

# Orange County City Internet Strategy Analysis

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*An Assessment of City Internet Strategies and How they Embrace Social Media,  
Transparency and Citizen Access*

Version 0.9

BETA

Authored by Ryder Todd Smith



TRIPEPI SMITH & ASSOCIATES

## About Tripepi Smith & Associates

Tripepi Smith is a boutique consulting firm based in Orange County, California. Tripepi Smith provides technology and marketing advisory services to small to mid-sized businesses and government.

The Technology practice is led by Ryder Todd Smith, a 14 year veteran of the technology and government relations arena. Ryder is a graduate of Claremont McKenna College and former research associate with the Rose Institute of State and Local Government at Claremont McKenna College.

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## Executive Summary

The Internet is a powerful component of the public's communication with each other and social institutions. City websites are likely the most common interaction that the average citizen has with their municipal government, making the website the primary communications tool for cities to communicate with the public.

Tripepi Smith set out to analyze city websites across Orange County (34 city websites were included in the analysis) to determine their use of certain features that Tripepi Smith believes are a best practice for city websites. The criteria focused on three areas:

1. Access and ease of use of the website
2. Use of social media.
3. Enabling greater transparency and citizen engagement.

Here were the 11 simple tests that were used to conduct this analysis:

1. Does the city have a friendly URL (i.e. <http://www.ci.laguna-niguel.ca.us/> versus [tustinca.org](http://tustinca.org))?
2. Does a search for the city result in enhanced search results?
3. Does the city have a Twitter account?
4. Has the city updated the Twitter account in the last 7 days?
5. Does the city have a Facebook page?
6. Has the city updated the Facebook page in the last 7 days?
7. Does the city have video and audio of council meetings online?
8. Is there a search function on the site?
9. Is an email for the mayor (including a generic email for the whole council) available on the website?
10. Did the mayor or mayor's staff respond to a test email?
11. Is the city's budget online?

The simply yes/no questions were designed to ensure clarity in the facts (as opposed to asking: "Is the website nice to look at?")

Certain questions were given a greater weight. For example, 5 points were given for having a Twitter account, but 10 points were given for updating it in the last 7 days. Reasons for the scale of awarding points are identified in the detailed section on Questions/Criteria Explanation.

Based upon the data and the question weighting criteria, the following cities best adhere to the tests executed in this analysis of the 34 cities that were reviewed:

1. Newport Beach
2. Brea
3. Buena Park
4. Mission Viejo
5. Fullerton
6. Irvine
7. Tustin
8. Laguna Woods
9. Westminster

It must be noted that analysis is a “draft” or “beta” effort to look at these components of city Internet strategies. As such the inclusion or exclusion of a city from the top 9 list should not lead one to conclude that one city is “great” or another city is “less than good.” Rather, review of these results and the best practices identified in this analysis should encourage cities to engage in a discussion of best practices and contribute their feedback to the future 1.0 version of this analysis.

If any data is incorrect, please email the correction to [ryder@tripepismith.com](mailto:ryder@tripepismith.com).

The raw data that was collected for this analysis took place from June 5, 2010 to July 5, 2010

### Other Observations

There were several anecdotal observations to come from this study that are not shown in the data and deserve further study in the 1.0 version of this analysis. However, since the data was gathered by a single individual, there are certain consistent observations that were made which warrant notation here.

- Most cities have official social media accounts (Twitter username or Facebook Page), but city websites rarely or clearly link to the official social media accounts (Twitter.com/username or Facebook.com/cityname). Further, cities are even less likely to feature a link to their official social media accounts on the city website homepage.
- Some cities seem to have avoided



Figure 1 - Note here how two others have registered similar City of Irvine accounts with Twitter.

securing any official accounts in the social media realm. This has created a vacuum of identity where private citizens have secured accounts appearing as if they are the city. In one case, it was observed that someone was squatting on a city name hoping to sell it (a likely violation of Twitter policy).

- Nearly every city in Orange County that has webcasting for their council meetings has a contract with Granicus. This could represent an opportunity to for cities to combine contracting power to secure better pricing for the service.

## Background

Since its early days in the 1990's to today, the Internet has exploded as a communications tool. Email and websites have dominated this brief history of the Internet as the primary methods of interacting with people, but a wave of new sites and tools that some have declared Web 2.0 are quickly gaining favor with the public. Underlying these changes is a simple fact: more people use the Internet today than ever before, and they use it in more ways than ever before.

Cities have responded to the growth of the Internet by building websites to engage and inform their communities. Citizens in some cities can now watch city council meetings on their laptops, receive traffic updates on local road closures via Twitter or register for parks and recreation events online. Cities – the closest form of the government to the people – are engaging with their citizens in important and valuable ways.

This City Website Analysis intends to inform city staff, elected-officials and the public about how cities are evolving their websites and general Internet efforts to inform their citizens, ensure transparency in their local government and evolve their communication to the new medium of social networks.

## Analysis Methodology

Data was gathered by using a computer, Google Search and digging through individual city websites. All the research was conducted by Ryder Todd Smith. Since much of this was manual work, it is possible that errors were made in gathering the data or results were overlooked. When errors are identified, the feedback on correcting them will be welcomed.

## Questions/Criteria Explanation

### *Does the city have a friendly URL (i.e. <http://www.ci.laguna-niguel.ca.us/> versus [tustinca.org](http://tustinca.org/))?*

Easily remembered URL's are faster for citizens to recollect and easier to promote with the public. Purchase of individual domain name is relatively inexpensive given the additional branding value for cities. The standard .us extension is an older more tedious URL for citizens to recall.

Question Weight: 5 points

### *Does a search for the city result in enhanced search results?*

Websites can be optimized so that when a search is conducted on a standard search engine such as Google or Bing, a series of results from within the city's website are returned. This allows faster citizen access to relevant information and provides an indicator of the site's optimization for search engines.

Question Weight: 5 points

### *Does the city have a Twitter account?*

Registering an account is free and should be done if for no other reason than to secure access to a name. Twitter usernames today are similar to simple domain name registration in the mid-90's.



Having a Twitter account also demonstrates that a city is engaging in social media communications. Additionally, cities need to be concerned about others who spoof the city name to gain unsuspecting follows who do not realize the spoofed name is not the official city account.

Question Weight: 5 points

***Has the city updated the Twitter account in the last 7 days?***

Having a Twitter username is really only part of the process. Once you have that account, it must be used. To the users of social media, an idle account is worse than having no account at all because having the account raises the expectation that you will have content, leaving the reader disappointed when there is none. Further, in the era of social media, the conversation is ongoing and fast, meaning more than 7 days between communications is simply too long.

Question Weight: 10 points

***Does the city have a Facebook page?***

Securing a Facebook page is free and easy to do. Facebook's services have evolved over time and the concept of the Facebook Page was introduced two years ago and represents the best method for a city to engage with its citizens through Facebook (versus using a personal account with a city name or a Facebook Group). Having the account does indicate a city's progressive use of social media to reach citizens. Finally, similar to Twitter, securing a page and vanity URL for the city is important to give citizens a valid page to follow. Otherwise, unsuspecting citizens may follow non-official city pages assuming they are the city's.

Question Weight: 5 points

***Has the city updated the Facebook page in the last 7 days?***

Having a Facebook Page is really only part of the process. Once you have that Page, it must be used. To the users of social media, an idle account is worse than having no account at all because having the account raises the expectation that you will have content, leaving the reader disappointed when there is none. Further, in the era of social media, the conversation is ongoing and fast, meaning more than 7 days between communications is simply too long.

Question Weight: 10 points

***Does the city have video and audio of council meetings online?***

The public is expecting video content more than ever before. The expansion of high speed Internet access and services like YouTube and Hulu have set the expectation that all content can be delivered via the Internet. Access to council meetings online (audio or video) provides a clear record of past and current debates and activities of the city council and makes it easier for citizens to follow the words of their elected leaders and hold them accountable.

Question Weight: 10 points



***Is there a search function on the site?***

As websites have grown more complicated with more data on them, the irony becomes that finding the data you want is harder. The effect is called “data smog.” To counteract that, search functionality on sites makes it much easier for a person to find the right data on the site.

Question Weight: 5 points

***Is an email for the mayor (including a generic email for the whole council) available on the website?***

The Internet has helped bring government closer to the people. We can now interact with our elected officials in various ways and reach out to them quickly and efficiently. This is particularly true at the city government level where the government is closest to the people and seeing your elected official at the local coffee shop or deli may be common. As such, citizens should expect to be able to email their mayor via an email address provided on the city’s website.

Emails to a general council email address were acceptable. As were emails to either personal or city accounts.

Question Weight: 5 points

***Did the mayor or mayor’s staff respond to a test email?***

Having emailed their mayor or a group email to the whole council, the expectation is that a response of some form should come back. Having an email on the website creates an expectation that a response will come back. Of note here is the possibility that spam filters or other technologies may intervene in the communications. Regardless of technical interventions, the expectation is that some form or response will be received by a citizen if they take the time to engage their government via email.

Responses from city staff were counted as responses in this analysis. A generic email referencing that this analysis work was being done and a mere “Reply” was requested to acknowledge the response was sent to the provided email address. At least ten days was provided to allow for a response.

Question Weight: 10 points

***Is the city’s budget online?***

The city budget is a key document that in simple numbers explains the priorities of the city. It is a starting point for all citizens to understand their government and how tax dollars are spent. Making it easily available to citizens is important.

Question Weight: 10 points

## City Results

Numbers here are the count of cities that positively met the criteria. For example, 15 of the 34 cities had a Facebook Page at the time we researched the data. Data is provided here for cities to self-assess their performance relative to peers.

Friendly URL	Expanded Search Results	Twitter Account	Twitter Last 7 Days	Facebook Page	Update in last 7 days	Meeting Video/Audio Online	Search on Site	Email for Elected On Site	Response to Email	Budget Online
26	29	21	11	15	10	18	32	29	15	33

Specific results for a city included in the analysis are available upon request to officials of that city.

Please contact Tripepi Smith at 626.536.2173 or [ryder@tripepismith.com](mailto:ryder@tripepismith.com)

## Cities Included in Analysis

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Aliso Viejo
Anaheim
Brea
Buena Park
Costa Mesa
Cypress
Dana Point
Fountain Valley
Fullerton
Garden Grove
Huntington Beach
Irvine
La Habra
La Palma
Laguna Beach
Laguna Hills
Laguna Niguel
Laguna Woods
Lake Forest
Los Alamitos
Mission Viejo
Newport Beach
Orange
Placentia
Rancho Santa Margarita
San Clemente
San Juan Capistrano
Santa Ana
Seal Beach
Stanton
Tustin
Villa Park
Westminster
Yorba Linda

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## City Twitter Stats

City	Twitter Name	Followers	Tweets
Aliso Viejo	@ctyofav	258	74
Anaheim	@anaheim311	305	10
Brea	@cityofbrea	411	114
Buena Park	@BuenaParkCA	102	99
Costa Mesa	@CityofCostaMesa	143	70
Cypress	NONE		
Dana Point	@CityofDanaPoint	1007	426
Fountain Valley	None		
Fullerton	@CityofFullerton	6	0
Garden Grove	None *gardengroveca???		
Huntington Beach	None		
Irvine	@City_of_Irvine	1316	354
La Habra	@LaHabraCA	279	105
La Palma	None		
Laguna Beach	@lagunabeachgov	67	1
Laguna Hills	@CityLagunaHills	34	6
Laguna Niguel	@LagunaNiguelCA	953	159
Laguna Woods	@lagunawoodscity	66	91
Lake Forest	@LakeForestCA	308	2502
Los Alamitos	None		
Mission Viejo	@MissionViejoCA	1176	1165
Newport Beach	@newportbeachgov	57	105
Orange	None		
Placentia	@PlacentiaCA	9	31
Rancho Santa Margarita	None		
San Clemente	None		
San Juan Capistrano	@cityofsjc	275	107
Santa Ana	None		
Seal Beach	None		
Stanton	None		
Tustin	@CityofTustin	1843	212
Villa Park	None		
Westminster	@WestminsterCA	11	52
Yorba Linda	@CityofYL	21	1

Data Gathered 7/13/2010

## City Facebook Stats

City	facebook URL	Fans
Aliso Viejo	none	
Anaheim	<a href="http://www.facebook.com/cityofanaheim">http://www.facebook.com/cityofanaheim</a>	1382
Brea	<a href="http://www.facebook.com/pages/Brea-CA/City-of-Brea/105471338466">http://www.facebook.com/pages/Brea-CA/City-of-Brea/105471338466</a>	1482
Buena Park	<a href="http://www.facebook.com/CityofBuenaPark">http://www.facebook.com/CityofBuenaPark</a>	328
Costa Mesa	none	
Cypress	none	
Dana Point	<a href="http://www.facebook.com/CityOfDanaPoint">http://www.facebook.com/CityOfDanaPoint</a>	394
Fountain Valley	None	
Fullerton	<a href="http://www.facebook.com/CityofFullerton">http://www.facebook.com/CityofFullerton</a>	4463
Garden Grove	<a href="http://www.facebook.com/pages/Garden-Grove-CA/City-of-Garden-Grove/149409874252">http://www.facebook.com/pages/Garden-Grove-CA/City-of-Garden-Grove/149409874252</a>	1151
Huntington Beach	<a href="http://www.facebook.com/pages/Huntington-Beach-CA/City-of-Huntington-Beach/110529810259">http://www.facebook.com/pages/Huntington-Beach-CA/City-of-Huntington-Beach/110529810259</a>	322
Irvine	<a href="http://www.facebook.com/cityofirvine">http://www.facebook.com/cityofirvine</a>	287
La Habra	none	
La Palma	none	
Laguna Beach	None	
Laguna Hills	<a href="http://www.facebook.com/pages/City-of-Laguna-Hills/156592950177?v=wall&amp;ref=search#!/pages/City-of-Laguna-Hills/156592950177">http://www.facebook.com/pages/City-of-Laguna-Hills/156592950177?v=wall&amp;ref=search#!/pages/City-of-Laguna-Hills/156592950177</a>	22
Laguna Niguel	<a href="http://www.facebook.com/pages/Laguna-Niguel-CA/City-of-Laguna-Niguel/165446105472">http://www.facebook.com/pages/Laguna-Niguel-CA/City-of-Laguna-Niguel/165446105472</a>	220
Laguna Woods	none	
Lake Forest	none	
Los Alamitos	none	
Mission Viejo	<a href="http://www.facebook.com/pages/Mission-Viejo-CA/City-of-Mission-Viejo/51106190422">http://www.facebook.com/pages/Mission-Viejo-CA/City-of-Mission-Viejo/51106190422</a>	835
Newport Beach	<a href="http://www.facebook.com/CityofNewportBeach">http://www.facebook.com/CityofNewportBeach</a>	1090
Orange	none	
Placentia	<a href="http://www.facebook.com/pages/Placentia-CA/City-of-Placentia/123256117696062">http://www.facebook.com/pages/Placentia-CA/City-of-Placentia/123256117696062</a>	30
Rancho Santa Margarita	None	
San Clemente	None	
San Juan Capistrano	None	
Santa Ana	None	
Seal Beach	none	
Stanton	None	
Tustin	<a href="http://www.facebook.com/cityoftustin">http://www.facebook.com/cityoftustin</a>	2323
Villa Park	<a href="http://www.facebook.com/CityofVillaPark">http://www.facebook.com/CityofVillaPark</a>	1632
Westminster	<a href="http://www.facebook.com/CityofWestminster">http://www.facebook.com/CityofWestminster</a>	101
Yorba Linda	none	

Data gathered 7/13/2010