



Press Release

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For immediate release

First ever Civic Voice awards winners announced

Last Saturday saw the winners of the Civic Voice awards for the best websites and newsletters by civic societies announced at the first ever Civic Voice AGM, which was held in Peterborough.

Winner of the best website category was Brighton Society (www.brighton-society.org.uk), who saw off competition from Wakefield and Ripon Civic Societies. The best newsletter award went to Cambridge Past, Present and Future (www.issuu.com/civic_voice/docs/cambridge), beating other shortlisted entries from the societies in Birmingham and Wakefield.

The awards were sponsored and judged by communications agency, Forster, who specialise in developing communications for positive social change. Amanda Powell Smith, Director at Forster said:

“We were impressed by the standard of entries from civic societies from across the country, particularly considering that so much of this work is done by volunteers. These groups represent a fantastic example of how communities are working together to make the most of their local area and run important local campaigns and initiatives. Whether it’s the Conservatives Big Society or Labour’s Good Society, these are examples of those theories in action.”

Representatives from the winning groups were presented with their awards by Paula Ridley, Chair of Civic Voice, the national charity for the civic movement, which launched in April this year.

Commenting on the awards, Civic Voice’s Director, Tony Burton said, “Effective communication with both members and the public lies at the heart of successful local



groups. The civic movement is going from strength to strength and we are delighted to recognise the achievement of volunteers working to improve the places where we all live.”

This year’s awards – the first of their kind – attracted over 40 entries from civic societies nationwide. While the quality of all entries was high, the judging panel from Forster felt there were a few simple tips that would help all civic societies improve their communications to members, and to the wider public. Its top ten tips for civic society communications have also been published on the Civic Voice website www.civicvoice.org.uk for everyone to use.

Forster’s top ten communications tips:

1. Keep your design and structure simple – people have expected ideas about where to find things on a web page or in a newsletter. Don’t try and be different – stick to the conventions
2. Put yourself in the user’s shoes – many of us make the mistake of using websites and newsletters to tell people about what we want to tell them – not what they want to hear
3. Make sure it’s up to date – old news and events that have already passed will make your site or newsletter look out of date and irrelevant quickly. Plus having regular new content keeps it interesting, so people will come back
4. What’s the most important thing you want to say? Whether it’s your latest news, your membership joining page or your latest campaign, make sure the thing you most want people to read about is on the homepage or prominent in your newsletter
5. Clear navigation – don’t over complicate things, pick a few simple rules for how you group and link information and then stick to them. Keep these rules simple and obvious, just because you know the intricate internal structure of your civic society doesn’t mean a first time reader or visitor to your site will
6. Be concise – no-one wants, or has time, to read pages of copy. And if people want to find out more, make sure they can get in touch



7. Invite interaction – give people the opportunity to really get involved – by allowing comments and feedback, asking people to submit ideas, articles or pictures, as well as the opportunity to join your group or sign up for the newsletter online
8. Make links with social media – by starting a Facebook Group, making regular tweets on Twitter or sharing images through Flickr for example, you can engage more people and reach out to different audiences
9. Consult, consult, consult. A website or newsletter is never finished - there is always something you can improve, some way of making it work better for your users, so make sure you regularly ask for feedback and regularly test your site on willing volunteers/unfortunate family members
10. Don't be afraid. Online communications is an evolving animal and so there are always new ways to interact. You don't have to do them all at once, but by finding out more – and getting advice from experts – you can get your messages out to more and more people.

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Notes to editors

1. Forster is an integrated communications agency which helps change people's lives for the better - improved health, stronger communities and a cleaner, greener world. We use our insight to create powerful communications that inspire positive change.
2. Forster services include PR, corporate communications, behaviour change, brand design and consultancy. www.forster.co.uk
3. Civic Voice works to make the places where everyone lives more attractive, enjoyable and distinctive. We speak up for civic societies and local communities across England. We promote civic pride. We are the new national charity for the civic movement and have a strong local presence. We believe everyone has the right to live somewhere they can be proud of. We know how people feel



about places because we feel the same way. Civic societies are the most numerous participants in the planning system. Since its launch in April 2010 Civic Voice has been joined by 268 civic societies with more than 68,000 members. Further information is available at www.civicvoice.org.uk including how to join Civic Voice (£10 individuals) and contact details for local civic societies.