



MySouthlakeNews.com^{BETA}
for CISD school, business, and community happenings

MySouthlakeNews.com
Alliance for Innovation Award Nomination

www.MySouthlakeNews.com

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Often in the digital age, the public sector lags behind when it comes to innovation, which makes it difficult to reach out to citizens who are more connected than ever before. The City of Southlake, Texas aspired to be different, however. Instead of continuing on a path of “business as usual”, the City strived to harness the power of the digital revolution to engage citizens and provide a mechanism for them to participate and be informed. The result of this was MySouthlakeNews.com, which established a digital portal for the entire community to access news and important information.

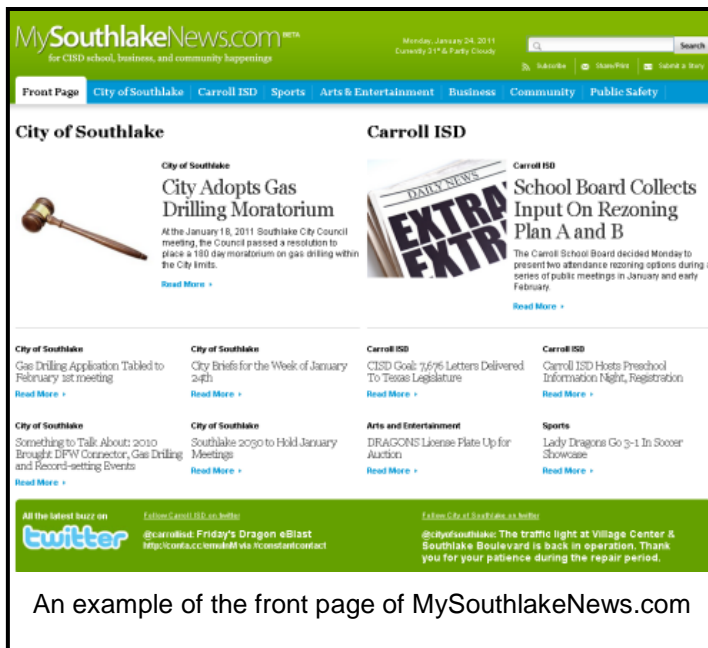


Southlake, Texas is a community of 26,917 located in the heart of the DFW Metroplex. The demographics of the community, which is made up of affluent, highly-educated citizens, tend to be technology savvy and have a desire for the City engage and provide information in a digital format. Despite this need, it was often difficult to find news of importance to the community

that was centrally housed, leaving visitors to the City’s website to have to search across many pages for articles of importance for them. This situation provided the impetus for the MySouthlakeNews.com project, which sought to centralize and standardize the way Southlake residents get their community news.

The City of Southlake began work for the MySouthlakeNews.com concept in 2009. Under the direction of the City Manager’s Office and spearheaded by Community Relations Officer Pilar Schank, the City worked with Ariamedia to develop the concept into what it is today. This partnership, strengthened by the fact that the City has worked with Ariamedia for many years on the City’s website, allowed both parties to build a website that would meet the needs of the citizens of Southlake. During this development process, the City approached the Carroll Independent School District (CISD), which serves the majority of the City, to participate in the endeavor. CISD agreed to sign on to

the project, and agreed to pay for half of the costs associated with the website in exchange for the opportunity to be involved in the community initiative.



An example of the front page of MySouthlakeNews.com

The culmination of these efforts was rewarded in August 2010, when MySouthlakeNews.com officially launched. The end product is a website in the vein of a CNN.com-type news portal, where citizens can go to access content specifically put out by CISD and the City. Like any major news website, MySouthlakeNews.com presents a front page which is populated by stories from sections such as the City of Southlake, CISD, Arts and

Entertainment, Sports, Business, Community, and Public Safety. The front page is not just a portal to news stories from each section, however. Noting the increasing importance of social media, MySouthlakeNews.com provides live Twitter feeds from CISD and the City, as well as YouTube videos and a live Flickr feed. This setup ensures that citizens have access to both the important news stories in their community and the social media feeds that keep them aware of community happenings. The goal of these efforts is to create a cohesive portal that citizens go to first to get their news about the City, their children's schools, and their community. This idea capitalizes on the concept that people really are interested in what is going on, but sometimes lack the medium to follow as closely as they would like. MySouthlakeNews.com also provides the option for visitors to submit a story or provide feedback on the stories on the website. This allows those in the community to be interactive with the website, and allows CISD and the City to better engage the public about what is going on in both arenas.



MySouthlakeNews.com is a quantum leap of creativity, showing that it is possible to package important news in your community in such a way that is engaging and inclusive. Not only does MySouthlakeNews.com promote communication with citizens, it promotes citizen engagement and helps to get people involved in both CISD and the City. When asked in the City's 2009 Citizen Survey about features residents would like to see on the City's website, 82.5 percent responded that they would definitely or probably use any feature that contained community information. This statistic demonstrates the measureable benefit that MySouthlakeNews.com has as a natural extension of citizens' desire for more community information and since the launch of the project, there have been 37,000 page views. Not only does MySouthlakeNews.com provide news for the community, it has also become a source for the local newspapers to obtain news about Southlake, further demonstrating the effectiveness of the website.

City of Southlake

- Something to Talk About: 2010 Brought DFW Connector, Gas Drilling and Record-setting Events
- City Briefs for the Week of January 24
- City Adopts Gas Drilling Moratorium
- Southlake 2030 to Hold January Meetings
- City Briefs for the Week of January 17th

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An example of City of Southlake news headlines on MySouthlakeNews.com

The risks involved in this type of project were minimal, due to staff support, Council support, CISD support, and community buy-in. This environment of support helped to create a situation where there would have been more risk in maintaining the status quo where information had to be hunted and gathered instead of creating the MySouthlakeNews.com concept. This viewpoint allowed the MySouthlakeNews.com concept to grow and develop in the time between the beginning of the project and the

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@cityofsouthlake: The traffic light at Village Center & Southlake Boulevard is back in operation. Thank you for your patience during the repair period.

An example of a the City's Twitter feed on MySouthlakeNews.com

launch of the website, allowing the final presentation to be an attractive, cohesive product. By partnering with CISD to provide content and offset the costs, both entities have been able to

minimize their costs in relation to the benefits received from the end product.

The MySouthlakeNews.com development process shows that there are many lessons to be shared with other local governments. There is always an audience for effectively communicating with the citizens in your community, as long as you package it in such a way that is informative and easy to use. Also, by exploring different partnerships, such as the City's partnership with CISD, you can help to satisfy important needs in your community through new and innovative concepts like MySouthlakeNews.com. These innovative strategies are only the beginning, as plans for Phase II of MySouthlakeNews.com are under development. Future additions will include additional pages and sections, and an e-mail blast system that will allow for



better and targeted communication with citizens.

MySouthlakeNews.com is the product of months of hard work initiated to meet the community's need to be informed by harnessing the power of the digital revolution. By partnering with CISD, the City was able to offset costs and jointly provide content that deals with both school news and events and community news and events. The result is a portal for Southlake residents to remain informed and engaged, which strengthens the community as a whole.