

CASE STUDY: THE WITNEY APP

Polly Inness, Communications Officer with Witney TC introduces their mobile App



Witney really does have just about everything going for it. The Town Council services a thriving market town with parks, a lake, public halls and free town centre parking. We have an active, interested community and a burgeoning population.

The Town Council also has a modern, mobile friendly website, a healthy relationship with the local press, quarterly newsletter, busy social media pages and a diary of civic and community events. All this has developed over the last few years in a conscious effort to improve perceptions of the Council's communications strategy by its Communications Steering Group.

That said, it is undoubtedly, difficult to reach everyone in a population of around 27,000, making the assumption that everyone wants to be reached and engaged.

Along with many other councils, I suspect, we have discovered there is no 'one size fits all' way to communicate with all our residents. Some like good old fashioned posters or newspapers while others prefer something they can view on the go, on their phone. In our mobile, wireless age there is an expectation of instant access to a stream of information. A mobile App seemed a natural addition to our strategy to reach people.

Once proposed, the Town Council began to consider the sort of content that would make it relevant to our residents. As we were well in to pothole season, we began with Fix My Street, a simple way for

residents to report road and pavement problems to the relevant authorities. We also wanted people to be able to access, download and wirelessly print council documents from within the App. We added a diary of events with the ability to send notifications to subscribers. These can be targeted according to interest, location, or triggered at a particular time as reminders. Push notifications are a great way to send out alerts and promote events.



Cllr Chris Woodward, Chair of the Communications Steering Group and Polly Inness, Communications Officer, proudly display the Witney App

Everything fell quickly into place. We researched suppliers and settled on The App Office, a company that had already produced a similar App. They offered competitive pricing and were able to deliver a live App within the deadline the Council had in mind for the launch at the Annual Town Meeting, a lead time of just a month! Being fairly comfortable with technology I was tasked with working with them to come up with an App that met

our needs. The steering group responded promptly when it came to making decisions about content and design preferences and with the level of support and guidance offered by The App Office throughout the process we made good progress.

So here we are a year on, still adding features and finding ways to encourage downloads such as photography competitions with entries made via the 'Submit photos' feature, or working in partnership with events that use our venues, to provide offers via the Rewards tab.

We like that it is engaging as well as practical. One feature allows visitors to pop a pin in a map when they park and the App guides them back to their car after shopping! We are currently exploring a way to connect with our local TV station so we can link to their local good news video stories.

There is something immensely satisfying in knowing that we are now so globally in touch that the Burgermeister of our German twin town uses our App and it's comforting to know he is kept informed of all our roadworks and events and can even report a pothole to our County Council if he spots one on Google maps!

So, what do you give a town council that has everything? An App of course, oh and maybe relocate our town about 100 miles closer to a beach!