

NEW AFFINITY PARTNER TAKES THE PAIN OUT OF HAVING A WEBSITE FOR YOUR TOWN OR WATER SYSTEM

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A good website can save you significant time and money — and now RuralWaterImpact.com and MunicipallImpact.com make it easier than ever.

"Do we REALLY need a website?" NYRWA asks that you please share this article with your clerk and other Administrative staff.

When you hear that question, you might shake your head and think to yourself, "We don't need a website." "Most of our customers wouldn't know how to use it." "Websites are too expensive and too difficult to set up." "I wouldn't know where to start."

Well, if that IS what you're thinking, you might want to think again.

Internet use is growing – FAST! Today, over 80% of US households have Internet service, and broadband is continually expanding to rural areas. At least 85% of all Internet users shop, bank, and/or pay their bills online, and customers, even in the most rural areas, have come to expect these conveniences. This doesn't even take into account the widespread adoption of smart phones that are Internet connected.

On top of that, the age demographic that is growing the fastest in computer literacy is between the ages of 50 and 75. Of course, younger generations tend to be technically proficient, but now their grandparents are getting on board as well. Even my 89-year-old neighbor now likes to check her Facebook page on her iPad.

So, you might be wondering: "Could I just set up a Facebook or Twitter page for my business rather than a website?" Well, it's true that Facebook or Twitter can be excellent tools to get news and messages out to your residents. However, not everyone is on Facebook or Twitter, and even if they are there's no guarantee they'll see the information that you post there. So you still need a place where your customers can easily access forms and reports, rates and policies, FAQs, bill payment options and other important information.

Consider that your website can be a powerful communication tool, and an extremely effective one at that. Think of your site as a "giant public bulletin board" where your customers can find answers to a plethora of pertinent questions about your town or

water system (Where are you located? What are your office hours? What are your rates and policies? How do I pay my water bill or parking ticket? How do I contact you? Where can I see the most recent Water Quality Report? What is the latest news or events coming up? What's on this month's board/council agenda? How do I establish new service? What are your drought contingency plans? How do I read my meter?)

Having a professional-looking website that provides up-to-date information instantly boosts your credibility with your customers, informs them of the services you provide, and increases your customers' confidence in you. And if set up correctly, your site information can be updated as frequently as you need, and it gives customers a reliable means of communicating with you as well.

To summarize the benefits of having a website, we refer to this list that what we call "The 5 C's":

- **Convenience:** Through your website, customers have access to pertinent information, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. It can save them time by giving them round-the-clock access bill payment information, download forms and reports, or to send an email to customer support. In turn, this saves you time from picking up the phone to answer questions – this means a decrease in frustration and an increase in productivity.

- **Customer Service:** Customers have greater access to everything they need to know, right at their fingertips... leaving them well informed, satisfied, and more appreciative. Better informed and satisfied customers means FEWER COMPLAINTS!

- **Communication:** News and alerts, sent by text and email, inform customers of necessary information, such as a Boil Water notice or road closure due to repair work. The "Contact Us" information can include after-hours and emergency numbers, and a simple email form. In addition to being able reach out to your customers, they also need to know they can reach you.

- **Cost Savings:** In addition to fewer phone calls, you'll also have fewer mailings! As you know New York approves ►►►