COMMUNICATING WITH PEOPLE
Bega Valley Shire Council Communications Strategy 2013.
“We become what we behold. We shape our tools and thereafter our tools shape us.”

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First, a word.

This strategy is possibly different in style, content and delivery to those previously put forward by Council.

This is intentional.

It’s hoped that what you see before you will make you think about how we communicate with people in placing the personal before the organisational.

Rather than looking at communication as a static process applied to an organisation as the only way to speak, we look instead at people: those with something to say, and those who may benefit from hearing what is said.

Processes in this strategy are viewed as a supporting and fluid component of communication that needs to change in accordance with what is said, how we say it, and what effect we want it to have.

What follows is an in-depth look into the way people respond to information and how we can use this to better inform the community using clarity, good design, technology, easy language and conversational engagement.
Intent.

How to be trusted; how to be liked in both its traditional and Facebook denotations; how to be heard; how to change behaviour. It’s a challenge, particularly if you believe we have no control of the media, but argued in this communications strategy is a process of managing people behaviour through traditional, new and holistic views of media. The insight of Marshall McLuhan cited at the beginning of this report causes the reader to think of technologies; thirst for understanding leading to creation of computers, leading to creation of content, influence overload, a greater thirst for understanding, the creation of bigger, better, faster machines. And so it continues. Framing a communications strategy around this observation of McLuhan’s is vital if we are to utilise technologies and avoid the pitfalls of information bloat and missed opportunities, but of equal importance is the observation of behaviours creating organisational values, obligations, wide-ranging strategies and tactical outcomes, which if communicated correctly, can themselves change behaviours. The tandem processes of beginning behaviours ultimately influencing end behaviours through technological and organisational means provide the essential human, group and tools-based components of this study into effective communication.
FINDINGS.

- We cannot rely on the provision of information to change behaviour.
- People focus more on feelings of dissatisfaction than satisfaction.
- Informed people are less moveable and prone to assumptions.
- We gather more information than we are able to process and communicate, despite having the means to do so.
- We are at risk, as an organisation, of not knowing what we are talking about through an inability to communicate effectively.
- The media is made up of people equally prone to delusions and assumptions. Generally they do not have hidden agendas.
- Misrepresentation by the media is a failure by us to communicate effectively.
- Media, and public opinion expressed through the media, feed off each other, producing more stories and opinion as a result. In these instances the information is easily skewed by misinformation and assumptions.
• This cycle can be disrupted by orientating the message with relevance and engaging the consumer with emotion.

• People will often refrain from saying what is important if they are unsure of the details.

• People are happy to be introduced to new ideas and will embrace them for good or bad if they are sure of the details.

• People will take ownership of new ideas through discussion, sharing and action via decision making if they are provided with an easily digested message that encourages an emotional response.

• By reducing information, we can still in many cases convey the same message.

• People are gaining some control of the information heavy online world through use of smart devices. This affects demand for useful information presented with brevity and emotional response capacity.
RECOMMENDATIONS.
Priority 1.

Information bloat to be addressed with a multi-point information tree of descending information and ascending emotion.

Proposed action: All current major public reports and strategies to use the information tree model.

For existing and current documents: composition of one page summary outlining purpose, aims and key findings/recommendations. Summary to be available in hard copy at libraries and to accompany electronic documents in the following manner:

Summaries to appear in dedicated ‘summary library’ section of website where visitors can browse sections in search of documents/reports/strategies. Title and a single paragraph précis to appear first. Then click through to one page summary and finally onto main document.

For new and yet to be published documents: The summary is to be incorporated into the document and appear in the dedicated ‘summary library’ as outlined above. Major documents are to be released using the information tree model where the document and summary are accompanied by a press release, Facebook entry, Twitter post and photograph using image sharing tools such as Instagram.

Additional action: Document audit. Determine the number of existing documents to be given hard copy and online summaries. Also determine the number of major public reports and strategies currently available through the new website. How many documents are missing and what timeframe for transfer onto new site.

Resources required: To avoid a resource blowout it is suggested we focus this model only on current, existing and yet to be published major documents/reports/strategies. The bulk of the work will involve determining in each group what documents fall into this category and the consequent writing of one page summaries for each document. This should not require the redefinition of roles within the organisation, but will see a temporary workload increase for some staff.

WHEN: Document/report audit to commence upon approval of Communications Strategy. Result of audit to determine timeframe of applying information tree.
Priority 2.

Move the BVSC website from Web 1.0 to Web 2.0 and prepare for future moves in line with internet user trends. Conduct a long-term review of website.

Proposed actions: Information heavy government sites are a challenge to make user friendly, attractive and interactive. But it can be done. It’s proposed that a long term review of the site’s appearance and functionality start as a two part process.

Part one involves simplifying the site’s navigation and presentation of information as per best practice sites such as: www.gov.uk. Ongoing discussions with our web developer, Source Cover, are taking place to determine the cost of structural changes for the site. These will be reported as and when they are received.

Part two involves the continuous rollout of online tools and campaigns that are less information centric, but are useful, interactive, community building and enjoyable. A rolling 12 monthly online campaign plan will lead this process.

Proposed campaigns/tools:


**Shire Experiences.** This is online local knowledge; the equivalent of listening to a person sharing intimate knowledge of an area and the experiences to be had. Shire Experiences will dovetail with SCT campaigns by allowing people to share unique and personal experiences that’s often not be mentioned in usual tourism/promotional media. Example: “building driftwood sculptures on Mogareeka beach after a king tide”. The aim is to encourage local knowledge to be shared through an engaging and interactive portal on our website which will link to our social media sites and act as a springboard to the SCT site. This will fit with our Live Work Invest prospectus by using simple, visual communication to promote recreational, working and everyday experiences all of which are suggested by the community. See mock-up pages attached.

Image captions are to be of length suitable for Twitter (140 characters) in order for the campaign to be hosted across all social media sites (Facebook, Twitter and Instagram/Pinterest). It’s proposed we use the launch of the experiences campaign to coincide with the official launch of our Twitter page and the campaign’s associated hash tag #BVSbest.
Our Sustainable Shire. The recent success and popularity of the Every Home a Farm project has highlighted a need for a continued presence as a provider of advice and facilities for sustainability in the community. From a pragmatic point of view, this kind of publicity is extremely valuable; it is apolitical, useful and approachable, allowing community members to connect with Council in a different way. A number of options exist:

1. An online portal where advice on sustainable living can be provided with an emphasis on local conditions. It offers opportunities for the development of electronic and hard copy publications such as local farm gate guides as published by Eurobodalla Shire Council and Fruit Growers Tasmania (see example here).

2. An online presence as listed above, plus the continuation of an Every Home a Farm like project that features regularly at local markets and events. This provided a great opportunity for Council to soften its image by offering the community some useful advice and a hands on approach involving a range of Council waste initiatives.

3. All the above plus the development of a Community Garden Plan, including associated policies and procedures. This sits outside the area of communications but substantial benefits for on/offline community building would result. Example in following link. http://www.northsydney.nsw.gov.au/Waste_Environment/Coal_Loader_Centre_for_Sustainability

Plans on a page. This project is already underway and is expected to be launched on July 1 2013. This first stage will cover the four major towns with services, facilities and major projects displayed on the map. Each point on the map will expand and link to dedicated pages on our website containing full details of the service/project. Options of the best mapping system are currently being investigated, including layering on Google Maps, Prezi and a new mapping module on our Content Management System.

Resources required: The implementation of a long term website review and management of navigational, design (minimal), and campaigns/tools will be a primary objective of the communications team. This demonstrates a further need to expand the team with the proposed addition of an online and social media content position. To maximise on efficiency it is also proposed we expand on the team’s skill base, with the implementation of a skills audit identifying areas where further training is needed.

The bottom line is we have a website created for about $5000 which is acceptable on some levels and performs fairly well as an information store. The IRIS community survey identified our website as growing in popularity as a means of accessing information, but it’s thought that without a significant focus on functionality, navigation and content, our website will be a missed opportunity in terms of communication. Management will be advised of costs for proposed changes as and when they arise.

WHEN: Simplification of site navigation and information presentation underway. Ongoing job. First online campaign plan ready by end June 2013. Individual campaign building to take one month each, beginning upon approval of plan.
Priority 3.

Conduct a design review of all Council publication templates for purpose of bringing design elements up to date with current trends.

Action underway: It has already been noted that Council’s document design is outdated and in need of review. A recent test was successful in redesigning the latest Operational/Development Plan and Community Strategic Plan. The same new design template, plus information tree, will be applied to the shire bike plan. It’s anticipated that a redesign of all major documents will follow, with existing documents receiving new covers and new/revised documents receiving a full redesign.

It is also proposed that Council’s website be taken into account when considering new design elements. A complete redesign is not being proposed, but some elements, such as home page structure and design elements will be considered.

**Resources required:** For the initial redesign period of documents and templates it is recommended we use the services of a professional or competent designer to assist with the workload. This is not absolutely necessary if it is acceptable to transition to an organisation-wide ‘new look’ at a slower pace.

It’s proposed we use the results from the document audit proposed in Priority 1 to determine the number of documents to be redesigned or fitted with new covers. Timing and costing for the organisational redesign can then follow.

**WHEN:** Redesign of CSP ready by end of May. Final design brief/templates for all Council documents to be ready by end June. New covers for existing documents to be ready by end of 2013 (this is dependent on the hiring of a professional designer).
Priority 4.

Rework Community Link page.

**Proposed action.** Redesign Community Link page to maximise on readability and positive news stories. New design to have a heavy focus on images, useful information and good news tailored to issues of the day. Each story or entry to have accompanying QR code and short link that enables access to more information on our website and/or Facebook page.

Care must be taken to retain mandatory material, but investigate (currently under way) the possibility of providing via weblinks to free up space. We have successfully negotiated prominent placing with local papers and offered transition to colour for a reduced cost of $66 extra per edition. New design to compliment redesign of Council documents (see priority 3).

**Resources required:** Redesign can occur in house. No extra workload beyond this as it involves just a change of style and content.

**WHEN:** New Community Link design ready end June 2013.

Priority 5.

Internal communications recommendations to be investigated through a separate strategy document.

**Proposed action:** Compose an internal communications strategy analysing best practice sites and tools to establish an efficient means of communicating with staff and Councillors. Emphasis to be placed on streamlined information sharing and social elements.

**Resources required.** None.

**WHEN:** Draft strategy ready by end August 2013.
Recommendations by category.

Design/messaging.

- Rework Community Link page. See priority 4.

- Conduct a design review of all Council publication templates for purpose of bringing design elements up to date with current trends. See priority 3.

- Devise a design/layout brief for staff piecing together their own documents. This is to happen alongside a redesign of Council documents. No additional resources needed.
Digital/web/social.

- Disengagement addressed through major adoption of social media across multiple platforms. Also through involvement in feedback to traditional media.

**Action underway:** Facebook – Currently signed up and working well as a community engagement tool with number of ‘Likes’ gradually rising, however, recent actions such as hosting the Australia Day photo competition on our Facebook page show the capacity to grow our following and reach at an increased rate. It’s proposed we continue to host interactive events on our page. With approval, these will involve an online pet rehoming campaign linked with Council’s Wallagoot pound (as per Mackay Council’s award winning Pound Pets campaign - http://www.govcomms.com.au/library/scripts/objectifyMedia.aspx?file=pdf/3/18.pdf&siteID=1&str_title=Mackay%20-%20Advocacy.pdf), an online, photo and community based campaign highlighting great experiences to be had in the shire, and a Council run sustainability project to continue and expand on the successful Every Home a Farm project. The above projects will be discussed in greater detail in the website section below.

Twitter – BVSC’s Twitter page has now been launched under the user name @BegaValleyShire. This will work in conjunction with our website and Facebook page as well as allowing us to share information quickly with the community. The surge of interest during the summer’s bushfire episodes showed the need for an outlet that allows us to get targeted information to the community in minimal time. Twitter provides the perfect platform for this.

1. Photo sharing through Instagram and Pinterest – Recent developments with Instagram have seen it fall from grace due to the release of a restrictive privacy policy. I’m watching how this pans out, but for the time being we can still harness the power of this tool and the Pinterest community by sharing images of the everyday things we do as Council. Suggested process:
2. Sign up to Pinterest (done) and Instagram (currently can’t do this on my phone owing to iOS problems... working out with ICT).
3. Register with Pintacular, a sharing tool that allows photos to be shared on multiple social media sites at the flick of a button (including Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest and Instagram). Saves time.
4. Staff given brief explanation of photo sharing benefits.
5. Staff take photos and send via email to central photo editor – me at this stage.
6. Appropriate photos selected and shared through Pintacular.

**Resources required:** The nature of social media makes it difficult to estimate the time and staff resources required to effectively manage. As it currently stands we manage with what we have, but if significant gains are made in activity and followers then we will require extra staff resources. The creation of online campaigns and projects such as those listed above would certainly require dedicated staff (more information in the website section below), and it may be wise to create a combined online and social media content position to maximise productivity with minimal demand on resources.

Other resources to consider are the distribution of mobile phones with good quality built in cameras and an ability to share images via email. To minimise costs it is suggested they are provided to team leaders dealing with public issues – town teams, rangers etc.
Digital/web/social. Continued

• Deploy an independent and external Facebook moderator who follows our comments guidelines to the letter.

**Action underway:** External moderator, Bang the Table, currently being used. Meeting soon with moderator to review functionality/need for the service.

**Resources required:** Service costed at $5000pa. Already assigned.

• Utilise the Twitter platform, with the creation of accounts for BVSC, the Mayor, the GM and Councillors if they wish. Provide Twitter training for interested parties.

**Action underway:** Twitter account for BVSC now up and running. Communicate with Mayor, GM and Councillors, explaining benefits/uses of Twitter and enquiring who is interested in opening an account. Follow up with training and support.

**Resources required:** None at present, although if uptake is strong there may be further cause to make room for an online and social media content position.

• Revitalise and fully adopt features offered on Bega Valley Views. Test BVV functionality during SV public consultation period.

**Action underway:** Bega Valley Views was used during special variation consultation period. Some concerns exist regarding slow uptake despite advertising across multiple mediums. Next step is use the platform for consultations on bike paths project and Littleton Gardens masterplan.

**Resources required:** None. Currently managed by Communications team and Rebecca Bogie.

• Investigate development of a BVSC app for Apple, Android and Windows platforms.

**Proposed action.** A report be drafted for senior management indicating proposed content for app and cost benefit analysis of signing up to currently developed local government app verses the cost of developing of our own app. New online app building tools to also be investigated.

**Resources required.** None for drafting a report, but potentially substantial sum if we are to go with developing our own app. Cost to be indicated in the report.
Digital/web/social. Continued

- Move the BVSC website from Web 1.0 to Web 2.0 and prepare for future moves in line with internet user trends. Implement interactive elements to our website. See priority 2.

- Continue with investigation of live streaming Council meetings. Set up Mayoral post meeting video summary.

**Proposed action.** Make a final report to General Manager indicating feasibility of online streaming. Problems with Council’s outgoing bandwidth possibly not coping with live online streaming have come to light. An alternative that may be less expensive and easier to operate is a dedicated 3G system, but this in itself comes with problems at busy times when demand for the network is high.

Another alternative is to stream using podcast technology. As an option this can be accompanied by an image or set of images, or just made available in audio format. Absence of pictures will significantly reduce file size and improve accessibility for people without fast internet connections. This option will also address (although not fully) problems arising in relation to privacy. An audio podcast is also considerable cheaper to set up and maintain. As an indicator, it is possible to livestream five hours of audio at about $50 per meeting. This price includes 1500 hours of audio to be stored and publicly accessible online. **At this stage, audio streaming is the recommended method.**

Other issues such as privacy need discussion. New Commonwealth privacy laws are being introduced in March 2014; an investigation is underway regarding the general impacts on Council communications, including live streaming.

- Compose a 12 monthly content plan for Council’s website, including release strategies, proposed outcomes and resources required.

**Proposed action.** This is a plan covering the proposed content to be added to our website over the coming year, specifically referring to online tools and campaigns such as those listed above. It will not focus on style elements as these will be covered in the revised style guide.

**Resources required.** No additional resources. Work closely with web administrator and community engagement staff.
Organisational.

- Information bloat to be addressed with a multi-point information tree of descending information and ascending emotion. **See priority 1.**

- Internal communications recommendations to be investigated through a separate strategy document. **See priority 5.**

- Review BVSC style guide, and integrate social media components. First draft of the BVSC style guide with additions for social media and online writing are complete.

- Discuss resourcing strategies regarding plans to bring our website and online strategy in line with current trends and future developments. **Action underway.** Outcome to be determined by senior management.

- Continue with review of Council’s Media and Community Policy, and Media Guidelines and Procedures. **Action underway.** To be completed and submitted for approval by end June 2013.
Training/skills.

- Emphasis is to be placed on writing for the media for the purpose of being reused by the media.

Proposed action:
Staff are to be trained in writing for, and speaking to the media. Local newspapers now commonly use our press releases as pre-written stories. Incorporating a basic media language and structure to our documents will save a lot of time and resources in preparing them for print in the local media. Training for media writing will happen through workshops and written guides to be distributed among staff. It’s recommended that training for talking to the media be conducted by public relations professionals for all senior staff.

Resources required:
Writing for media workshops can be conducted in house by the communications team.

- Provide training in use of/benefits of social media for staff.

Proposed action:
Group and one-on-one training sessions to be scheduled for staff wishing to use social media to benefit the performance and perception of Council. This will be particularly of benefit to staff managing Council backed satellite pages. Recent training session with Community Development team was successful.

Resources required:
Training sessions to be provided by existing communications team, plus use of free online training tools.
**Behavioural.** These items generally require a change in thought or behaviours rather than specific actions.

- Recognise visual communication as an effective way to get a message and emotion across to a wide audience. To be included in review of policy and procedure documents.

- Implement an organisational practise of accompanying documents with images for purpose of encouraging emotional response from consumers. To be included as a procedure.

- Produce material that gets read and gets people talking. In general, but particularly in dynamic social media setting we must talk with, not to people but still lead the conversation.

- Social media damage control achieved with combined use of traditional and digital communication. Damage control prevention workshop recently attended at Government Communication Australia conference.
SCHEDULE
### Schedule. Priority items

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<tr>
<th>WHAT</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Information bloat to be addressed with a multi-point information tree of descending information and ascending emotion.</td>
<td>Document audit to commence upon endorsement of this strategy. Timeframe of completion to be determined with results from audit.</td>
<td>Organisation wide. Comms team to implement changes after exec summary section of information tree.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Move the BVSC website from Web 1.0 to Web 2.0 and prepare for future moves in line with internet user trends. Conduct a long-term review of website.</td>
<td>Website review to commence immediately. Subsequent work on website to follow. Ongoing process.</td>
<td>Communications team.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conduct a design review of all Council publication templates for purpose of bringing design elements up to date with current trends.</td>
<td>Design review to commence upon strategy approval. Timframe dependent on direction from executive re contracting a designer.</td>
<td>Communications team. Work with C&amp;R Admin Coordinator &amp; Customer Service Manager on style guide and templates.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rework Community Link page.</td>
<td>To commence upon strategy endorsement. Full redesign ready within one month of strategy approval.</td>
<td>Communications team.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal communications recommendations to be investigated through a separate strategy document.</td>
<td>Draft strategy to be completed by November 2013.</td>
<td>Communications Coordinator.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Disengagement addressed through major adoption of social media across multiple platforms. Also through involvement in feedback to traditional media.</em></td>
<td>Underway and ongoing.</td>
<td>Communications team.</td>
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*This is an ongoing priority with work underway, so it has not been included in the list of priorities on page 67.*
## Schedule. Design/messaging

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<tr>
<td>Rework Community Link page.</td>
<td>See priority item 4.</td>
<td>See priority item 4.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conduct a design review of all Council publication templates for purpose of bringing design elements up to date with current trends.</td>
<td>See priority item 3.</td>
<td>See priority item 3.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Devise a design/layout brief for staff piecing together their own documents.</td>
<td>Part of planned design review. For details see priority item 3.</td>
<td>Communications team.</td>
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### Schedule. Digital/Web/Social

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<th>WHAT</th>
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<tr>
<td>Disengagement addressed through major adoption of social media across multiple platforms. Also through involvement in feedback to traditional media.</td>
<td>See priority item 6.</td>
<td>See priority item 6.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deploy an independent and external Facebook moderator who follows our comments guidelines to the letter.</td>
<td>Action underway. To review at end of contract period. Jan 2014.</td>
<td>Communications Coordinator.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utilise the Twitter platform, with the creation of accounts for BVSC, the Mayor, the GM and Councillors if they wish. Provide Twitter training for interested parties.</td>
<td>Action underway. Consult with interested parties once strategy approved.</td>
<td>Communications team.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Investigate development of a BVSC app for Apple, Android and Windows platforms.</td>
<td>Report to be handed to management by end December 2013.</td>
<td>Communications Coordinator.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Move the BVSC website from Web 1.0 to Web 2.0 and prepare for future moves in line with internet user trends. Implement interactive elements to our website.</td>
<td>See priority item 2.</td>
<td>See priority item 2.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continue with investigation of live streaming Council meetings. Set up Mayoral post meeting video summary.</td>
<td>Feasibility report to be ready within month of strategy approval.</td>
<td>Communications Coordinator. To work with ICT Manager.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compose a 12 monthly content plan for Council’s website, including release strategies, proposed outcomes and resources required.</td>
<td>Plan to be ready by end October 2013.</td>
<td>Communications Coordinator.</td>
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## Schedule: Organisational

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<th>WHAT</th>
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<tr>
<td>Information bloat to be addressed with a multi-point information tree of descending information and ascending emotion.</td>
<td>See priority item 1.</td>
<td>See priority item 1.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal communications recommendations to be investigated through a separate strategy document.</td>
<td>See priority item 5.</td>
<td>See priority item 5.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review BVSC style guide, and integrate social media components.</td>
<td>First draft of the BVSC style guide with additions for social media and online writing are complete.</td>
<td>Customer Service Manager, C&amp;R Admin Coordinator. (templates), Communications Coordinator.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discuss resourcing strategies regarding plans to bring our website and online strategy in line with current trends and future developments.</td>
<td>Action underway.</td>
<td>Communications Coordinator, LEG.</td>
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## Schedule. Skills/Training

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<tr>
<td>Emphasis is to be placed on writing for the media for the purpose of being reused by the media.</td>
<td>Skills workshops to commence January 2014.</td>
<td>Communications Coordinator. Customer Service Manager.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide access to media (speaking) training for managers.</td>
<td>Investigate cost of external training provider. Report to management by end September 2013.</td>
<td>Communications Coordinator.</td>
</tr>
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## Financial requirements.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>REQUIREMENT</th>
<th>COST per annum</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Appointment of an online and social media content assistant. Group 5 full time. Part time is an option.</td>
<td>$48,063.60–$56,477 pa. Plus 9% superannuation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Digital communications budget. For ongoing structural and back end alterations to website, proposed audio streaming of Council meetings, and purchase of online tools/apps to aid communications.</td>
<td>$25,000 pa.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OPTIONAL: Temporary utilisation of professional/competent designer to assist with organisational redesign of documents.</td>
<td>Suggest we put this out to tender.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purchase of smartphones (iphone) for key staff. Number of phones to be determined by executive.</td>
<td>$792 per unit, plus ongoing usage costs. These costs will be reduced with quantity purchase.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
PEOPLE
Our greatest asset.

Communications strategies discuss a number of things; chiefly an approach to uniting messages for target audiences by means of harnessing strengths and building on weaknesses. They talk about use of technology, use of words and the toolkit required to deliver a message into the lap of the community. And that’s it. Mission complete. Objective reached through the fine tuning of a message and application of a method to get it ‘out there’. Strangely, nobody seems to mention people beyond their identification as a target audience. They appear to miss what is possibly the most important point: how are minds and behaviours changed by the provision of information? So before we take a look at the things we need to do, we are going to look at what is both the greatest asset and the toughest nut to crack.

You.
What are we doing well, and does it matter?

The answer to this of course, is YES. But consider the question when framed from a different perspective:

“I’m a ratepayer, what do you do?”

“I’m at school and living with mum and dad. Mum just ‘liked’ you guys on Facebook and I want to know why.”

“I’m a journalist, why are there so many empty shops in Merimbula?”

Note that nobody has asked about the good things we do; in fact their questions are framed in a way where bad things are presumed or accepted, and good things must be proven.

A NATURAL RESPONSE TO THESE QUESTIONS IS TO PROMOTE OURSELVES THROUGH PUSHING OUT POSITIVE INFORMATION. TURNS OUT THAT IT’S NOT SUCH A GREAT IDEA...
So don’t pass on the good stuff?

Not quite. Keeping achievements under our hat is as bad as consistently defending our inadequacies, but if the end game is to change the way people think about us as an organisation, there needs to be some thought on how people react to influence and decision making.
It won’t win them over.

US professor, Drew Western makes a living doing brain scans of people facing political decisions. He’s found that people have absolutely no problem hearing, processing and agreeing with negative information aimed at people or groups with whom there is a pre-existing level of dissatisfaction. If the same negative information is levelled at an ideologically aligned organisation, however, Professor Western found his subjects to be “Lost in Space” until protective chemicals kicked in and dealt with the feeling of conflict through delusion.

BASICALLY, INFORMATION HAS LITTLE EFFECT ON THE PREDECIDED BRAIN.
We like to dislike.

Another professor, Michael Spezio, points out that heaping negative emotions on people and organisations we distrust comes much easier than forming alliances. In a political sense this means we vote against those we dislike, rather than for the candidates we think are best to represent us, or in our organisational sense, this means our constituents focus more on feelings of dissatisfaction than satisfaction. This is where any sane person would start pumping out positive news of all the lovely things we do. Convert the negativity with information, information and just a little bit more information.

BUT IT DOESN’T WORK!
You’ll only make it worse.

But informing people does not create informed people. And to make things worse, the most informed people in our community are the worst offenders when it comes to self-deception. Larry M Bartels is the co-director of the Centre for the Study of Democratic Institutions. He’s discovered that the more you know about the place where you live and vote, the more likely you are to form delusions based on assumptions.
Delusion Vs. Agendas.

We read the newspapers and see a reporter who should know better misrepresent us yet again. We cry foul. We talk of agendas, but beyond this we have no idea of why this reporter continues to write inaccurate copy. It may be an agenda, we will never know, but it’s worth also applying Bartels’ theory of informed delusion to the mix.

“There are few people more informed than journalists, and yet assumption is certainly no stranger to their craft”.

This is an important distinction because treatment of assumption-based delusion is very different to that of a professional organisation pushing an agenda.
They have an agenda!

There is no doubt that media agendas do and have existed. From Rupert Murdoch’s Involvement in removing Gough Whitlam as Prime Minister of Australia, to Gina Reinhart’s unabashed attempt at influencing the Fairfax board of directors, there have been many high profile attempts at swaying public thought for the wellbeing of certain shareholders and executives. This, however, creates a dangerous culture among those misrepresented by the media. Texan scholar, Maxwell McCombs was the first to explore agenda setting as a relationship between the mass media and the public. As he points out, ‘agenda setting’ is merely a descriptive term; it’s not to say that a news organisation has an agenda to relentlessly pursue a predetermined goal. McCombs goes on to say that the media agenda as he sees it results from countless day-to-day decisions by different journalists and supervisors regarding the news of the day.

IN SHORT, TO BE MISREPRESENTED SHOULD NOT MEAN YOU ARE THE SUBJECT OF A NEWS ORGANISATION WITH A PARTICULAR AGENDA.

TREATING THE SITUATION, OR WORSE STILL THE NEWS ORGANISATION, AS BEING ‘AGENDA’ DRIVEN’, IS WRONG, AND A DANGEROUS MOVE FOR OUR ORGANISATION.
They’re delusional!

The presentation of wrong information has the same damaging effect be it as a result of a true agenda or a delusion based on hard-wired assumptions. The treatment of the two, however, is very different. The bad news for victims of a true agenda is that treatment is near impossible. Your only defence is the hope of a news organisation getting it wrong in terms of public sentiment. For example, the Murdoch press failed in its attempt at muddying Kevin Rudd’s squeaky clean image in the run up to the 2007 Federal election when it reported that he had visited a strip bar. Why? Because the information they provided wasn’t relevant. People didn’t care.

Treatment of assumptions borne of delusion, however, is possible, and this forms the core of a communications strategy that looks to change the way an organisation is perceived in the public sphere.

Here’s how it’s done.
Finding your way.

The aim of breaking the perpetual media and consumer vortex is to offer a clearer path towards forming opinions. Like it or not the media have opinions and in many instances they are not afraid to use them outside of the traditional editorial and in stories that should be subjective in nature. Consumers are obviously free to form and discuss opinions too. It’s in this environment of forming opinions that assumptions are made and spread, sometimes right, often not.

This is not something we can blame on the media or consumer.

The answer must come from us, the communicator. A clearer path means thinking about the information we present in terms of relevance to engender caring and interest among the community, and communicating in a manner that causes an emotional response as a way of converting information into thought and action.

ORIENTATE THE MESSAGE WITH RELEVANCE.
ENGAGE THE CONSUMER WITH EMOTION.
Being relevant.

On the surface, it’s a simple concept. If you are going to say something and you want people to listen, say something that people will care about. Be relevant. But what do people actually care about? It’s certainly the biggest question posed in this document, and not surprisingly it’s a question without a defined answer.

The good news, however, is that caring and relevance often have little to do with what people actually desire.

Research has shown there is a large disconnect between what people think is important and the individual items that actually move them to care. Steve Jobs perhaps summed it up best with an idea he based his business empire on:

‘A lot of times, people don’t know what they want until you show it to them.’

Jobs was saying that it’s not so much the issue that is relevant, but the consumers’ ability to relate to and understand ideas. The ipod/iphone/ipad phenomenon was not created by the products, but by clever marketing that made people talk about the products.

But let’s not get grandiose ideas. We don’t have the next ithing up our sleeves. We simply want people to relate to and understand the things we say, and doing this is incredibly easy.

MAKE IT SIMPLE. MAKE IT SHORT.
GIVE OWNERSHIP OF THE IDEA BY ALLOWING PEOPLE TO UNDERSTAND THE IDEA.
Being emotional.

This is an incredibly effective and versatile communications tool, and a by-product of allowing people to understand your message. Simply put, by giving our audience the key to understand and take ownership of our ideas, we are creating opportunities for our ideas to be shared. An orientated audience is a comfortable audience, and if we make people feel comfortable and safe, they are able to relax, talk with others and share.

Neuro economists, Isabelle Brocas and Juan D. Carrillo point to a secondary benefit, and what is possibly the best case outcome in achieving an emotional response. They indicate that behaviours are changed when people are exposed to information that engenders an emotional response. This, they say, occurs through the presentation of simple messaging encouraging not only discussion but also high levels of decision making.

Achieve this, and the vortex is broken. Opinion is established not only by a relationship between the media and a handful of people who write letters to the editor; they are now also set by people, talking to people, about the things we do.
People in summary.

- We cannot rely on the provision of information to change behaviour.
- People focus more on feelings of dissatisfaction than satisfaction.
- Informed people are less moveable and prone to assumptions.
- The media is made up of people equally prone to delusions and assumptions. Generally they do not have hidden agendas.
- Misrepresentation by the media is a failure by us to communicate effectively.
- Media and public opinion expressed through the media feed off each other, producing more stories and opinion as a result. In these instances the information is easily skewed by misinformation and assumptions.
- This cycle can be disrupted by orientating the message with relevance and engaging the consumer with emotion.
- People will often refrain from saying what is important if they are unsure of the details.
- They are happy to be introduced to new ideas and will embrace them for good or bad if they are sure of the details.
- People will take ownership of new ideas through discussion, sharing and action via decision making if they are provided with an easily digested message that encourages an emotional response.
PERFORMANCE
We can improve.

The 2012 IRIS Community Survey revealed widespread community dissatisfaction with the way we communicate.

A Leading Organisation
To shape an organisation that supports the agreed aspirations of the community and the capacity of the organisation.

Ave. Imp = 4.24  Ave. Sat = 3.15

This result shows there is much to be done. Further analysis of our communications role has shown the specific areas where improvement is needed in our role as communicators.
Weaknesses & bad stuff.

PEST & SWOT analysis of our current communications functionality revealed a number of key areas needing attention:

1. Information bloat
2. Disengagement
3. Language /phrasing
4. Low tech
5. Design
**BLOAT.** Too much information

Our servers are filling up fast with reports, strategies, reviews, studies and plans. These are currently our go to points for strategic information. We direct the public to them, and at times even the media. Massive opportunities to alter our public profile are lost in this process. We have to ask ourselves, as an organisation, how familiar are we with the content of our reports, strategies and plans?
DISENGAGEMENT.
All talk and no conversation

We allow the letters pages of all four newspapers to fill up with negative comments and questioning aimed at Council. And more often than not we offer no response. A recent letter composed on behalf of Wayne Sartori, addressing the cries of foul play regarding the Littleton Garden turf, attracted as much comment regarding the appearance of a response than the response itself.
DISENGAGEMENT. Continued

Social media, whilst already on the agenda of strategic communications, can in its present form be massively expanded. Our Facebook page is already showing positive results in transitioning from a notification tool to a conversational and engagement tool. Our other online engagement tool, Bega Valley Views is currently underutilised*, despite having major benefits for in-depth community consultations. Bega Valley Views currently sits as a standalone site, accessed via a hard-to-find link on our website; it’s therefore suggested that avenues for integration with Facebook should be explored.

Other major social media sites remain unused. With over saturation a concern, it is recommended that other sites be considered for their specific use, not as an expansion of Facebook.

*Update. Bega Valley Views has recently been used as an engagement tool during the special variation public consultation period. Its use and functionality will be tested during the year (2013) with further consultations planned for the site. Links to the site have been improved and we have advertised the site through press, online and social media.
LANGUAGE. Write it right

Language and phrasing are a vital component of getting our message across. An extended period with nobody in the media/communications role has resulted in our press releases being of a quality not suitable for republication by the local media. Press releases written without specific media in mind, and to a quality not suitable for reuse and redistribution, are a missed opportunity for having our words used directly or effectively paraphrased. While a communications coordinator is now in place, it’s noted that organisational media training is much needed if we are to continue working with the press in a manner suitable for the reuse of material.
Forgiving the current transition from the old to new format, it’s noted that our website fails to utilise the full suite of mediums available for communication in the Web 2.0 age. The website is now better designed with extra thought put into the incorporation of themes, but is still basically a repository for information. An electronic noticeboard of sorts. There are missed opportunities with essential components missing from the site, including, interactivity, social media aggregation, and audio/video integration. Failing to utilise and move with trends in web browsing and technology will impact on the behaviour of visitors to our site, resulting in fewer visitors and less exploration within the site.
DESIGN.
Paints more than a picture

Design and visuals communicate information to the brain in a way that the written word can’t hope to replicate. Visual communication can dramatically alter the way we understand, feel and talk about information presented across any medium. BVSC communications, when looked at in this context reveal some areas in need of repair, as well as some excellent opportunities. Those in need of repair or enhancement include dynamic visuals underutilised in media releases, our website and social media feed. We are also failing to use image specific social media platforms such as Instagram and Pinterest, both of which have experienced exponential growth in the past year.
DESIGN. Continued

Opportunities exist in the use of visuals, particularly infographics, to convey complex information in a way that it is understood, emotionally communicated and shared. This could offset a potential for negative emotion experienced as a result of our current range of information heavy and poorly designed public documents. Industry research has found the human brain decodes the elements that make up an image 60,000 times faster than if we were to attempt the same with text. This means that not only is information processed, but more importantly, emotions are set in place, and it is only through an emotional response that we can fully utilise the power of sharing through social media platforms. In short, if we like it, we’ll share it.
RELIEF
PEOPLE DESIRE COMPLEXITY.

Or to put a finer point on it, people like to be seen as understanding complexity.

So we make things complicated, fail to grasp it and look for the answer on Twitter.
WE NEED A MECHANISM THROUGH WHICH OUR ORGANISATIONAL VALUES, OBLIGATIONS AND STRATEGIC PLANNING CAN BE CONVEYED SIMPLY AND TO THE MAXIMUM EFFECT IN TERMS OF INFLUENCE AND LONG-TERM BEHAVIOURAL CHANGE.

Would we produce the exact volume of reports, plans and strategies if we were not obliged to do so? A fruitless answer maybe because like it or not we have a statutory requirement to complete them. But asking the question does allow us to look at how human behaviour jump-started a society so heavily dependent on, and regulated by, information.

Since the age of civilisation we have been adding increasingly complex layers on every aspect of our lives. We’ve found new ways to make money, new methods of mass production, new ways of viewing our relationship with the environment, and of course, new ways of communicating.

Societies with greater complexities require greater understanding by governing bodies, who in their perpetual dance of action for popularity, compile a multitude of ‘ways forward’ through a never-ending cycle of studies, reports, strategies, plans, policies, regulations and laws. Digging out the good that lies within the mountains of material is seemingly beyond many of the people who create them. And so in acts of desperation to convince the masses of their best intentions, governments go from mountains of information to literal grains of sand, ignoring the need to communicate their work and going instead for a slogan or catch phrase that describes a consequence rather than the material within...

‘Going forward,’ ALP
‘Forward...Change,’ US Democrats

How will it move us forward? I don’t know, but the answer will be somewhere in a 350 page report. So it’s a human demand for complexity that spawned the monoliths of information currently doing little more than gathering dust and befuddling the few people who read them. And our governments, they’re trying hard to please themselves by pleasing us through diligently amassing information; which of course will never work because people do not change behaviours solely through the relaying of complex and non-emotional information.

So let’s produce material that gets read and gets people talking. Here’s how.
RELIEVING BLOAT
Filling the boot.

We actively seek greater complexity in our lives so long as we have a means to process the extra information. We have evolving brains, advanced computers and connectivity with about a billion brains on Facebook alone.

Relate this to our use of information as an organisation and you get something akin to packing the car for a family holiday. You fill the boot to bursting point simply because you have the space.

BUT.

Packing a second Esky doesn’t mean that you will use it, and having the means to process extra information as an organisation doesn’t mean that we actually do. And it certainly doesn’t mean that we communicate it effectively to others.

Meet Ludwig von Wittgenstein...
PROFESSOR IN PHILOSOPHY OF MIND AND LANGUAGE.
CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY 1939 - 1947.

WITTGENSTEIN’S THEORY

If you can’t communicate in a common language, you probably don’t know what you’re talking about.

If you are confusing others, chances are you are confusing yourself as well.

If you can’t communicate something, you don’t really know it.
Nobody knows?

So we are now in the curious position of producing so much information that we may be failing to understand what we are saying as an organisation. Do we really want to know how many people in our organisation understand the direction we are taking in our Community Strategic Planning documents?

If we do have an organisational disconnect over what we do and where we are going we have little hope of relaying our message on to the media and public.

So we’d better do something about it.
Proposed relief. Information tree

Adopt a multi-point information tree model that takes information heavy documents through a process of minimisation. In doing so the information content is reduced in conjunction with an increase in emotional and conversational elements.

An early criticism of this model would be to say that minimising information content is to minimise the message. This can be defended on two fronts. Firstly, the original document still stands. This model recognises that complex documentation is still required, sometimes by law, in the running of governmental organisations. Although considerable work is still needed in making these documents reader friendly, it’s understood that we cannot simply replace them with a one page executive summary.
The second defence is that by reducing information, we can still in many cases convey the same message. This is the strength of the information tree model. By considering what it is we want from our documentation, rather than what we should include, we can cut a path towards the end result rather than crossing our fingers and hoping to arrive at the same point by producing a document weighed down by information, statistics, charts, maps, graphs and acronyms.

By example, our Community Strategic Plan main document is a blueprint indicating the forward direction of Council, put together through years of consultation with stakeholders and community groups. It’s required, it’s necessary and it helps us determine a way forward. But what do we want from all this hard work? We want recognition by the community that we are making the right choices, for the future, on their behalf.

Applying the information tree model in this instance will allow us to cut to the desired outcome through making the content and more importantly the attached emotion accessible to a wide audience. Whereas before we would have relied on the main document, some attached publicity and thereafter a sprinkling of references to the plan in a variety of media releases, this time we can achieve the desired emotional response with a well-placed photograph of, for example, the Mayor talking with members of a contributing community group. An accompanying caption could make reference to the plan and the group and virtually nothing else, and yet still there will be the same association with Council doing something good for the community.
**Information tree. Continued**

This is where the model begins to work, because through an emotional response as simple as liking a photo, you have for a brief moment the attention of the consumer. From here they can talk about it, or click on a link leading the consumer to a media release, which itself contains a link to our website where a standalone summary is revealed with a link to the full document. So from one brief moment where the consumer engages with a simple photograph there is an opportunity to access information at varying levels of complexity.

Even if they walk away without clicking on a single link or talking to another person, they still have the image of Council doing something positive for the community. A win either way.
The infographic. Does what it says on the tin

Another tool used for reducing bloat is the infographic. Imagine if the London Underground train network was visualised at each station using only text. Infographics prevent chaos and confusion, and urge people to share information through being useful, attractive and emotionally positive. It’s the perfect meeting point between emotion and complexity.

Any complex message works with an an infographic.
PAIRING WINE & FOOD

SO YOU WANT to Save Water?

How much water is in that cup of coffee next to your desk? Well, about a cup, plus the bathtub full of water that it took to produce the beans for it. It takes more than 2,500 gallons of water to produce just one pound of roasted coffee beans.

- CUP OF TEA: 169 gallons to produce
- WHEAT BREAD (1 SLICE): 10.6 gallons to produce
- DISHWASHER (1 LOAD): 13 gallons to produce
- APPLE: 18.5 gallons to produce
- GLASS OF BEER: 16.8 gallons to produce
- 10 MIN SHOW (LOW FLOW): 25 gallons
- 10 MIN SHOWER (HIGH FLOW): 50 gallons
- SUGAR (1 LB): 39 gallons to produce
- VEGETABLES (1 LB): 45 gallons to produce
- INSTANT POTATOES (1 LB): 227 gallons to produce
- COTTON SHIRT: 209 gallons to produce
- CEREAL GRAINS (1 LB): 197 gallons to produce
- SET OF NEW TIRES: 2072 gallons to produce

A FULL BATHTUB IS ~ 50 GALLONS

It's not always simple to figure out how much water goes into making what we use every day, but here are some figures for how much water goes into producing some of them.
RELIEVING DISENGAGEMENT
Relieving disengagement.
Traditional

Beginning with traditional mediums, we can go a long way towards engaging with the community by picking up a pen and writing a letter to the Editor of one of our four newspapers. We must remember that the 2012 IRIS survey showed people still use newspapers and our Community Link section as the main method of receiving information from and about Council. The letters page can be used in many ways; it’s not just a place for answering angry accusations from the Rates Payers Association. If you see a random act of kindness, write a letter; if you attend an arts function and enjoy yourself, write about it, thank the artists or performers. Be human. Be positive; let this be your dominant voice in the letters pages, and on occasions answer an angry letter.
Relieving disengagement. Digital

Expanding our conversational reach requires the easiest, yet most commonly neglected step in terms of increasing a following through any social media platform. We have to talk with, not to people. If we are asked a question on Facebook, we should answer and if the opportunity exists, throw it open by asking others what they think. Join, lead and create the conversation. Also of importance is a recent study looking at 16-24 year olds and what they want from brands and organisations in the social media sphere. This key demographic has clearly stated that conversation is out, and usefulness and making life easier is in. Other growing demographics, however, demand conversation. It is proposed here that we expand our social media base to satisfy changing demands and user preferences to involve maximal access to information, conversation and usefulness.

A look at different social and digital media platforms follows.
Facebook.

Whilst already using this platform, Facebook is dynamic enough to require its own communications strategy. It is proposed that this ever-changing platform be fully utilised by constant monitoring of its benefits to users. Facebook is moving evermore towards visual communication as its primary mode of engagement, and since its recent purchase of Instagram there are anticipated to be some major developments in the way we communicate with visuals in the near future.

Recent developments on our Facebook page show both the power and dangers of running an online community forum. In an incident that resulted in controversy, the banning of a user and a front page headline, we saw our page go from a place for polite questions, answers, community information and discussion to a place where ill feeling and accusations were the norm. Lessons learned from this include: the need for an independent and external moderator who follows our comments guidelines to the letter; and the need for applying traditional social skills to a digital situation in order to return a situation to normal. This last lesson is important, because through remaining human in our discussions and decision making, and through utilising traditional media, letters to the editor and even a face-to-face meeting, we were able to resolve the situation with an apology (to us) printed three times in the local newspapers and no backlash from the community other than what occurred in a single comments stream on our Facebook page. Our Facebook page has seen an increase in normal activity as a result of this event.
Twitter.

Twitter’s strength is in personal, instant and forever moving information. People wishing to keep up with the latest news no longer log on to media websites, and certainly don’t use traditional media; instead they follow individual journalists on Twitter, who are growing increasingly adept at tweeting live from interviews with brief information, a photo and a hint of emotion or opinion. It is suggested we utilise this platform*, with the creation of Twitter accounts for BVSC, the Mayor, the GM and councillors. Training will be provided.

*Update. We now have a BVSC Twitter account. We propose to launch this during an online campaign suited to Twitter users (see recommendations below). Our Twitter name is: @BegaValleyShire.
Instagram & Pinterest.

Both these platforms are solely image based, and judging by their incredible growth (Pinterest grew its user base from 600,000 to 20.5 million last year) it will be the way we communicate online well into the future. Council’s varied interest base leads to the potential for lots of image sharing, from the launch of new community plans to fixing vandalised play equipment at a park. This will enable minor good news stories usually not worthy of a press release to be shared with thousands of people. A fixed pot hole can generate the same positive emotion as a new library in Merimbula when viewed through Instagram, or on Pinterest and the new image-heavy Facebook format. All it takes is to click the ‘Like’ button.
It is proposed that we revisit Bega Valley Views through further talks with Bang the Table. It’s value is through in-depth engagement on particular issues of importance to the community. Current concerns are the small uptake by the community. This is more likely to be an awareness issue as it remains hard to find and unheard of as a recognised social media platform. It is suggested we talk with Bang the Table in creating a Bega Valley Views Facebook App, meaning the BVV site will then be available through a tab on our Facebook page. BVV was used as a key public consultation tool during the current Special Variation application process. This is providing a good test of its functionality. Using BVV in such a way allows us to combine traditional and digital media by promoting the BVV public consultation tool in our widely read Community Link section published in the local newspapers.
Community Link.

While currently a traditional media tool containing mostly ‘dry’ information that has little or no bearing on how people feel about or react to Council, this whole page section in our local newspapers has massive potential to engage the community and link seamlessly with our website and social media sites. As previously discussed, newspapers are currently the way most people access Council information; imagine then a page with a heavy focus on images, useful information and good news that is tailored to issues of the day. With each story or entry there is an accompanying QR code and short link that enables the interested reader to access more information on our website and/or Facebook page. IRIS research has shown that accessing Council information online is snapping at the heels of newspapers in term of popularity. This will provide an effective bridge between two already popular modes of communication.
Development of an app.

It’s early days for this, but the potential benefits associated with developing an app (web application) for Council are huge. Smartphones and tablet computers are now the main way people access the internet, and apps are what people want in terms of streamlining user friendliness and categorisation of the web. Think of traditional websites and the web as a labyrinth of dark tunnels brimming with uncategorised information where the temptation to wander down other tunnels whilst looking for something specific is irresistible. You get hopelessly lost and forget what it is you were looking for in the first place. Now think of apps as books in a well categorised library. You find the book, pick it up and take from it what you need. This is why apps are so popular, not so much for the content within, but for the way they are accessed and used. When not in use they sit on the screen (like a bookshelf) ready to be picked up and utilised when needed. Imagine the usefulness of an app that allows a person to learn of events, road closures, natural disasters and even DAs tailored to their specific location. It can all be done, and it is suggested here that we make enquiries into the cost and timeframe of such a project. Apps tick all the boxes: they are small and manageable, they are useful, and they easily harness an emotional response.

Update. It is understood that an app representing multiple local government areas is currently being developed. It’s proposed we make enquiries into the suitability of such an app when tailored to our specific needs.

App building software is now freely hosted online by a number of organisations. These tools enable the simple creation of basic apps for a fraction of the cost. Features are, however, limited.

Another strategy for utilising app technology is to sign up with ready made apps that are of use to our organisation. For example, test are currently underway with a free app called Snap Send Share that enables residents with smartphones to snap an image of something in need of repair such as a pot hole and at a touch of a button have it sent with the exact GPS location to Council.
Internal engagement.

It is proposed that internal communications be investigated through a separate strategy document. The comprehensive section on people in this document will need a revision owing to differences in the way we, as staff, respond to and process information. It is clear, however, that improvements are needed in a number of areas, primarily in fine tuning the mechanisms used to get information to Councillors and employees. This often overlooked area of communications is vital for the wellbeing of an organisation, as it is often the staff who fill in the gaps where external communications have failed. Being informed and motivated plays a key role in this process.
RELIEVING LANGUAGE
No corporations here.

The aim of any organisation involved in providing a service for a large population in exchange for money is to present themselves as a united collective of human beings, not a corporation. This means staying on message, but saying it in a way unique to the individual, with the loose parameters around presenting ourselves as being authoritative, approachable, moveable and interested. For this reason, it is vital to have staff trained in writing for the media. It’s proposed a staff training program be developed, teaching the essentials of writing press releases for reuse by the local media. A training program should also be developed for key staff who are likely to be called on for talking to the media in both live and pre recorded interviews. A review of our current style guide is in motion. It is recommended that with a major uptake of social media, we develop a guide unique to this particular medium and its variety of platforms.
RELIEVING TECHNOLOGY
Marshall was right.

The quote from communications philosopher, Marshall McLuhan at the beginning of this document was right in stating that we shape our tools, and they in turn shape us. Although written in 1964, long before the creation of the ubiquitous smartphone and tablet computer, McLuhan’s statement is an important consideration for the planning of effective communications. Thanks to the advent of mobile internet, apps and the humble touchscreen we are now entering a phase where information consumers are able to physically control their virtual environment. We’re moving away from surfing the web. Instead we’re diving in, grabbing what we need and getting out before we get sucked into the mire. We follow people, we follow blogs, many of us have grown up with the internet and we’ve reached the point where we know what we like and expect. We’re done searching. What does this mean? It means that more than ever we are sensitive to surplus information. It means that we can now reach out and touch the information seen on our screens and physically discard it if it doesn’t fulfil our needs. In our minds we are gaining some control in a virtual world drenched to saturation in information. We made the tools and the tools have changed us; our efforts at communicating must always take this into account.
Keeping up with 2.0.

The advent of social media and interactivity saw the internet being rebranded as Web 2.0. Some would argue that we are now at Web 2.5 with mobile technology being the main way people use the internet. Talk is already happening at what Web 3.0 will hold, although consensus is that it will involve a computer driven, rather than a user driver, web searching capacity. In short, your computer will know what you want.

The bad news is, the BVSC website is currently stuck in Web 1.0. We need to move on from seeing a website as an electronic noticeboard. Technology now allows us to use websites as virtual meeting places where information can be discussed and shared. We need to follow the trends in web usage, offering interactivity through social media aggregation and a social media portal clearly visible on our home page. In addition, there is a need for hosting of other mediums popular with web users. Audio and video, if used correctly, can convey both information and feeling, and thus change minds.
Content.
This communications strategy focusses on people; how we talk to them, how we present our information, how we alter behaviour and through what particular mediums using which technologies. All of this is of course irrelevant if we have nothing of interest to share. Much of what we produce through hard copy reports or pages on our website is information. People access it, process it, react to it and move on. In real terms this is the practise of a person logging on to our website, finding the information they need and then leaving the site to go about their day. This is good but not fulfilling because it gives people what they want but loses them once they get the information they need. To address this it’s wise to first look at the reason why people search the internet, of which there are two main reasons:

1. To search for information
2. To experience something

We already provide the information, but are short on experiences. This can happen in any number of ways but primarily it’s achieved through emotional content linked with interactive elements: a photo gallery that can be commented on and shared, or a campaign that engages personal sentiment through partnering with the community in its creation. To implement experience related content on our website we will need ongoing planning for the trickled release of online tools and campaigns. It is proposed we commence a rolling 12 month plan indicating a range of online tools and campaigns to be developed for hosting on our homepage. This should include release strategies, proposed outcomes and resources required.

But why? The only thing that keeps people within a site is the next item to be viewed. Our aim, therefore, is to keep the user engaged and immersed in our site through providing a discoverable and enticing ‘next item’. Information is a required material, but experiences are discoverable, explorable, engaging and sometimes a lot of fun. If we do this right we can still inform the community about many Council related matters, but it will be information consumed in an entirely different and positive emotional state.

Please see the recommendations section for details of proposed tools and campaigns.
Live streaming.

This is an avenue currently under investigation. Its usefulness will be more apparent in our promotion of the service rather than the service itself. It will convey a valuable image of openness, honesty and transparency. Areas of concern that need to be discussed are confidentiality, privacy, cost and the capacity of our connection to host live streaming. An effective addition or alternative to streaming is the recording of a Mayoral post meeting interview summarising the outcomes for the community.

An additional and recommended option is that of live audio streaming or podcasting the meetings. This option is affordable, achievable and addresses problems arising in relation to privacy.
Resources.

It is proposed we discuss resourcing strategies regarding plans to bring our website and online strategy in line with current trends and future developments. Currently we have one member of staff building a website and transitioning the old site to the new, and a range of content managers who require training in uploading content on to our site. With the online environment showing considerable gains in community interest, and the potential for increasing interest through improvements to our website, expansion of our social media presence, and development of an app, we should be discussing funding for these developments.
RELIEVING DESIGN

The importance of visual communication has already been discussed in the section on information bloat. Worth adding, however, is the importance of overall design on the ability to affect feeling. It is proposed a review be made of all council publication templates, with considerations including page word limits, colour schemes and typography. All are major influences on the way information is consumed, and affect user emotions before a single word is read. Our current document templates are outdated and poorly designed. Graphic design elements need to be updated to conform with classic, simple and clean designs that are less prone to going ‘out of fashion’.

Further design considerations will be made in the Style Guide review, including the setting of parameters for the layout of Council documents. It’s proposed a stripped down approach be taken with limitations on the number of ideas discussed on a page (as per this document).
Policy.

A review of Council’s Media and Communications Policy, and Media Guidelines and Procedures is currently underway. This will aim to streamline and improve efficiency in dealing with the media. Both also need urgent social media components added.
CONCLUSION
So will we change minds?

Possibly, yes. When dealing with people and emotions this is about as good a guarantee as you can get.

To subliminally change the way people think and respond upon receiving information from or about our organisation requires consideration of the steps mentioned in this strategy. But if we are to take home a snapshot of how to improve the way we are seen by the public, we should consider the following:

Summarise everything, and then summarise again. Keep going.*

Tell somebody what your report is about in one sentence. Write it down. This is all most people need to and want to know.


Say it with a photo.

Capture sentiment and emotion with brevity and images.

Link everything to our website. Improve our website.

Talk with, not to people. Be conversational. Use social media to its full advantage.

Present everything in a simple, clean and uncluttered way. If it doesn’t tell you exactly what it’s about in less than five seconds, redesign it, or leave it out.

Present ourselves as a group of professional, friendly people, not a business.

All the above allows us a point of entry into the emotions of people actively seeking information about Council. They also go a long way towards giving a point of entry to people who stumble upon our information. This is the main point of the Communications Strategy: provide short, simple and emotional information always with PEOPLE in mind, and possibly we will see a change, for the better, in the way we are perceived.

*This document will have the Information Tree model applied upon approval.
Appendix.
Mock screen grabs for proposed online campaigns.
Move to keep Pambula Pool afloat
Wednesday, April 17 2013
Councillors have moved to keep Pambula's Sapphire Aquatic Centre afloat by forming a new management committee and releasing funds to continue its operation. Read more..

Delegation to China named
Friday, April 12 2013
Mayor Bill Taylor has named the members of an official delegation from the Bega Valley Shire to the City of Nanyang in the Henan province, China, later this month. Read more..
Shire experiences.

jumping off mitch's jetty at sunset. #BVSbest

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The pound pet project.

help bozo find a home.

He’s old but not too old to play. He’s a gentle soul in need of some love.

Learn more

share  give a home  Contact us

see our happy pets in their new homes on pinterest.

more pets
Our sustainable shire.

YOUR TWITTER TIPS.

@jobloggs. Plant garlic on the shortest day. #bvstips
@pbarry. plant veggies in every part of the garden, not just the patch. #bvstips
@gJones pears are never picked ripe.
@FJohnson. it’s April, last chance to plant carrots.
@Johno. Plant an apple pip and you’ll get a unique variety!

see our fabulous community garden on pinterest.