

Village of Bayside

Citizen Engagement: Right Brain and the Emotional Draw

9075 N. Regent Road
Bayside, WI 53217

Alliance for Innovation: Innovation Awards



Contact Information

Andrew K. Pederson, Village Manager

P: 414-351-8818

F: 414-351-8819

apederson@bayside-wi.gov

January 20, 2012

Village of Bayside: Citizen Engagement – Right Brain and the Emotional Draw

The Village of Bayside is a quiet, predominately residential community located on the shores of Lake Michigan. Just ten miles north of downtown Milwaukee, Bayside offers residents the opportunities of “big city” living while remaining a safe, family-orientated place to live, work and play.

Bayside, a community of just over 4,400 residents, is one of the seven communities that comprise the North Shore. With beautiful Lake views, historic presence, and a high quality of life, Village residents have come to expect the highest form of service delivery. Unfortunately, the Village has not been immune to the same financial struggles suffered by many as the global economy faltered in 2009. The reduction in Wisconsin state shared revenue, interest rate shortcomings and increasing health care costs, and other adverse financial factors impacted the ability to achieve those expectations.

This year, the Village, in conjunction with the local schools, took on a different type of community engagement effort. Throughout this submission, you’ll see exactly how and why the Village’s communication and service excellence provided for a citizen engagement process that worked hand in hand to provide the best possible service to our residents.

Changing Public Perception

The sentiment about government, heightened more so now than ever, especially in Wisconsin over the past 18 months, has been the notion that the public demands more for less, especially at the local level. In the August, 2011 issue of *American City & County*, an article discusses the stress on public employees, and specifically, the feeling of anti-government. The article notes “that most people do not understand what local governments... provide for the average taxpayer.” Second, government must discuss what services it should provide and what services can be performed elsewhere. “Educating people on what government does is the biggest hurdle. People don't know how county government works. They don't realize what we do every day. It's invisible government.”

What local governments provide by way of service can often be a mystery to the common resident. In lies the issue: How do we engage the public and encourage them to learn more about and see the value in exactly what local government offers? In a time of government distrust and low citizen participation, it is more important now to not only educate on the services provided, but to engage as part of the solution making process. Therefore, to facilitate transparency, accountability, and enhanced citizen engagement, the Village utilizes four simplistic, yet often times difficult to achieve principles. They include:

- If the public perceives the decision making process of a project to be “fair”, it is willing to live with a project that impact different interest unequally.
- Professionals do not have a monopoly on coming up with good solutions to problems.
- Whether an interest will be willing to accept a particular solution to a problem depends not just on what that solution looks like, but on whether it feels that the solution is being “imposed” on it.
- Interests who participate – or have the opportunity to participate – in an agency’s planning process, generally do not... and cannot... take extremists or irresponsible positions as readily as can interest who have been completely outside the planning process.

Right Brain, Part One: Make them wonder, open it up

While the Village has always tried to be a leader in employing new-age communication techniques, we too have to constantly adapt and re-evaluate how and what we communicate with residents. This year alone, the Village has adapted to the ever grown need to timely and effectively communicate with residents. In addition to our Friday email newsletter, the Bayside Buzz, we implemented the “Tuesday Talk.” As we identified the need to be more pro-active, informative on one specific subject, and further engage our residents to have a conversation on a more frequent basis, we developed the Tuesday Talk, a short, usually one topic email that is sent every Tuesday.

While our “open rate” for our email communications was well above industry average, we were not satisfied with the penetration and began exploring new ideas to further engage people and get them the information they needed about their community. In re-evaluating our communication strategy, we adapted to our audience and began changing our stagnant headlines with catchy, intriguing, and provocative headlines of our emails from:

- “Your Weekly Bayside Buzz: June 10, 2011”
- “Tuesday Talk: June 14, 2011,”
- “What’s Orange, Tall, and Warm?”
- “Don’t Flush That!”
- “Everybody’s Doing It”

By simply developing a catchy snapshot of the topic, it has generated more interest, citizen engagement and an “open rate” nearly 25 percent higher than what we were already experiencing. One resident replied to an email regarding prescription medication, stating, “Your emails are a kick. Your funny headings pull me in to read what’s up each time. Good work on making the running of our community so much fun to read about, even if we need to be chided occasionally about some failure to do the right thing!”

In addition to being distributed via email, each of our email communications is posted on Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn, allowing residents and interested parties to view our communication through their preferred outlet. This is in addition to providing RSS feeds through our web site, iPhone applications, and many more innovative technologies to keep up with the rapidly changing ways in which we communicate with our residents.

Right Brain, Part Two: The Emotional Impact: A Case Study

Each year, the Village receives inquires, concerns, and other comments in relation to pedestrian traffic in the community. Bayside is in an urban setting, yet prides itself on its rural natural features in an urban environment. We have a limited number of sidewalks in the community. This does not, however, hinder the amount of pedestrian and bicycle traffic. In addition, young children often ride or walk to school in early Fall and Spring, when weather permits. The issue at hand, is a 35 mph stretch of Brown Deer Road, also considered State Highway 32, which transverses the Village as its’ major thoroughfare. Here is where many children, pedestrians and bicycles must cross to go to and from school. The mentality in much of Wisconsin is that vehicles have the right-of-way, as opposed to pedestrians. To combat this concern, the Village took a multi-phased and faceted approach to improve pedestrian awareness in a less traditional way.

In early 2011, the Village received a groundswell of support/concern for improvements on this busy stretch of road. As one of the most traveled areas (for both vehicles and pedestrians), we began to search for a long-term solution. Many residents began working together to form advisory needs for the area. Residents and the Village participated in organized bike-to-school days, where our police department provided added enforcement and visibility. While all these initiatives helped create community momentum, there was still something missing. In fact, the Village received an email that suggested improvements for the area.

“I have a few suggestions to improve the safety of this crossing but I am looking to all of you for support and to add your own suggestions. I personally would recommend, at a minimum, the following changes:

- *Add additional crossing lines on the east side of Regent (they are only on the west side currently) so that cyclists crossing southbound do not first need to cross Regent to get to the crosswalk and then cross back to the right side of the road on the south side of Brown Deer to continue onward, adding an additional hazard.*

- Add yellow “strobe lights” with ample space before and after the crossing to alert vehicles to slow down and yield to crossers; In my observation, this is especially critical for drivers coming westbound on Brown Deer from Lake Drive.
- Create a “15 mile/hour” zone before and after the crosswalk during peak hours prior to and after school ie. 7:45 am – 8:30 am and 3:30 pm – 4:15 pm.”

These improvements may seem reasonable, and possibly even, effective. There was just one problem - we already had every one of them in place. We had the traditional, regulatory signage, flashing lights, a 15 mph school zone, and everything else you would normally see across the country. And herein lays our problem. All of these “effective” measures were already in place, but were either ignored, unnoticed, or most likely – simply ineffective. So much so that the group of concerned residents lobbying the Village didn’t even know they existed.

In the mindset of author Daniel Pink, who promotes “right brain,” emotional thought as a way to help better communicate with the public, the Village embarked on an *Emotionally Intelligent Signage Contest*. The premise was simple - hold a contest that would have children, parents, and residents – the public – create signage that would help draw motorist’s attention and force them to slow down and stop at crosswalks. The winning designs would then be made into actual traffic signs – providing a fresh, innovative look to the way we reach the public.

The project began in earnest, with some simple information being released through the Village’s weekly email distribution, not knowing how much, if any, response the public and the kids would engage in the process. Quickly, the program snowballed from what some considered a “dumb idea” to one that garnered local, state, and national media attention. The program was so noteworthy, the Village even attracted the Wisconsin Department of Transportation attention. In a public email, they outlined the following:

“Do people at times ignore signs or overlook them? Certainly. Of course; you can install what you like on private Right of Way, but we would not recommend “emotionally intelligent signs”.

This is an example of why the public at times finds government frustrating. The WIDOT admits that normal regulatory signs are ignored, but are not willing to explore alternative solutions to resolve the issues. After receiving the WIDOT’s response, the Village was even more motivated that we were on to something that was different and may have an impact.

Through the work of a dedicated team, the Village spearheaded several community engagement initiatives, including:

- Judging at each of the three local schools by the students and faculty;
- Display at Village Hall during open hours for judging and evaluation ;
- Online judging of the individual signs;
- Two Town Hall meetings to provide community input, education on crosswalk safety, and judging;
- Village hosted a Community gathering in the Park (Bonfire in the Park and Business Promotion) to evaluate and judge signs;
- At the conclusion of the July 4 Parade, all signs were posted on our website and a notice was resent via email encouraging the public to evaluate one more time.



Kids voting for their favorite signs.

Perhaps most unexpected was the community’s outreach and involvement in the process. Many of the local school districts took the project on as a challenge, and incorporated the sign design into their classroom syllabus. A local arts and crafts business, *Art Trooper*, held a Sign Design Night, where children could help utilize their supplies to create an entry. In fact, the efforts to improve pedestrian safety became so widely recognized, that many members of the public

indicated their interest in becoming volunteer crossing guards for the busiest intersections. The Village's police department provided necessary training and equipment, with local parents providing the time – at a volunteer rate.

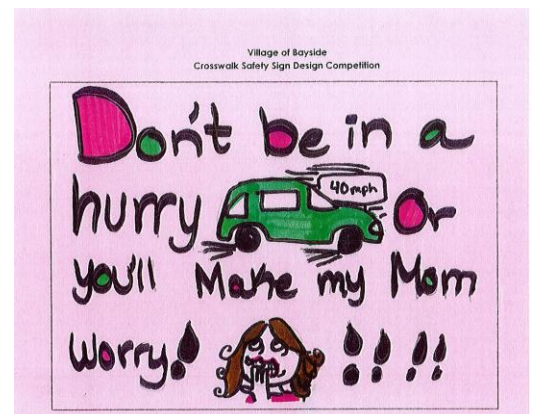
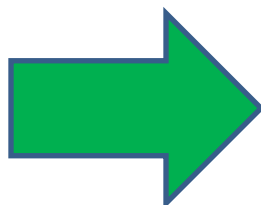
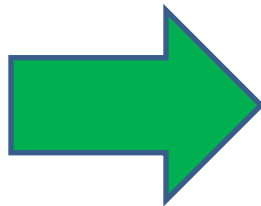
At the end of this process, 115 sign designs were submitted and 2,412 votes were cast for the signage. After all the votes were counted, the field was narrowed to 25. From this, a seven member evaluation panel evaluated the signage on:

- Originality, creativity, overall impact, WOW factor, uniqueness, relevance, simplicity and intuitiveness, effective appeal to different generations (kids, adults, etc.), and overall impression

Twelve (12) signs were ultimately selected as finalists to be turned into actual traffic signs to be placed throughout the Village. The Village then worked with a local vendor, TAPCO, Inc. who donated three of the initial signs, as well as constructed all of the winning entries into aluminum traffic signs. All of the entries, information about the process, and much more information can be found out at <http://www.bayside-wi.gov/index.aspx?NID=350>.

Below you'll find the winning sign slogans as well as a few examples of regulatory signage, as compared to the winning entries. Which one works for you?

- Slowpokes Welcome in Bayside
- Drive like Your Kids Live Here
- HIT THE BRAKES, NOT US
- SIMON SAYS SLOW DOWN
- THIS IS A SCHOOL ROAD; NOT A SPEEDWAY
- GET OFF YOUR PHONE; HANG UP
- SLOWING DOWN = SAVING LIVES
- SLOW DOWN
- GO SLOW



Take-Aways

How is the idea a quantum leap of creativity?

Emotionally Intelligent signs are not a totally new subject. Often, we see new ways to communicate with the public regarding a number of issues. The use of humor, or unique mannerisms are a great way to advertise, sell, etc. The Village took the mindset of engaging individuals on a more emotional level to help get motorists attention. The twelve signs that were selected were placed throughout the Village, not just at crosswalks. With motorists more distracted than ever, it takes something more than a regulatory sign to grab their attention. We believe this is a quantum leap of creativity to do just that.

How did the idea improve the organization/Who has benefited?

The idea for emotionally intelligent signage has helped raise awareness throughout the community, as well as the organization. Each department has a buy-in to see the project come to fruition, with public safety front and center. In addition, we've created a new way to think about issues. As opposed to looking for what has been tried and tried again unsuccessfully, we taken a different approach to problem solving.

How was the innovation initiated and implemented?

As described, Village residents, pedestrians, parents, and kids alike all expressed the need for safer passage at our busiest crosswalks. Village staff recognized the need, and searched for improved ways to meet these requests. Outside of the actual resident-designed signs (which are one of a kind), the Village also implemented new LED pedestrian activated signage at the crosswalks. These utilize a Wi-Fi signal to communicate to several signs at once to light up, which also uses a new RRFB light system. The signs that were placed throughout the community are also rotated occasionally to avoid stagnation in one place.

What customer/community needs and expectations were identified and fulfilled?

We took a problem (pedestrian/bike safety) and turned it into a full scale community engagement process. By making residents the stakeholders in the process, they became part of the solution, as opposed to continually turning to government to find the solution.

Has service delivery been enhanced/did the initiative improve access to government?

We examined a way to solve our problem, and do so in an "unordinary" fashion. Residents want their problems solved, but sometimes doing so with innovation helps create even more participation and excitement. Our communication & emotionally intelligent process is one that promoted transparency and encourages the public to get involved and to partner with government, as opposed to becoming adversarial.

What lessons were learned that could be shared with other local governments?

We believe this is a formula that can be replicated anywhere – and even tweaked to serve specific communities and various subjects. In terms of communication – the Village utilizes Constant Contact, which provides data analysis for amount of email opens, bounce rate, etc. We continue to search for new and improved ways to get more email participation. It is a low cost solution to not only find a way to address crosswalk safety, but to encourage citizen engagement in the process. For the signage project, the Village has placed our speed monitoring trailer at several locations throughout the community to monitor average speed prior to the emotionally intelligent sign placement. The same areas are being monitored currently to determine impact. Perhaps the most important take-away is the process of education and engagement these challenges provide. It's often the journey, more than the destination.

Which Department/Individuals Championed?

Village residents helped push the need for intersection improvements. Village staff, including the Village Manager, Deputy Village Manager helped see the idea to fruition. The Village's DPW installed signs and new equipment. The Village incorporated the help of TAPCO, Inc. – a local sign/safety manufacturer – to help implement the new signage and coordinate the LED safety features.