



Abbotsford School District Website Development – Proposal

September 27, 2011

You want to engage your audiences.

Telling stories and inviting stakeholder input on websites is a great way to do that. It's about more than presenting data; it's about presenting compelling stories, timely information, and relevant communication. That's what interests people – people like your audiences.

Staff need to buy in.

They need to understand the rationale and the bigger picture. They need to trust the tools and the people offering them. And they need to be coached and supported in creating quality content. When they are on board, and when communication outcomes are understood by all, then good things happen.

It's not about technology.

Nobody cares what features you've got. They care if you've connected with them, if you've informed them, if you've consulted with them. They care if they are in the loop – within and outside the District. Ultimately, we don't want your staff to have a set of technical 'features' blinking at them. Rather, we want them to be truly equipped to communicate better over multiple years.

You need to achieve communication outcomes.

The Abbotsford School District website and its school and program websites are communication tools for the public, with the intent to welcome, engage, promote, inform, instil pride and build support for the educational and operational aims of the District. By developing websites for the District and its schools through a communication-oriented approach, with our extensive understanding of the necessary processes to get the internal team on board, we can ensure you achieve success. And we'll do it efficiently.

That's what good websites are all about.

After significant discussion with the District, we understand the following...

ISSUES & CONSIDERATIONS:

The last website development was frustrating for staff publishers, consequently there was low adoption and fall-off of early adopters. This next introduction needs to be managed well, in a supportive and clear process.

Implementation of this next development therefore requires – beyond the obvious significant planning – an effective pilot phase, clear definition of the content types and an optimal interface, sufficient training and support, and strong rationale within a larger communications context.

It is a given that the underlying website infrastructure must be optimized for web and provide a flexible and easy to use interface and method of publishing content. This infrastructure must support strong, flexible, engaging content delivery. If it doesn't communicate with impact, what's it there for?

The majority of this effort relates to content development and design, as well as to supporting school and program staff in planning, assembling, writing, publishing content, and sustaining their content over time. The technology is merely a means to this higher goal of communicating.

The pilot phase becomes critical in collaborating with schools/programs about the best ways to shape, organize and present content; how the design interface supports this and is flexible and powerful in presenting a suitable hierarchy of information and interactions; and the ability to easily implement tools, transactions and facilitate response from site visitors. We need to figure out how best to help them succeed, work through that in detail, determine our approach, and then deliver it to the rest of the internal team. Our pilot schools become advocates to their colleagues.

WEBSITE OBJECTIVES:

- To distinctively position the District/schools as quality, friendly, accessible places to learn (brand/esteem building; public support; promotion);
- To provide timely, engaging and relevant content primarily to the public, and especially to parents;
- To create synergy across online and offline communication (from websites to brochures to memos to signs) so that everyone immediately understands key messages and visual identity with repetition and consistency;
- To build pride and a sense of team amongst “internal” audiences teachers, staff, students and parents (we look and feel professional, caring, cooperative);
- To enhance the promotional and recruitment effectiveness of specific programs/schools;
- To create strong identification with the District (the team) while still allowing for distinctive local identity for each school (the players).
- To interface with digital and online tools for education, collaboration, transactions in a way that is interesting and that reinforces a cohesive brand identity and face for the organization.

WEBSITE PRIORITIES:

- Appealing, relevant and attractive content in words, images and information;
- Clear, logical and intuitive organization of content, design and navigation;
- Timeliness and relevance of content;
- Strong planning, mapping and strategizing for communication and technical components;
- Strong communication/technical leadership of and support for school/program/district staff who take responsibility for the development of their respective websites;
- Interface with internally focussed digital collaboration or educational tools, including exchange of data where necessary;
- Consistency from each website to all other mediums of communication in design, content, emphasis;
- Authorized, trained and accountable content publishers from each school, department or program;
- A web-optimized, flexible, scalable technical platform and content management system upon which the websites are built;
- A powerful, easy-to-implement technical platform for creating, styling, theming and updating design, content and site structure;
- Easy implementation of plug-ins and modules as well as presentation of database generated elements where required;
- Cross-browser support and web standards accessible sites (administrative back-end and public front-end);
- Control of content, metadata, page headings etc for search engine optimization;
- Strong training and sufficient support for non-technical staff content publishers
- Low maintenance, low support requirements for district technical staff;
- Scalability and ability to modify;
- Efficient timelines for implementation;
- Cost effective both now and in the future.

WEBSITE FEATURES:

The Pilot Phase will ultimately tell us the structure of each site, but in order to provide as concrete a budget scope as possible, some assumed features and tools are outlined. Our proposed content management system implementation is to provide tools that allow non-technical users with assigned permissions to edit the content of their websites within schools and district departments. This includes but is not limited to:

- Text (obviously), but in multiple, flexible formats – body content, varied sidebars, features, promos pushed from one page to another, from one site to another as determined, spaces for story presentation, etc.
- Navigation/Page Creation – common themes that also allow for the uniqueness of each site, automated ways to modify and reorganize as required; ultimately to support a cohesive organizational identity
- Email addresses – specific formats, organization as required
- Images – page specific; also galleries
- Attachments
- Tables
- Calendars – with data tie-in to Google or other calendar tool
- News – with date management and hierarchy; also data sharing and promotion of headlines to home pages, other websites, or district wide
- Announcements – with same functions as News
- Twitter or Facebook feeds – with in-site integration of content (not just links to external sites) along with site-to-site integration as determined
- Links and design integration with teacher web pages, educational tools such as Moodle, etc.

Additionally, a Training Site with video tutorials will be supplied to complement face-to-face training of staff publishers. This will also support the hand-off of future training and support to District staff with little complication.

Content like photography and video can be developed and supplied as additional projects to the web development.

SCOPE OF DEVELOPMENT AND DESIGN:

The more fluid and dynamic the interplay between technical development and content design, the more effective will be both the engagement of site visitors as well as adoption by staff publishers. If it is a stunted or disconnected technical-content creation process, then it will compromise these essential factors.

Stages of the Project:

1. **Defining objectives** (drafted as part of Website Communication Analysis by Sotropa Communications). See above.
2. **Pilot phase** – in order to work out the best possible approach to site design and mapping, and just as important, to test the system on a working group in order to gain proof of concept AND buy-in for the approach... determining which schools and departments will participate... Once pilot phase is completed, remainder sites will be developed and shaped according to determinations in pilot phase.
3. **Remainder sites** – a schedule of development, design and content creation will follow based on priorities and availability of the non-pilot schools and programs.
4. **Training** – a component that is essential to the launch of each site in each phase is content publisher training... video as well as text resources and person-to-person support will ensure that each publisher feels comfortable in using the tools, understanding the technical and communications expectations, and knowing where to receive support. This is critical to strong adoption and sustainability of the system.
5. **Evaluation** – we need to know how things are working for users; following each phase a more global review will provide valuable information about the quality of experience for site publishers as well as for site visitors... Ongoing review of sites (regular sweeps) will allow communications and training staff to give feedback to site publishers, deal with errant or stale content, and to provide support and encouragement to improve and sustain quality content and experiences for site visitors.

Engaging the Staff:

Each school or program will vary widely in how ready they are to generate and complete their site's content; each must be dealt with in a unique way, based on their resources and abilities. This is perhaps the most intensive part of the project and represents a pass-or-fail in our ability to engage staff in becoming website publishers on a district-wide system. Over the course of weeks or even months, we will provide tight parameters, clear process, best-practices, creative resources and accountability to each school and program in getting their content (written, visual and other) ready for soft launch. We will work closely with district communication staff to achieve success for each site.

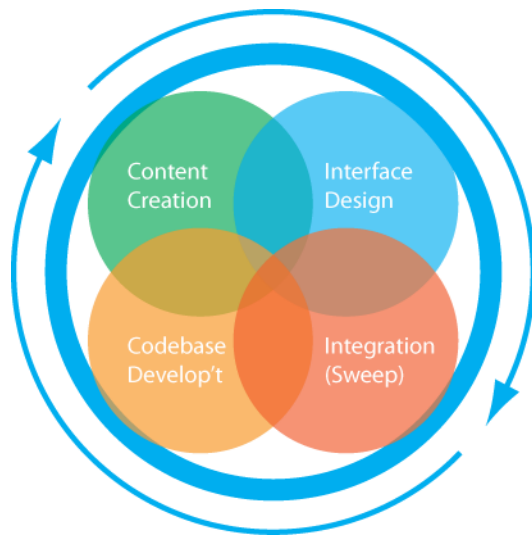
Working Process:

1. **Content Creation** – planning, writing (and imagery etc), advising, editing, publishing, training
2. **Interface Design** – navigation, mapping, page structure, hierarchy, graphic design
3. **Integration** – sometimes called the ‘Sweeper’, this job marries the code with the interface
4. **Code base Development** – programming to support the interface presentation, deliver data, integrate with extra-site tools

It is essential to understand how the integration of these roles impacts the creation and development process. Because of the unique and powerful ways that websites can present content and engage the visitor, their development is a constant, multi-disciplinary effort.

All four of these components must work seamlessly for the best delivery of content, navigation, hierarchy, interaction, implementation of tools, adoption of site users and sustainability and growth of sites. If there is stunted process or hampered ability to integrate the content, interface and code base during development, then people will be frustrated and the outcome will be less than ideal.

Each time you make a change, add a feature, change a feature, present the content in a different way (particularly in the pilot discovery phase)... the faster and closer these components work together, the better for everyone.



Sotropa Communications brings together experience and proven success in all of these critical areas, but just as importantly, knits them together within an effective team environment for optimal development, roll-out, support, evaluation and outcomes.