

And the survey says...

Print praised, social media gains ground

By Tracie Bettenhausen and Kelly Jo Wald



The results are in and communications vehicles are doing their job at Basin Electric

One way the Basin Electric External Relations and Communications Department gains ideas for improvement is through cooperative- and membership-wide surveys. This spring, Basin Electric launched a survey evaluating the cooperative's current communications vehicles: 86.4 percent said the department does a good/very good job at communicating information.

To mitigate cost, the Internet-based surveys were created in-house and distributed with the help of the Information Services & Telecommunications Department. Communications then compiled and reviewed each of the anonymous responses.

Of the more than 2,300 surveys distributed, 803 employee responses

and 75 member responses were received. Topics addressed in the survey pertained to the various communication vehicles the department uses including Basin Electric video reports, Basin Today, Basin Update, Annual Report, Annual Meeting, the Intranet, the public Web site, the cooperative's blog, and the members' Web site.



Ted Cash

Ted Cash, Basin Electric media support supervisor, says the communication staff's ability to make use of multiple

mediums is extremely valuable. "We give members and employees options on the way they get information by delivering the same core message through as many avenues as possible."

A look on the inside

Communication isn't effective unless the various media vehicles used are effective.

"The survey gives us an opportunity to craft effective communication tools by seeing how people react to our media vehicles and then repurposing the work our staff does to fit what people want to see," says Mary Klecker-Green, Basin Electric supervisor of public and member communications.

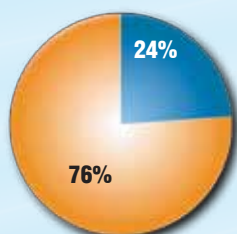
Looking ahead, the department is hoping to make the surveys an annual or bi-annual practice. Cash says, "We're putting a system in place to learn how to better serve customers and to measure our progress."

Although improvement is a never-ending process, the department has several ideas of how to increase its effectiveness based on continuing to

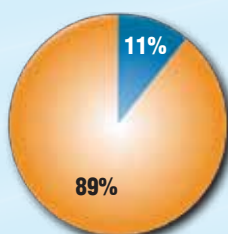
Members/Employees

Yes No

Do you typically read Basin Update?



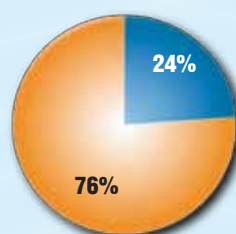
Do you typically read Basin Today?



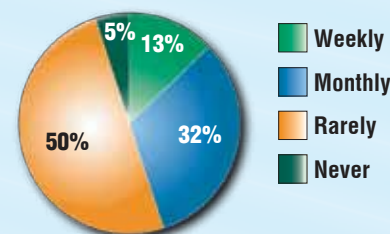
Members

Yes No

Do you typically read Basin Electric's Annual Report?



How often do you typically visit www.basinelectric.com?



improve two-way communication and making use of technological advancements and internal resources to improve efficiency.

Basin Electric gets social

With the recent societal push toward social media, Basin Electric has opened its own Facebook, YouTube, WordPress and Twitter accounts. These sources are being used so communicators have additional avenues with which to reach people.



Mary Klecker-Green

When Klecker-Green attended a national communications conference a couple years ago, she realized the way communications professionals were doing their job was changing drastically.

And Basin Electric needed to get with the times.

Presentations by representatives from Southwest Airlines, Ebay and Siemens made Klecker-Green realize “many communicators are productively using ‘social media.’ This was at a time I didn’t even know what Twitter was. (If you don’t know what Twitter is, or have never heard the term ‘social media,’ check out the next page for explanations.) I

walked away thinking, ‘Like it or not, social media is going to impact corporations’ public relations practices.’ That scared me, because at Basin Electric, we weren’t using any social media at all. And using these tools is free of charge.”

Klecker-Green took that message back to senior staff in communications. “At the time there wasn’t another co-op within the utility industry doing this. We asked ourselves, ‘Does social media have a place in the utility industry?’ If we didn’t try to find out, I figured we weren’t doing our jobs.”



Mike Eggl

Mike Eggl, senior vice president of External Relations & Communications, says he knew from the start some of the social

media vehicles may fail. “My advice was, ‘Be cautious and know what we’re getting in to.’ As a department, we started diving in and learning together.”

At the same time...

- Sen. Barack Obama’s presidential campaign was getting lots of attention for using what’s been termed “social media” to its advantage. The candidate’s campaign team had

Continued ▶

Survey comments, answered

Answered by Mary Klecker-Green, supervisor of public and member communications

Blogs seem frivolous. How do they help me get my job done?

Blogs have come a long way from the very beginning. The perception was that blogs were frivolous, that they were just people’s rambling thoughts or opinions. Blogs have evolved in a serious way and have become an integral part of the way people receive information today. Media sometimes go to blogs now to seek a direct quote, instead of going to the person or getting them from a press release like they’ve done in the past. The blogosphere is a major player when it comes to public relations.

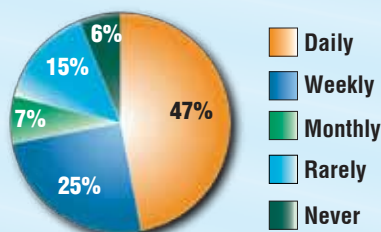
Blogs can communicate serious issues in a conversational way. At Basin Electric, we communicate a lot of technical, serious issues that are often hard to understand. Because a blog is written in a more conversational way, it is another way for employees, the public and members to digest information.

There are too many places to look for news.

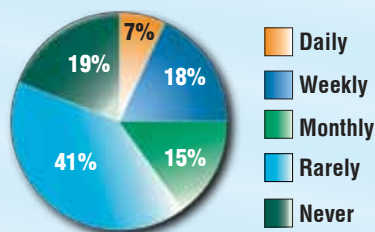
Part of our mission is to take the issues of the cooperative or the industry and communicate them through a variety of mediums, to appeal to a broad audience. The survey showed that our employees don’t have a lot of time to be looking at our news. Offering news through 140-character tweets, short blog entries and more in-depth features gives our audience a choice.

Employees

Other than for administrative purposes, how often do you typically visit Basin Electric’s Intranet?



How often do you typically visit www.basinelectric.com?



Tech talk Q&A

Answered by Tracie Bettenhausen,
Basin Electric staff writer

What is YouTube?



YouTube is a free online video streaming service that allows anyone to view and share videos that have been uploaded by members.

How we use it: Basin Electric started using YouTube in July 2008 as a way to augment the established Basin Electric video gallery. You can share YouTube videos easily with family and friends. Once we uploaded the first video, Basin Electric had its own YouTube channel, which has received about 60,000 views so far.

Basin Electric's channel:
<http://www.youtube.com/user/pc2drth>

What is Twitter?



Twitter is a free service that lets you keep in touch with people through the exchange of quick, frequent answers to one simple question:

What are you doing?

How we use it: Basin Electric started a Twitter account in January 2009. Links to our news releases, news briefs, stories about Basin Electric that are in the news, our blog entries, our YouTube videos – all of that is fed to Twitter through a free service called TwitterFeed. Because Twitter users can search for others with similar interests, we have many “followers” who had never heard of Basin Electric before, but are interested in what we’re doing. We use Twitter as a quick way to get the word out on stories before they’re published. Each “tweet” can only contain 140 characters or fewer, so it’s a way to get your Basin Electric news in little segments.

Basin Electric's Twitter feed:
http://twitter.com/Basin_Electric

several Twitter feeds, hundreds of thousands of Facebook friends, blogs for collecting money and promoting campaign stops, and the mobilization of a whole lot of engaged voters.

- In May 2009, the Vatican launched Pope2You.net. The site features links to Pope Benedict XVI's YouTube channel, an iPhone application called H₂Onews, and a Facebook application called “The Pope Meets You on Facebook.” The Vatican has also launched Vatican Radio, where you'll find recordings of Papal speeches and more.
- In July 2009, American Express unveiled OPENForum, a site designed to help small businesses grow. The site uses Twitter, blogs and a tool called ConnectodexSM to help businesses network.

Lee Aase, Mayo Clinic's manager of syndication and social media, says social media has given Mayo Clinic a way to react to late-breaking news much more quickly. For example, when the communications department learns one of the clinic's doctors will have a study published in the Journal of the American Medical Association that afternoon, Aase says they can have a blog post ready by then, which includes a video interview with the doctor.

“I think video is the most powerful tool we use,” Aase says. “With a little extra work, it enables us to unlock the tremendous knowledge we have in the brains of our doctors. Instead of them having just the face-to-face conversation they have with their patients, which they do every day, they can have the conversation with us and our camera, too, and reach thousands.”

Aase says social media tools are free. When it's pointed out that staff time to work with these tools isn't free, Aase answers, “You have the staff already. Are you going to give them the tools to enable them to be more productive and to help them communicate much more effectively?”

When Basin Electric's communications team dipped its toe in the water last summer, videos were uploaded to YouTube. Then just before Annual Meeting, Tracie Bettenhausen, staff writer, developed Basin Electric: The Flip Side, a blog. “We did this without promoting it or linking it anywhere because we just wanted it to be an experiment right away,” Klecker-Green says.

But staff started finding valuable ways to use the new tool. “The blog fits a niche we didn't have before. Sometimes we come across interesting employee stories that don't fit the criteria to

make it into Basin Today; with the blog, we can communicate these pieces of information that we haven't been able to before," Klecker-Green says. "Also, the blog brings a voice to our readers. They can comment on what they see, and that fosters an opportunity for two-way conversation."

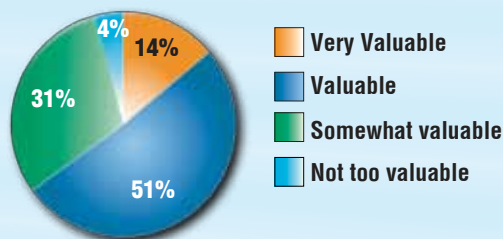
A Twitter account and a widget to aggregate all this information soon followed. "You can see – in one spot – how we're communicating all our messages across all these different mediums," Klecker-Green says. "With the widget, the work is already done. It pulls the information together with no extra work on our part."

Basin Electric's YouTube channel and Twitter account are linked with several member co-ops that are now employing social media tools, as well as the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association and members of U.S. Congress and state legislators.

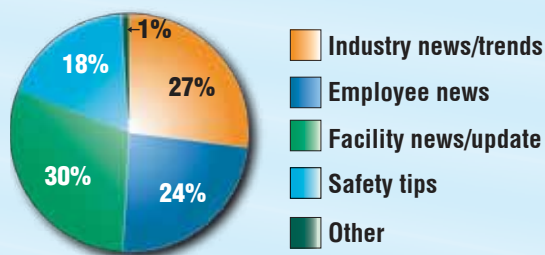
"I don't see social media replacing any of our traditional outlets, such as press releases, Basin Update and Basin Today," Eggl says. "The survey told us we have very high readership in those areas. But social media can help get the word out in more ways – to an audience we didn't reach before."

Future improvement: Employees/Members

How valuable is the information that is currently being communicated to you by Basin Electric?



What types of information do you feel Basin Electric should be communicating to you?



What is a blog?

"Blog" is short for "Web log." Blogs started as online journals; they've evolved into much more.

How we use it: Basin Electric started The Flip Side in October 2008. It's still evolving and growing. We use the blog to promote selected stories from Basin Update and Basin Today, and our video news stories. We consider it a good way to tell "the story behind the story." When we go on an interesting photo shoot, we can write about the members we met and what makes them unique. We promote our blog on Facebook as well. At the end of 2008, Bentley Systems posted a link to a Flip Side blog post about Dry Fork Station's engineering model award. That link was on Bentley's homepage for almost a month.

Basin Electric's blog: <http://basinelectric.wordpress.com>

What is Facebook?



Facebook helps you connect and share with the people in your life. You sign up, and find people you know to become "friends" with. You can upload pictures, videos, and update your status to let your "friends" know what you're up to.

How we use it: Basin Electric developed a Facebook "fan page" and "event page" to help promote the 2009 St. Baldrick's event. We uploaded photos, videos, sent out event reminders, and let followers know every time there was a story in the local media about the event. This year's St. Baldrick's event was hugely successful, raising about \$125,000.

Basin Electric page: Join Facebook and search Basin Electric.

What is a widget?

Not only a "social media" tool, a widget is also a major time saver. It aggregates all the different social media tools we use into one spot. We placed a widget on www.basinelectric.com in May 2009. About a month later, we started using the widget on Inside Basin. Before this miracle of a technology, we had to manually update several different Web sites when a story was new. Now, the widget does much of that automatically.

Basin Electric's widget:
http://www.basinelectric.com/News_Center