Website and Social Media Communication Strategy
Lowell National Historical Park

OVERALL PURPOSE

An important key to growing Lowell National Historical Park's audiences is the park's ability to create meaningful visitor experiences through web and social media. The website and social media are two digital tools that are tied and work best together—two sides of a coin. The website is structured and allows for complex and layered information. It is the vetted and authentic voice of the park, but is one-way communication. Social media thrives on interactivity from short, catchy hooks and eye-catching visuals. It provides the dynamic, participatory environment that is paramount to establishing and building communities, in both real and virtual worlds.

This *Web and Social Media Communication Strategy* is the guiding document for how Lowell NHP communicates via digital media. Strategic goals, objectives, and audiences have been aligned with specific digital media platforms to ensure consistent messaging and long-term sustainability, leading to more positive and meaningful visitor experiences.

WEBSITE STRATEGY

The National Park Service entered into the digital world slowly over time at the individual park level, and without service-wide strategically planning. When NPS online content was finally corralled and placed into a Content Management System (CMS), Lowell NHP fit their existing content into the new system, and has since made adaptations and changes on a page by page level, but without overall planning. The result is a web presence that falls short of creating excellent visitor experiences.

Before Lowell NHP began developing a social media strategy, the Digital Strategy Team decided that strategically analyzing and re-envisioning the website should be the first step in creating digital visitor experiences.

The Lowell NHP Digital Strategy Team acknowledges that the NPS-unifying but rigid framework of the CMS is both a strength and a weakness. Thus, the *website* portion of the *Web and Social Media Communication Strategy* provides direction for leveraging the strengths of the CMS. Many of these website goals are interconnected, but to ensure the detail and nuances desired, the strategy focuses on six distinct areas of concentration.

AUDIENCES

- *Primary Visit Trip planning*
  - First time visitors (trip-planners)
  - Families (trip-planning)
  - NPS savvy
- *Secondary Visit Trip Planning*
  - Local/Regional Travelers (from Boston metro area)
  - Event-goers (secondary visits)
- *Virtual visitor* – Seeking a digital experience, but not immediately planning on coming to the park
- *Information seekers*
  - Students – research, history
  - Teachers
  - Researchers of special topics & history buffs (genealogy, textiles, Kerouac)
  - Job seekers and Volunteers - looking to get involved
- *Stewards and Volunteers*– individuals and groups looking to get involved

ANALYSIS

Strengths

- NPS Level Branding and link from National NPS Page
- Consistent system
- Content for orientation and trip planning
- Current events – updated regularly
- Communication of economic availability (Park is free)
- Basic "story"
- Links to web2.0 available
- Nearby attractions links
- Technical abilities within staff

Weaknesses

- CMS provides rigid structure, which results in challenging navigation and limited adaptation. Finding links and locations = frustrated users and managers
- Limited mobile access
- Limited visual content
- Having the right/seasonal/accurate information for the right audience
- Inconsistent location info
- Limited interpretative content
- Lack of interactivity and ability to be dynamic
- Limited capacity of staff to maintain – currently part of one person's duties

STRATEGIC WEBSITE GOALS

1. The Lowell NHP website will create a foundation for digital communication and social media efforts.
2. Website will be logical to navigate with a well-planned structure fitting within the NPS CMS.
3. **Website will be current, dynamic, and will communicate park successes through a committed multi-divisional team**.
4. Website content will provide excellent information and orientation to meet all visitor trip planning needs.
5. Website will provide opportunities for emotional and intellectual connections to the park resources (i.e. interpretation) and promote stewardship through layered content, strong visuals and thoughtful placement of content.
6. Website will reach and welcome new and diverse audiences through strategic community outreach and engagement, public affairs and specialized content through partnerships and links.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

GOAL	*OBJECTIVES*
1. **The Lowell NHP website will create a foundation for digital communication and social media efforts.**	o Link all social media efforts (tweets, status updates, photos and videos) back to appropriate pages on the website: "…for more information". o Link content on the web to appropriate social media to promote interactivity and conversations. o Detail social media efforts on the website (links).
2. **Website will be logical to navigate with a well-planned structure fitting within the NPS CMS**	o Determine a consistent web map/system for content (rethink the structure we *can* change). o Develop a strategy for the new "Features" option (3-9 topics) to help us be more dynamic, promote current events (PA tool), and achieve smoother navigation. o Thoughtfully and strategically select content that best meets visitor and park needs – what and how much. o Leverage website analytics to inform park operations. - Establish internal and external evaluation mechanisms for website content. - Evaluate analytics to learn more about audiences, uses, and interest in content. o Incorporate already printed park publications and materials with what is available on the web (use developed content – bulletins, offerings, etc….).
3. **Website will be current, dynamic, and will communicate park successes through a committed multi-divisional team.**	o Use a team approach to plan, rebuild and maintain website to ensure content is meeting visitor needs. o Ensure balance and consistency among the multiple users/managers. o Bring together all works groups and encourage effective internal communications. o Consciously meet visitors' pre-, during-, and post-visit needs. o Actively communicate successes and current park initiative. o Find and include interpretive opportunities. o Promote park activities, community events and initiatives.

4. **Website content will provide excellent information and orientation to meet all visitor trip planning and onsite needs.**

- Devote resources to ensure being the primary source for fresh and accurate visitor trip planning information.
- Help visitors understand WHO and WHERE we are (Stop Looking, You are in it).
- Develop a FAQ section to strategically provide important links within site.
- Include well-made and easy to use maps.

5. **Website will provide opportunities for emotional and intellectual connections to the park resources (i.e. interpretation) and promote stewardship through layered content, strong visuals and thoughtful placement of content.**

- Draw in visitors from orientation pages and encourage more meaningful experiences through layered content and interpretive techniques.
- Use more videos and photography – "best of" gallery.
- Adapt the style of writing to ensure interpretive connections.
- Add complexity to our stories—introduce concepts and ask thought provoking questions to facilitate visitor relevance for the places/stories that are not so apparent…and be prepared for conversations and reactions.

6. **Website will reach and welcome new and diverse audiences through strategic community outreach and engagement, public affairs, and specialized content through partnerships and links.**

- Be inclusive – to all audiences.
- Actively welcome new audiences – and determine digital needs of these new audiences.
- Be deliberate, intentional, and *authentic*.
- Link to carefully chosen and appropriate partners and neighbors throughout the city who share our themes, stories and advance the Park's mission – Park is the City, City is the Park (policy?).
- Understand and evaluate what content already exists on the greater web about LOWE (wiki, partner sites, etc…).
- Display Lowell as a "Model City" and provide specific content related to:
  - Preservation and redevelopment
  - Education partnerships
  - Folk Festival and Summer Music Series
  - Cultural events (Folk Life) and special sections
  - Urban and historic park climate change
- Enter the world of web-based curator and exhibitions.
- Blog – create a voice for introducing provocative questions and welcoming new audiences to the park.

SOCIAL MEDIA STRATEGY

PURPOSE

Social media, such as Facebook, Flickr, Twitter and YouTube, helps build new audiences and strengthens engagement opportunities. Social media is most effective when used to provoke connections and inspire conversations, share valuable content with online communities, and invite community participation as shared content and voices. Lowell NHP will leverage the strengths of social media by crafting participatory social media campaigns that make park themes, events, initiatives and programs meaningful through a visitor experience that rivals in-person connections. Social media campaigns will deliberately leverage each platform's individual strengths to connect with local, regional, national, and international audiences through short, interpretive posts, catchy hooks, and eye catching visuals that invite participation.

STRATEGIC SOCIAL MEDIA GOALS

1. Raise awareness of park and park significance, increase park visitation and create meaningful digital visitor experiences.
2. Build virtual communities and invite participation by providing timely, relevant, and conversational content to reach broader audiences
3. Integrate with park website as a piece of the larger whole of the visitor experience

PLATFORM-SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES and AUDIENCES

Through thoughtful and strategic selection, content will be generated or repurposed to meet the goals and objectives outlined below.

FACEBOOK

With a growing number of diverse members, Facebook represents the best platform to develop meaningful dialogue with new and existing visitors. Planned social media campaigns will guide the selection of content contributed to Facebook. Thematic and provocative statements, questions, photos, park news, and behind-the-scenes glimpse into NPS operations will be posted and shared. Whenever possible, posts will be interpretive to provide intellectual and emotional connections, and offer opportunities for visitors to participate by responding, continuing the conversation, and engaging with NPS staff.

GOAL	*OBJECTIVES*
1. **Build a community and invite participation**	o Elicit conversation and participation with thematic, conversational language, and provocative questioning. *Audience: Virtual visitor*
	o Actively recruit seasonal staff, youth, SCIP, upcoming volunteer opportunities. *Audience: Youth, VIP, community*
2. **Provide a forum for sharing of user-generated content**	o Actively seek out post visit engagement by encouraging visitors to share Lowell related reflections of experiences at park, photos, etc. *Audience: Visitors, community*
3. **Share Lowell and NPS significances**	o Communicate program and project successes through high quality photos, video and audio. Image and video resources will also be hosted on and linked to Flickr. *Audience: Media, region/WASO, community*
	o Invite in-person park visitation by featuring upcoming signature and significant park events. *Audience: Partners, region/WASO, community*
	o Feature "Behind the Scenes" glimpse of NPS staff/volunteers (interns, youth, unusual jobs, recruitment/VIP messaging). *Audience: Community, youth, educators*
	o Share and be a convener of community stories. *Audience: Local/ regional community, virtual visitor*
	o Promote and participate in local, national, and international events that tie into relevant LOWE themes. *Audience: Virtual visitor*

FLICKR

Photographs, with appropriate metadata, will be the primary content shared by Lowell NHP on Flickr. All images taken by staff, volunteers, or contractors will include the photographers name, year photograph was taken, and a short interpretive description. Lowell's photo presence on Flickr will be intentionally selected and represent the park's "best of". Historical or past park event photos will be curated into sets that visually represent an interpretive theme.

GOAL	*OBJECTIVES*
1. **Raise the visibility of Lowell NHP through high quality images that communicate site significance and project and program successes**	o Strategically select Flickr sets and collections that visually communicate the depth and breadth of themes and special events *Audience: Community, region/WASO, media* o Provide links to Flickr sets in monthly superintendent reports, PR releases, WASO communications. *Audience: Media, region/WASO*
2. **Make high-quality images more accessible to interpretation staff to enhance the visitor experience**	o Highlight and post the highest quality images that are frequently used by staff, requested by visitors, and have the proper copyrights permissions *Audience: Internal staff, virtual visitor*
3. **Provide a forum for sharing of park and user-generated image content (to be implemented in phase 2 of strategy)**	o Actively seek out post-visit engagement by encouraging visitors to post and tag Lowell NHP in photos. Promote Flickr sharing on other social media site (Facebook, Twitter). *Audience: Visitors, community, local artist community* o Actively participate in Flickr conversation within groups and communities *Audience: Virtual visitors, visitors* o Actively build a robust contact list of engaged and active users in order to leverage sharing strengths of Flickr *Audience: Virtual visitor*

TWITTER

Twitter will primarily be used to share park announcements, urgent park news, and event reminders. In addition, Lowell NHP's Twitter content will consist of strategic and thematic 140 character micro-blog posts that allow for an intellectual and emotional connection. Thematic posts will direct visitors back to interpretive content on the park website.

GOAL	*OBJECTIVES*
1. **Harness the dynamics and immediacy as a communication tool to "get the word out" and share public information"**	o Tweet incidents and emergency updates. *Audience: Community, media*
	o Encourage visitation with event reminders. *Audience: Community, potential first time visitors, past visitors*
	o Tweet park announcements and news. *Audience: Community, stakeholders*
2. **Direct attention to other social media, websites, or elsewhere**	o Tweet themed and strategic links developed as part of a campaign. *Audience: Special interest, partners and their audiences, local community*
	o Post tweets that follow an event- "Live from Folk Fest..." *Audience: Attendees, partners/friend audiences, "virtual attendees"*
3. **Capitalize on "public affairs" nature of the Twitter community**	o Tune into Twitter "radio" for feedback loop and public pulse monitoring (what is being said about us, external awareness). *Audience: Followers, community*
	o Show gratitude and goodwill with post-event shout-outs. *Audience: Participants, partners- work with TIHC*

YOUTUBE

Park-produced videos and short films will be posted both on the official NPS website, as well as Lowell's YouTube channel. Content will communicate park programming and event successes, provide pre-trip visitor orientation, and short *Hidden History* interpretive films. All YouTube content will be accessible to audiences through open-captioning.

GOAL	*OBJECTIVES*
1. **Communicate successes of Lowell programs and projects**	o Create brief 30 second- 2 minute videos featuring projects, events, staff, innovations, interdivisional collaborations, and Call to Action accomplishments. *Audience: Greater NPS- region/WASO, other parks, media, community*
2. **Provide visually rich and conversational pre-trip orientation/introduction video**	o Create brief 30 second-2 minutes videos that orient the visitor (parking in relation to VC, Park is the City, City is the Park), highlights/overview of things to do. *Audience: Potential visitors, pre-visit*
3. **Provide brief videos on in-depth Lowell stories**	o Film 90-second "Hidden History" content. *Audience:* Virtual visitor, community

MAINTENANCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA PRESENCE

Success and sustainability of digital media efforts is dependent on the strategic selection of team members. Lowell NHP has established a multi-tiered and interdivisional team approach to meet park and visitor social media needs. Digital media will be a collateral duty assigned to staff from the divisions of interpretation, education, cultural resources, special events and the superintendent's office. Key digital media team roles include - the Strategy Team, a Digital Media Lead, Tech-specialists and Digital Media content generators (see appendix).

EVALUATION OF WEB AND SOCIAL MEDIA CAMPAIGNS

The evaluation of the use of social media to achieve desired engagement outcomes will be continuous. A comparative evaluation approach will be used to determine the strengths and weaknesses of individual web and social media campaigns. Evaluation will be used to help answer questions such as:

- What types of content resonated most with online visitors?
- What types of content resulted in the greatest number of impressions? (page views, conversations, shares, likes, favorites, reposting, re-tweets, @mentions, incorporation into blog posting, pins, re-pins)
- Do impressions indicate that meaning was derived from digital media campaign efforts?
- Which platforms were most active during campaign?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of cross-referencing social media efforts during campaign?
- Can an increase in park program attendance or media attention be directly correlated to campaign efforts?
- Can an increase in website hits be directly correlated to social media efforts? Which parts of the website saw the greatest increase in hits, aside from the page directly referenced in social media post?
- How can insights gleaned be used to inform future digital media campaigns?

Quantitative data will be collected using platform specific analytic tools. Analytics will be pulled and analyzed monthly. Analytics will identify trends, gage strategy success, and inform revisions to the *Web and Social Media Communication Strategy.* Trends will be shared with the greater Park Operations and Digital Media team on a monthly basis initially. Monthly analytics will be compiled and shared quarterly once substantial, once progress towards strategy goals have been achieved.

Qualitative data will also be collected, compiled, and shared with Lowell's management team, contributing to the feedback loop between visitors and Lowell NHP. Screen shots of posts, comments, and conversation threads will be compiled and shared. Initially qualitative information will be shared monthly, tapering to quarterly as the strategy further implemented.

SIGNATURES

Prepared by

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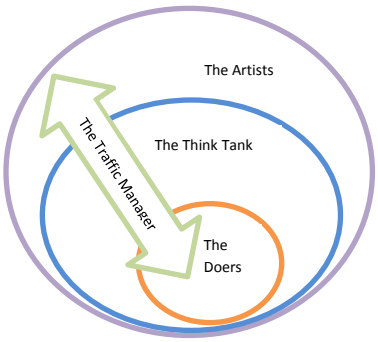
Approved by

Celeste Bernardo, Superintendent — Date: 5-8-13

APPENDIX

Roles of Digital Media Team



Digital Media Lead – aka Traffic Manager

- Implements website/social media strategy
- Facilitates and leads/instigates/initiates work
- Communicates need to move information
- Assigns work to contributors (aka The Artists)
- Sets timelines
- Has technical skills/expertise
- Has access to equipment and knowledge

Tech Specialists

- Creates and communicates platform parameters that are easily understood by all tiers of web team
- Edits content for appropriate platform
- Publishes web content
- Maintains collaborative working relationship with contributors/writers
- Communicates feedback and analytics

Content Contributors

- Writers
- Photographers
- Videography
- Develop Creative concepts
- Graphic/infographic designer

Digital Media Strategy Team

- Evaluates progress towards web and social media strategy goals and objectives
- Collaborates to strategically develop campaigns
- Sets LOWE standards of digital media content
- Broadly defines framework for creation and sharing of digital content