

STAFF REPORT

TO: Communications Subcommittee
FROM: Communications Adviser
DATE: 23 September 2010
REFERENCE: C797
SUBJECT: Newslines – First Principles Review Progress Report RFN10-09-21

PURPOSE

To provide the Communications Subcommittee with a progress report on key results of the initial survey within the review of Newsline.

SUMMARY

The initial stage of the Newsline review was managed as a questionnaire in the 17 September issue of the publication.

At the time of the report being written in excess of 250 responses had been received. In lieu of a comprehensive report on the survey's results and further discussion with Community Boards and Associations this report will summarise the key findings so far.

Of the responses received, 75% of respondents were positive or neutral regarding Newsline's role, whereas 25% believed it should be stopped immediately.

In the relatively small number of responses there is a clear indication that readers would like to see more hard news regarding Council activity, particularly around infrastructure and decision-making.

The purpose and cost of Newsline is also high on the interest list. This information will be communicated as we move through the investigation phase and more than likely within the summary of results to be published in Newsline.

The question on the move to an online version provided evenly split responses reflecting the spread of broadband versus dial up, those with high-speed connectivity being in favour of an online version.

RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Communications Subcommittee notes the report on the Newsline First Principles Review Progress.

Chris Choat
Communications Advisor

Appendix 1

Background notes to Newsline and Newsline Updates

Newsline

Background

Newsline started as a quarterly four page two colour tabloid newsletter in 1991 at the request of Council. Council was looking for:

- i. a way to inform residents and ratepayers of Council decisions and news.
- ii. a way to develop a sense of community right across the District Council considered a newsletter was a part of the communication process necessary to help build morale and foster a sense of belonging.

Newsline began publication on a two monthly basis in 1994 as more Council news and information was being generated and the importance of talking to/with residents and ratepayers was taken on board. In 1998 the newsletter went monthly and the format was also changed to an A4 magazine-style as this was easier to manage when reading.

In 2004 Council discussed a 'Community Information Network' approach to its communication with residents and ratepayers as a way to better manage the information residents and ratepayers received and to counter misinformation going out via commercial media.

The Community Information Network involved:

- Reducing the frequency and cost of Newsline Updates.
- Increasing the frequency of Newsline to fortnightly and incorporating public notices – based on a model from Manukau City Council.
- Re-developing Council's online services to incorporate, among other things, online payments and an online magazine-style news and notice section.

In 2006, adopting the 'Community Information Network' approach to its public communications, Council withdrew Newsline Updates from the Nelson Mail and published only in community newspapers.

The cost of running updates and public notice advertising in the Mail, its low circulation in the Tasman District (around 9,000) was the major factor in this move.

The cost savings made by withdrawing Newsline Updates and all public notice advertising in the Nelson Mail were channelled into a fortnightly edition of Newsline which included a public notice section designed to become Council's primary vehicle for publishing of both public and statutory notices.

In 2010 Newsline is witnessing reasonable success. NRB figures show Newsline is seen or read by around 92% of the 95% of residents and ratepayers who 'see,

read or hear' Council information. The number of people who use it as their main source of Council information is 63%. This tops the list of all media by a significant amount.

These figures, while remarkable in the very competitive war for resident's attention, do not identify the efficacy of Newsline. For example, does Newsline enhance their relationship with the Council?

Add to this concern that over 2009 and 2010 an increasing number of public notices have 'slipped' back into the Nelson Mail eroding the cost savings originally used to launch the fortnightly editions of Newsline.

While the shift of advertising affects the cost effectiveness of Newsline, it also places at risk the view that Newsline is the one place to find the information relevant to Tasman residents.

Delivery

In 2008 Newsline was taken out of its 'to The Householder' envelope and delivered by independent contractors as a flat, folded to A5 document which reduced delivery costs (no folding by printer required, no stuffing of envelopes required; no envelopes to be bought or printed) and saved time giving a tighter turn around (NZ Post changed its requirements adding four extra days to delivery times) which was better suited the publication of statutory notices.

As well as being distributed to every householder within the District, Newsline is also available from selected outlets and is mailed to non residential ratepayers.

Costs and Advertising

Continued evaluation ensures Newsline remains a cost effective and efficient means of communication. Current estimates put production, printing and delivery at around 29-49 cents per copy per issue with a fortnightly print run of 19,000 copies.

The inclusion of advertising has reduced significantly its production costs.

- In the 12 issues May 2000 to April 2001, \$8,205.00 (gross) was billed out (\$683 per issue)
- In 24 issues November 2006 to October 2007, \$28,279 (gross) was billed out (\$1,178 per issue, nett approximately \$905)
- In 24 issues published in 2009 the gross advertising sales were \$36,000 (\$1,500 per issue, nett approximately \$1,200)
- In the 24 issues published in 2010, with current contracts in place, gross sales will be \$46,000. (\$1,916 per issue, nett approximately \$1,533)
- In the 24 issues to be published in 2011, with current contracts in place, gross sales will be \$56,000. (\$2,233 per issue, nett approximately \$1,866)

Measure of success

The NRB survey in 1996 showed 60% of Tasman residents saw or read Newsline.

In 2005 NRB figures showed 94% of residents were aware of Council information published in the media. Of this number 95% either saw or read Newsline while 54% said it was their main source of information about Council. This compared with around 37% for whom newspapers was their main source of Council information.

In 2010, 95% of people said they either saw, read or heard information published by Council. Of these;

92% saw, read or heard information via Newsline

75% saw, read or heard information via newspapers

59% saw, read or heard information via information sent with Rates Demands

56% saw, read or heard information via Council's 10 Year Plan

49% saw, read or heard information via Annual Plan

43% saw, read or heard information via radio adverts

38% saw, read or heard information via brochure racks in Council offices/libraries

26% saw, read or heard information via Council's website.

In 2010 residents and ratepayers main source of Council information was obtained from:

Newsline	63%
Newspapers (Updates/public notices)	27%
Personal contact	2%
Council's website	1% (86% of residents can access the internet)
Other people/hearsay	1%
Radio	2%
Public meetings	0%

In 2010 72% of residents and ratepayers thought Council supplied enough information, 14% thought Council did not supply enough information and 9% thought council supplied more than enough information.

In 2010 a Council survey aimed at measuring the effectiveness and future direction of Newsline will be conducted. This will take the form of:

- a questionnaire in Newsline (this occurred in September) and on Council's website
- workshops conducted with ratepayer organisations, community boards and community councils

Newsline Updates

Background

Started in 1995 in the Nelson Mail. It collected all Council's public notice advertising under one banner so that it could be found easily by residents and ratepayers looking for Council notices. It was initially published three times a week then reduced to twice weekly on Wednesdays and Saturdays.

In 1999 Newsline Update was also published in community newspapers as these were delivered to all letterboxes and provided a far wider reach for Council notices.

Withdrawn from the Nelson Mail in 2006 and published only in Community Newspapers.

Has been compromised in the last 18 months by an increasing use by Council staff of the Nelson Mail again for the publishing of public notices.

With the expansion of Newsline public notice section there may be a case for dropping Newsline Updates altogether. While there would be undoubted cost savings for the communications budget, there may also be a corresponding loss of community goodwill as Updates carry more community notices than we currently fit into Newsline.

Measure of Success

In the NRB survey Newsline Updates comes under 'Council advertising in newspapers' and 'Newspapers. There is no separate question for Newsline updates and public notice advertising.

In 2009 75% of the 95% of residents and ratepayers who 'saw, read or heard' Council information did so via 'Council advertisements' in newspapers. For 35% of residents and ratepayers, newspapers were their main source of Council information.

Appendix 2

Draft Survey Form

Newsline celebrates its 20th anniversary next year in June. It began as a simple newsletter and has evolved over the years to become the major channel of communication through which Council delivers its news, community and statutory notices, feature stories, human interest stories and promotes its services and events across the whole District.

Along with Council's website, it is now the place where you will find all of Council's statutory, public and community notices. It has become a respected news magazine in its own right that is seen or read by 92% of the District's residents.

Now, through this survey, we would like your help to make it even more effective. Please answer the questions, cut, fold and tape the page and drop into the mail. Remember, all completed questionnaires to be received by 30 September

Possible questions

i) current awareness and usefulness of Newsline

1. Do you receive Newsline in your letter box or post box. (Yes/No)
2. Do you read Newsline when you receive it? (Tick one)
 - cover to cover
 - selected stories
 - none of it
3. Is Newsline published
 - too frequently
 - not frequently enough
 - frequently enough (tick one)

(ii) Newsline's place in and contribution to, local communities

4. Does Newsline cover enough of what is happening in your local community?
5. Does Newsline detract from you local community newsletter? Yes/No
6. Could Newsline work more closely with your local newsletter to share news, notices and stories?

(iii) relevance of Newsline content

7. Do you find the contents of Newsline informative?
 - Yes
 - No (tick one)

8. Which area of Council's services and activities are you most interested in? (Tick up to four)

- | | |
|---------------------------------|------------------------|
| ---- Roads & footpaths | ---- Parks & Reserves |
| ---- Reticulated Water services | ---- Recreation |
| ---- Irrigation water services | ---- Environment |
| ---- Air quality | ---- Building |
| ---- Forestry | ---- Resource Consents |
| ---- Dogs | ---- Rivers |

9. What regular content not already appearing, would you like to see in Newsline?
(List)

(iv) Newsline's place and development in Councils future community information network.

10. Do you have access to the internet? (Yes/No)

- Broadband
- Dial up

11. Would you read an online version of Newsline?

12. Would you prefer:

- an online version
- a printed version delivered to your letterbox (tick one)

13. Which of these online facilities do you use:

- Facebook
- Twitter
- RSS Feeds
- You Tube