Website Renewal Committee
March 4, 2021   5:30 PM
Meeting Minutes, recorded by Kimberley Selness

The meeting was held by Remote Access using Zoom Video conferencing, per the meeting posting

Meeting convened   5:30 PM
Members Attending: Patrice Garvin [Town Administrator], Margaret Decker [Town Information
                     Technology], Michael Lanza [Disability Access Committee Member], Ian
                     Rosenblum [Resident], Paul Roberts [Town Information Technology Advisory
                     Committee Member (ITAC)], Ellen O'Brien Cushman [Town Clerk], Kimberley
                     Selness, [Resident]; Jeff Hansell, [Belmont Media]
Not in attendance: Mireille Boutin

AGENDA

I.   **MINUTES** from January 7, 2021 approved unanimously.
II.   **ANALYTICS SUMMARY & DISCUSSION**

Ian, Paul & Kimberley reviewed a variety of reports generated by the town (Matt Haskell) and the vendor (CivicPlus) to learn about user behavior and activity on the Belmont-ma.gov website. Findings:

Who is coming to Belmont-ma.gov?

In 2020, there were 413,740 unique website sessions with a total of 981,869 pages viewed. Our website "users" are residents, businesses, employees, committee and board members, and non-residents such a vendors and contractors. We also have page hits from other Belmont communities (particularly from Texas and California) from Google searches.

When are they coming?

While we don't know what time of day (during business hours or after hours), traffic averages 2,690 page views daily (including Thanksgiving and Christmas with 787 and 819 page views respectively).

By far, the heaviest traffic in 2020 was between March and June due to developing COVID info, Town Meeting, and the local election.

What devices are they using?

People's device of choice for any given session may vary depending on the info they seek or task at hand. Our current website is "responsive," which means the design and page layout will optimize (look slightly different) according to what device is used. => *Responsive will be a requirement should the committee recommend going to RFP.*

Website activity (sessions) by device:

- **59% from desktops** – these have the longest average sessions (2.7 pages/155.3 seconds)
- **37% mobile** – these sessions are the shortest (1.87 pages/ 93.52 seconds) with the highest bounce rate of 46% compared to 38% overall
- **4% tablet** – sessions average 2.37 pages / 131 seconds

Where are they coming from?

- 23.7% arrive via Belmont-ma.gov homepage
- 20% use a direct link (typing the URL or using a bookmark) to one of the following a landing pages:

  > Belmont-ma.gov/
  > /home/urgent-alerts/covid-19-information-for-the-town-of-belmont-find-all-updates-here
  > /purchasing-bids
  > /human-resources/pages/job-openings
  > /town-clerk/pages/elections-absentee-voting-early-voting
  > /dpw-highway-division/pages/recycling-trash-information
  > /board-of-assessors-office/pages/assessing-database-fy-2014
  > /recreation
  > /pay-bills
  > /assessors-office

- 5% come as referrals from other websites, primarily Belmont.k12.ma.us, mass.gov, belmontian.com, and Belmont.wickedlocal.com.
- 1.5% link from social media (primarily Facebook and Twitter)
- Links from email are virtually non-existent
  - *We believe that people simply open up their browser (at that point or later when they have more time) rather than click the link(s) in the actual email.*
- **73.5% (300,924) of all sessions start with a search engine Keyword search;** the majority of those are seeking specific information from an internal page (which then counts as an "entrance" page). To protect user privacy, Google does not share/report back to us those Keywords or phrases of anyone logged into google. The few that were reported were some variation of "town of belmont Ma," "belmont ma covid" or "belmont ma assessor database."

What are they doing / where are they going?

- Across the entire site, the average number of pages a person visits is 2.379, with the average session lasting 131.5 seconds.
- We have some historical data in .pdf format of the top 100 content pages, but in 2020, **43% (424,749) of ALL views come from these top 10**:

  > Belmont-ma.gov (**84% of users will move on to an internal page**)
  > /home/urgent-alerts/covid-19-information-for-the-town-of-belmont-find-all-updates-here
  > /board-of-assessors-office/pages/assessing-database-fy-2014

/departments
/dpw-highway-division/pages/recycling-trash-information
/assessors-office
/pay-bills
/human-resources/pages/job-openings
/town-clerk
/treasurer-and-tax-collector/pages/online-tax-payments

- While 2020 website activity was skewed by visitors seeking COVID information, the top 20 pages were essentially the same as they were across 2017-2020. This information doesn't tell us if more people actually *paid* bills online, but such transactional pages increased in traffic, while the Recreation page dropped when it's typically top 10.
- Time spent on a page varies, depending on:
    - TYPE of page it is (Department or Committee page vs a transactional page)
    - The ACTION the users take (e.g. reading information, paying a bill, or just passing through to find a specific department)
    - RELEVANCE –Did they find what they need and exit out? Did they try multiple times to find what they searched for? Was the visit successful at all?

Additional Comments / Discussion

Overall, time spent/pages visited is probably appropriate IF people are actually finding what they're looking for in that time. We know from personal experience and anecdotal feedback, that's not always (often) the case.

Different departments have ownership of their content and pages - rather than simply updating information on an existing page, some upload a document or flyer creating a new page. This compounds issues with poor search results when searching online (SEO) or within the actual site.

Ellen inquired about what makes an "effective" department pages (e.g. is it better to have fewer pages with long content or short content snippets)? If we identify certain areas for immediate improvement, changes may be possible without waiting for the committee's final recommendations.

Implementing a more resident-centered, topical approach to core information could help reduce friction/ improve user experience: two of the most popular TOPICS in our top 100 pages (other than COVID) are centered around **Trash/Recycling** (collection schedule, bins, compost, yard waste, hazardous waste) and **Elections**. These topics have many related content pages that are currently actually housed under multiple departments on the website that don't often "connect."

> ⇨ We will take a deeper look into these and other categories/topics that could possibly be streamlined (e.g. like a Voting & Elections) page and linking all relevant info there).

Emergency alerts - COVID is currently on the red homepage banner. If the majority of users are skipping the homepage, are they missing this information? If they go straight to a document, yes. The alert banner does carry through to most department/committee *main* pages but not most internal pages.

⇨ Given the duration of COVID, should it be removed from the Emergency banner and made its own permanent resource area?

⇨ How can we get more people to sign up for the town Emergency Notifications (red button on homepage)?

Our calendar is specific to town-sponsored meetings only: How can we incorporate Community Events on the website while keeping the integrity of the functionality (views and reminders) that are particularly critical to town employees? Our vendor offers this, but not sure if it's included in the version we currently have; we will look at community calendar functionality in website reviews.

III.   EXTERNAL WEBSITE REVIEWS

During the review process we will dive into other municipal website with an eye for: specific **content** (trash, budget info, volunteer, Agendas and Minutes, etc.), **page layout** (such as core department pages, committee pages etc.), **technologies** used (including transactions and accessibility), **functionality** offered (community calendars), **top navigation** (by user or town entity), **usability**, **and branding narrative** (who makes their town sound or look great to live in?) for consideration.

IV.   NEXT STEPS / ACTION ITEMS FOR APRIL

Conduct individual website "reviews" and document vendor platform (e.g. CivicPlus, Revize, Granicus).

Conduct additional data analysis and request additional user activity reports:

- Begin grouping pages by topic category, project, task, audience
- Get additional analytics on operating systems, browsers used, time of day, audience profile
- Inquire about tracking homepage Feature clicks, newer key pages (Budget calculator), and documents with tags going forward
- Can we get info on the E-alerts and notifications activity https://www.belmont-ma.gov/subscribe and subscribers to Belmont Connect emergency notifications?
- Follow up with CivicPlus if we don't receive the report showing key search terms within the actual website.

NEXT MEETING - April 1, 2021 (first Thursday of each month @5:30 pm)

ADJOURNMENT - 6: 50 pm by roll call vote: Kimberley, Michael, Ellen, Margaret, Jeff, Ian