

2015 Achievement Awards Virginia Association of Counties

APPLICATION FORM

All applications must include the following information. Separate applications must be submitted for each eligible program. **Deadline: June 1, 2015.** Please include this application form with electronic entry.

PROGRAM INFORMATION

Locality: Fairfax County

Program Title: Save \$, Save the Planet and Furnish a Room; Marketing the Fairfax Co. Public Auction Program and Website

Program Category: Communications

CONTACT INFORMATION

Name: Jeremy Lasich

Title: Deputy Director

Department: Office of Public Affairs

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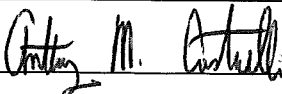
Fax # _____

E-mail: Jeremy.Lasich@Fairfaxcounty.gov

SIGNATURE OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OR CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER

Name: Tony Castrilli

Title: Director of Public Affairs

Signature: 

Category: Communications/2015 VACo Achievement Awards
Save Money, Save the Planet and Furnish a Room for Under \$100: Marketing the Fairfax County Public Auction Program and Website
Submission by Fairfax County Office of Public Affairs

Overview

The Fairfax County Public Surplus Auction program and website was launched by the Department of Purchasing and Supply Management in 2010 as an easy way for residents to bid on and purchase county government surplus items ranging from desk chairs to cars, gym equipment to books. The program has three key benefits for the county and its residents:

- The revenue generated from sales goes directly into the county's General Fund, which benefits county taxpayers.
- The county's environmental goals have been integrated into the program. Instead of used government property going into the dumpster, it is sold and reused.
- It provides the public with the opportunity to buy used property at bargain basement prices. In fact, it is quite doable to furnish a room for under \$100 using the public surplus program.

Challenge

The challenge, which was identified in late 2013, was that there was little awareness about the program and website. It was a hidden gem that needed marketing and communications support. The Department of Purchasing and Supply Management contacted the county's Office of Public Affairs to collaborate on creative solutions to promote the public surplus auction program and website using only available resources such as social media and county cable TV.

Description

The [surplus auction program website](#) is run by an outside vendor and is basically a running list of items for sale, including a photo, price and short description. The Office of Public Affairs identified the need to

not only promote the website but to take potential buyers to the next step by showing them how these items could be used in their home - and emphasize the bargain basement prices. A communications strategy was created under the theme of “creating a room for under \$100.” It was also critical that in order to get attention, the communications needed to be timely, actionable and even a little fun. The strategy included:

- A series of ads that are sent out on the county’s NewsWire (electronic news release service, which includes a Web page, daily and weekly emails and a dedicated Twitter account), as well as the county’s Twitter and Facebook accounts.
- An award-winning YouTube video illustrating how to use the website and how to create rooms for under \$100, which also aired on Fairfax County Government Channel 16.
- A podcast of a conversation with the county employee who manages the public surplus auction program.
- A graphic that could be used to brand and promote the program and website.
- Flickr gallery of photos that can be used for social media efforts.
- Improvements to the Department of Purchasing and Supply Management’s home page so that people can easily find the public surplus auction site.

Execution

The marketing and communications effort began in January 2014 with a series of short ads that were published on the county’s NewsWire communications platforms. In May 2014, we added a YouTube video produced by the county’s government cable station Channel 16. In July 2014, a podcast was recorded with the manager of the program. We sought opportunities to make the program timely by tying into sporting events, as well as some life events such as going to college (examples below). A shopping cart logo was created and the home page for the Department of Purchasing and Supply Management was reorganized and enhanced. The marketing and communications effort is ongoing.

Here is an example of one of the ads and several of the headlines we used.

Example:

Create Your Own Nats Hangout for Less Than \$100; Buy Used From County Auction

Oct. 2, 2014

Got Natitude but on a budget? You can create a comfortable place in your home to watch the baseball playoffs (and football, too!) with friends and family – for under \$100. Shop the [Fairfax County Public Surplus Auction](#) and you can buy a few chairs and tables and even a TV for a small fraction of what they cost new. Inventory is constantly changing – [start shopping today!](#)

Watch the video: [Save Money, Save the Planet and Furnish a Room](#)

For more information and links to other local government public auctions, [click here](#).

Examples of Other Headlines/Themes Used:

- [Be the Smartest Student \(or Parents\) on Campus; Furnish for Under \\$100](#)
- [Create a Kids' Arts and Crafts Haven for Less Than \\$100; Buy Used From County Auction](#)
- [First Apartment? Buy Chairs, Tables and More for Less Than \\$100; Buy Used From County Auction](#)
- [Create Your Own Soccer Viewing Room for Less Than \\$100; Buy Used From County Auction](#)
- [Be Ready for Thanksgiving Guests for Less Than \\$100; Buy Used From County Auction](#)

Video

- The video “[Save Money, Save the Planet and Furnish a Room](#)” is a key component of the marketing effort and has been used as a stand-alone and embedded on NewsWire communications. The video recently won a 2015 Bronze Telly Award in the category Film/Video,

Non-Broadcast Productions, Government Relations. The Telly Award is a national competition to honor excellence in local and regional cable TV commercials and programs.

Staffing and Costs

All work on the marketing and communications effort was implemented by a team of county staff led by the Office of Public Affairs in collaboration with the Department of Purchasing and Supply Management and the Department of Cable and Consumer Services (Channel 16). All work was done within the normal workload and resources of the agencies and employees.

Results and Metrics

Through the marketing and communications effort, we were able to increase awareness of the program.

Examples of communications metrics:

Outreach Metrics:

- YouTube video: More than 1,400 views.
- NewsWire Twitter followers and email subscribers: 10,400+ average.
- County Twitter followers: 50,000+ average.
- Facebook engagement: 2,000 to 6,000+ average.

Bottom-line Metrics:

- Baseline is **FY 2013** (July 1, 2012 to June 30, 2013) when external sales through the public surplus program generated **\$1.25 million** in revenue. Since the communications effort began, revenue has **increased to \$2 million** and the program is on track to sell **1,000+ more items** in FY 2015 than in FY 2014.

Award Criteria – Innovation, Collaboration and Ability for other Jurisdictions to Replicate

Although not exhaustive, our research did not come up with much in the way of other county-level marketing efforts for government surplus auctions. However, many jurisdictions across the state (and the country) have similar public surplus programs in place and Fairfax County simply took the next step and promoted this terrific revenue generating and environmentally responsible program. Indeed, Fairfax County is not alone in looking for additional revenue sources wherever it can to add dollars to the General Fund budget. Other counties in Virginia with similar auction programs can easily replicate this type of low-cost marketing and communications effort to enhance and grow their auctions sales efforts. Through a team effort by three agencies, we are able to generate revenue, integrate environmental goals and help our residents save money.

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