



The City of Cupertino, California, Takes a Budgeting Education Road Less Followed

By Timothy Martin

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Earlier this year, the Cupertino, California, city council directed staff to create the city's first-ever community budget workshop in order to educate residents about the budget, the budget process, and how they could get involved. The city's budget team went to work, brainstorming ways to highlight and promote the upcoming "Budget and Bites" workshop. As planning began, one thing was clear: Cupertino staff didn't want to take the traditional route. So they didn't — and here's the story to prove it (#PicOrItDoesntCount). The team began brainstorming ways to show important aspects of the budget process, through social media — not just a post here or there, but a social media takeover!

"Since a social media takeover had never been done in the city before,

there weren't many expectations of how we were going to make the budget fun and relevant. With that, we went into this campaign thinking we were going to do great," said Kristina Alfaro, director of administrative services.

THE PLAN

Staff spent the next several weeks crafting posts for the takeover, mainly for the city's Facebook and Instagram accounts. "We wanted posts that would be relevant for our viewers to know, including major revenue sources (sales, property, and lodging taxes) as well as major expenditures. We then brainstormed how we wanted to creatively present the information," said Toni Oasay-Anderson, management analyst.

The idea was to prepare seven days worth of content on the city's social

What Is a Social Media Takeover?

According to Sprout Social, "A social media takeover is essentially a form of influencer marketing. It's kind of like dipping your toes into the pool but not completely committing to it. It's often used to increase brand exposure, give some entertainment to the audience, and provide interesting content. Because it has a start and end time, it can give you a taste of what a large-scale influencer program might do for your company."

media channels that were being used for the campaign. “We knew we wanted this to be fun. We wanted to throw out the general convention of what is expected from a finance/budget team, including spreadsheets, line and bar graphs, etc. In the social media world, that could be called #boring! The key was making information relevant to the average person,” Alfaro said.

To help, staff looked at current trending topics in an effort to creatively connect those topics to the budget. After putting ideas on paper, staff met with the city’s public affairs team, which oversees the city’s social media account, to discuss ideas. Staff then created a timeline, working back from the budget workshop date of April 18, 2019.

To help visualize what they wanted and to determine who would do what, staff used the Planner feature in Microsoft Teams (a communication and collaboration platform) to organize details, create to-do tasks, and produce a checklist to make sure the planned posts and the workshop logistics were on track. They also double-checked the information they were going to present to citizens on social media. Numbers change on a regular basis in government finance, and having the most up-to-date figures was an important part of the process, along with making sure nothing confidential was being released.

THE POSTS

Since creativity was a top priority, each post had its own theme — and this social takeover didn’t shy away from taking chances. Post topics included a “*The Office* Intro Spoof,” a video introducing the community to the budget



team the way the NBC sitcom *The Office* introduced its characters. In another video, staff went behind the scenes to show how a budget proposal gets approved. This video's theme involved an overly dramatic reenactment of popular singing shows like *American Idol* and *The Voice*. Other posts referenced "National High Five Day" and movies like *the Avengers* and *Mean Girls*.

What does that have to do with budgeting? The campaign was intended to connected current trends on social with building. *Avengers Endgame* was released in April 2019, and "If you think about it, the budget team is like the movie. We all have our own special super powers," Alfaro said. "In the end, we join forces and come together to balance the budget." A social media takeover video explained exactly that.

As for *Mean Girls*, it just so happened that the takeover was happening during the 15-year anniversary of the movie, so people were talking about it on social media. The team wanted to grab fans' attention with a Cupertino spin. "We decided to use lines from the movie to help get our message across, Alfaro said. "We dressed the budget up in pink and used references like 'the limit does not exist,' 'fetch,' and on 'Wednesdays we wear pink.'"

THE RESULTS

Staff analyzed the results when the takeover wrapped up, and the num-

bers were impressive. "All social media views, reactions, and comments collectively have far exceeded anything the city had ever seen on its social media pages. This really provided a new way to engage residents," Colleen Lettire, the city's former community outreach specialist, said.

What Is an Impression?

An impression is the number of times your post/content is displayed on a timeline.

THE RESPONSE

The public's response to social media is immediate, and in this case, it was overwhelmingly positive. "Most of the comments revolved around how much they appreciated our transparency efforts, how much they liked our

new social media posts, and some 'wow, cool' comments. And we also received some questions. Additionally, there were some really fun interactions around some of our pop culture posts (i.e., *Game of Thrones*). The 'The Budget is Coming' post was pretty epic, with references to 'House Cupertino,' 'Master of Coin,' 'Golden Company,' and 'Knights of the Vale.' The Budget Team found a way to creatively tie these back to the budget or to other city information such as how to pay your library fines. We were able to turn some social media comments into positive and informative interactions with the community," Alfaro said.

THE TAKEOVER TAKEAWAY

"Sometimes social media can be viewed as an outlet where people hide behind their phones and computers, and post unpleasant comments about things they don't like or agree with," Alfaro said. But the takeover

Social Takeover Overview, By the Numbers

7 Days

23 Posts

11 Staff Members (Six of the 11 staff did the majority of the work involved for the social media takeover, and the other five spent about 30 minutes each.)

Facebook

- All Facebook posts had a reach of 23,461 (more than 1,000 per post).
- There were 640 Facebook reactions (comments, shares, likes, etc.).
- There were more than 2,301 post clicks. (Not only were users viewing the content, they were diving deeper to see more.)

Instagram

- Instagram posts generated 15,941 impressions.
- There were 383 actual Instagram profile visits.
- Each Instagram post reached an average 397 accounts.

What Is Reach?

Social Media reach is the total number of people who see your content.

Involving Young People

A key factor in the success of Cupertino's social media takeover and "Budget and Bites" community workshop was its ability to engage with young people. Budget Team members attended Youth Activity Board and Teen Commission meetings to promote the city's first budget community workshop and social media efforts. The teenagers who got involved were excited to engage with the budget team attended the workshop and engaged with the city on social media as well. Most of the workshop attendees were teenagers from Cupertino, and including them in the city's social media posts was key in attracting them to the workshop.

opened the city's eyes to the possibilities social media offers. "Several people commented on how they noticed and appreciated that our city was stepping up its social media game. The whole social media takeover campaign and the budget workshop itself exceeded our expectations," Lettire said.

This is a budget team that's proud of its transparency of the city's finances. Other departments are taking notice as well, and they're interested in doing a similar social media takeover to engage the community in the work that they do. The city's Public Works Department has already decided to do a takeover of its own. ■

TIMOTHY MARTIN is the senior manager for member engagement at GFOA.

Want more information on the City of Cupertino social media takeover?

- Contact BudgetTeam@cupertino.org.
- Find Cupertino on Social Media.
- **Facebook:** City of Cupertino — City Hall
- **Instagram:** [@cityofcupertino](https://www.instagram.com/cityofcupertino)
- **Twitter:** [@cityofcupertino](https://twitter.com/cityofcupertino)

Want to plan a takeover of your own, but don't know how to get started? Contact Timothy Martin, GFOA's senior manager of member engagement, at tmartin@gfoa.org.

