

## Oakland County Uses Email to Change the Relationship Between Citizens and Government

The state of Michigan has the second highest rate of unemployment in the U.S. at 9.5 percent. This has directly impacted the residents of Oakland County, Michigan, and they have begun seeking information today that they did not necessarily need in the past, such as information on unemployment benefits and foreclosures. In response to residents' changing expectations, Oakland County has begun utilizing GovDelivery's email and digital subscription management solution to deliver updated information directly to residents' email inbox and wireless devices.



***“Oakland County uses email to really change the relationship between citizen and government. Citizens today want to know more about what’s happening in government; matter of fact, citizens today are relying on information from government in numerous ways. One way to communicate that is to create email alerts that will come out of our web pages or web services, and go directly to the end user.”***

- Phil Bertolini, Chief Information Officer,  
Oakland County, Michigan

Oakland County, Michigan is committed to serving its people and communities. Its progressive leadership has vowed to utilize technology in innovative ways to better serve its residents. Included in this mission is to fully utilize [www.Oakgov.com](http://www.Oakgov.com) to provide better and more efficient government services to its constituents. The County has formed an eGovernment Group responsible for coordinating and launching all county websites. The group's primary mission is to “increase efficiency and reduce costs of government operations from the inside while providing better, faster access to government services from the outside.” As the group continues to work towards this goal, it has been recognized for the innovative work it's already doing. In 2008, Oakland County was named the number one government Web site in the 2008 Best of the Web County Portal Category by the Center for Digital Government (<http://www.centerdigitalgov.com/>).

### Situation

In 2007, the Oakland County website welcomed more than two and a half million visitors, serving approximately nineteen million page views. With so many residents desiring information and county services, Oakland County redesigned its website for a uniform 'look and feel' with standardized organization and design across all agencies and departments, providing residents with a 'one stop' location for all up-to-date county information and services.

Residents are able to access all government information in a single system, allowing them access to forms and other valuable information that was once only available by visiting a county office. Easy site navigation allows visitors to quickly find the information they need.

The desire for online county services has been increasing as the economic situation in the area has worsened. Residents desire a greater amount of information on topics unique to their current



### RESULTS

Since launching GovDelivery in May 2008, Oakland County, MI, has:

- Sent more than **570,000 emails** to subscribers.
- Signed up more than **48,600 subscribers**
- Incorporated **184 subscription items** including:
  - Job Openings
  - Health Division Updates
  - Beach Closings and important Water Notifications
  - Pet Adoption News
  - County Events
  - **And More...**

situation. Oakland County understands the importance of “pushing” information out to residents, rather than expecting them to visit the website and search for the information themselves. Because of Oakland County’s extensive network of services it is important for communications with residents to be relevant and targeted.

While the website traffic has increased since Oakland’s site redesign and the County continues to develop Web 2.0 capabilities, its leadership recognizes the need to communicate with residents on their terms. Email continues to be the #1 use of the Internet. Understanding email as a predominant communication channel has shaped the County’s continued plan to improve its services and communication efforts.

### Solution

On May 30, 2008, Oakland County launched GovDelivery’s Email and Digital Subscription Management (EDSM) communication solution. GovDelivery is an automated system that uses email, text messaging or RSS to keep residents informed when new information is available on topics of interest.

Oakland County’s eGovernment Group recognizes email and digital communications as key additions to its strategic communication plan. Vital reasons for adding the GovDelivery service included automation and personalization capabilities. The GovDelivery system was implemented on the [Oakgov.com](http://Oakgov.com) in just over two weeks, with impactful metrics realized immediately. Within 3 months of implementing GovDelivery, Oakland County had established a subscriber base of over 18,000 residents.

Less than a year later, the County has realized the tremendous opportunity to support improving communications at the municipal level, as well as cross-functionally within the County. Municipalities are impacted by current budget issues, yet the importance and expectations of improving citizen communication has increased. The County announced February 2009 that it would provide the GovDelivery service to its 62 municipalities free of charge. The first municipality to sign on to the GovDelivery solution under the Oakland County agreement was Groveland Township.

The automation available through EDSM is vital to Oakland County as they have more than 22,000 web pages. GovDelivery’s proprietary technology ‘watches’ the pages associated with subscription items (topics), and creates and delivers alerts automatically when changes or updates are made to these pages. While the automation



*"We still have areas that send out newsletters, reports and letters to people... By implementing GovDelivery, where we could push that information out to that community, we have seen significant savings. By taking a conservative estimate... that comes out to a large number of \$268,000 of cost to traditionally print, fold and mail that information that Oakland County no longer has to absorb because of GovDelivery."*

- Phil Bertolini, Chief Information Officer,  
Oakland County, Michigan

saves staff time and improves communication, the ability to manually create and send email notices is even more valuable during critical times. Emergencies and disasters occur, time-sensitive information is released, and the County is able to use GovDelivery EDSM to instantly communicate with residents.

GovDelivery's personalization allows Oakland County to communicate with their residents on a want-to-know basis. County email alerts are delivered as opt-in communications, sent only to residents who desire the information, in the method and time frame that they desire it.

To best provide relevant information to its subscribers, Oakland County leverages the subscriber segmenting feature, providing more critical subscriber information for targeted communications. This feature helps Oakland County improve their customer service by gathering details such as zip code and community information, allowing email communication to be based on region. The County also uses the segmenting feature to support revenues for recreational services. Oakland County asks questions regarding recreational interest to those who subscribe to updates from Parks & Recreation; this provides an efficient promotional opportunity, sending relevant communication on recreational activities to those interested.

### Results

In tough budget times, return on investment (ROI) becomes increasingly important to local governments. Spending is scrutinized and government officials are held to an even higher standard of accountability in how residents' tax dollars are spent. Oakland County has experienced cost savings in both infrastructure and traditional mailing costs. Sending communications digitally versus through traditional mail methods saves on printing, postage, staff time and supports 'green' efforts. Prior to the GovDelivery implementation the County still had departments sending out physical newsletters, reports and letters to people. These publications required increased labor as each piece needed to be printed, folded and stuffed, in addition to the monetary costs of postage. Oakland County has seen significant savings by delivering such communications through email. By taking a conservative estimate of ten messages each week delivered to a modest group of 3,000 residents that comes out to a large number of \$268,000 of cost annually to traditionally print, fold and mail that information that Oakland County no longer has to absorb.

Investing IT staff resources to build a similar system would have been a substantial expense to the County. Oakland County has an employee wellness program that is vital to reducing future healthcare costs. The Human Resources department wanted to build an email listserv to market the service and deliver necessary communications. The GovDelivery system was able to take on these communications and save the County \$75,000, the estimated cost of building a system on its own.

While the tangible benefits experienced by Oakland County are important, many more benefits lie in the unique ways the County has been able to utilize the system. Oakland County has used GovDelivery in its Animal Services Division to increase pet adoption, its Health Division to practice emergency procedures, and in its Human Resources Department to market its employee wellness program.

To receive email updates from Oakland County, MI, go to <http://www.oakgov.com> or <http://www.oakgov.com/subscriptions> .

**GovDelivery** is the world's leading provider of government-to-citizen communication solutions. GovDelivery's Email and Digital Subscription Management solution is a Software as a Service (SaaS) platform that provides organizations a fully-automated, on-demand public communication system.

*Updated November 2009*