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Introduction
Our process

This brand storybook is written using the combined knowledge gained from previous steps in our city identity and branding process:

01 **Place DNA™**: Uncovering Ottawa’s core identity, which is a collection of its defining attributes

02 **Brand framework**: Beginning to express Ottawa’s Place DNA™ by defining the city’s brand story, brand promise and brand essence

03 **Brand themes**: Identifying core ideas and concepts that will complete the foundation for Ottawa’s stories, resonate with its people and remain true to its identity (DNA)

04 **Brand storybook**: Defining guidelines for implementing the new brand framework and themes through communication and experiences
Identity and DNA

What makes this city what it truly is? Ottawa evokes a distinct sense of place — a complex blend of ingredients that coexist in a single location. Elements of identity include geography, economy, culture, history, climate and people. Citizens can reveal a city’s character as they experience it, which helps to define the city’s Place DNA™.

Place DNA™ is a city’s identity. It is the foundation of a city brand and the primary influence for everything the city develops or communicates. It is the truth of a place: it’s who that place really is. A city that ignores its DNA risks losing brand authenticity and credibility. It is likely to build urban experiences that are disconnected from its identity while its city marketing makes promises it can’t fulfill. Many places struggle with this. Place DNA™ is the way to ensure that our city’s brand voice is a trusted expression of the people and their desires.
Ottawa’s Place DNA™
Ottawa’s DNA

As the country’s capital, part of our identity is inextricably linked with our nation’s government. But this does not solely define us. We’re ready to tell our story and share our pride for this special city we call home. Ottawa is a city that has been shaped by the connections it forges between people and nature and across time.

DNA statement

Home first to the people of the Algonquin Anishinabe Nation, Ottawa has been shaped by the history of Canada. Situated at the intersection of three rivers and two cities, we bring together the past and the future, city and nature, English, French and Indigenous communities. We are the confluence of peoples and cultures that shaped Canada and, as its capital, we connect our citizens with the rest of the country and the world.

The people of Ottawa are proud of their city. We enjoy a slower pace of life in our intimate city with its unique heritage, stately architecture and surrounding nature. We are developing our city with care in order to protect and add to the holistic story of Canada while maintaining our own identity. We have a vision for our future; now it’s time to actualize it.
Ottawa’s DNA

The Place DNA™ process revealed the gaps between Ottawa’s identity and perceptions.

**Mind the gaps, please.**

Many people do not know enough about Canada’s capital and do not see it as a unique, authentic place.

Ottawans are proud of their city and see themselves as urbanites, but people in the outside world do not see Ottawa as a vibrant, urban city. They sometimes perceive it as boring.

In the French-speaking world, Ottawa struggles to spread awareness that its citizens are bilingual.

---

**Environment**

Three rivers, beautiful natural parks
Ottawa is a natural meeting point at the confluence of three rivers.

**Infrastructure**

Museums, Historic Rideau Canal, Parliament Hill
Ottawa’s infrastructure has shaped the city and is recognized by both its local community and visitors.

**Society**

Authentic, agreeable, proud
Ottawans see their city as truly urban, but the outside world is unaware of this vibrancy and perceives Ottawa as boring.
Ottawa’s brand
The brand framework

Our identity is not a choice; it’s a representation of who we are. Our brand, however, is a choice; it’s how we actively present our identity to the world. By grounding our brand in our Place DNA™, we will present ourselves in a genuine way that attracts the right citizen, visitor, student or business.

A city’s brand is truly the sum of its parts. City marketers cannot create a brand; instead, the city brand is shaped by the people who live there, the experiences that happen within it and the stories those experiences create. Every interaction with a place affects how a person perceives its brand, so it is vital to understand what makes Ottawa unique and ensure that the brand flows naturally from its identity. The following brand framework for Ottawa is based on Ottawa’s Place DNA™ defined above.

A brand is a living thing and is perceived differently by every person. A family with young children from France who visits in the winter will see Ottawa differently than a student from Winnipeg who considers Ottawa a place to study or a prospective business from the U.S. that contemplates opening a new branch. This means that Ottawa’s brand framework should serve as a template to deepen the experience and communication for each defined audience group.

Building a true city brand is a collective effort. Instead of leaving Ottawa’s brand to be owned and executed exclusively by a single organization, the brand framework and corresponding storybook should empower each entity to emphasize its unique attributes and contribute to a city-wide story. This document has been created to help guide, inspire and unite the city of Ottawa, partners, individuals and businesses in a common vision that strengthens the city’s brand. The brand serves as the compass that guides the communications and experience delivery.

The purpose of the brand framework is to:

- **01**: Provide direction for all communication (within the city’s control).
- **02**: Provide direction and align stakeholders in communication and storytelling.
- **03**: Act as a guide for destination development initiatives.
- **04**: Benchmark and measure ongoing brand performance.
Heritage
Ottawa’s heritage runs deep. As the capital of Canada, you can feel and see Ottawa’s rich history the moment you step into the city. Indigenous and European roots are woven into museums, eclectic and cultural festivals and Victorian architecture. This is a place that connects Canada’s past and the present.

Riverland
Because of its relatively mild climate, Ottawa is surrounded by a natural wonderland year round. Located on the Canadian Shield, dense forests abound, while its deep river valleys serve as a picturesque backdrop to a vast landscape of rolling hills and vibrantly green flat plains.

Events
Bringing people together from all walks of life is Ottawa’s specialty. Our city is the gathering place for people to connect and share in something meaningful. From tulips to celebrating Canadian winter, its many festivals and events showcase Ottawa’s spirit while also uniting various cultures.

Quintessential Canada
Past and present; urban and nature; Indigenous, French and English culture all come together where three rivers converge. The country’s heritage lives on through the city’s famous landmarks like the Rideau Canal, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The country’s presence is alive within the passionate Canadian citizens that call this place home. Ottawa’s history and diversity make it an embodiment of Canadian culture.

Beautiful
Ottawa’s elegant appearance marks the balance between city and nature. Our city lies at the edge of nature. The natural landscape is one of vibrant green riverlands and forest. The city’s landscape is stately, charming and comfortable. Together, they combine to create a beautiful place that is intimate and inviting.

Intimate
Ottawa is an eclectic urban centre, but our small-town vibe gives our city an intimate feel that is rare to find in a national capital. Ottawa is metropolitan but maintains a warm and friendly nature. Its citizens have the camaraderie of a small village; this permeates the entire city, creating a warm welcome to visitors.

Proud
Ottawans have a unique sense of pride unlike any other Canadian city. We are proud to live in Canada’s capital. We are also proud of our city — and our country — for being a place with an open-minded attitude, neighbourly values and natural splendour.

Lively
If Canada is a mosaic, then Ottawa is the tile that completes the picture. We are home to a diverse range of cultures from all around the world and because of that, there is never a dull moment. From a thriving art and music scene to a wide-ranging culinary community, Ottawa is as interesting as it is engaging.
Ottawa’s brand story

The moment you arrive in Ottawa, you will feel connected to Canada. In a place that unites the past and the present, this historic city calls on you to uncover the richness and complexity of a unique nation.

Tap into the spirit of Canada by learning the story of its origins and future. As a city, Ottawa connects three rivers and its sister city Gatineau. As a capital, Ottawa unites the country of Canada. Engage with the diverse cultures and peoples of Ottawa, who are unified by their pride for their beautiful city with an intimate vibe.

This easily accessible city is a place where you can be yourself, experience the heart of Canada, raft through the city and visit Parliament. Immerse yourself in a city that will refresh you with its welcoming nature and an invitation to come together.

Ottawa is where you can connect with Canada’s soul.

Canada in one city.

Ottawa's promise

Ottawa’s essence
04

Ottawa’s brand themes
Four brand themes

These four themes flow from Ottawa’s brand and Place DNA™, which was developed through extensive research. The themes, whether used individually or in combination with each other, should be found at the heart of all stories told by city storytellers.

**Ottawa’s legacy**
- The future gifted from the present
- Parliament shaping policy and life for all Canadians, present and future
- New frontiers in academics & technology

**Connect with Canada**
- Canada’s past, present & future
- Urban and nature
- Connecting people, geography, politics, provinces and languages

**Joie de vivre**
- Quality of life
- A personal and intimate city
- Time taken for celebration and vibrant events
- A lively urban experience

**Canada’s village**
- Unity in diversity
- Acceptance and freedom of individuality
- A caring community
Connect with Canada

At the heart of Ottawa’s brand is the truth which defines this place and its very essence: Canada in one city.

All cities within Canada are part of the fabric of the country, but not all cities are an embodiment of the country itself. In this regard, Ottawa is distinct. In Ottawa, you can connect with Canada at any moment in time — not only with the present moment, but with what has been and is yet to come. Ottawa is home to the hallowed ground of Canada’s past; a pivotal aspect of the country’s very beginning; a nation’s memory preserved and given the spark of life by those who uncover it through Ottawa’s museums, galleries, Parliament and monuments.

Canada’s present is alive in the very streets of the city and the hearts of the citizens. It is where you can connect with the people who live by and bring Canadian values to life. Indigenous, French, English and other people from all corners of the world have created a diverse society that is quintessentially Canadian — one that is rooted in diversity, acceptance, warmth and welcome. On the horizon is the future of a city and of a country. Ottawa offers the opportunity to connect with the intangible — to see beyond what is to what could be.

When writing content that incorporates “Connect with Canada,” consider the following thought starters:

- Brainstorm how your organization demonstrates strong Canadian connections. Do you have a long heritage as a Canadian organization? Are you located near other iconic Canadian businesses, locations or places in Ottawa?
- How are other places, cities and provinces represented in Ottawa through the lens of your organization? Think about food, traditions, customs, language, personalities, MPs, etc. Think about how your organization reflects Canada’s national cultures and experiences.
- Incorporate a wide variety of perspectives in your content (i.e., an Indigenous perspective, a French perspective and other stories from diverse people groups who represent Canada).
- Use images that illustrate the diversity of Canada’s population.
- Inspire local pride when developing content. Ask more questions so people can share their pride and love of their city; this works well to start meaningful conversations. Share statistics, articles or staff testimonials about why Ottawa is a great place to live, study and work to help build pride.
- Heritage isn’t limited to people. When writing content, think of how your organization aligns with Canada’s outdoor heritage and other experiences tied to our unique landscapes.
- Your tone of voice should be warm and welcoming, reflecting the warm and hospitable nature Canada is known for around the world.
Canada’s village

Ottawa is where Canada comes together. “Kanata,” now Canada, translates to “village”. A village is a community where customs, culture and convention are common — a place of comfort and safety where the people within form a different version of family — different but the same, with a familiar kind of comfort, but on a city scale.

During the winter, a day may be spent skating the canal followed by hot chocolate or, in the summer, anyone may join in doing yoga on the footsteps of Parliament, the most peaceful of practices on the hallowed grounds of a nation’s political power. This city has not lost its village soul. Ottawa welcomes everyone — individuals visiting for the first time, students who spend their semesters here or couples who have called this city home for the past 10 years — with a friendliness unique to G7 capitals that wield a similar level of economic and political might. A village houses a diversity in perspectives and people but is united in a foundation of respect, acceptance and recognized value of all individuals.

We’re a G7 capital with a community and village feel.

- Think about Ottawa as though it is a small town. What community-focused activities and experiences can your organization speak about in your storytelling?
- Use images that inspire people to get outside, meet each other and explore the world beyond their doorstep.
- In the absence of a specific event or activity, how can your organization support neighbours meeting neighbours? Maybe it’s through a Meetup group, through a happy hour you announce on LinkedIn or even through supporting other online communities to develop and grow.
- Remember that communities can gather offline and online. Cultivate your online community by engaging with them regularly, being available to answer questions and facilitate connections. Don’t focus on follower numbers. Focus on the quality of interactions and the quality of people following you.
- Speak about family-friendly activities, safety and other themes that showcase Ottawa as a community-minded city where people take care of each other.
Joie de vivre

Joie de vivre is a philosophy that translates to the “cheerful enjoyment of life; an exultation of spirit.” It can be the joy of conversation, eating, travel, celebration — the joy of living. Ottawans love to enjoy life — to live better — to find and pursue happiness in the place they call home and all the people within it.

They take great pleasure in the beauty of their city and its intimacy, the seasons as they turn throughout the year, a delicious meal shared with friends, vibrant events that bring the people and city to life and the nature that surrounds them. Ottawans offer those new to the city, or just visiting, an open invitation to join them and welcome into their experience – the joy of living.

Leverage the engagement from your audience to shape the story of Ottawa.

- Brainstorm with your team members about what makes them happy to live in Ottawa. When do they feel like they're living “the good life?” Is it the food, the easy access to the outdoors, the engaging conversations they have with others? Think of how the topics they bring up can be woven through your content.
- Brainstorm with your team the best things to do in Ottawa during all four seasons. Does your target audience know about these experiences? If not, communicate Ottawa's unique activities from your team's perspective.
- Research events that you think your target audience would be interested to experience. How can you add value to the conversation around these events and provide value to your audience? Are you going to have a presence at any large events? Let people know so that they can come and meet you in real life.
- Joie de vivre presents plentiful opportunities for you to switch from broadcast to engagement. Don’t tell people Ottawa is lovely; ask them why they love it. Where are their favourite places to go? What are their favourite events? Where is the best ice cream in the city?
- Level up WHY you’re asking these questions by looking out for hashtag holidays. A quick online search will lead you to calendars that lay out social media holidays throughout the year. Select the ones that are relevant to your business and use them as conversation starters with your audience. For example, your business is in the restaurant industry and it’s #NationalMargaritaDay. Ask your audience to let you know their favourite recipes or tell you which margarita on your menu is their favourite.
- Share timely photos that showcase the joy found in taking spontaneous trips within the city. Instagram stories could be a great platform for this.
Ottawa’s legacy

Ottawa’s legacy is enduring — an unbroken cycle without end. The people of the past laid the foundation for Ottawa’s future, just as the people of the future inevitably become part of Ottawa’s past, and so the circle continues.

The cityscape from both a built and a societal perspective reflects Ottawa’s many legacies, coexisting together, with each generation adding a new layer to the tapestry. It is a city that has long been home to changemakers, pioneers and those who can see beyond what is to what could be. Since the beginning, Ottawans have looked ahead to ensure that they were setting their place and its people up for success. The Rideau Canal is a gift of economic prosperity and competitive advantage given from the past to the future. The Parliament buildings are the very embodiment of a country’s and capital’s legacy as shaped by the minds, vision and leaders of the nation. From policy, economy and trade to culture, education, healthcare and the environment, fundamental aspects of Canada are galvanized in Ottawa.

Utilize Ottawa’s history and stories of the past to tell your audience how this forms the future for the destination.

■ Every generation adds a new layer to Ottawa’s history. How does the past, present and future of your organization tie into this? How are you making an impact on Ottawa’s future?
■ How can you recognize the First Nations culture and heritage through your content?
■ Include key dates or events in Ottawa’s history.
■ Find creative ways to weave personal stories throughout your content; highlight key personalities in your past, historic images or stories of successes from the past.
■ Ask for your online community’s input. Let them play a role in small decisions for your business (e.g., a new menu item, an idea about your outdoor patio layout or anything else that would allow them to feel involved.)
■ Are new changes in store for your organization? Announce them with pride in your online content and find ways to use these opportunities to start a conversation with your audience.
05

Audience profile

Visitor
Charlotte Zhang, 47

A visitor to Ottawa from Calgary; will be joined by her husband for the Tulip Festival.

- She’s been to Ottawa for business pre-pandemic but didn’t see much beyond the board room and a few good meals her company paid for.
- She saw some stories about the 2021 Virtual Tulip Festival on Ottawa Tourism’s Instagram account. She enjoyed watching the live videos and shared a few clips with her husband, who loves working in their garden at home.
- She also has a few relatives who fought in both world wars and wants to learn more about their experiences. But overall, she just wants a fun weekend away with her husband.
- Between the kids being at school and the pandemic, she hasn’t had the chance to take a trip with her husband in a long time - this is her chance, and she’s putting a lot of effort into planning it.
- She loves trips that are a good balance between exploration and relaxing.
- After being restricted indoors for much of the last two years, outdoor activities that connect her to wide-open spaces and nature are essential.
- On the flip side, she’s also embraced the return of the restaurant scene and loves a good meal (and cocktail).
- In the world, she’s unhappy to see so much food going to waste and hear news about refugees not being accepted in other countries. She is happy that Canada is welcoming to many cultures.
- In the future, she’s worried that she will be working well beyond her planned retirement age or that she won’t have enough money for retirement.

Who are you speaking to?
Know your audience: Create a persona

- What is this person’s name?
- What do they do for work?
- How old are they?
- Where do they live and with whom?
- What do they want? Why are they listening to you?
- What are positive things in this person’s life?
- What opportunities excite them?
- What hopes do they have for the future?
- What things are going on in the world that make them unhappy?
- What things might irritate them day to day?
- What fears do they have for the future?
Visitor profile

Psychographics

Believe
- Value experiences over things.
- Value health and safety (key considerations when planning).
- They are responsible travellers (consider the impact they have on the destination).

Need
- Flexible, convenient and personalized travel experiences. For example, changing flights or bookings through an app.
- Intentionally seeking out less crowded destinations, which may be related to concerns about COVID-19.
- More personalized information. 57% of travellers feel that destinations should tailor their information based on personal preferences or past behaviours.

Like
- Experiencing a local’s way of life.
- Off-peak travel continues to grow in popularity.

Desire
- A balanced need for growth with responsible and sustainable development.
- Experiences. Google’s data shows that 36% of consumers are willing to pay more for these personalized experiences.

Media consumption

Internet
- Eighty-six percent of people – and 92 percent of the Gen Z generation - have researched a destination after being inspired by other users’ posts online.
- Destinations need to participate in building platforms for the visitor experience.

Word of mouth
- Consumers are heavily influenced by the people in their circles.
- 92% of consumers trust peer recommendations more than advertisements.
- 52% of consumers say they’ve made plans to visit a specific destination based on image or video they saw from friends, family or peers on social media — up from 43 percent in 2017.

Traditional
- Continued move away from traditional to niche media outlets. The exception is reliance on traditional outlets and official resources for pandemic-related news.

Digital
- Travellers typically visit 22 websites in 9.5 web sessions when researching a trip.
- Over 1 in 3 travellers across countries are interested in using digital assistants to research or book travel.

Best practices
- Copenhagen, Denmark, is a good example of a city that connects the visitor experience with the quality of life of its residents.
- The Hague, Netherlands excels in the meeting industry by embracing storytelling and being strongly aligned with the brand and value proposition of the city.
- Berlin, Germany, is an outstanding example of a city where tourism plays a significant role as the cultural champion of a destination.
- Tel Aviv, Israel, is a strong example of a place where leadership in technology influences tourism and vice versa.
Visitor trends in key markets

**Insight**

- Pent up demand for travel, but travellers also have concerns, primarily related to health and safety in a potential destination.
- Confidence in travel continues to grow. The most significant barrier to travel within Canada for those who feel safe travelling is cost.
- Leisure trips and visiting family and friends will drive travel in 2021 and beyond. However, business and conference-related travel is lagging.
- Key markets are outdoors focused, with COVID-19 likely enhancing the popularity of outdoor activities such as hiking/walking in nature, natural attractions, and nature parks.
- Reimagined consumers: people have stopped to think about their purpose and what brands they buy - they are not spending less; they are spending differently.

**Implication**

- Illustrating that health and safety measures are in place and a destination is safe to visit are key messages that need to be communicated to encourage key markets to travel to Ottawa.
- Travel deals and illustrating the value of a vacation to Ottawa may motivate this group to travel more.
- Visiting family and friends aligns with our “Joie de vivre” theme. Talk up the celebratory aspect of reuniting with loved ones in Ottawa.
- Outdoor experiences and heritage align with our “Connect with Canada” theme. Communicating the availability of popular outdoor activities and events in uncrowded settings will capture the attention of potential travellers.
- Communicate your values as a business - what steps are you taking to be more sustainable and responsible? How are you contributing to the local community?

Communications checklist

Applying the equity and inclusion lens to all communications

- Have we considered all possible target audiences? Who might be at risk of exclusion?
- What specific communication strategies are needed to reach them? (e.g., working with community leaders, bulletin boards, community newspapers, social media)
- Do our communication materials get out to the community organizations and networks that serve the diverse populations we need to reach? Do we check periodically to ensure materials are stocked and being used?
- How do the messages we are communicating foster inclusion, respect and equity?
- Are there concepts or terms that may be culturally specific and need to be changed to make them more accessible? (e.g., kiosk/canteen, washroom/restroom, runners/sneakers)

- Is the medium easily accessible and understood by the full diversity of our target audience? (e.g., plain language, accessible formats, graphics, multiple languages, both online and print, voicemail)
- Have we considered what populations will be missed by only using certain methods? (e.g., online or social media communications) What other approaches might we use?
- Have we considered if there is a budget or alternative resources for translation services?
- Do images represent the full diversity of employees or residents?
  - Do they capture the diversity within specific communities of people?
  - Will the people portrayed in the images relate to and feel included in the way they are represented?
- Is everyone portrayed in positive images that promote equity and break stereotypes? Consider: who is active and passive, who is at the centre, who is serving and being served.

REMINDER
For more information, please refer to the City of Ottawa’s Equity and Inclusion Lens Handbook
Visitor audience – content examples

C’est Bon Cooking
Cooking for couples

833 likes
ottawatourism
C’est Bon Cooking
Looking to brush up on your cooking skills, spice up date night or learn some tasty new recipes from a professional chef? Then @cestbon_ottawa is your spot! 🌽ORA
Known for their local neighbourhood food tours, @cestbon_ottawa also offers private cooking classes, virtual cooking classes, with in-person group cooking classes set to resume in the fall.
Tag a foodie (or someone who needs help in the kitchen!) who needs to check this out!

Fall views from Meech lake in Gatineau Park🍁😍🍁
Planning a hike in the capital region this month? Keep up to date on fall colours in the capital region with the National Capital Commission’s handy fall colour meter🕊️
https://bit.ly/3HH0dUc

833 likes
cdntulipfest
This week’s #ThrowbackThursday falls on Remembrance Day. 🕊️ It’s a fitting combination. It is a perfect day to look back, reflect, and appreciate those who came before and what they did for us. This is one of the #CdnTulipFest’s favourite archival photos. These Canadian soldiers are celebrating the liberation of the Netherlands with Dutch locals in 1945 – they even have some tulips with them. It’s photos like this that remind us of why Canadian men and women sacrificed as they did. The joy in these faces, knowing they are at last free and safe, means everything. 🙏

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Brand storytelling
The power of storytelling

Stories are at the heart of a city brand. They directly affect a city’s reputation. Storytelling has a powerful influence on what people think about a place, how much affinity they feel, how desirable it is and how memorable their experiences are. As perceptions change, so does behaviour. Stories that resonate can literally shape cities.

A story can transform the physical products of a city into an experience. A city’s most important stories reinforce remarkable experiences: those that make the place feel special. Storytelling has the power to make memories by helping people find a sense of connection. The most remarkable stories are easily shared. For example, the city of Paris is more than a collection of streets, buildings and the Seine river. Over time, it has become known as a city of romance and of light. Likewise, Venice contains more than ancient stones; it’s known as a beautiful but decaying city that evokes nostalgia.

Stories like these are fundamental to human communication. They help us make sense of our lives. Stories activate parts of our brains that data points do not, which makes them more memorable. This is why cultures using oral histories were able to transmit ideas through generations of people for thousands of years before literacy and writing. Stories are that powerful.

Stories are also memorable because they build an emotional bond. You can see the impact everywhere: a superhero film premiere draws a long line-up, a high school reunion brings up long-forgotten memories between friends or a couple travels to the same holiday destination year after year. These stories endure because they are meaningful and emotionally resonant.

Stories that people tell
The word-of-mouth storytelling that affects a city’s brand.

Experiences
The things people do and the things that happen to them within the city.

These three elements are the catalysts for a city’s experiences:

Place
The setting of the story, which is the city.

Visitor, citizen, student, business
The characters that interact with the city or destination.

Change or challenge
The personal growth or emotional impact on the person interacting with the place.

Theme
The central idea or concept that encompasses the distinct aspects a place is about.
Creating and curating effective content

Always focus on your audience when creating content or finding content made by someone in your community. This way, you will have a better chance of sharing content that is engaging and relevant.

Ask yourself this question before you publish: Who is my intended audience, and what makes this content valuable to them? This checklist can help.

Effective content should tick one or more of these boxes:

- Inspires interest/intrigue, motivates action and travel; video/photo albums
- Grabs attention; stops people from scrolling and focuses them immediately
- Entertains; shows remarkable visuals
- Informs; provides local tips/insider information or event dates and time of year to visit
- Adds value; provides exclusive offers or deals/demonstrates value in terms of money and time

Keep these five areas in mind when you are creating your own content or curating content from your community to share on your channels.

How do you know if it’s working?

Measure the effectiveness of your content to learn which posts resonate best with your audience on each channel. Focus on engagement statistics (likes/reactions, comments and shares) for each piece of content you post. Set realistic goals for each channel. This will motivate you to keep producing and sharing content that boosts your overall business objectives.
Digital channel guide

This section covers the full range of tools available, plus best practice tips per platform. Use it as a content creation guide and inspiration to try something new.

### Instagram content

**Image posts**
Create content that resonates best with your audience and as measured by engagement. Adjust your efforts based on what you learn from Instagram Insights data. The better your content, the more likely people will follow you and interact. Poor quality or inconsistent or uninteresting posts cannot compete.

**Instagram Stories**
Use Instagram Stories for candid moments, destination tips, and trip planning. As these videos are only available to view for 24 hours after posting, they are the perfect avenue to show your personality and share time-sensitive information. Post behind-the-scenes content, make announcements, share special offers or events, or show off your surroundings on a beautiful or remarkable day.

**Instagram Stories Highlights**
If you wish to extend the life of select Instagram Stories, save them as Highlights to sit between your main feed and your bio. When deciding how to organize your Highlights, think of it in terms of your website navigation bar. Ask yourself what information is most relevant and useful. Answer FAQs about how to get to your destination, top things to see and do, and trip inspiration.

**Video**
Like Facebook, Instagram’s feed runs on an algorithm favouring some posts over others. As of mid-2021, that algorithm favours video content — a direct push to compete with TikTok.

**Video posts**
Use this space to post high-quality video up to 1 minute in length. As the video will appear on your IG homepage, make sure to select an appealing cover photo that complements your account’s look and feel. Video posts are still a great space to feature user-generated content from locals and visitors, too.

**Video Stories**
Post videos between 1 second and 15 seconds, or cut a longer video into 15-second segments. It’s a safe space to show your personality and try something creative and a little bit different. Just make sure it reflects your brand guidelines.

**Instagram Live**
Stream live for a few seconds and up to 60 minutes. The live video feature in Stories is a great space to show off beautiful nature scenes and interesting events or conduct interviews with locals, experts, and influencers.

**Reels**
Reels are 15- to 30-second clips set to music. Think of Reels as a space to have a little bit of fun and reflect Ottawa’s personality. Reels are also the perfect space to share informative content.

**IGTV**
60 seconds to 15 minutes for smaller accounts; 60 seconds to 60 minutes for larger accounts. Like Instagram Stories, IGTV content doesn’t always need to be polished. Use it to share how-to’s and tutorials, promote events and stakeholder products, and more.

### Instagram best practices

- **Post quality content.** Accounts with a curated, cohesive-looking feed attract more followers. Stick to content themes and ensure your photos have a similar look and feel.
- **Follow a consistent style.** Use scheduling tools such as Planoly or Later to plan out the look and feel of your Instagram feed. Formatting captions consistently will also help you create a distinct and recognizable style.
- **Make it valuable.** Always consider the value of what you are posting. Create content that resonates best with your Instagram audience.
- **Keep your caption short and get to the point.** Most Instagram post captions are cut off after the first 80 characters, so lead with what you need to say in the first sentence to make people curious enough to press the “more” button.
Engage with others to grow your network. Like, comment and follow other accounts posting and talking about similar experiences. Avoid comments that are generic and overused such as “Great capture!” Genuine comments resonate best.

Be consistent. Try to post regularly, so your followers know what to expect. The goal is to ensure that people see and engage with your content.

Keep your profile current. Choose an identifiable profile picture and provide a clear description in the bio with your business address, hashtag, and website link.

Use hashtags wisely. Only use hashtags that are related to your product or to Ottawa. Always include the #MyOttawa hashtag, for example. For a more impactful caption, post the majority of your hashtags in the first comment.

Tag your geo-location. This is one more opportunity to engage with people and help new followers find your content.

Maximize the mobile screen. Post square or vertical videos and photos for best results. People can only post on Instagram via mobile and rarely access the platform with desktops.

Facebook best practices

Make it valuable. Always ask yourself why your post will be beneficial to your followers. Then, create content that resonates best with your Facebook audience.

Be consistent. Try to post around a regular schedule so your followers know what to expect. The goal is to ensure people see and engage with your content.

Share stories and conversation pieces, not sales pitches.

Be human. Use a friendly, conversational tone. Respond as soon as you can and be helpful.

Share unique, diverse content. Then, choose who sees it through targeting.

Share user-generated content. This encourages fans to share their own stories.

Unless you own the content, always credit photos and videos.

Facebook content

Image posts
Be consistent with your photo captions and use the same writing format from post to post. This will help people better connect with your brand.

Video posts
Upload directly to Facebook. A day or two after posting, check your page’s analytics. Facebook provides total views, length of views, and audience retention. Learn from these insights to constantly improve your video offerings.

Facebook Live
Use this feature to make announcements, share events with a wider audience, or show off your surroundings. Facebook Live is also a great platform to conduct interviews with experts or host trivia sessions with your audience.

Link posts
Add a link to your post to generate a link preview that includes an image and the title. Facebook includes link clicks in its News Feed algorithm and rewards high-traffic links by showing them to more users.

Twitter

Add images and video. Tweets with images receive 150% more retweets than tweets without images (source). Use attention-grabbing photos to make your posts stand out as users scroll past.

Use hashtags and keywords. Hashtags make it easier to find tweets that relate to the same topic. Add one or two relevant hashtags to your messages. Then take the time to explore those conversations and interact with other users. Identify keywords associated with your organization or with Ottawa and listen to what people are saying through them. Potential hashtags: #MyOttawa #OttawasOwn #DiscoverON #ExploreCanada

Keep Twitter content original. Twitter requires a different posting style than Facebook, so linking the two together (i.e., posting the same content on both channels by connecting them) does more harm than good.

Post frequently. If possible, share one or two tweets per weekday (along with a couple of retweets and as many replies as necessary). Get in the habit of scheduling a number of posts per month. This can help you keep a consistent frequency when paired with live posts.
Think of your Twitter account as a customer service center. Check your mentions frequently and respond to any interaction. If someone retweets a post, take time to thank them. You will build a positive impression when followers see you interacting with others.

Know your audience. Use Twitter’s audience insights to understand your followers’ demographic profile and passion points. This information can help you create new content themes and ideas.

Linkedin

At its core, LinkedIn is a social media platform. The most important thing to remember is to provide content that is valuable to your audience. Share original content and content from other sources, try posting videos, and use the poll functionality to engage the audience. Adding suitable hashtags will also help your content become more discoverable.

TikTok

TikTok is a short-form video-sharing app with 1 billion monthly active users. While it is popular with Gen Z, it has not developed a wider following. Use it for casual videos relevant to that market, but do not join unless you have a strong reason to. Here are some key facts:

- Roughly 41% of all users are aged between 18 and 24.
- TikTok content is designed for consumers looking for micro-entertainment and a distraction for a few minutes throughout the day.
- Content created on the platform is not meant to be polished, videos are often raw and overlaid with popular songs.

Pinterest

In 2021, Pinterest introduced Idea Pins, a multi-page video format that lets creators publish high-quality content directly to Pinterest. The new feature includes a suite of publishing tools, including editing tools, and detailed pages for instructions or ingredients. It also comes with a newly created content policy designed to keep Pinterest a positive and inspiring place.
Eight takeaways for great online content

These principles will help your content connect with your audience, no matter the platform.

1. Make it valuable
Valuable content can take many forms. Value can be insider information. It can offer a deal or a prize. It can be a distraction from a busy day. There is opportunity to provide value everywhere. As writer and speaker Jay Baer says, "Make your marketing so useful people would pay for it."

2. Make it easy to share
Content that is difficult to share will not be shared. This includes off-brand content, heavily branded content, low-quality content and uncommon formats.

3. Speak like a human
Don’t speak like a company. Use simple, personable language. Wordy, dry or sales-oriented copy tends to underperform on social media. Instead, add humour, ask questions and include "you" and "I" where possible. This will help your audience feel that they are having a real conversation.

4. Respond to questions
Answer questions promptly and directly with relevant information. Make sure that links take people to the correct pages and contain useful information.

5. Share other people's stories
This is a great way to build trust in your brand. By sharing real stories from real people, you can reassure your audience that others like them have become involved with your organization and had a great experience. User-generated content (UGC) can come from Ottawa’s citizens and visitors alike.

6. Be creative
When taking photos or shooting video, look for new and interesting angles. Think about the stories that are unique to you and to Ottawa and how you can align them with the Ottawa brand.

7. Be consistent
Without consistency, people are not likely to come back to your channels. Being consistent means keeping a similar rhythm in your posting schedule from day to day and week to week, sticking to a visual style that may use the same filters on photos and using captions that follow a consistent format per channel.

8. Promote your content
Asking people to share your content can help it reach people well beyond your own networks. You can create a list of bloggers and influencers connected to your organization and its interests and reach out to them with relevant content.

Example message:
“Hi @travelinfluencer, we know you write about Ottawa’s museums and galleries. We thought this photo of our new exhibit might be relevant to you. Feel free to mention this if it fits. :)

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The value of user-generated content

User-generated content (UGC) can build trust among your audience members by showing them how others are also enjoying what Ottawa has to offer. Effective UGC, reused with permission, has been shown to generate engagement that is almost seven times higher than brand content (source).

Follow these steps for sourcing UGC:

First, find content to re-share.
Begin with outreach to find content from new audiences. Doing this regularly will help to grow your community. To understand how it works in more detail, we have shared the process for Instagram below.

Then, ask permission to re-share content.
It is always best practice to ask the creator before you re-share images, videos or stories. It is the polite thing to do, but it also builds goodwill and creates a connection between you and the person who owns the content. Consider a variation of the below copy depending on the social platform and always wait for a “yes” reply before sharing the content.

SUGGESTED COPY:
"Hi @InsertUserHandle, we love this photo! Would you mind if we shared it on our own Instagram account with credit to you?"

Outreach process for Instagram

1. Use the search bar on Instagram to input a relevant term. Look at the results under “places” and “tags.” “Places” will show you all of the content that is geo-tagged from a certain location, while “tags” will give you a list of relevant hashtags around your search term. Think beyond official hashtags to all the combinations that people might use. You can tell how active each tag is by reading the number of posts beside each one.

2. Keep a list of commonly used location tags and hashtags. Check these regularly.

3. In the mobile app, use the “save” function (it appears as a flag at the bottom right of each post) to “organize” content into collections.

4. Use your organization’s account to message people in a friendly tone, asking permission to share their content with credit to them. This is also a good way to gain engaged followers as you are personally introducing them to your account.

Example: @InsertUserHandle, what a beautiful photo of Elk Falls! Would you mind if we shared this on our Instagram account with credit to you?

5. On the mobile Instagram app, keep checking saved posts for replies and permissions.

6. Once permission has been granted, use a downloading service like www.dredown.com or www.web.stagram.com to save images.

BONUS TIP:
High-resolution images will get more engagement, so avoid taking a screenshot of a user’s content to share it onto your channels. The original version reflects the effort taken by the original owner and will always get better results.
Best practices for visual content

Elements of a great photo

It takes less than a second for someone to judge whether or not to stop scrolling and view your content. With this in mind, here are some principles for selecting and creating a good photo. Images with these elements tend to earn higher-than-average engagement levels on social media.

VANISHING POINTS
Vanishing points create a sense of depth and are aesthetically pleasing. Photo ideas include roads and sidewalks, hiking trails leading into the distance, shorelines and rivers.

REFLECTIONS
Reflecting surfaces often capture people’s attention as they scroll through their Facebook or Instagram feeds. Consider running a photo competition on your channels and asking your community to submit their best reflection photos.

Credit: @ottawa_waterandlight
(Note that this photo was used on Ottawa’s Instagram.)
Credit: @theplanetd
(Note that this photo was used on Ottawa’s Instagram.)
LEADING THE EYE
Ideally, the people in your photos should be looking toward where you want your followers to look. Viewers tend to follow the gaze of the subject in a photo. Engagement increases when the person in the photo is looking out at a landscape or feature rather than at another human or directly at the camera.

AUTHENTICITY
People connect to photos that appear to be taken in a candid moment or that show a realistic scene. Avoid over-staged, over-edited images and stereotypical scenes. Authenticity is always best.

SHOWING PEOPLE
Including people in your photos helps members of your audience picture themselves taking part in the same experience. Avoid sharing photos of empty venues or landscapes and instead use images with people.
Photos that show iconic scenes from a different perspective are well received. Think of ways to encourage your community to share varying views of the same landmark or location.
Patterns are visually pleasing and stand out in a Facebook or Instagram feed. Images that capture the interruption of a pattern also perform well (e.g., a road or river cutting through the trees in a contrasting colour).

One dominant colour

Photos using one dominant colour perform particularly well on social media.
Elements of a great video

Online video is consumed more than any other medium (source). Understand the elements of a great piece of footage on social media to make sure that your time creating video content is well spent.

**Keep it short**

The shorter the video, the more views to completion it will receive. The ideal runtime for Facebook is less than 10–15 seconds and 15–30 seconds for Instagram. You risk losing your audience during a longer video. Review your page’s retention statistics to see when your audience stops watching. This will help you adjust the length of your videos according to how your unique audience views them.

**Compelling with or without sound**

A great video grabs the attention of the audience with or without sound. Assume that people are not viewing with the sound on. If people speak, add subtitles. Minimal text overlaid during transitions can help guide viewers visually.

**Authentic and emotive**

Compelling video triggers an emotional reaction. Content that is informative, funny, inspirational, joyful or heartfelt will be watched and shared more than a video without a strong emotional pull. Videos that contain authentic stories and real moments often do this well.

**Originality**

Videos that show scenes from an unusual perspective are well received. For example, underwater and aerial footage can help grab the audience’s attention in the important first few seconds of a video.