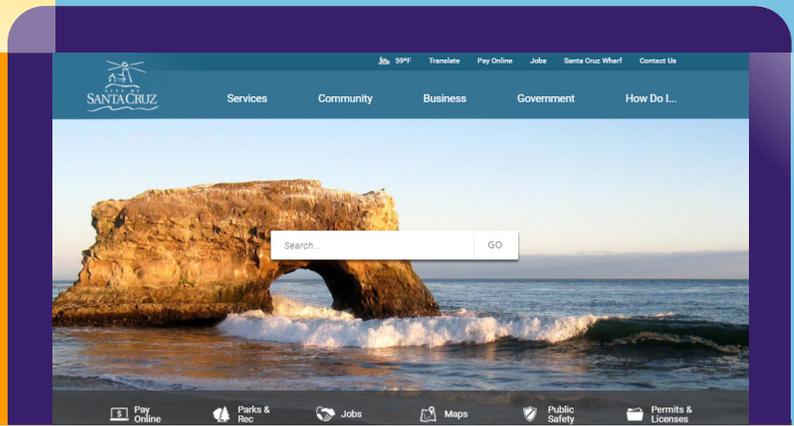




City of Santa Cruz  
Case Study



## Website Content Training Helps 100+ Content Editors Put Customers First in the City of Santa Cruz

Redesigning a 7-year-old government website can be a challenge under the best of circumstances. Add 100+ content editors to the mix and the process can be like herding cats.

The historic City of Santa Cruz, California took the bull by the horns and enlisted the help of the government website experts at Vision to create a powerful new digital platform that will keep its 62,000 residents and steady stream of visitors engaged and informed for many years to come.

### The Challenge: Getting Everyone on the Same Page

“We have about 120 content editors who all do their own thing,” said Kimberly Ramirez, Information Technology (IT) project manager for the City of Santa Cruz. “We’re a city with limited resources, so each department is responsible for creating its own content and keeping it up to date. Our old website was far behind where it needed to be.”

According to Ramirez, prior to partnering with Vision virtually none of Santa Cruz’s website editors or “super users,” who handle the bulk of departmental content updates, had any specialized training in content development. That’s why the city opted to utilize Vision for training sessions in both analytics as well as Content Strategy.

Vision’s advanced data mining and user experience techniques guided the Santa Cruz team to develop their content with the “customer” in mind.

The team identified the most visited pages on the old

site, which included Human Resources, Parks & Recreation and Police. IT then directed all departments to eliminate any page that had less than 320 visits over the prior 18 months. Content developers and super users in departments with high traffic pages were encouraged to attend Vision’s Analytics and “How to Write for the Web” training classes to help them refocus their departments’ pages.

### The Solution: Train the Trainers

The analytics training session proved its worth in helping to make Santa Cruz’s website more customer oriented.

“Analytics were a big surprise,” said Eileen Cross, community relations specialist in the city’s Water Department. “I work with engineers and scientists who think the public is interested in a lot of detail. But we learned our section of the website was too content-heavy with way too many pages. It was not intuitive or user friendly. On the old site, our Conservation section had 40 pages. After creating links and streamlining content on the new site, Conservation is now down to 3 pages.”

**“We definitely needed Vision’s content training. Yes, it was an investment of time and money, but it was absolutely worth it.”**

**Kimberly Ramirez**  
IT Project Manager  
City of Santa Cruz



Ramirez said the content training also was extremely useful. “The Vision trainer explained that good content design puts what the user is looking for right up front, not at the bottom of the page. He also encouraged us to use bullets to put information right at the customers’ fingertips. Those insights were huge for our content developers. It wasn’t something they’d realized on their own.”

Visuals with “before and after” examples of existing web pages also strongly resonated with participants in the content training session. Departmental content developers were shown an example of one of their existing web pages, and then were shown what it could or should look like.

“This side by side comparison really hit home,” said Ramirez. “Those were the big ah-ha moments where some realized that what they said in five paragraphs could be put into one.”

### **The Result: A New Engaging and Easy-to-Use Website**

Super users took these examples back to their departments where they shared what they learned to help other editors in their departments visualize how content should be written and presented in the future.

***“In addition to the updated look and feel, the whole process provided the entrée we needed to look at our website from the public’s perspective. It was the launch pad to a new understanding of customer service.”***

**Eileen Cross**

Community Relations Specialist, Water Department  
City of Santa Cruz

Joyce Blaschke, public information officer for the Santa Cruz Police Department was especially impressed with the training segment that focused on citizen personas. “The exercise really drove home that different generations will use the website in different ways,” she said. “It helped us simplify the steps needed to get information, eliminate acronyms and cut our department subpages by more than half.”

Jessie Soto of the Finance Department agreed. “The training helped us realize how difficult and clunky a city government website can be for people on the outside. Feedback during the training session helped us improve one of our most visited pages – fees, taxes and licenses – and made it much easier for people to go in and find what they want.”

Santa Cruz Events, Classes & Promotion Supervisor, Rachel Kaufman, led the team that rewrote the Parks & Rec pages using the tools Vision introduced in Content Strategy training.

They took a fresh look at some of their most-visited pages including the Santa Cruz Wharf.

“Information on The Wharf was really buried on our old website. It was a sad page,” Kaufman said. “In content training, we learned to approach it as a destination site. It’s still part of Parks & Recreation, but it also has its own link at the top of every page on the site. The landing page includes videos and content focuses on what customers want: shopping, dining, recreation, parking and directions.”

Summarizing the training experience, Ramirez said, “We definitely needed Vision’s content training. Yes, it was an investment of time and money, but it was absolutely worth it.”

### **What’s Next: Continue the Momentum**

Santa Cruz will continue to rely on its super users to share content development strategies and tips with co-editors as the city’s website continues to evolve. A new team of nine super users, including Cross, Kaufman, Soto and Blaschke, will lead the continued effort to streamline pages and content. The governance team also will help content editors follow new design and content standards, outlined in a Santa Cruz style guide created with Vision, to unify and support the new site.

“In addition to the updated look and feel, the whole process provided the entrée we needed to look at our website from the public’s perspective,” said Cross. “It was the launch pad to a new understanding of customer service. Vision’s approach freed our department up to change its mindset. It wouldn’t have happened without them.”