



DAILY LIBERAL MEDIA INQUIRY - DRC NEWS

From: Lynn Rayner – The Daily Liberal
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Subject: Media inquiry - DRC News

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Responses attributed to: Andrew Parsons, Manager Corporate Image and Communications

1. What sort of stories will you be promoting? Will it all be just associated with what council is doing?

This video program is designed for the purpose of sharing information, produced as a by-product of Council's existing day-to-day media and communications work, ie. from material gathered in response to Council related media enquiries, communications activities, marketing and or advertising. Its primary area includes the City of Dubbo, Wellington and surrounding villages.

Video stories covered in DRC News relate to Council operations, projects and services, and stories where Council is working with community, community groups, business or organisations to deliver outcomes for the community.

2. Why do you feel this is a 'void' that needs to be filled and why do you feel it is the council's responsibility to fill this?

Simple research will show that Council has already complained to broadcasters and government regarding the withdrawal of WIN News from the region in 2019 - including the closure of the Orange newsroom and Dubbo satellite office. The same simple search would also reveal Council's disappointment and concern regarding the closure of the Dubbo office and withdrawal of Nine News Regional's staff from the region amid the pandemic emergency in 2020.

Aside from losing locally based staff and diversity in local TV news production, the region has also lost a newspaper with the Wellington Times -- Wellington's own dedicated paper -- being withdrawn from circulation. This is also something which has greatly concerned Council.

Council is using a free, subscription and paywall-free, video platform to provide news about Council. DRC News makes value-add use of video, digital and editorial material already produced for media use/consumption, communications (internal/external), marketing and advertising which would otherwise be placed -- ad hoc -- on social or other mainstream channels. DRC News is using that material to fill a video platform void; video widely recognised globally -- and delivered by Facebook, Instagram and Youtube -- as a ready and easy form for an audience to receive and absorb information.

3. How many people watched the first episode? Did they watch the full episode?

To date, noting the program went live on Friday 15 January, DRC News has been four times more popular than any post (so far of January) via Council's Facebook page.

Over 3,500 organic (unpaid) views of episode 1, with a reach 7,100 (and growing) people via Facebook (the main delivery platform for this video product). Of that, a little over 10 per cent watched the full 23 minute episode in one sitting – start to end. Numbers via the Council website were significantly lower – completely expected as this is a product primarily for Facebook.

As this was the first episode it was intended to be longer. Subsequent episodes will be significantly shorter.

4. What is the budget to produce this service? And if it is part of the communications team budget - what is that budget?

DRC News, given it's a by-product of Council's day-to-day media and communications work, sits within the existing Corporate Image and Communications operating budget.

The equipment, facilities and staff used are in-house and are Council owned and operated assets. Outside of existing day-to-day media and communications work, episode 1 costs included:

- One off payment of \$94.50 for video/audio production elements
- \$148.50 for the hire of the TV screen that makes the set – adjacent

to the presenter

- Episode 1 budget \$243.00 - \$148.50 per fortnight if we continue to hire the TV.

For example, this is significantly cheaper than advertising the text/content included in DRC News' ticker/crawl located on the bottom of the screen, the same information that would be advertised in the Council Column, Shopper and other paid editorial space per fortnight with Daily Liberal which costs the communications budget \$1,600 per fortnight.

5. Was this something ratepayers wanted? And do you feel they are happy to pay for it?

Not including existing budgeted day-to-day operational costs, Episode 1 cost \$243.00 for the fortnight - \$148.50 per fortnight thereafter if we continue to hire the TV used as the DRC News set.

In the period November 2019 to November 2020, Council spent \$83,000 in advertising with the Daily Liberal to convey public information, public notices and key Council announcements; the same type of content and information DRC News will share – in conjunction with advertised content... unless ratepayers would prefer the cheaper alternative?

6. How long does it take to produce a show?

Not including the time taken to produce content as part of daily responses to media enquiries, communications activities, marketing and or advertising within the fortnight period, the initial episode took around 5 hours to produce. Shorter episodes will take less time.

7. Does council think this will dissuade media outlets from covering council topics or issues?

Council has a record of the times it has specifically been asked by TV news to provide content because they are unable to attend events. This has included producing 36 video news releases (VNRs) for local TV news in the past 52 weeks.

Similarly, Council also regularly provides high-resolution images to newspapers and online news services, and audio news releases for radio (usually the by-product of taking audio from video). Council will continue to produce these as part of the overall suite of media products and services made/provided -- free of charge and free of corporate watermark or branding -- to regional, national and overseas media outlets.

Council continues to produce response to media enquiries, communications activities, marketing and or advertising regardless of DRC News' existence.

DRC News is a 100 per cent video platform made using existing material. At the end of the day, it is an editorial decision of media alone in regard to independent, fair and balanced reporting, and what they will/won't cover in regards to Council activities. It is not for Council to dissuade the editorial decision making of mainstream media; that is 100 per cent their choice and their choice alone.

8. It's called DRC News, which links it to journalism, but key to journalism is providing independent, fair and balanced coverage. Does the council make this claim for its DRC News coverage?

Semantics aside, this free, subscription and paywall-free, video program is about Council news - what Council is doing, what community groups, individuals and agencies are doing with Council. It does not purport to be, or identify as a traditional 'news' or 'current affairs' program.

There is 60+ years' media and journalism experience, including senior journalists, executives and chiefs of staff from regional, metro and overseas television, radio and newspaper newsrooms working in Council's Corporate Image and Communications team – a sign of the times and changes in our media industry. Council makes no claim other than DRC News is a factually produced video product and public record of Council's community-based activities and operations. Information used in its production is publicly available and publicly accountable.

9. What do you say to those who say the news services produced by councils (such as those in Queensland) are just 'propaganda masquerading as news'. Do you feel this is different?

This this free, subscription and paywall-free, video program is about Council news; what Council is doing, what community groups, individuals and agencies are doing with Council. Viewers and critics alike can make their own interpretation of the publicly available facts provided in this video product.

As this video program evolves, as promoted in episode 1, community groups who are supported by Council, work with Council and use Council facilities are encouraged to put forward stories/story ideas that highlight their work. Similarly, events and organisers sponsored by Council are also encouraged to contribute, so too agencies who work with Council to provide services and positive outcomes for the community, eg.

emergency services, welfare groups, non-government organisations, corporate/business and government.

Councils (NGOs, charities, corporates, larger government agencies, including police and emergency services) throughout Australia, and overseas, are either producing or looking at producing similar products and services, with several medium and larger Councils producing short-form video content 'news updates' already. DRC has already been approached since DRC News was released by Councils in the Greater Sydney Area, regional NSW, Victoria and Queensland, and the City of Cape Town in South Africa with questions/advice on how to deliver a similar product. All of these organisations have identified a similar need... a video based storytelling product of what their Council is doing. It remains their 'editorial decision' on style and policies for their specific services/products etc., DRC News' style is a factually produced free, subscription and paywall-free, video product and public record of Council's community-based activities and operations.

Unlike one larger Council in Queensland, Bundaberg Council, who took the initiative to develop their own community-driven and Council supported on-line newspaper - with proven public success and popularity, DRC News remains a video platform. While both are completely different platforms (one is an 'online newspaper' the other a video product) and have completely different audiences, both Bundaberg's successful online newspaper product and DRC News share the same synergy of: encouraging community group input - about the community, for the community and by the community.

10. There were a number of negative comments on the first episode's Facebook post that were removed. Why were they

removed? What is the council's policy on removing these comments, and is this publically available?

Some simple research would find Council's Facebook Comments Policy in the 'about' section, where all Facebook pages host similar information.

To assist you, that policy states:

Welcome to the Facebook page of Dubbo Regional Council.

The page is monitored Monday - Friday, 9am - 5pm. It is not a Customer Service Centre.

For urgent matters please call (02) 6801 4000. To report an issue please submit an online form at dubbo.nsw.gov.au or email council@dubbo.nsw.gov.au. This will ensure your query is recorded, responded to in a timely manner, and traceable.

COMMENTS POLICY

This page is intended for our community to remain up-to-date with Council and news from across the region. We welcome comments and suggestions. All users of Facebook have the right to remove unwanted content posted by others on their page, and we reserve the right to moderate comments and remove any that are considered to be:

- *Personally attacking another commenter or staff*
- *Shouting - that means they're written in ALL CAPS*
- *Advertising or spam*

- *Containing expletives, or images or videos containing nudity, sexual acts or excessive violence*
- *Defamatory, obscene, offensive, pornographic, vulgar, profane, indecent or otherwise unlawful*
- *Racially or religiously vilifying any person, or inciting hatred or violence, or likely to insult, offend or humiliate others based on race, religion, ethnicity, gender, age, sexual orientation or any physical or mental disability*
- *False, misleading or deceptive*
- *Completely off topic or repetitive content.*

Users who breach this policy will be advised by private message and their comment or post will be deleted. Users who repeatedly breach this policy will be blocked.

If you have any concerns about content posted on this page, please contact us via a Facebook message

The comments of one individual, who has previously been cautioned -- in writing -- regarding the comments policy, were removed because they breached this policy, and common decency, by being offensive, irrelevant and defamatory.

It's episode 1, it's new, it's never been done or offered before in this region - for this region. It needs to establish its identity and build its audience base. Not expecting some sort of negative feedback, scepticism from sections of the community, and media, would be naïve on our part. All feedback - irrespective of tone or intent, will always be welcome.

ENDS

Last Edited: 25 Jan 2021