read
- PDF forms for applications and the Ride-Along Program
- There are no cohesive templates available to use for newsletters
- News releases posted on the website are not current

Opportunities

- Storytelling on the good stuff they do to help community
- Citizen academy which is one night a week for 11 weeks where citizens dive into police department life
- Need translators to speak to target audience in a way that makes sense to them
 - Write police jargon in a way citizens will be able to digest
- All the important information is there, it just needs to be shortened and more concise
- Instead of having pdfs for forms, there could be an embedded form that could be filled out on the website for these programs
- Easy to eliminate some pages to reduce clutter
 - Do not need social media page since there are already links on the homepage to social media platforms
- Create graphics and testimonials of past interns or volunteers to recruit for internships and volunteer opportunities

Threats

- Other local non-profit organizations are utilizing the same pool of volunteers
- Organizations are receiving donations from people who also have the opportunity to donate to the Burlington Police Department
- The cluttered appearance of the website turns away those interested in potentially learning more
- There is a very small operational budget for the department, limiting the amount of freedom present.
- Law enforcement officers are portrayed as negative in the media
- Instant gratification is popular with younger generations but the Police Academy takes years of experience before officers are ready to officially begin
- The hiring process takes almost a year
- There has been a deterioration in journalism ethics
- Potential of losing an officer in the line of duty or to retirement

Recommendations

Our main recommendation is a redesign of the Burlington Police Department website. In its current state, the website is very cluttered and difficult to navigate. Specifically, information about volunteering and internships is very hard to find. Since volunteering and internships are important for the BPD, making information more readily available and easier to find might increase traffic to the respective programs. The Burlington Police Department could start by

going through each page of the website and deciding what key messages need to be kept and what information can be taken out. This would improve the clarity of the copy. The department should also make key programs, such as the Ride-Along Program, easier to find. Instead of PDF application forms for the Ride-Along Program and similar program, we recommend an embedded application form on the website. This would make the application process quicker and more convenient. Photos on the website are also outdated and could be updated.

Additionally, we recommend that the Burlington Police Department updates the news releases on its website. The current news releases are outdated. Having updated news releases would aid in the community being informed and knowledgeable on what is happening in the Burlington area.

We also recommend creating a position within the organization to manage communication functions such as social media and the website as well as implement new functions such as email newsletters. These newsletters can utilize storytelling techniques to try and recruit people for the volunteer and internship programs. The newsletters could be sent out weekly or bi-weekly to the local community. This could encourage future volunteers or internship prospects and would allow for citizens to feel connected to the department. A communications manager could create and keep an updated email list. The position could start as a part-time position or as an internship position.