



City of Sausalito
Case Study



California City Approaches Website Makeover “One Bite at a Time”

How do you eat an elephant? One bite at a time. Especially if you’re an administrator who wears multiple hats in a city with a land mass of just 1.8 square miles and a population of less than 8,000.

That’s the conclusion reached by the website development team led by Abbot Chambers, city librarian and director of communications for the City of Sausalito, California. The team, which included Sausalito’s IT manager, administrative analyst and the assistant city manager/city clerk, partnered with Vision to “turn a site that was in serious disrepair into one that now is a stone’s throw away from best practice.”

The Problem: Inconsistent Content, Poor Navigation

In early 2017, Sausalito had a website with outdated content, links that led to nowhere, and inconsistent departmental templates that left visitors confused about where information was located and what it was called.

“When people went onto our old website and saw that its pages were inconsistent and navigation was a mess, it left a negative impression that could influence their perception of how city government was functioning,” Chambers said. “Once the website redesign was approved, we saw the opportunity to build something that the city can be proud of and make interactions between the public and the city much more efficient and productive.”

Chambers said his biggest concern going into the project was thinking about how he and his team were going to create a consistent voice, structure and experience to help website visitors get their tasks completed.

The Solution: One Bite at a Time

Lack of writing consistency across the site made Vision’s content strategy training a key element of the redesign process. Some pages were conversational, others used language only a subject matter expert could understand. The content strategy consultation, according to Chambers, “got people to step out of their silos and develop content that was simple, integrated and complementary.”

“Working with Vision was essential to starting the conversation with staff about why it’s important to achieve consistency. We need to think about the user and what they’re trying to accomplish in every decision we make about content. The whole content strategy phase was invaluable. It was when we made the first big step toward consistency.”

Abbot Chambers

City Librarian and Director of Communications
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“Working with Vision was essential to starting the conversation with staff about why it’s important to achieve consistency,” said Chambers. “We need to put ourselves in the shoes of the website visitor and consider what they’re trying to accomplish in every decision we make about content. That’s the value of the content strategy consultation. It was why we made the first big step toward consistency, simplification and plain language that every website visitor can understand.”

Chambers said that the old site’s navigational structure was in such serious disrepair that the baseline analytics “weren’t entirely trustworthy.” Without reliable analytics, many final content decisions were postponed until after the new site launched. They did, however, reduce the site’s page count by 20 percent at launch. In phase two, the city will use updated analytics to further refine their content.

“We did our best job and hustled to get it launched on time, but we’re not done yet,” Chambers said. “I feel like we’ve taken a site that was in pretty bad shape and we now have a very good site, but we want it to be ‘great.’ Following through on all the lessons we learned in Vision’s content strategy consultation is the last stage to getting us to ‘great’. We’ll do more user testing and more evaluation. We’ll come up with profiles of different types of website visitors, identifying what they may be looking for and how they prefer information. Then we’ll test to see how easy it is for them to find it. That’s the level of attention to the site that our customers want but we didn’t have the luxury of addressing in our initial makeover.”

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The Results: Happy Citizens & Lessons Learned

“Cities like ours which are trying to go from an outdated site to one in line with today’s content strategy best practices, need to realize that updating their sites is achievable even with limited staff and time,” Chambers advised. “As our initial launch date approached, there were things I wished we could be doing, but we know that the website is an ever-changing communications channel that will never be ‘done.’ Instead, we must constantly be on the lookout for ways to improve it.”

The results of a post-launch survey show that Sausalito’s efforts have paid off. The overwhelming majority of citizens (93%) said they were happy with the new site. Comments included:

“Awesome job and improvement! Easy access to information and professional look! Excellent job well done!”

“Congrats on the modernization effort! What a feat!”

“Overall a much improved website.”

“Part of my job now is to develop processes to make sure pages continue to be updated and we continue to think of ways to make the site better,” Chambers concluded. “I’m pleased with the ongoing evolution of the Vision CMS, and have a lot of faith that Vision will continue to create new tools and provide good advice to help municipalities improve our sites.”