

Reporting to your Community Division A: less than 30,000 Mid-Western Regional Council submission

1. Overall Report Strategy

Short overview of the report strategy including content, identification of the audience(s) and method of delivery (medium).

Mid-Western Regional Council's Community News Bulletin is a 2-3 minute video presenting Council-related news items that affect residents in the Mid-Western Region (Mudgee, Gulgong, Kandos and Rylstone). The Community News Digital Bulletin was developed in 2018 to supplement an existing Community News print publication, a gloss A3 folded booklet that is delivered monthly to 10,000 homes, businesses and PO boxes in the region.

The News Bulletin is part of a wider Communications Strategy (Community News campaign) to inform the community on a monthly basis using various mediums (to engage different audiences) including video, print and audio across a range of platforms including social media, video sharing and Council's own website. The Bulletin is a video package of 5-6 news items with footage, voiceover and graphics, similar to that of a traditional television news bulletin which mirrors the content published in the printed Community News. It is written, recorded and produced in-house by Council's Communications Team and published on Council's website, Facebook page and YouTube channel. The target audience of the Bulletin is the population of the Mid-Western Region who use social media to access information and news.

2. Visual Presentation

Explain the choice of visual presentation: design, layout and language and its relevance to the material and audience.

The Community News Bulletin is a 2-3 minute video that includes 5-6 grabs on monthly Council news items. Content is diverse and determined by the Communications Team based on the monthly strategy, and can range from service announcements to educational information, promotion of major events, road closure notifications or grant funding.

The video is produced in a similar format to a traditional television news bulletin with an intro and outro that incorporate After Effects graphics. A number of professional techniques are utilised in the video including voiceover, chapter transitions, supers, scrolling news bars, music and calls to action.

The production of video was a strategic communications approach based on social media trends that demonstrate a meteoric rise in video consumption. By 2022, online videos will make up more than 82% of internet traffic – 15 times more than in 2017.

3. Budget

Briefly outline your budget: (how much it cost and whether it was a cost effective use of resources. This should include all expenses, including production, printing, distribution and evaluation costs).

The production of the Community News Bulletin is a highly cost effective method of communication based on investment and return.

The product is developed in-house with the footage, voiceover and storyboard developed by Council's Communications Officer and final video with graphics and sound produced by Council's Digital and Graphic Designer. The greatest expense is staff time, however that is absorbed by the team. If this project was to be outsourced to a digital media company, Council estimates it would come at a cost of approximately \$3000 for the production of the video alone each month. This is therefore a huge saving for the organisation.

The bulk of the equipment used to produce the bulletin such as a DSLR camera and Adobe Creative Suite (Premiere Pro program) were existing assets within the Communications Team. There was a small initial outlay of some recording equipment including a shotgun microphone, hand held microphone and tripod. There are ongoing expenses of subscriptions to stock video and audio libraries at of approximately \$450 per annum or approximately \$37 per bulletin.

Distribution costs are nil as the video is uploaded to Facebook and YouTube, with neither requiring subscriptions. Council currently does not boost bulletin posts and is satisfied with the organic reach of each post.

While it is difficult to determine, the total net cost of production of the bulletin per month is estimated to be approximately \$300 – a low cost when the average engagement per video is approximately 20% of the region's digitally engaged residents.

4. Distribution Methods

Describe your distribution methods and print run or coverage (online).

The Community News Bulletin is distributed across four platforms, including Council's Facebook page, YouTube Channel, website and a monthly eDM delivered to 500 registered email recipients. Cross-platform distribution ensures greater reach, targeting a range of demographics. The central platforms are Facebook and YouTube due to these social sites being the most mobile device friendly. With more than 60 per cent of people accessing the internet on their mobile phones, the platform selection was critical to ensure we were able to firstly, target the select audience and secondly, maximise views and retention rates. The target audience is the population of the Mid-Western Region who use social media to access information and news. The Bulletin is directly uploaded to Facebook and YouTube and placed in a Community News playlist that groups past editions. The YouTube link is embedded within

a Community News landing page on Council's website as well as the eDM. Among the benefits of a digital publication are the reporting capabilities that capture views, audience engagement and retention rates that are not available for printed forms of communication.

5. Evaluation

Describe any feedback or evaluation methods received.

The process and product are refined by the Communications Team monthly to ensure delivery of a high quality publication that meets audience needs. The method of evaluation is based on firm data derived from social analytics including views, audience engagement and retention rates, and soft data from verbal and written feedback.

From 1 January to 31 December 2018, 20,340 minutes of video was viewed on Council's Facebook page as recorded by Facebook metrics. These videos were either complete Community News Bulletins or chapters split into quick video news grabs.

On average, Community News Bulletin videos organically reached 32% of Council's followers, and have an engagement rate (like, share or click) of 12.8%.

As part of the internal evaluation process early on the Communications Team opted to separate out each news item and publish individually to increase retention rates. Rather than watching a 2-3 minute video, the audience has the option to watch a 30 second video. There is also the option to view a piece that is of particular interest rather than the whole news bulletin.

Further soft data is provided in the form of feedback received from staff and residents either written or oral. An example of this is a resident who recently told the Communications Team they no longer read the printed publication of Community News, preferring to watch the Community News Bulletin. Written feedback is monitored via Facebook and YouTube posts, with one example of this being the following comment: "Love the new video format! Keep up the good work", left by a local business on the 2018 January edition uploaded to YouTube.

6. Thematic Unity

Account for thematic unity: whether it conveys a clear sense of local character and council/community concerns.

The Community News Bulletin brief is to deliver Council's key messages to the community, respective to the relevant issues that month. A series of development processes are in place to ensure the publication is specific to matters affecting residents in the Mid-Western Region and address community concerns related to Council issues. Content is sourced by the Communications Team following a review of internal and external matters. Internally, input is sought from Council's Management and Executive Team on the projects, activities and notifications that will affect residents that month and in coming months. Additionally, the Communications Team oversees the organisation's social platforms and is in daily contact with managers and the Customer Service Team on any issues generating particular public interest. Externally, the Communications Team keeps abreast of matters of community

concern by following community Facebook sites and maintaining relationships with community organisations such as the Chamber of Commerce and Local Health Council. Content can range from Council co-ordinated event information, to exhibition of key documents, progress and completion updates on infrastructure, works notifications such as traffic notifications including road closures and promotion of other Council services and education campaigns.

Visually, the Bulletin conveys a clear sense of local character with all footage and interviews captured by the Communications Officer in the region, aside from some stock footage when necessary. The Communications Team has taken great care to develop the intro and outro of the bulletin based on artwork from the printed publication to illustrate design consistency and unity across the Community News campaign. Further to this, the voiceover is recorded by the same person each time to ensure familiarity with the audience.

Due to its location, the Mid-Western Region does not have a locally-based television news crew. In the absence of this, the Bulletin fills a spot in the market providing a monthly news bulletin relevant to residents in the Mid-Western Region.

7. Innovation

Give reasons why the report shows excellence and innovation.

With a third of online activity now spent watching video content, the Community News Bulletin demonstrates excellence and innovation by evolving a one dimensional publication into a digital communication that targets a broad audience. Its distribution methods on social media are intended to capture some of the 45 per cent of people who watch more than an hour of Facebook or YouTube videos each week. Market research demonstrates Mid-Western Regional Council is one of the few regional councils to break into the burgeoning area of digital communications. It further demonstrates excellence in community reporting through delivery across multiple platforms.

It is economically innovative when compared to more traditional printed communications publications that are high cost and produce significant waste. The Community News Bulletin is carbon neutral and produces no waste.