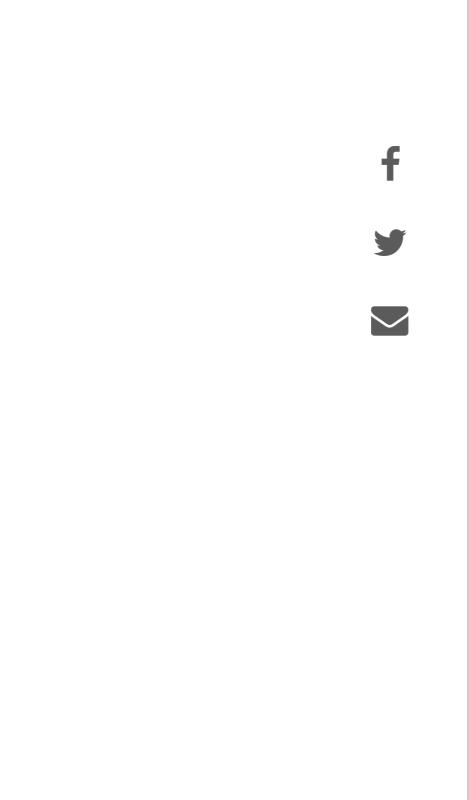


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Government public notices should be published not just posted

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There has been a disturbing trend by some administrations at the municipal level to post more and more public notices on their own websites instead of using hard copy press. This should be disturbing for all for a number of reasons.

The purpose of legal requirements to post public notices of government actions is to inform the public of what is being done. Democracy can't function without an informed citizenry. Whether it is a change in zoning, public consultations on pending legislation, new parking regulations, deadlines for applications or any of the myriad changes that can compromise citizens if they are not aware, governments must make people knowledgeable.

Posting only on municipal websites does not meet that duty. People may or may not go to those websites. It's not the first thing on their mind. To use a modern tech term, it's not exactly "push" technology.

The idea of public notices was to put the information in the public's face. Up to the late 19th century notices were posted in public squares, saloons and church buildings to assure the widest possible dissemination. Hard copy press took over because it too was in the public's face. However many people would pick up a newspaper, they usually turned all the pages and would at least notice the page where the government notices were.

It is still true today. Digital platforms are passive. They depend on the public going to them. Newspapers, particularly community newspapers, are either delivered to your door or are stacked at central locations like supermarkets, shopping centres and public buildings where a lot more people are sure to pick them up. Papers are proactive, they're not passive, and allow for the largest number of people to see the government information they need to know.

Governments prefer to run between the raindrops and do things with as little attention as possible. Bureaucrats will tell you that posting online rather than publishing in newspapers saves money. But it is just as important for them to keep things out of the public eye.



Some of you might be thinking as you read this that we just want to keep the ad dollars coming in. But this newspaper also has a very important and effective web presence. Our site is state of the art. But that brings us to the second point. Sure it's nice to have the public notice revenues. Though they are published at special rates, every little bit helps especially to community papers. But let's be clear on this. There is a good deal of hypocrisy on the part of politicians, particularly local ones, who would argue the cost savings of posting versus publishing, yet also demand coverage — particularly from community newspapers — of the hyperlocal events they participate in. The kind of events dailies don't have room for but that community papers cover so thoroughly. If they want this kind of coverage, they can't at the same time block a source of revenue. They should remember the advice of a federal Minister I once heard telling a newly elected MP not to pay attention to the big papers. "Your success," he said, "will be determined by your local community press. They're the ones whose coverage will determine whether you're re-elected or not."

A recent study of community newspaper readership by the Reynolds Journalism Institute demonstrated that 67% of the public read a local newspaper ranging from 1 day to 7 days a week. The study found that local newspapers continue to be the primary source of information about the community information people need to know. Four out of 10 residents (42%) selected "newspaper" and "newspaper's website" as their primary source of information. An Ipsos-Reid independently done study found that for The Suburban, that number is 77%.

The Quebec Community Newspaper Association's, English and bilingual publications, that distribute weekly, monthly and biweekly reach some 710,000 readers across the province. These publications serve communities in West Quebec, Laval, Montreal, the South Shore and the Townships through their focus on relevant local news and high editorial-to-advertising ratio. Local publications cover communities that are often hard to reach, and effectively provide coverage in both rural and urban markets. You can't find that breadth of push on any digital.platform here.

So let your elected officials know, particularly at the municipal level, that you don't want to be left in the dark on their decisions. You don't need to sift through the jungle of websites to find out what they are imposing on us. You want it easily accessible in your local paper brought to your door or picked up at your favorite store. Tell them that online alone just leaves the public offline. And permanently in the dark.

editor@thesuburban.com

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