Delaware Municipal Web Developers Group
MEETING SUMMARY

January 28, 2010
Delaware Public Archives
Dover, Delaware
12:30 p.m. to 3:30 p.m.

AGENDA

1. Attendees/Absentees

Attendees

Win Abbott (Fenwick Island), **Jennifer Brook** (Smyrna), **Lee Brubaker** (Ocean View), **Cheryl Carney** (Magnolia), **Dick Cleaveland** (Dewey Beach), **Marian Delaney** (New Castle), **Mark Deshon** (IPA-University of Delaware), **Alice Erickson** (Lewes), **Greg Hughes** (GIC), **Dana Johnston** (Newark), **Wendy King** (Newport), **Kristen Krenzer** (Middletown), **Tina Law** (Elsmere), **Richard Maly** (Camden), **Debbie Morris** (Sussex Co.), **Danny Schweers** (The Ardens), **Lindsey Shallcross** (Bethany Beach), and **Pam Smith** (South Bethany)

plus guests **Gene Brinkley** (Smyrna), **Beth Chajes** (OCM-University of Delaware), **Pam Haddick** (Wyoming), **James Markow** (Smyrna), **Mike Marasco** (Wyoming), **Barbara Roberts** (Odessa), and **Donna Schwartz** (Millville)

Absentees:

Barbara Belli (Wilmington), **Doris Adkins** (Greenwood), **Cathy Beaver** (Townsend), **"Sam" Callender** (Cheswold), **Kathleen Clifton** (Delaware City), **Agnes DiPietrantonio** (Fenwick Island), **Dorothy Doyle** (Kent Co.), **Lisa Driggins** (Camden), **Sarah Ferguson** (Felton), **John Giles** (Elsmere), **Tom Glenn** (Sussex Co.), **David Henderson** (Rehoboth Beach), **Shadina Jones** (Cheswold), **Lisa Kail** (Bethany Beach), **Mark Kennedy** (Kent County), **Jason Kilpatrick** (Milford), **Jim McElhinney** (New Castle Co.), **Oralia McGinness** (Harrington), **Ed McNeeley** (GIC), **Tracy Mulligan** (Bethany Beach), **Sue Muncey** (Clayton), **Tricia Newcomer** (Seaford), **David Potter** (Middletown), **Vikki Prettyman (Blades), Tom Roth** (Henlopen Acres), **Jesse Savage** (Bridgeville), **John Schatzschneider** (Harrington), **Jamie Smith** (Laurel), **Angela Townsend** (Georgetown), and **Bonnie Walls** (Bridgeville)

Mark Deshon thanked the Town of Elsmere for providing lunch, and Cheryl Carney of Magnolia for preparing it.

2. Website Status Reports

Arden – Site is put together using Adobe Dreamweaver. There are no big changes, but DannyS Schweers noted that village volunteers are now becoming interested in the site. He pointed out that the site links to the village's library holdings, whose pages are "clunky" in terms of usability.

Bethany Beach – Not much has changed. Updated Christmas holiday slide shows, agendas, and minutes.

Camden – Because there have been some staffing changes due to the economy, Richard Maly has been asked to take on responsiblity for the everyday management of the site. Camden uses Delaware.Net's "Team Logic" system and is slowly moving forward with it.

Dewey Beach – Town hired a new manager who begins on February 1. Dick Cleaveland, who volunteers as the town's webmaster, is anxious to get online bill payment. Still monitoring the "Contact Us" citizen input and is under some pressure now to webcast town meetings, primarily to benefit seasonal residents. Working on live streaming these meetings. He mentioned that a provider called Watershed charges only $50/month for this service (with a maximum of 500 viewer hours per month). Implementation of online calendars is also being integrated.

Elsmere – Tina Law said that she and manager John Giles began working with IPA and GIC; they hope to have a new town site soon. Still successfully utilizing CivicPlus's add-on Request Tracker for citizen complaints/inquires.

Fenwick Island – Win Abbott reported that, through Agnes DiPietrantonio's receipt of information on and subsequent entry of a contest from Civic Plus because of her attendance of an IPA municipal clerks class (that included a web development presentation by Mark Deshon and Greg Hughes), Fenwick Island has won an "Extreme Web Makeover" from Civic Plus. They hope to have a new site up and running by the next meeting.

Lewes – No big changes. Alice Erickson will be taking on more control over the site, which is hosted by Delaware.Net.

Magnolia – There has been a good response from residents with respect to the town's website, but communication with the current host is problematic. Considering redeveloping help from the state.

Middletown – Hopes to launch a new site soon. Kristen Krenzer is still working with learning Dreamweaver.

Millville – Donna Schwartz just began working with the Millville site recently and is currently maintaining this Delaware.Net–hosted site using its "Team Logic" system, which she says is easy to use.

Newark – On January 11, Newark introduced online bill payment. At the group's suggestion at the previous meeeting, Dana Johnston moved the latest news to the top of Newark's homepage. It now has an e-newsletter subscription option. Dana is working on a better looking page for its Parks & Recreation department and has been asked to take over the site of the Downtown Newark Partnership.

New Castle – Site needs revamping. There is an online payment feature and a calendar.

Newport – Wendy King reported that she and one of the town council have begun working with IPA and GIC to redevelop the Newport site.

Ocean View – Site, which is hosted by Delaware.Net, is being maintained; public notices and calendar are being updated on a regular basis.

Odessa – Barbara Roberts said that some things work and some don't. It was created in an older version of FrontPage, and it needs something different.

Smyrna – Just maintaining at this point. Nothing new to report.

Sussex County – Added online dog licensing on January 1.

South Bethany – No changes at this time. Working on a website use policy.

Wyoming – Town currently has a site that is about two-year's-old in its present configuration and is currently maintained by a paid non-staffer.

Delaware.gov – Sixty percent of GIC's current efforts involve social media. Feedback has been good, so they are training other state agencies with regard to blogs, Twitter, Facebook, and Flickr. Greg Hughes mentioned that the Lt. Governor's blog is particularly good and that State Parks is really active in this effort. He suggested that local governments include these in their marketing plans. The state is simply "going where the folks are."

IPA – Nothing new to report.

3. Writing for the Web (guest presentation by Beth Chajes, Communications Specialist, Office of Communications & Marketing, University of Delaware)

download presentation (632KB - PDF)

Beth gave a presentation that includes some wonderful basic tips about how to write content for the Web.

The two things that users are doing when they come to your site are

- looking for content
- taking action or performing a task

It is critically important that sites be designed and maintained to facilitate these basic uses. She pointed out that rather than read content, Web users tend to scan content. She showed a page that had been analyzed by the frequency of area on the page where one's eyes have focused. This illustrated the point that (at least on the initial visit) one glances quickly at the things that catch attention best—an interesting photo or graphic, article headlines, etc.—and darts all over a page, rather than reading top to bottom and left to right.

Beth showed us an example of content written for printed media and how, though several steps, it could be transformed into a much more digestible form for the Web. Four tips for editing and optimizing usability of content:

- Use small paragraphs (less than 50 words)
- Use lots of subheads
- Use bullet points (this enhances scannability and improves visibility)
- Bold keywords

Simplify language to the extent possible. Direct marketing language helps scannability. Make text "friendly" and personalize for the user. It's OK to write in second person (you, your), rather than in third person (he/she, his/her).

A reference that Beth pointed out was an article from Jakob Nielsen's site on usability.

4. Statewide Web Survey Results (by Mark Deshon, Institute for Public Administration, University of Delaware)

download presentation (292KB - PDF)

On behalf of the Delaware Municipal Web Developers Group, Mark disseminated a Web survey in the late summer. We received 32 responses, which included 31 municipalities and Sussex County.

Findings of particular note include

- Right now only about a quarter of Delaware local government sites are identified by a .gov domain name, whereas nearly half are still .com domains.

- There are a variety of service providers that host Delaware local government sites, Delaware.Net being one of the more popular ones (used by 25% of respondent governments).

- The vast majority (85% of respondent governments) utilize either a lone staffer or up to three responsible staffers for their websites.

- Nearly a quarter of respondents (22%) indicated there was no budget for their municipal website.

- Those responsible for local government websites in Delaware have a variety of job titles/functions, with 9% who are volunteers, and only one whose title is actually "webmaster" (Wilmington's Barbara Belli). The most frequent was only 16%, and there were three categories each with that total.

Local governments were asked to identify features their sites included from a list of 24. Results of note include

- Only a quarter to 40% of the respondents indicated presence of the following features:
  - Site search
  - Staff directory
  - Frequently asked questions
  - Local weather
  - Archived documents
  - Online citizen feedback

- Less than a quarter indicated the presence of the following features:
  - Online bill payment
  - Emergency services
  - Subscription service
  - Interactive maps
  - Online licensing

- The following local governments boasted the most features (more than 80% of the 24):
  - Town of Bethany Beach
  - City of Lewes

- Roughly half of the respondent governments indicated between 50-69% of the 24.

- Eight respondents indicated their website included less than 12 of the 24 features.

- On questions asked specifically about the MWDG,

- Two-thirds of the respondents indicated they were very familiar our group.

- About one out of every five respondents were not very familiar with our group.

- Of the respondents, 22% indicated they were "very active" in the MWDG.

- Another 22% indicated they were "active."

- However, 44% indicated minimal involvment.

- Of those who indicated they were "very active," there is a high degree of satisfaction (greater than 4 on a scale of 5) with each of the MWDG's mission functions (support, education, networking).

At our April meeting, based partly on these findings, we will discuss some items that pertain to our group's future and how we can be more effective at involving minimally active local governments.

5. **Report on State and IPA Assistance with Local Sites** (by by Greg Hughes, Government Information Center, State of Delaware

Greg presented a brief update early in the meeting, after fielding an in-depth question from Cheryl Carney (Town of Magnolia) about the state assistance available through the Government Information Center (GIC).

GIC will work with towns that want to redevelop sites under the .delaware.gov domain (e.g., www.[townname].delaware.gov).

Greg explained that helping local governments fits within the parameters of GIC's stated mission of helping provide government information in Delaware. Not only do they not distinguish based on what level of government is involved, they welcome the "blurring of the lines" of government hierarchy because (1) this is in keeping with the issue of promoting government "transparency" and (2) users really don't care from whom they're getting the information they want.

This state assistance includes helping set up the domain name (and pointers from current non-.gov domains if necessary), crafting a WordPress-driven site design template, and training local government personnel on how to use this Web-based social media tool for maintaining their new website. This assistance is FREE.

Local governments would be responsible for providing the content.

In addition, Greg noted that MWDG convener Mark Deshon of the University of Delaware's Institute for Public Administration is available on a small-contract basis to help local governments prepare adequately for the WordPress redevelopment.

So far, the Town of Felton and the Town of Greenwood have utilized GIC for site redevelopment. Mark is currently working with the Town of Elsmere and the Town of Newport, as they prepare content for their site redevelopment project with GIC.

There appeared to be a lot of interest among this meeting's attendees for this relatively quick and vastly more affordable site-development solution.

Contact Greg Hughes for details.

Announcement of Next Meeting

The next meeting will take place on Thursday, April 22, at 12:30 p.m. at the Delaware Public Archives and will begin with lunch.