



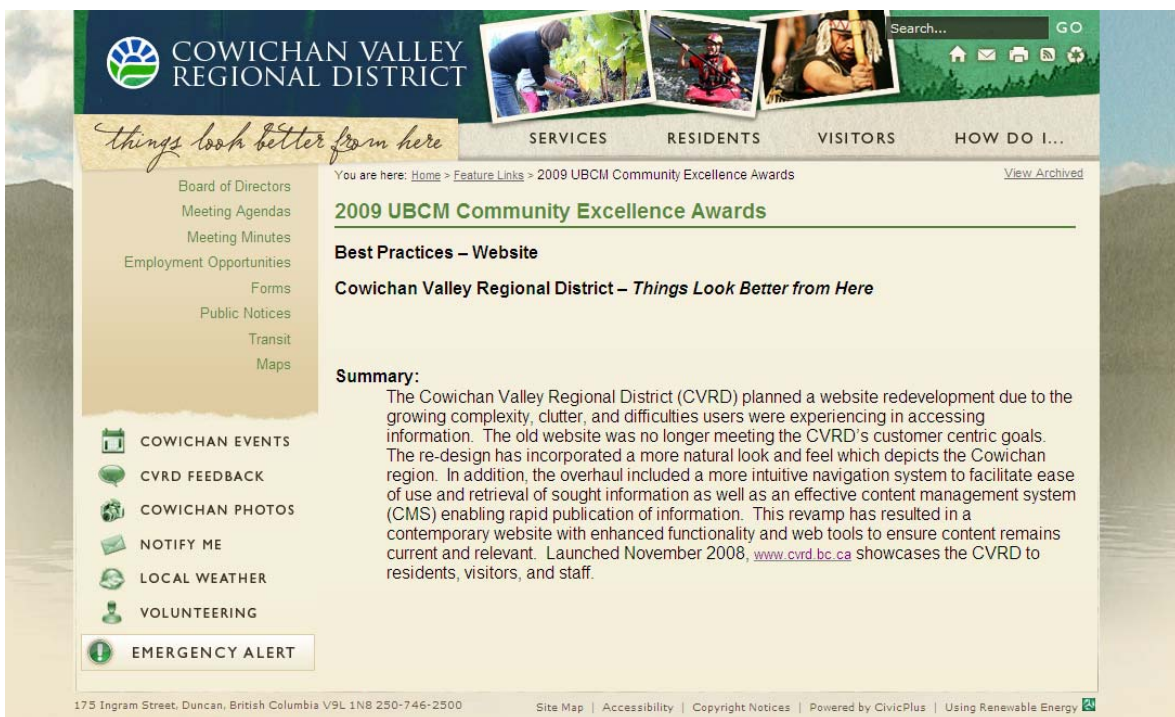
## 2009 UBCM Community Excellence Awards

### Best Practices – Website

#### Cowichan Valley Regional District – *Things Look Better from Here*

#### Summary:

The Cowichan Valley Regional District (CVRD) planned a website redevelopment due to the growing complexity, clutter, and difficulties users were experiencing in accessing information. The old website was no longer meeting the CVRD's customer centric goals. The re-design has incorporated a more natural look and feel which depicts the Cowichan region. In addition, the overhaul included a more intuitive navigation system to facilitate ease of use and retrieval of sought information as well as an effective content management system (CMS) enabling rapid publication of information. This revamp has resulted in a contemporary website with enhanced functionality and web tools to ensure content remains current and relevant. Launched November 2008, [www.cvr.bc.ca](http://www.cvr.bc.ca) showcases the CVRD to residents, visitors, and staff.





## **Background:**

The Cowichan Valley Regional District (CVRD) is a combination of four municipalities and nine Electoral Areas, which deal with issues on a region-wide perspective, as well as administering local functions for the unincorporated Electoral Areas directed by locally elected officials.

Covering approximately 373,000 hectares and 81,000 inhabitants, the CVRD stretches from the Malahat in the south, to the Nanaimo Airport boundary in the north and west to the Pacific Ocean (Pacific Rim National Park and Trail).

Towering forests, numerous beaches and unique marine hamlets, plus some of the largest and most popular fresh water lakes on Vancouver Island have made the Cowichan Valley a tourist destination for decades.

With the highest mean temperatures in Canada, soil rich enough to grow virtually any crop, a full range of recreational and business services, the Cowichan Valley is a favorite place to live and do business on Vancouver Island.

The name "Cowichan", derived from the Coast Salish word Khowutzun, literally translates into "The Warm Land". A climatic fact of nature that has seen the region inhabited for countless centuries. European settlement of the district, starting with farmers and loggers, began in the middle of the 19th century.

With the natural gifts provided to the region it was a natural decision to showcase the CVRD in this light over the Internet while at the same time providing a valuable service to the public, visitors, and staff.

Our initial web presence was established in 1997 and provided basic information to the residents of the CVRD. In 2001 the CVRD partnered with a contractor to facilitate the redevelopment of the web site to provide a more contemporary and easy to navigate site. Volumes of content were added over time, paralleling the rapid growth of the CVRD, resulting in a cumbersome and disorganized website. The value of the site was beginning to be questioned and left many users frustrated with the inability to retrieve information. This in turn prompted the corporation to look for a solution.

In November 2007, a web page working group was established with representatives from the different departments within the CVRD. One of the groups' goals was to re-engineer the website to better reflect the business of the corporation and to more effectively reach out to the public. As the Cowichan Valley is rural in nature, any effort to publish useful interactive information to help minimize travel to the corporate offices is beneficial. The group performed needs assessments, established goals and designed a selection process which led the CVRD to a partnership with CivicPlus (a website design company).



**Process:**

CivicPlus assisted in developing the website navigation, overall design to showcase our unique organization, provision of website tools, and hosting for [www.cvrld.bc.ca](http://www.cvrld.bc.ca). With this web partnership, we directly benefit from regular updates and continual enhancements to the content management system (CMS) as website technologies evolve. By adopting this course, the CVRD projects the site will evolve and remain contemporary without requiring periodic major re-design and thereby looking sharp and functioning well into the future. CVRD staff maintains content control, flow, and overall design.

The CMS provided by our web partner has enabled non-technical users to easily and regularly update, maintain, and add content through the utilization of custom page wizards and online editors. These tools are linked to site style sheets and templates to maintain a professional corporate look. Also, the CMS streamlines the content approval process through user rights and enables automatic publishing and expiration of content.

Site visitors are directed to the information they are seeking through the web page navigation structure and Citizen Service tools. These tools, which include FAQs, contact information, calendars, and site search, enable the citizens to locate what they are looking for quickly. The result is a more positive engagement with the CVRD.

A number of communication services are incorporated into the new webpage which aid in the timely dissemination of important information to the public. Of note is the Emergency Alert feature which quickly alerts citizens when emergency conditions arise in the Cowichan Valley and immediately relays emergency information to subscribers via e-mail and text messaging. Additional communication features, such as Notify Me, News Flash, and RSS, manage visitor subscriptions to e-mail distribution lists, which in turn enables the CVRD to alert the community of important organizational news and events. In addition, the CVRD supports a community calendar where local events are published. This provides our citizens with powerful tools to keep informed and engaged.

Our Human Resources division is effectively utilizing the Job Postings module to attract and manage interested potential employees. The system enables the HR staff to provide more information to prospective applicants and automate the job posting cycle. In the near future, we plan to expand the Human Resources web presence with the implementation of online job applications. This is illustrative of the continued commitment the organization has towards enhancing the value of the web site for the automation of processes to enhance efficiency.

E-government tools currently deployed assist citizens to search for staff contact information, business listings in the business directory, view and print agendas, minutes,



forms, and searchable archives. The CVRD web map has been hugely successful through the provision of basic property, zoning, OCP, and fire service information. Linkages from the web map back to the community park webpage are in place with plans to expand information conveyance from the web map to Local Emergency Response Neighborhood volunteers upon request. For example, with the web map, we have observed a substantial decrease in Realtor traffic to our front counter requesting property information. With the multitude of easy to use tools available to the CVRD, expansion into E-government is now a reality.

### **Results:**

The webpage has incorporated a look and feel that is representative of the Cowichan Valley's natural gifts. The CVRD recently won an Award of Distinction in the Interactive Website Government Category from the 2009 Communicator Awards. This award has further motivated the team to expand the functionality and keep the information and services conveyed via the web current and highly useful to the public. Feedback received regarding the renewed web site is positive and utilization statistics suggest that we have exceeded the UBCM category guidelines in our revised webpage through improved site navigation and effective conveyance of information. In addition, this project has brought together all departments to achieve a common goal within a diverse organizational structure.

Site users encourage us to continue the development and expansion of website functionality. The current system is scalable to accommodate continued growth in service and function availability. Specifically, later this summer we are scheduled to launch our Theatre website along with online ticket sales. Thus with a progressive secure foundation, we are well positioned to meet the changing public and corporate needs.

