



CORONAVIRUS RESPONSE WEBSITE



Submission for Best Marketing and
Communications on the COVID-19
Pandemic – Shoestring Tactic

Who was the target audience for this entry?

The target audiences for this website were Spokane Transit riders, STA employees and the general public.

What was the situation/challenge that necessitated creating this entry?

For Spokane, April 2020 was the tipping point when many in the community began to panic over the coronavirus. People were worried there would be a ventilator shortage, food rationing and social instability.

There was also criticism of Spokane Transit for maintaining full bus service during the pandemic. Many didn't understand or agree that public transit was an essential tool for large parts of the population to get to medical appointments, buy groceries and to get to essential jobs, even during COVID-19.

People who depended on public transit wanted to know if it was safe to ride the bus, and internally at Spokane Transit, employees were questioning whether or not it was safe to come to work.

We needed to provide, and quickly, transparent information to all audiences about STA's response to this emergent issue.





What was the strategy/objective of this entry?

Our small communications team decided we needed a one-stop source of information for our emergency response. Our default tactic was to make a new page on our website. We built this, and then in the same day decided it was merely a drop in the bucket compared to what was needed.

The last time STA built a new website, the process was rushed and took over six months and nearly \$100,000. Multiple vendors were contracted, including an ad agency from the other side of the country, and committees and executive team oversight was set up.

This time, with our riders and employees raising legitimate questions about the safety of public transit, we didn't have time for that.

So we went outside standard procedures and protocols to build an entirely new website solely focused on our agency's COVID-19 response. We bought new Internet domains with our credit cards and taught ourselves to use a new quick-and-dirty CMS. We gave the new website a distinctive look and feel, and took new photos and video to make the site more visual than our regular agency site.

We had everything up and running within a few days. Because of the emergency situation, we didn't always seek the necessary approvals or sign offs. We just... did it.

Total budget for the website was \$216.

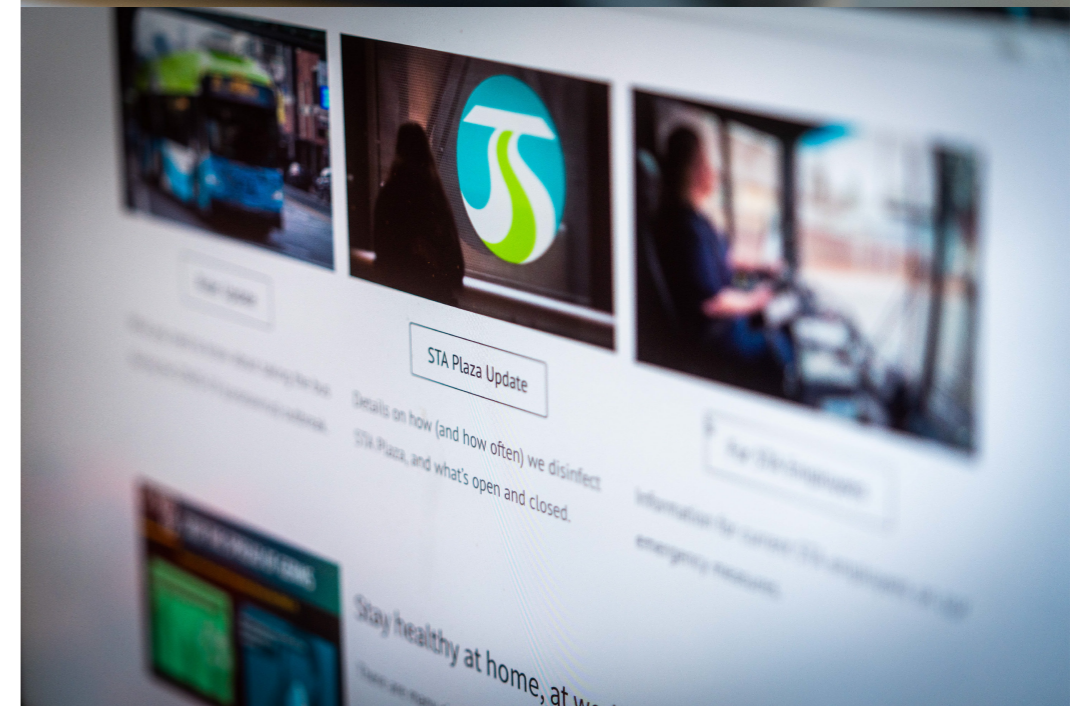
[Visit the STA Coronavirus Response website here.](#)

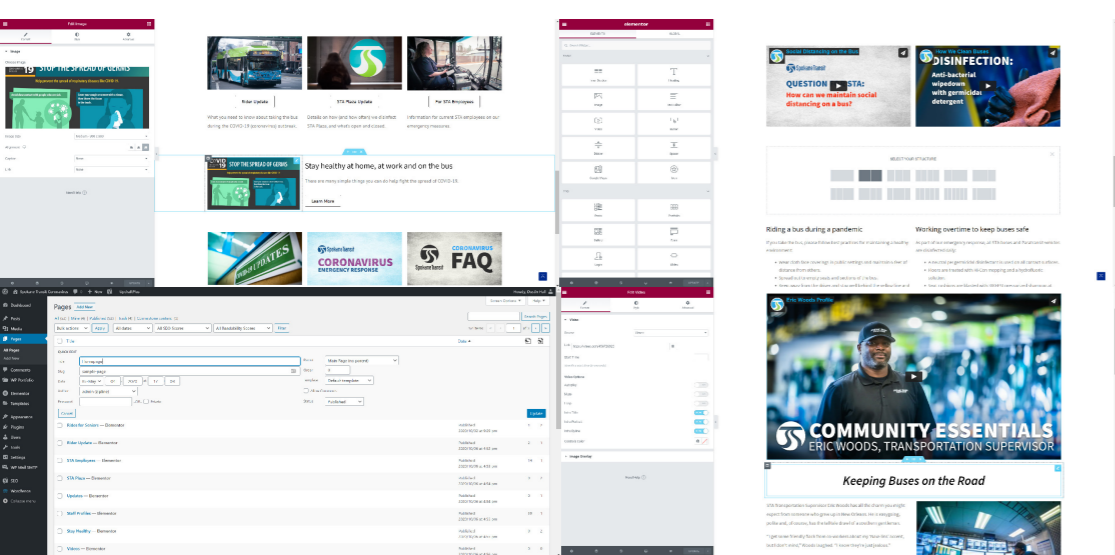
What results/impact did this entry have?

The new website quickly became the go-to source of transparent, breaking information about Spokane Transit's response to the pandemic. We directed everyone to the site – employees and their families, riders, reporters, as well as state legislators and community leaders.

Our agency quickly came to see the site as the best way to be completely transparent with the public and employees about what was being done to keep them safe. One telling moment was when HR decided to put a running count of how many Spokane Transit employees had COVID-19 on the website, open for literally anyone to see. When a new case was confirmed, we had the online count updated within the hour, and often within minutes.

Our team of four began churning out multiple videos a week for the website – interviews with agency leadership and videos on how we disinfect our vehicles, how to socially-distance on the bus and the details of our agency Emergency Response plan. We included details about what kinds of chemicals we use to clean buses, and even which brand of *rags*.

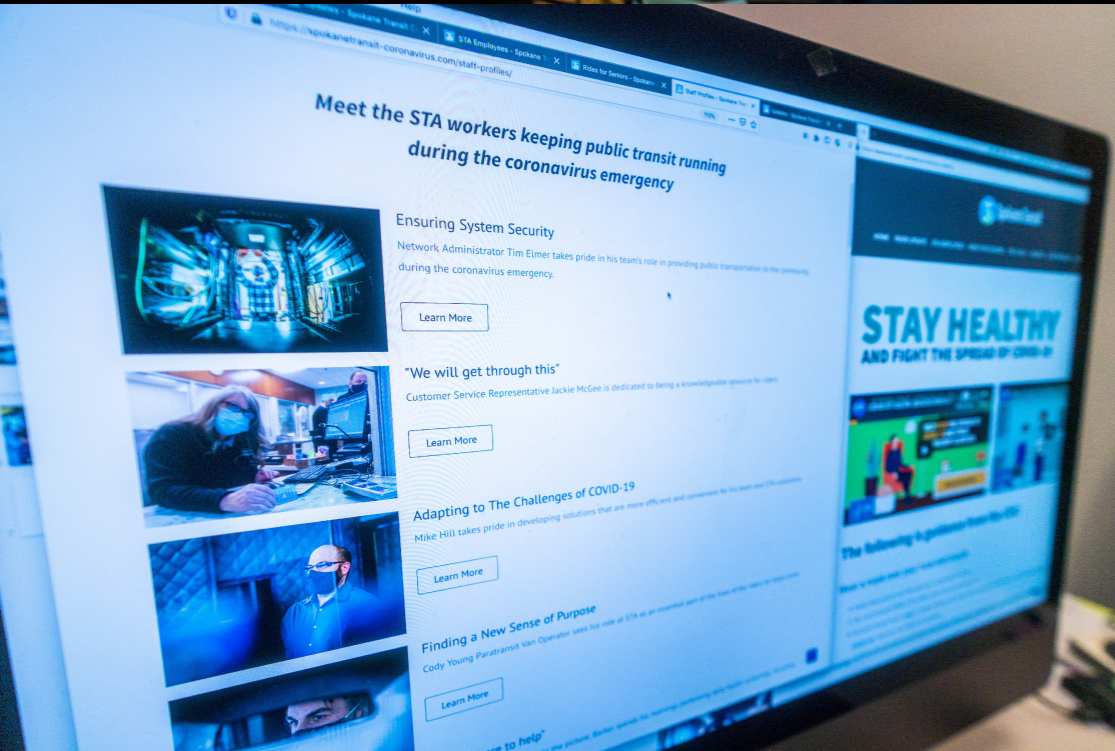




The site was updated daily with breaking news like service reductions and new safety measures being taken. We quickly built pages for new safety guidance from the CDC or regional health authorities, as well as new initiatives as the executive team approved them, such as letting seniors use Paratransit vans for socially-distanced rides. To highlight our employees as essential, we started a staff profile series called “Community Essentials” where we shine a spotlight on public transit workers with online articles, photo essays and videos – the series launched 39 weeks ago and we’ve profiled a different employee every week since then without interruption.



The impact of the website was felt very quickly. Managers reported employees had fewer questions and less worry about what the agency was doing once they were able to see everything in one place. Drivers still answered questions from riders, but were also able to point them to the new website. On social media, we contacted critical voices and directed them to the site, and a lot of the anxiousness waned. Pressure was taken off leadership to answer the same questions over and over because our strategies were being laid out for the public immediately after being adopted.



The site has over 41,000 page views and over 24,000 unique visitors. It has over 18x more unique visitors than STA's only other microsite.

Please tell the judges why this entry was submitted and why it should win an AdWheel Award.

We are submitting this project because it symbolizes what our small, scrappy team does best – work together, meet deadlines under pressure, spend hardly any money, and exceed expectations to make public transit easier and more convenient to use.

The information on the site demonstrated STA's commitment to safety and transparency as the agency dealt with the evolving pandemic.

The work was done at the start of the pandemic, when information was chaotic and fears were high, but we helped our riders and employees understand what STA was doing in response to the evolving pandemic.

[Visit the STA Coronavirus Response website here.](#)



Thank you for considering our team!

