

# COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY REGION OF QUEENS MUNICIPALITY

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## **INTRODUCTION:**

Great communications is about doing a few simple things right, every single time. It is about creating a simple narrative message, supporting the person who is to do the telling, knowing who to tell it to, using the channels they want to receive it, and then compelling them to pass it on.

The Region of Queens Municipality (RQM) has been in existence for over 18 years. The amalgamation formed an area that is diverse in geography, culture, and economics. RQM provides municipal services, including fire protection, community development and planning, engineering, parks and recreation facility services, a home for special care, maintenance and operation of an airport, solid waste management and water/waste water services to a population of approximately 11,000 citizens. In addition to the provision of services to the population, there has been an increased emphasis and priority placed on economic development.

The overall goal of this communications strategy is to make the Region of Queens Municipality the first and best source of information about what is going on in the Region. While doing this, to also ensure that communication is planned and anticipates issues and opportunities.

The RQM has internal and external audiences. There are a number of communication tools that can be used to deliver messages to each of these audiences, including the media, newsletters, notices and bulletins, public information sessions, and the internet. The more ways used to communicate a message, the more likely the message will be received correctly.

Using one person as the official spokesperson will help to ensure that the messaging is constant. The Mayor will continue to be the official spokesperson for the RQM and in his/her absence, the official spokesperson shall be the Deputy Mayor.

It should be noted that no matter how effective the communications program is, not all people will want to receive information about their government. Also, it takes time to increase the public's level of knowledge and understanding of municipal affairs.

*Communications messages and the means used to most effectively communicate with the Region of Queens Municipality's audiences may change over time; it is important to ensure that this strategy is reviewed periodically (i.e.; annually) to ensure that it remains reflective of the direction that the Municipality is moving, and also to ensure that the strategy remains a living document used by staff and Council.*

## **Overall Communications Goal**

**To make the Region of Queens Municipality the first and best source of information about the region's plans, priorities, growth, and progress; and to ensure communications is planned and proactive.**

### **Communications Objectives**

**Objective** – *To make RQM a key source of information for stakeholders seeking positive and proactive information about growth, planning, and operations in the municipality.*

- Key stakeholders are informed about RQM's direction, and consider RQM their first and best source of information about developments and progress in the region.

Measures include:

- Increased website and Facebook site visits
- Increased readership of communiqués, *the Municipal Matters Newsletter* and updates
- Increased direct-to-influencer speaking platforms for Mayor and Councillors
- Increased positive media coverage
- Increased participation in public events

**Objective** – *To integrate communications within RQM and at Council towards a planned, proactive strategic model*

- Council members and Departmental leaders, think about the communications implications and opportunities when making key decisions and when planning
- Council members and Departmental leaders understand the value of communications, and actively seek out and communicate positive stories or potential issues

Measures include:

- Increased awareness and compliance with media relations and social media guidelines
- Minimize the exposure for negative media coverage

**Objective – To augment the internal communications environment**

- All employees receive news early in the process. By hearing news first, they feel engaged and understand their role in success of the Municipality.

Measures include:

- Employees have greater understanding and awareness of RQM plans and direction

**DELIVERY OF MESSAGES**

A number of communication tools will be used to deliver messages to the appropriate audience. Among those will be newspaper, radio, Municipal Matters Newsletter, the RQM website, the RQM and Queens Place Emera Centre Facebook pages, public speaking opportunities, letter to the editor, and others that arise. It is most important to deliver timely messages that can be clearly understood by everyone and provide useful information.

To ensure that messages are consistent and not coming from many directions, one person will be the spokesperson for the RQM. The Mayor, in his elected position, will continue in this role as has been the standard since the 2001 strategy was developed, and in his/her absence, the Deputy Mayor shall be the spokesperson. This is not to prevent staff from providing technical and other relevant information. However, the Mayor will be the official spokesperson and will speak as the official “voice” of the RQM, and in his/her absence the Deputy Mayor shall carry out this role. A coordinated effort from Council and staff is important. The Community Development Coordinator (CDC) will be responsible for managing the tasks and day to day preparation of the planned communications issued by the RQM.

## **AUDIENCES**

### **“Who do we need to talk to, and what do they want to know?”**

Knowing who are the target audiences or stakeholders is an important part of any communications plan. With every planned communication, the municipality must think about to whom it should flow, and how its messages will be received.

The internal audience is made up of Council (the Mayor and Councillors), the CAO, senior management and all employees, and any members of agencies, boards and commissions. It is this internal audience that has to first be engaged in the communications strategy and vision. It is important that they understand the strategy so they can act on it, help build understanding and relationships, and improve the image and reputation of RQM. They are the municipality’s voice and face in the community.

The external audience includes the residents of RQM, other government organizations, and the media. The municipality has a responsibility to keep people informed and engaged on issues that affect the quality and pace of their lives. Businesses have a similar concern, wanting to have the assurance that their interests are being considered in the decision-making process. Other external audiences that should not be ignored are online users, social and community groups, and visitors. Tools like the website, Facebook page, newsletters and other direct communication help these audiences get a better sense of the region and its services and plans.

## **MESSAGES AND NARRATIVE**

A narrative is the overarching story that communicates a single powerful idea that transforms and inspires the target audience to care, own and take action. The purpose served by short and simple narrative messages is to re-establish, quickly and effectively, an organization's goals and objectives, its mission and track record, and the reasons that motivate it to act in a particular sector of activity.

While the Mayor as spokesperson has the task of conveying specific messages about the issue he/she is addressing, he/she must at the same time send out a clear organizational message: who we are, what we do, and why we do what we do.

The RQM spokesperson must always attempt to link any communications back to the organization's vision of where the Region is going. RQM's vision and priorities are a process, a roadmap of how the municipality will grow, evolve and prosper. Those who are on the receiving end of any information must understand that, whatever initiative or issue that is being discussed, it must be linked back to the longer-term vision of reinventing our future by building on the strengths of our past and innovating for the future. As always, proof points will fill in to substantiate the point being made, the stories being told.

As a result of a series of facilitated workshops that focused on developing the core narrative, and based on several other studies, workshops and existing narrative workshop collateral (ie; the Queens Attraction Strategy, the Transition Team report, etc.), the following narrative was arrived at by a special committee of Council, and eventually shared with the whole Council and senior staff members:

### **“We’re reinventing our future here.”**

We’re in the middle of a transformation in the Region of Queens.

We’re moving from a single large employer  
to a diversified economy of small and large businesses built upon  
our entrepreneurial people, our natural resources and our community assets.

We know that this transition requires making the right investments at the right time.

This reinvention won’t happen overnight. But we’re on our way, building on the strengths of our past while innovating for the future, in forestry, healthcare, education and more.

And living our lives connected to our rich community and the natural world.

In Queens County, we’re reinventing our future.

We’re ready for business. We’re innovative. And we’re living well.

Building on the strengths of our past while innovating for the future



# We're reinventing our future here.

Region of Queens Municipality

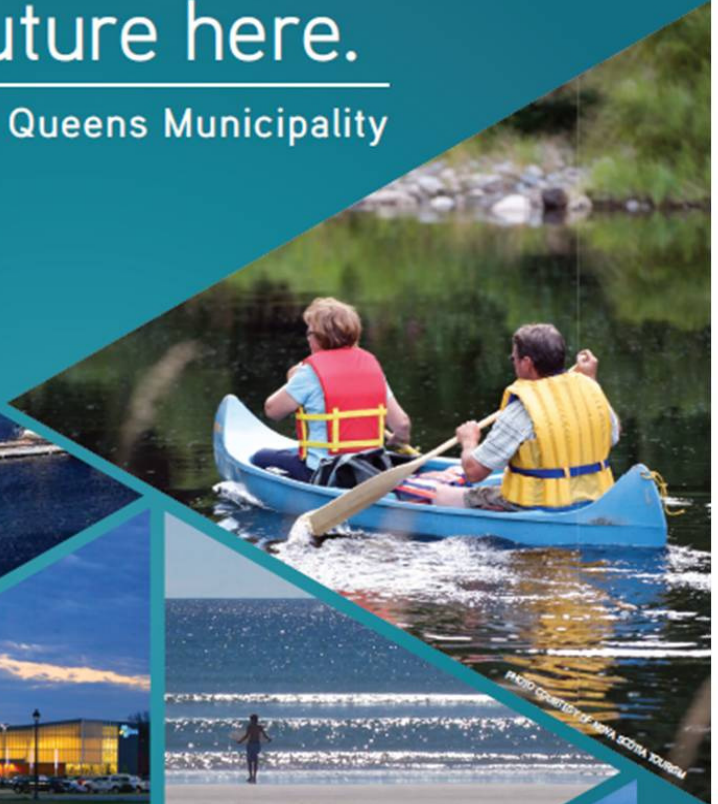
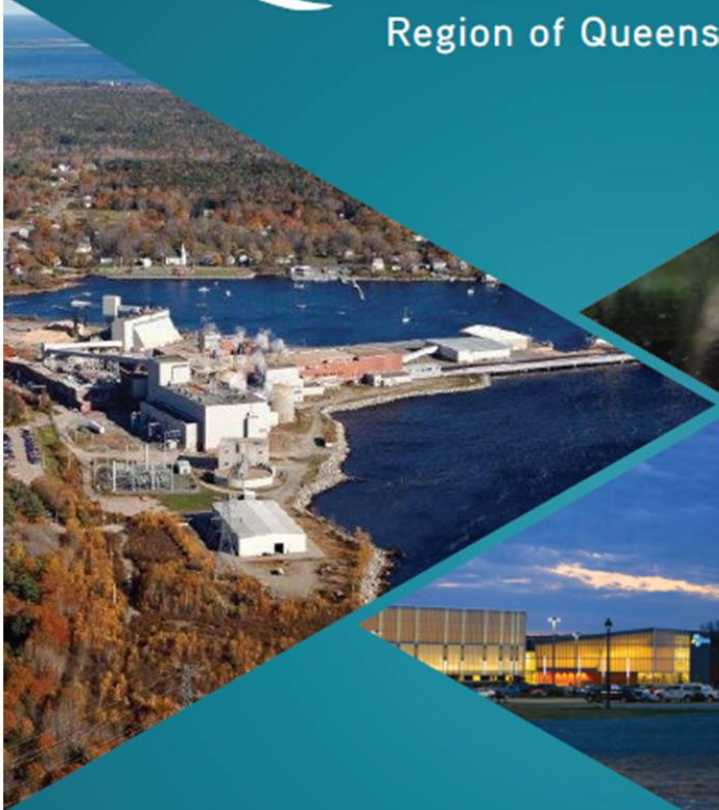


PHOTO COURTESY OF NEW SCOTIA TOURISM

## READY FOR BUSINESS

Our region is built upon our entrepreneurial people, our natural resources and our community assets.



- Trained labour force
- Shared industrial resources
- Efficient municipal government

## INNOVATIVE

We are a community of innovators.



- The future of resource technology
- Advanced healthcare and research in hospitals
- Pioneering technology in schools

## LIVING WELL

Living here gets you more.

- Pristine beaches and wilderness
- Rich arts and culture
- Connected to community

## IMPLEMENTING METHODS OF COMMUNICATIONS

**Method:** *Align communications with management decision-making.*

**How to:** Communications is a key consideration of operations. Ongoing representation of communications issues at the council level ensures that the concerns and interests of all stakeholder groups are rooted into the organization's way of doing business. As an integral part of every decision, communications issues are treated with the same level of priority as other business elements.

To implement this tactic, there should be a broad understanding of the RQM's communications opportunities, and the senior team to ask, "should communications be here?" whenever major decisions are being made. Key opportunities include: yearly budget planning, organizational business planning, project planning, etc.

**Results:** Communications person (CDC) is able to input into strategy and business planning at a macro level

**Method:** *Use proactive media relations*

**Objective:** Provide key background information surrounding an issue to media proactively to ensure that accurate information is shared in a timely manner.

**How to:** Being proactive with media means initiating and responding to media interest promptly and honestly.

Initiating media coverage when there is:

- A good news story about the organization to promote our vision, mission or plans
- Newsworthy information which, by virtue of being addressed through internal channels is now public knowledge
- Emergency and crisis situations
- Issues and events including negative ones, which are on the public radar, brewing on the government (Council) front or that will be of consequence to the way we do our business and offer our services.

Sample tools initiating media coverage surrounding an issue include:

a) **Proactive statements/releases** – Similar to traditional media releases, when an issue arises that should be addressed proactively, one key tool is a statement issued to media. This should be provided to key media who are either covering a story, or from whom an inquiry has arisen.

b) **Briefings with key reporters** – When appropriate, another key tool is a background briefing with one or two key reporters. This is a structured and well-messaged opportunity for the RQM to provide messaging and access to the media. By anticipating the need for communication, we are in a better position to set the tone and make certain information in the media is accurate. In controversial or sensitive situations, a proactive stance demonstrates our commitment to keeping key publics informed about decisions that may affect them.

There are circumstances when it is advisable not to initiate media coverage. These include:

- Personnel matters
- During negotiations, when news and developments are confined to the negotiating table
- External or internal investigations of the organization, a staff member or someone else with connection to the organization
- Incidents under police investigation

In all cases it is best to be prepared with statements ready in case of requests. These statements should explain why we are unable to provide detail or additional information (as opposed to simply saying “no comment”).

### ***Method – Correct errors, misquotes and “bad press”***

**Objective:** Create an opportunity and a practice whereby RQM’s communicators (spokesperson and/or CDC correct misinformation as soon as possible and respond to negative media in a way that does not prolong a “bad news” story.

**How to:** Generally speaking, unless the factual error or misquote is serious (see below), the best policy is no response. Minor inaccuracies can easily occur, particularly when the information being relayed or interpreted is complex.

An error misquote is considered serious when it does the following:

- Jeopardizes the image or calls into question the integrity of your organization
- Creates alarm and confusion for staff, stakeholders and the public
- Factually misrepresents the organization

Appropriate responses might be:

- For simple factual errors and misquotes, ask the journalist, editor or producer to follow up with a correction, retraction, or clarification
- For widespread published errors that will be compounded over time, issue a press release
- If all else fails, lodge a formal complaint with the local press council (Atlantic Press Council - <http://atlanticpresscouncil.wordpress.com/>)

Ultimately, the actual practice of judging when to “let it go” (i.e. decide that the information is not worth challenging) or to correct misinformation lies with the communicator (CDC) for RQM who will be in the best position to develop the necessary relationship with the media.

### ***Method – Develop augmented and segmented stakeholders list***

**Objective:** Know your audience and create an engaged group of citizen-leaders.

**Implementation:** The RQM currently has a list of stakeholders with whom it shares information on a regular basis. Some of this communication happens at the Mayor/CAO level, and in other cases, departments may have specialized stakeholder lists for projects and special activities. A segmented and targeted contact database of key stakeholders could be developed to distribute correspondence, updates, and other materials to directly. Groupings to include:

- **Economic and business stakeholders** – Those who would be interested in budget/tax updates, etc.
- **Planning and development stakeholders** – The private development community who would be interested in updates
- **Community groups, tourism associations, and other organizations** – Those with a vested interest in RQM’s yearly events and planning.

**Results:** RQM has a list of key stakeholders at its fingertips for use in direct-to-stakeholder engagement.

### ***Method – Establish a macro-agenda for communications***

**Objective:** The CDC will create a simple, user-friendly yearly agenda for communications which identifies key moments and opportunities at a macro level. The items are populated by the Mayor and CDC, as well as other members of the team; it focuses on events (positive and negative) on

the horizon. This is an opportunity to create a visual roadmap for communications to use for communications activities throughout the year.

The macro-calendar poster, will be a “year at a glance” document, with the draft calendar pre-circulated internally to ensure that nothing is missed. The final calendar will be shared with all inside the organization, including Council, and updated every 6 month. The calendar is a natural guideline for ensuring communications is ongoing and well

***Method – Broaden message of “Annual Year in Review and Future Direction” address***

The Mayor currently writes a year-end review for publication by local media and use in RQM social media. He also presents an “Annual Year in Review and Future Direction” address for the Chamber of Commerce and Board of Trade. These are opportunities to showcase RQM leadership, and past addresses have been very well-received. To reflect the diverse nature of the municipality and to reach key audiences across RQM, there is an opportunity to share the “Annual Year in Review and Future Direction” messaging in a broader way in communities across RQM. An event, organized by the RQM, could be held in additional communities throughout the region. Councillors could provide stakeholder lists for each event. Along with the media release on the address, the speech should be shared with the RQM’s key stakeholders directly. Good news about the RQM, its vision, priorities, and accomplishments would be shared widely, and communities and key stakeholders would be engaged and shown the RQM’s leadership and work over the past year.

***Method – Implement and communicate augmented media relations policy***

**Objective:** Establish a protocol for engagement with the media that broadens the media spokesperson role, and supports proactive and engaged media relations activities.

**Implementation:** The Mayor and Deputy Mayor serve as official spokespersons for RQM. The CDC should serve as the conduit through which media relations activities flow (i.e. inbound calls and inquiries should flow through her office, not necessarily expecting her to serve as spokesperson, but rather, as facilitator for the media relations). While there is value in ensuring that the municipality’s communications person (CDC) is engaged and informed about all media relations, in today’s media environment, it is also essential that those within the RQM can work in cooperation with the spokespersons to respond to media requests. The result is an organization that is transparent and accountable, while still maintaining a consistent message.

**Results:** The RQM has a broader voice in the media, and better-established media protocol

# REGION OF QUEENS SOCIAL MEDIA STRATEGY

## INTRODUCTION

This document outlines guidelines regarding social media goals and objectives, specific online target audiences, how to best create and leverage content, and how to manage an online social community.

## REGION OF QUEENS GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

All communications, including RQM social and broader online presence, should further the business objectives and primary organizational goals of the Municipality, which are:

- ***To attract, grow and develop the business community in the Region of Queens.***
- ***To attract people to the Region to live, work and play.***

With these broad objectives in mind, the business objective as it pertains to online communications should demonstrate that the RQM is a community that is addressing its challenges head-on and reinforce that the Council and staff are an integrated group dedicated to working with the community for the betterment of the region.

Through compelling online chronicling and actions, we will build the audience and activate supporters for the RQM.

By chronicling, we mean sharing good news stories and success, accomplishments, and when the Region overcomes obstacles.

By actions, we refer to acknowledging that the social presence will be viewed as a vehicle to generate conversation with citizens and stakeholders, and a way to engage broad community participation.

## Online Communications Goals and Objectives

The goal of the RQM social presence is ensure that the public has information to reinforce the Region's overall vibrancy and development. This aligns directly to the broad communications objective of attracting and retaining business to the region.

Additionally, an engaged and active social presence will leverage the voices of Councillors and staff members who regularly participate in social conversation. These voices represent constituents, and while they may have particular priorities that may not always align with the Region as a whole, they can reinforce important successes and add a layer of credibility to the Municipality with stakeholders and the public.

Finally, an active social presence can also impact other regional goals outside of the primary goal of business attraction. Specifically, it's a good vehicle to reinforce tourism goals and objectives, especially as tourism is a primary industry within the Region.

## **AUDIENCES**

The Region of Queens has many audiences to consider when creating social content and managing its online community.

### **1. Business and investors**

One of our most important targets is the business community within the Region, across Nova Scotia, and ultimately, potential investors from outside the province as well. It is critical that should businesses be interested or investigating the area as a business location, they see an active Municipal government that's working together in the best interest of the community, and a dynamic, lively public community.

### **2. Constituents**

A key primary audience to consider is the citizens of the Region of Queens. Councillors must account to those who elected them (constituency-based support) while considering what is in the best interest of the "greater good". As potential supporters of the efforts of Council and Administration, businesses and community groups are motivated in seeing their municipal government is working together to better their community.

### **3. Government, media and other stakeholders**

It's useful to consider government and media as external stakeholders, both from a partnership perspective and as a potential distributor of information and stories online. Good news stories from the Region should be shared across the province to demonstrate the leadership role the Region is taking from a business development perspective. Similarly, sharing stories with local and regional media via online platforms will be an important addition to traditional media outreach to increase reach and impact.

## CHANNEL CONSIDERATIONS

At this point, the RQM uses traditional methods to externally communicate progress to audience groups, though a website and Facebook page are also maintained. *As new social media channels become commonplace, access and use channels that will reach the majority of the RQM's audiences.*

### Current channels

- **Website**

The website is one of the Region's primary communications vehicles, and to fully support a social presence and traditional communications tactics, the Region may wish to consider reorganizing the site.

- **Facebook**

From a content perspective, the Facebook page is well maintained and active with content posted frequently, incorporating pictures and video where possible.

- **Twitter**

Nova Scotia has an incredibly active Twitter community. Nova Scotians are highly engaged on this particular platform, and journalists, bloggers, politicians and the community are all regularly participating in conversations online. During the summer of 2015, the Region activated a Twitter account. In late winter, 2016, Queens Place Emera Centre activated a Twitter account.

**Purpose:** The purpose of maintaining a Twitter profile is to connect with target audiences, drive traffic to the website and Facebook page, and further leverage the organizations' online storytelling reach.

**Administrators of the Twitter accounts:** In the interest of ensuring that the presence on Twitter can be maintained as needed and frequently, more than one person must be responsible for the Twitter accounts. The Community Development Coordinator in her role with Communications for the Municipality must have access to the accounts via being advised of account name, user name and password for both the Region of Queens Municipality and the Queens Place Emera Centre Twitter pages.

Administrators for the Twitter page for the Region of Queens Municipality are:

- Heather Cook, Community Development Coordinator
- Dana Henley, Secretary, Recreation and Community Facilities and Economic Development
- Richard Lane, Economic Development Officer

Administrators for the Twitter page for Queens Place Emera Centre are:

- Steve Burns, General Manager

- Heather Cook, Community Development Coordinator
- **One other, to be named**

**Content:**

As with the Facebook pages, the expectation is that the content on both Twitter pages be posted frequently (ie; at least several times a week), and will be primarily promotional in nature – highlighting positive things taking place at Queens Place Emera Centre and in the Region of Queens Municipality. The key difference between the two accounts is that the Queens Place Emera Centre account will be focused on events and activities held at Queens Place Emera Centre, or that the Centre is directly involved in. These events and activities may include the events taking place at the Centre organized by user groups or renters of the facility, as well as those organized by the staff of Queens Place Emera Centre and the Region of Queens Municipality. The Region of Queens Municipality will promote the activities undertaken by the Municipality, cross promote some Queens Place Emera Centre activities as well, and will feature posts about things that make the community great, including volunteers, community festivals, and other events and activities.

**Tone and style:**

A clear tone and style to any online content is critical to ensure that the RQM can remain strategic, consistent and confident in their online presence. To help develop style and tone, those writing should consider the personality of an employee you'd want to represent the RQM -- someone community-minded, enthusiastic and friendly, as well as forward-thinking and open to new ideas.

**Interactions online:**

At the present time, Twitter will be used by the Region of Queens Municipality and Queens Place Emera Centre as a method to spread information in an outward fashion. Conversations will not be engaged in with followers. If there is a retweet or response to a post that is negative, do not engage with the person who tweeted it. Responding to negative posts simply prolongs the negative exposure.

**Secondary channels**

- **Councillors active on social media**

The Region has a great opportunity to leverage its highly engaged Councillors via social media, and reach greater numbers of constituents and other target audiences. However, both parties must ensure that any material presented online reflects a Council that is working to improve the community.

Specifically:

- Posts from Councillors that highlight events, community groups or other non-political issues should be shared and leveraged.

- Councillors should not post on behalf of the Region. As a result of their elected position, the opinions that Councillors post on their social media accounts is perceived by the public and in the eyes of the law as being the opinion of the RQM. While Councillors may have opinions on issues that are not yet resolved, care should be used when posting on social channels as those opinions and statements are perceived as being that of the RQM, and may have legal ramifications or cause concern among residents.
- Both the Councillor and Region should post regarding successes to demonstrate both the unified perspective, and the Councillors specific perspective. For example, if a new policy is implemented that was brought forward by a particular Councillor, the Councillor can post that this is a project that he or she was excited to lead or support, and is proud of the complete Council for the work they've accomplished.

## **Content Strategy ... KEEP IT INTERESTING, TIMELY AND OF USE TO THE AUDIENCE**

The kind of content the RQM creates is the most important thing to consider with social strategy. If the RQM ensures that the content it produces or shares is interesting to its audiences, they will be more apt to trust the organization, share your story and information, and engage with you online.

This document outlines several things to bear in mind when creating content that works:

- Content themes
- Editorial calendar
- Style and tone

Broadly, there are two types of social content the Region should develop. By using both Stock and Flow content, the content will be diverse, interesting and tell the story of the community.

- **Stock Content**

Stock content is defined as durable, long-term content that serves your audience and mission and will be the same in months as it is today. These are stories about the Region's history and the Municipal Council's mandate, local regional statistics that may be of interest, as well as frequently asked questions and business information. This type of content is found online via search and is the foundation of your online reputation. Stock content is contained in web pages, but also pointed to in social media posts and updates.

- **Flow Content**

Flow content is curated content, and is the daily feed of posts and updates that will keep your audience engaged and interested. This is not necessarily content you create (but it often is).

Rather, this is content that links to other areas of the web that support your overall story. Flow content is reactive, can be completely spontaneous and could include content like answering questions from constituents, sharing events and community initiatives, or relevant newsworthy information. An important part of flow content to consider is leveraging other content that is found online via your social channels. The sharing of other content (e.g. linking to an event's webpage or reposting their post about an event) is an easy and efficient way for social profiles to be maintained and remain active.

## **Themes**

Consciously developing key storylines through ongoing communications can act like glue, sticking your audiences to your website, social media accounts, blogs or other communications. The overarching themes align with your narrative pillars:

- Innovative
- Ready for Business
- Living Well

Content that is created should align with each theme, to ensure that the complete Region of Queens story is being told.

## **Editorial Calendar**

An editorial calendar has been a trick of the publishing trade for centuries to help newspapers keep up with their publishing cycle. It is a simple and easy way to schedule who's responsible for writing what and to keep an eye on upcoming important events or programs to use in content.

For online content, an editorial calendar maps the creation of stock content. Specifically, it outlines:

- Dates for creating and publishing
- The topic of the post

- If approval is needed and received
- How many visits/shares

### **Style and Tone**

A clear tone and style to any online content is critical to ensure that the RQM can remain strategic, consistent and confident in their online presence. To help develop style and tone, those writing should consider the personality of an employee you'd want to represent the RQM -- someone community-minded, enthusiastic and friendly, as well as forward-thinking and open to new ideas.

### **CONNECTING WITH THE COMMUNITY**

It is critical to note that participating in online communications is a method to genuinely connect with constituents, other Nova Scotians and municipalities, and potential visitors and businesses. The Region of Queens should strive to create an environment where people feel they can express themselves, and then provide opportunities and encouragement to do so. In any social environment, the Municipality can reach out to their audiences and really listen and engage with them, which will ultimately give them extra value, and make their experience with you worth telling others about.

To be successful online, you must be responsive, courteous and authentic. For the RQM, this means that questions or concerns from the public must be dealt with in a timely way.