

# communication 2.0

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# executive summary

Our objective with Regional Economical Development Inc. (REDI) was to improve and develop an ongoing conversation with REDI's stakeholders. We were given an opportunity to assist with developing a new website for REDI and establishing the company's social networking presence as a capstone project in the spring of 2010. REDI's current website is extremely informative and rich with content, but lacks the interactive social elements present on most business sites today. Not only did we want to help REDI interact with the community, we also wanted to link the new media tools to the new website.


To clarify our objective and quantify our resources we researched other economic development teams and examined REDI's history and current communications strategies. From this research, we reached a few important conclusions.

First, we found REDI has four major target audiences: business prospects, entrepreneurs, investors/stakeholders and site consultants. These stakeholders desire a more free-flowing, easier dialogue with REDI. We also discovered what types of information these audiences desired from REDI. Second, while loaded with information, REDI's website was not user friendly or enticing. We found that a vast majority of REDI's targeted audience is using the Internet and social media tools as a primary method of research and communication.

Social media in general is obviously exploding, and businesses are taking advantage. E-Marketer reports that there are 127 million social network users in the U.S., which is more than one third of the entire country's population. More importantly, as of mid-February, three out of every four small businesses had a company page on Facebook or LinkedIn, according to the University of Maryland School of Business.

The economic development sites we looked at all had a strong social media presence. Because of the success of these sites, the lack of such presence in REDI and the fact that the REDI staff wanted us to look into it, we decided that we would focus our primary research around trying to figure out what those close to the organization thought of the idea.

Our primary research consisted of interviews with key stakeholders and board members as well as a survey. REDI staff members gave us names of those whom they trusted to give us an honest opinion of the state of REDI's communication with the community and how it could be improved. These five people gave very in-depth feedback, of which, had many similarities among them. They all felt as though REDI needed to do a better job communicating with its stakeholders.



In addition to the feedback and suggestions for communication improvement, the sources helped us develop questions for a survey we distributed. We realize that we needed a larger quantity of feedback before we could proceed, so we created a survey, which was distributed to 1,500 members of the Columbia Chamber of Commerce. The survey results confirmed what we had found in our secondary research and helped us decide that REDI needed to establish itself in the social media landscape.

Specifically, the survey indicated that REDI's target audience was using Facebook and LinkedIn as their primary social media outlets. Because of this, we decided to pursue building REDI's presence on these two platforms. The survey also suggested that a majority of REDI's audience would be willing to post and share to a blog. This finding gave us the opportunity to create a blog for REDI and its primary audiences.

We created REDI's social media outlets from scratch, and we are just starting to publicize them now. The Facebook fan page has more than 100 fans and the blog is getting an average of 30 views per day on days posts are made.

The opportunities for sustainability are numerous. We have created an opportunity that REDI can take and run with. Businesses are turning to social media as a primary means of promotion and publication, and REDI has the ability to join that group. Maintaining the social media outlets and eventually connecting them with the new, more modern multimedia version of columbiaredi.com are the main tasks at hand for REDI now, and we feel we have put them in a prime position to succeed.

# secondary research

We began our research by thinking about ways that REDI could be successful with its new communication outlook, and what better way to determine what will be successful in the future than to see what has been successful in the past? We decided to investigate other economic development teams from around the country to see how they used social media and their websites to interact with their audience. To find these economic development teams we enlisted the help of a few different authorities including REDI staff members, MU School of Journalism librarian Dorothy Carner (who is working on projects to encourage entrepreneurship) and the International Economic Development Council's award winners for best websites.

First, we went to Dorothy Carner and found she had a vast amount of information and resources for entrepreneurs, especially journalism or media-centric entrepreneurs. Her project is called Entrepreneurship@Journalism She also talked to us a bit about different tools she's seen used in her research and recommended investigating the Indy Partnership economic development company based in Indianapolis. It was through looking at the Indy Partnership that we found the International Economic Development Council's website and eventually their award winners. We looked to the following websites to develop REDI's social media campaign:

## Indy Partnership

The Indy Partnership's website (*indypartnership.com*) is an excellent example of a website that makes it easy to interact with their constituents. The website won the International Economic Development Council's "Best Economic Development Website in America" in 2009 and it is obvious as to why. It is easy to navigate, interactive and its social media outlets are centered on the homepage. REDI is currently redesigning their website to make it more user friendly. We offered suggestions based on our secondary and primary research for what the new site should look like.

We learned from the Indy Partnership website how to successfully implement social media to promote their site and interact with their target audience. Its primary social media tool is Twitter. The Indy Partnership uses Twitter as a way to drive traffic to its own website, create buzz about press releases and promote other businesses. Linking back to its website and other websites not only increases visibility of these sites, but promotes the general purpose of an economic development organization - demonstrate that the city you represent is the ideal place to locate a business.

Indy Partnerships uses several blogs, maintained and operated by individual staff

members to help create a discussion among its audience. This technique puts a voice behind the words, and is working well for the company. However, one part of its social media strategy that is lacking is its Facebook presence. Indy Partnerships does not have a facebook page or a fan page. We see this as an important platform for REDI as it presents a great opportunity to connect with the majority of its audience.

#### Enterprise Florida

Enterprise Florida was the International Economic Development 2008 Honorable Mention for New Media. We found a lot of inspiration from Enterprise Florida because its goals and strengths were exactly what we were looking for in REDI's campaign. Both its target audience and stated purpose with social media is similar to REDI's. Enterprise Florida's strategy is to post a couple of sentences about an article or an event on their blog then link to it Facebook and Twitter. This sort of back-linking makes Enterprise Florida's site and the articles they are posting about very SEO friendly.

#### KCADC

Michele Holmes recommended looking into Kansas City Area Development Council for social media tools and ideas. KCADC is just beginning to branch out using new media. Its primary tools are LinkedIn and blogging. The ideas we took from KCADC comes primarily from its blogs. We used its blog content as examples and inspiration in developing content for REDI's blog. For example, one of KCADC's first post was about jumping on the bandwagon with social media. Originally, this thought of formally introducing REDI to the blogosphere did not cross our minds. Using this idea, we wrote a blog post about REDI's new tools, how they plan to use them and how their audience can help promote REDI, thereby promoting Columbia. KCADC also has an excellent LinkedIn group going. We hope REDI uses KCADC as a blueprint for how to further develop its LinkedIn page.

# primary research

## Interviews

Our first step in primary research was to conduct a few interviews with some of REDI's closest constituents to figure out exactly what they thought REDI needed to do most to help communication. We interviewed Newsy.com founder Jim Spencer, social media advocate Brent Beshore, ShowMeTickets founder Brant Bukowsky, Flooring America Manager Dave Griggs and Reynolds Journalism Institute Librarian Dorthy Carner.

REDI helped Spencer find a location for his business and gave him a \$25,000 grant. Spencer uses Newsy as an example of success in Columbia to help REDI bring in more business. He had several criticisms of the website, namely that it did not help relocation specialists find vacant areas and that it did not emphasize Columbia's strengths as a community. He likes the monthly e-mail update that REDI sends out and would like to see it continue.

Beshore, like Spencer, was looking for real estate when first coming to Columbia but found it hard to find on the site. He specializes in new media and thinks that most businesses are moving in that direction, as he has found it to be a success with his. He gets his information about the area from his business network and local media outlets.

Bukowsky is on the REDI Board despite never having needed to use the company. He is a big advocate of blogging and would like to see a REDI-based blog with entrepreneurial success stories on it. He wants REDI to build on what Columbia already has rather than trying to attract more outside business. He wanted a social media guide to help local business owners build their brand and awareness. Specifically he mentioned Facebook, Twitter and RSS feeds as three outlets REDI should consider.

Griggs is the Chair to REDI from the Columbia Chamber of Commerce. He says that REDI's biggest problem is a lack of communication on both ends between the corporation and its investors. He says there is not a lot for the board to do and consequentially the board is not as involved as it should be. He recognizes that REDI has a very small staff, but he would like to see a blog maintained where staff can post regularly and stakeholders or investors can comment or post themselves. In addition to communicating with investors, he also wanted to increase communication with government officials and the general public.

These interviews gave us some great ideas as to where to begin, but we still needed to see if those who were not as involved as these folks would agree upon the communication issues that REDI had and the ways to go about improving

them.

### Survey

After conducting interviews, we turned our attention toward creating a survey to learn more about REDI's direct target audience. After meeting with members of the REDI executive staff, we carefully constructed questions with the goal of obtaining the best ways to increase communication between REDI and its stakeholders. We broke our survey into two sections. The first was for those who were already directly involved with or had worked with REDI. Users whom this did not apply jumped to the second part of the survey, which asked questions related to newsgathering habits. All respondents had the option to participate in this section.

Once we had completed the survey and revised it with the REDI board and the convergence faculty, we obtained the Columbia Chamber of Commerce list and e-mailed 1,575 people with an introduction that included objectives for the survey, and a link to take the survey at SurveyMonkey.com. We got 181 respondents, which is an 11 percent response rate.

### Interesting Trends

Only 60 of the 181 respondents had worked with or currently work with REDI. Of the 60, none had first heard about REDI via Internet searching, and none view columbiaredi.com more than once per month on average. Despite nobody ever having heard of REDI online, more than 56 percent of all respondents said they get information about Columbia from the Internet. Taking into account all the local media outlets in which people said they get information, we saw that as a sign to make REDI more searchable and prominent online.

We received feedback later in the survey that helped guide us in terms of how to make REDI more prominent online. To our surprise, 82 percent of respondents had a Facebook account, and almost as many were connected on LinkedIn. We were not expecting such a large social media presence from a majority of middle-aged respondents, but it directed us in our promotion of REDI online.

Furthermore, we were very encouraged by the fact that nearly 57 percent of those surveyed said they would be "somewhat" or "highly likely" to read and/or post to a REDI blog that had local business' thoughts and suggestions even though only 17 percent said they use a blog now. This finding showed us that people in the community would be interested in participating in an economic development blog hosted by REDI.

# strategies

REDI's goal with their social media campaign is to have an open conversation with their constituents about the benefits and advantages of Columbia. The luxuries for economic development teams in regards to social media is the majority of content on social media sites is already created, and the audience is built in. This makes REDI's social media campaign that much easier. Economic development teams promote their area and do everything they can to recruit and grow businesses. But REDI has a staff of only four people and do not have enough time during the week to come up with extensively original blogs or Facebook posts. This can be accomplished by discussing material that is already out there. After examining the mentioned economic development teams' social media tools, primary and secondary research, we know this method can be a success. Our social media strategy is as follows:

## Facebook

Make at least four engaging posts a week during high-traffic times (11 a.m. - 1 p.m., or 8 p.m. - 10 p.m.). Maintain a 'post quality' of at least 16.5, and grow the total number of fans to 300 by Aug. 1, 2010. Continue to monitor the 'insights' of the fan page to find out what posts work best for Facebook. Add as many people in REDI's target audience on Facebook as possible.

## Wordpress

Create two blog posts per week and steadily increase traffic to columbiarediblog.com. Post video to the blog once a month, and generate discussion on the blog. These posts will be contain more depth and research than the Facebook posts.

## LinkedIn

Connect Wordpress blog and twitter account so those in LinkedIn group can see posts automatically in LinkedIn's recent activity section. Add all events and meetings to event section of group as dates are finalized.

## Twitter

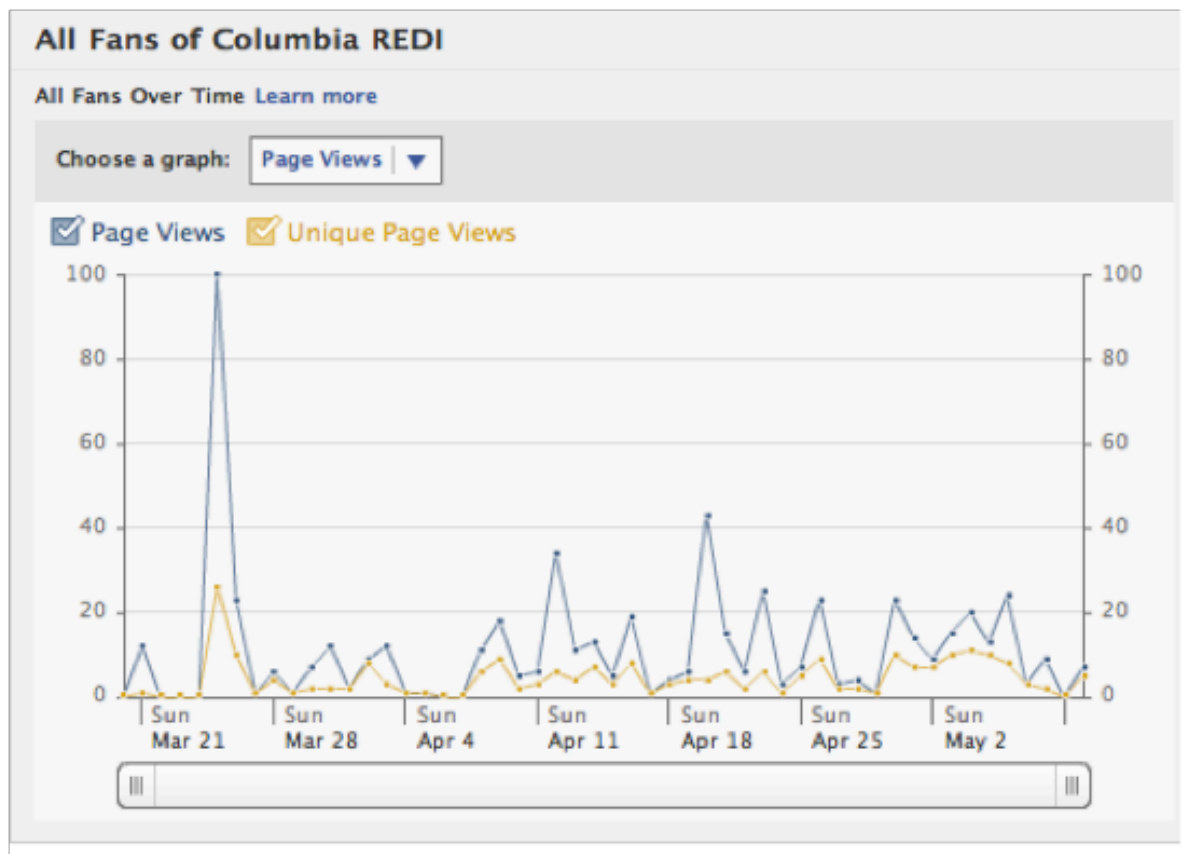
Twitter will serve as a supplementary social media outlet. Tweets will primarily be the same as the Facebook posts, but will include some off-the-cuff posts. REDI's tweets will provide links connecting our followers to articles, statistics, and other discussion topics.




# progress & results


Since the launch of REDI 2.0, The REDI Facebook fan page has amassed 117 fans, and Michele now has 112 Facebook friends. The process of adding REDI's database of contacts is still a work in progress. The number of fans and friends will grow as we finish contacting people from the database. One of the main goals of this project was to encourage discussion and grow REDI's online presence. Facebook has been a useful outlet, as we have seen multiple posts from REDI fans and friends.

During the week of May 3, REDI's fan page had a total of 11 interactions. The 'insights' application on the Facebook fan page will give REDI an excellent source of reliable feedback to monitor its online interaction. The application tracks the number of new fans, views, interactions, and measures the quality of posts to the fan page. This 'Post Quality' is a feature within the application that identifies how successful each individual post is by calculating the number of interactions and shares by users over a 7-day period. The 'Post Quality' for REDI's Facebook posts is 16.5, which is well above average. Furthermore, the Facebook fan page has steadily increased in traffic since its implementation. (see chart below)





The blog has been moderately successful so far. It has accumulated 259 unique viewers in three weeks with just six posts. The most activity was on Wednesday, May 12 with 35 unique viewers. This is a substantial number of views considering the limited number of tags, which means the blog is not search engine-friendly yet. It is also impressive considering the small number of friends and fans REDI currently has on Facebook.



# sustainability

We propose two methods of sustainability for REDI 2.0's social media campaign. The first method requires hiring a part-time intern to work approximately 10 hours per week. The staff at REDI is, at times, overwhelmed with work. This would allow the current staff to focus their time and energy on completing their regular day-to-day tasks. The intern would be a journalism student at the University of Missouri, looking to boost his or her resumé. The strengths of this method include increased productivity and efficiency. The student intern would need to have the necessary skills to maintain REDI's blog, Twitter, and Facebook.

The second method is to conduct the campaign internally. The strengths of this method are that it is cost efficient and easy for REDI since the person keeping up with it has strong knowledge of economic development issues. REDI may be hesitant to give the power of promoting REDI to a student intern. However the weaknesses of this method are that REDI staff may have technical difficulties trying to make certain posts, and it could interfere with their normal workflow.

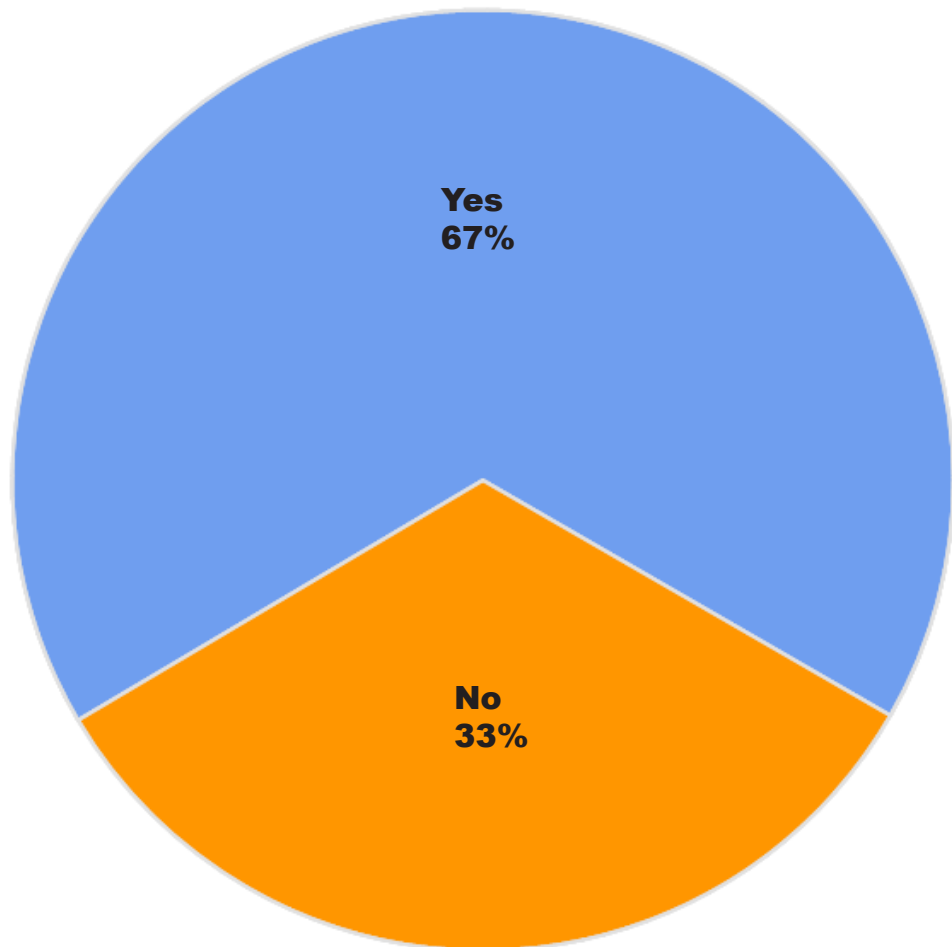
Another important factor for sustainability is constant monitoring of the effectiveness of each individual post. This can be done by keeping a close on the 'insights' on REDI's fan page. This also includes tracking web traffic and comments on the REDI blog. This monitoring will allow REDI to see which posts are working, and which aren't. This will ultimately help them be more sustainable, and encourage better discussion.

Although this project is easily sustainable, we feel that our portion of the project has been completed and does not need an additional capstone group in the fall. Unless REDI needs additional assistance that we are unaware of, the work needed to maintain REDI's social media presence would not fulfill the expectations of a capstone project.

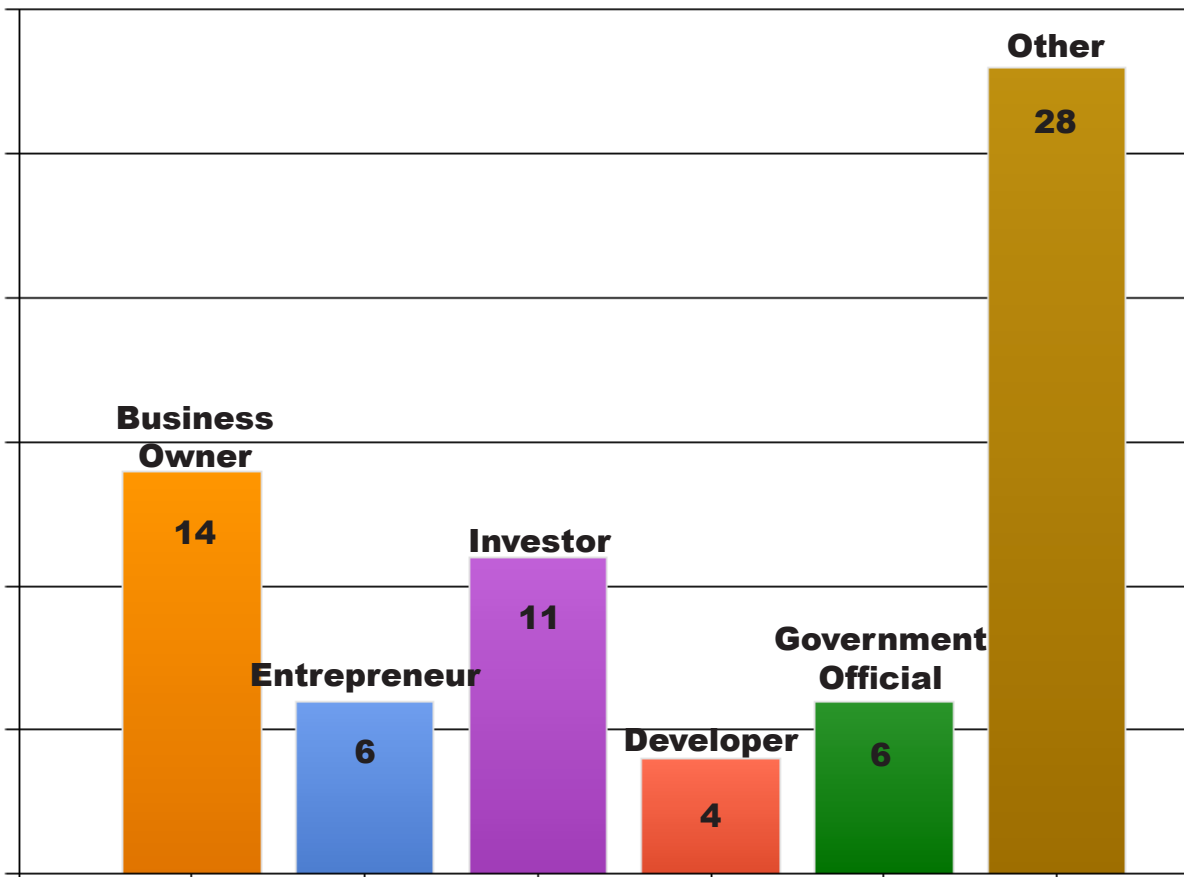


# survey results

Have you worked with or do you currently work with Regional Economic Development Inc. (REDI)?



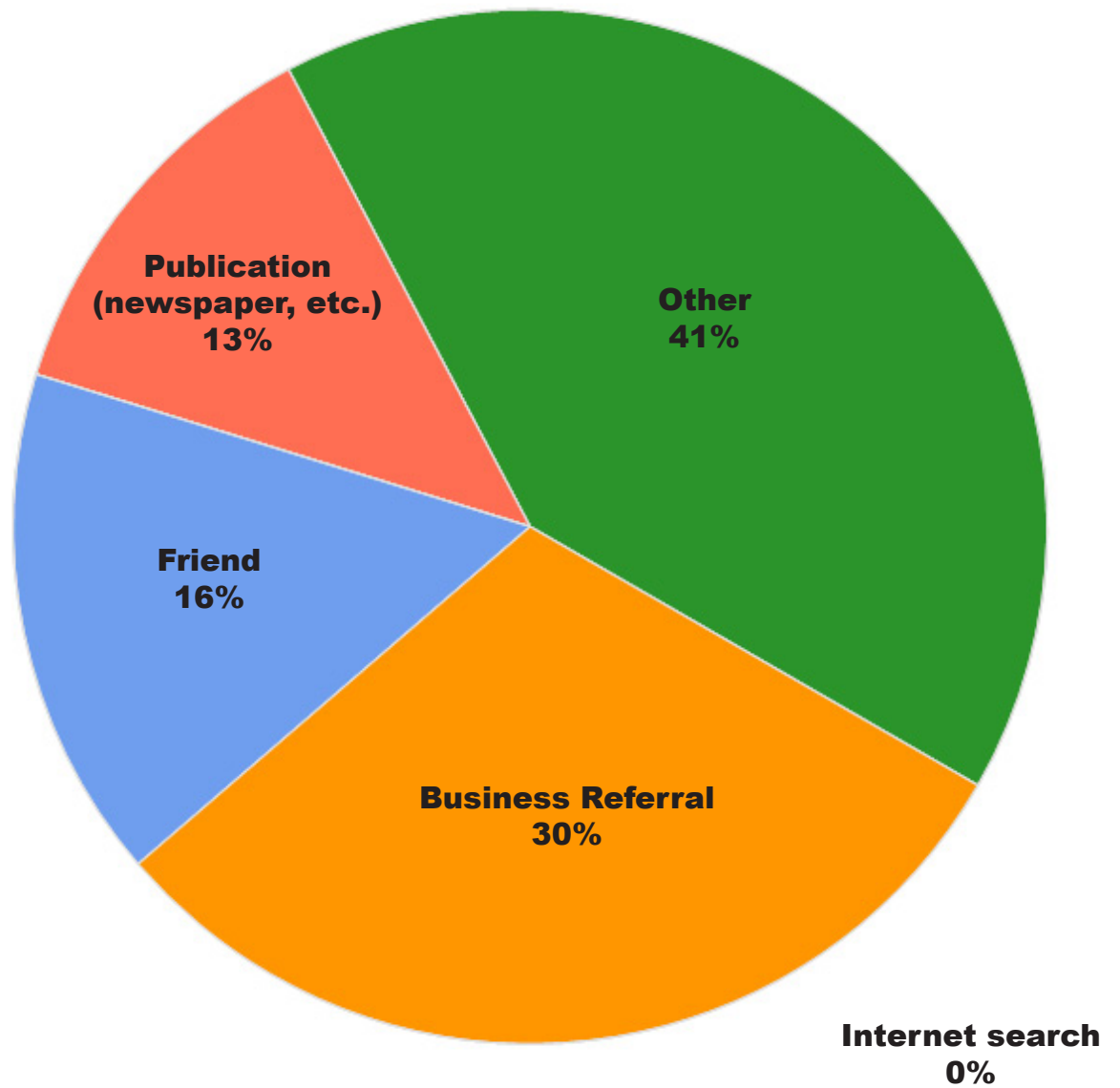
Which best describes your role in the community as it relates to Regional Economic Development Inc. (REDI)? Please check all that apply.



Popular 'other' responses:

- Local business
- Board member
- Chamber member
- Banker
- Realtor

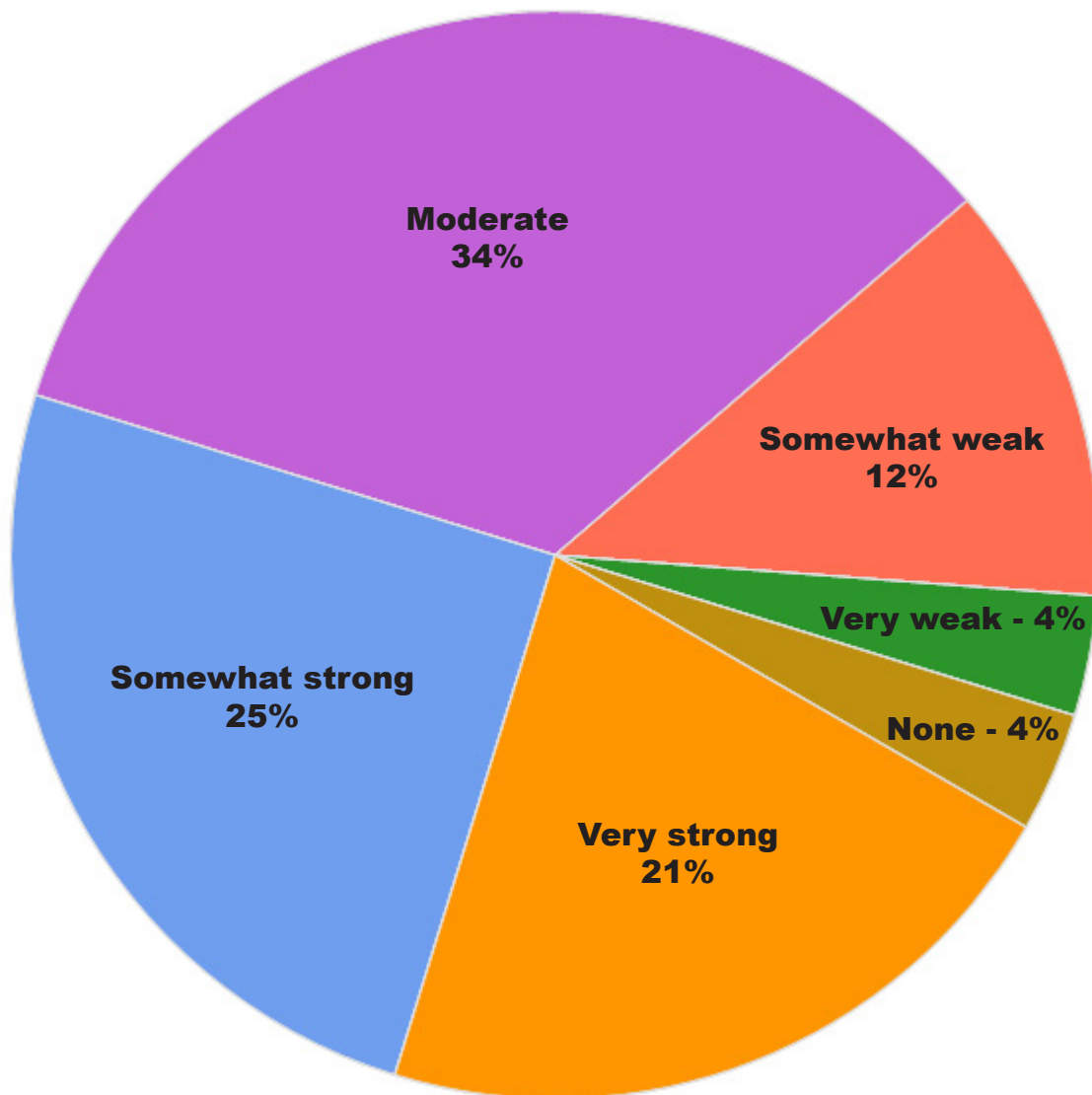
How did you first hear about REDI?



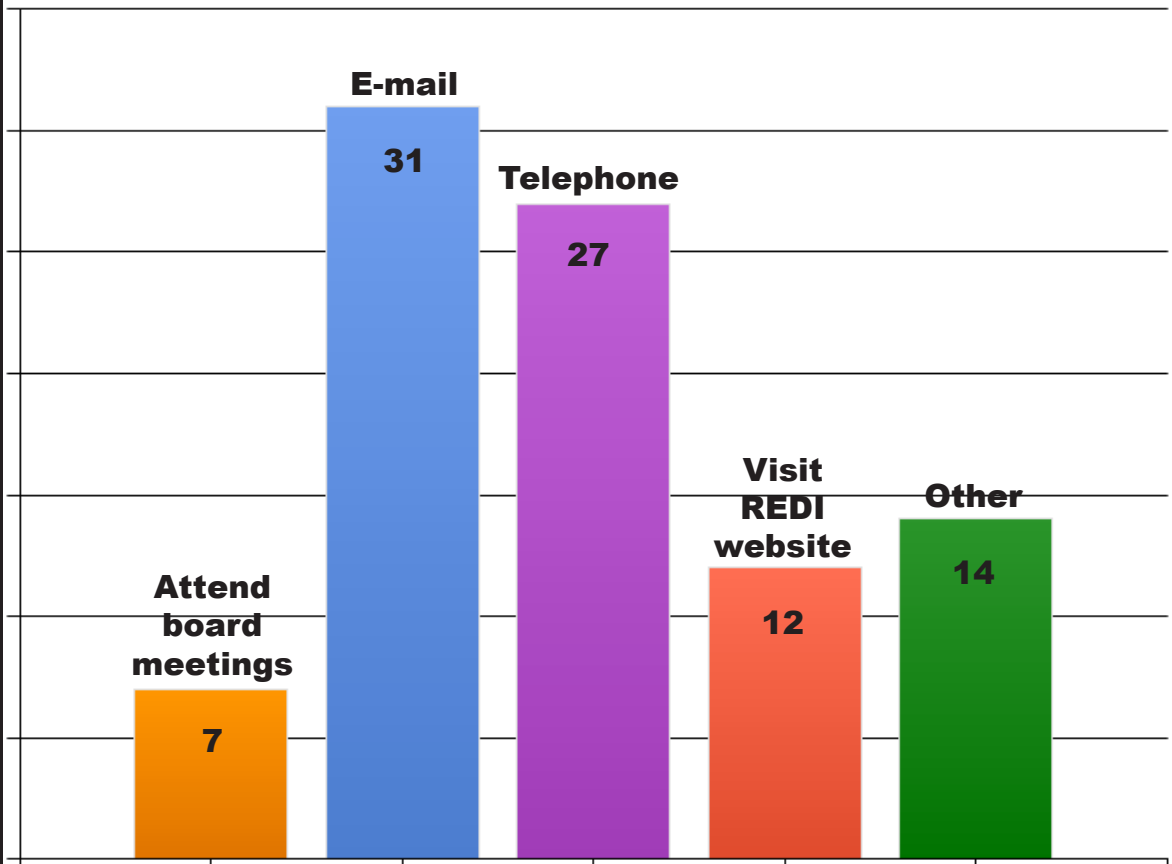
Popular 'other' responses:

- Chamber of Commerce
- Extended relationships with economic development stakeholders
- Roots in Columbia
- Community Involvement

Using the scale below, how would you best describe the quality of communication you have with REDI?



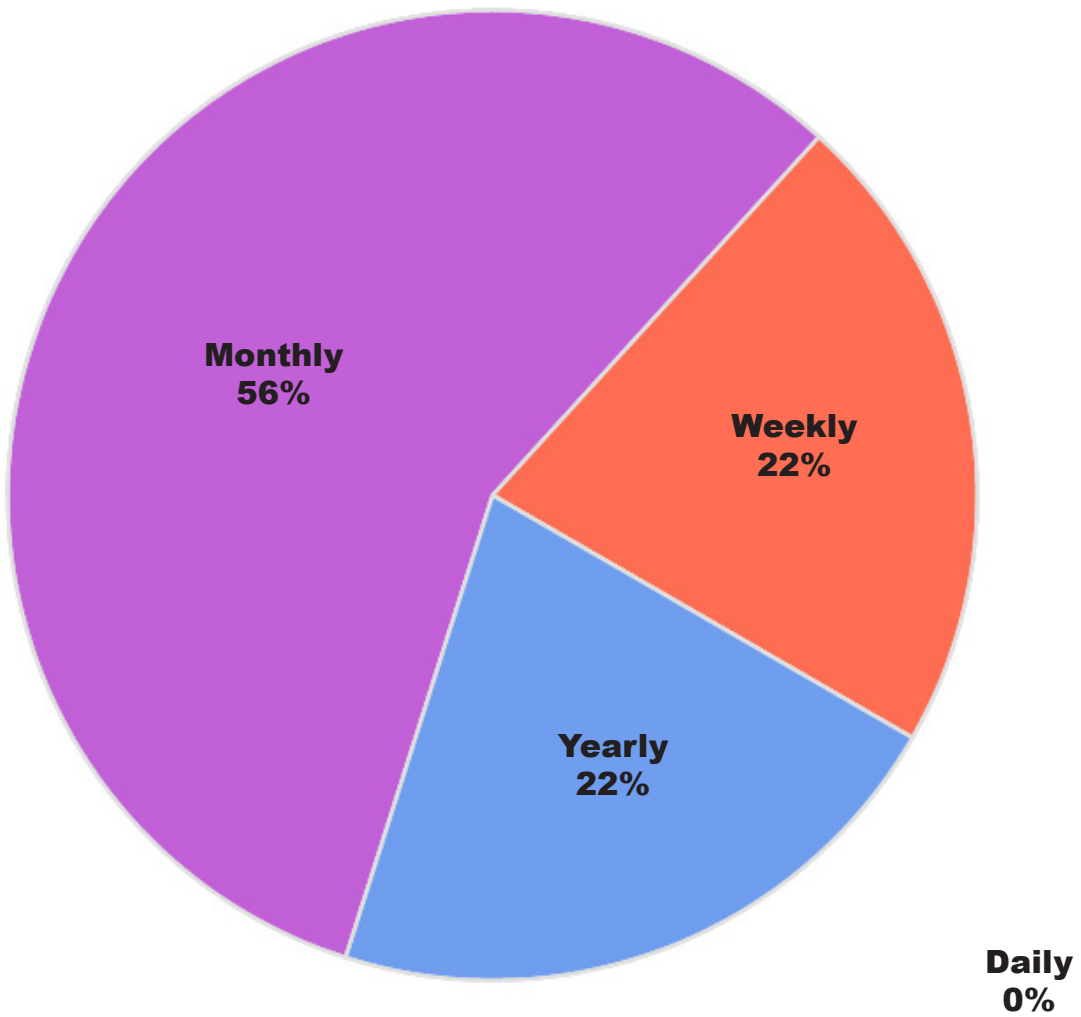
How do you currently communicate with REDI? Please check all that apply.



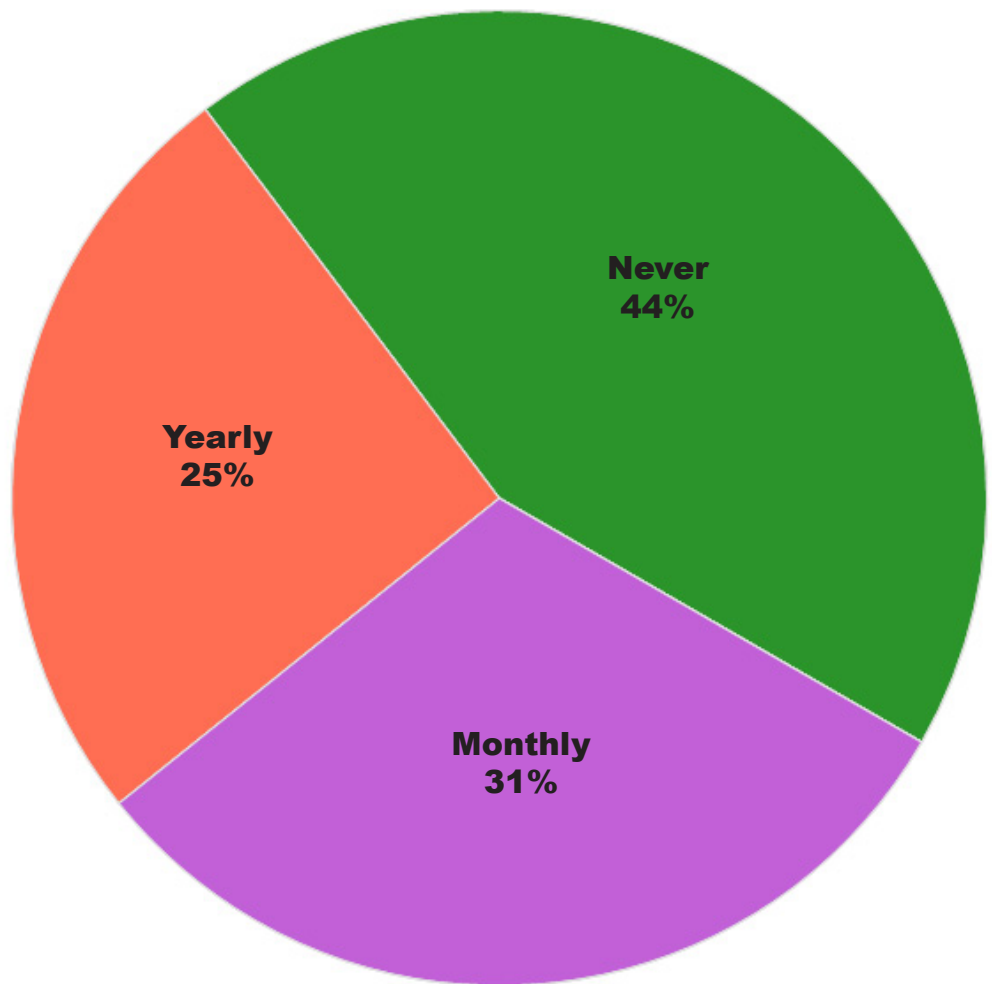
Popular 'other' responses:

- Through Chamber of Commerce
- Face to face meetings
- Economic development events
- Through friends

How often does this communication occur?

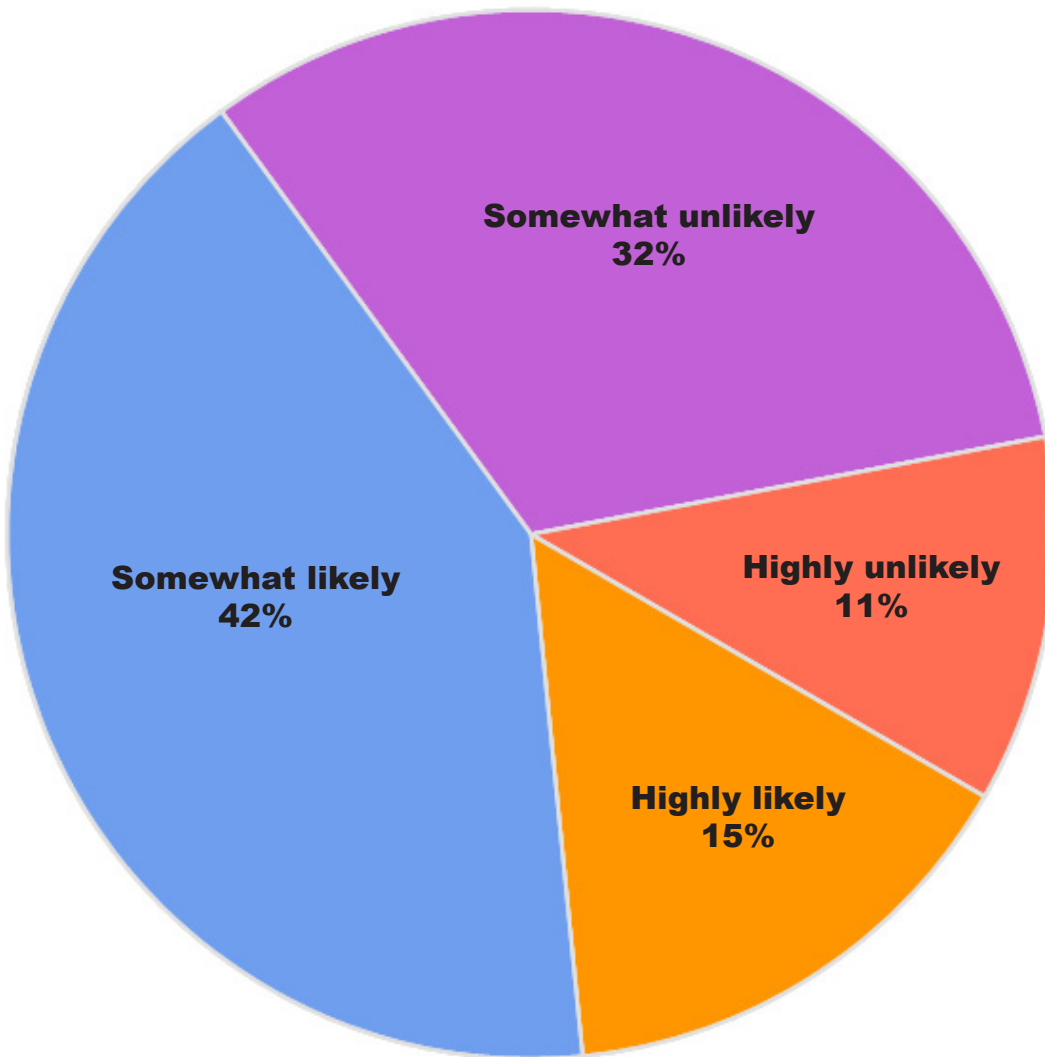


How often do you use REDI's website (columbiaredi.com)?

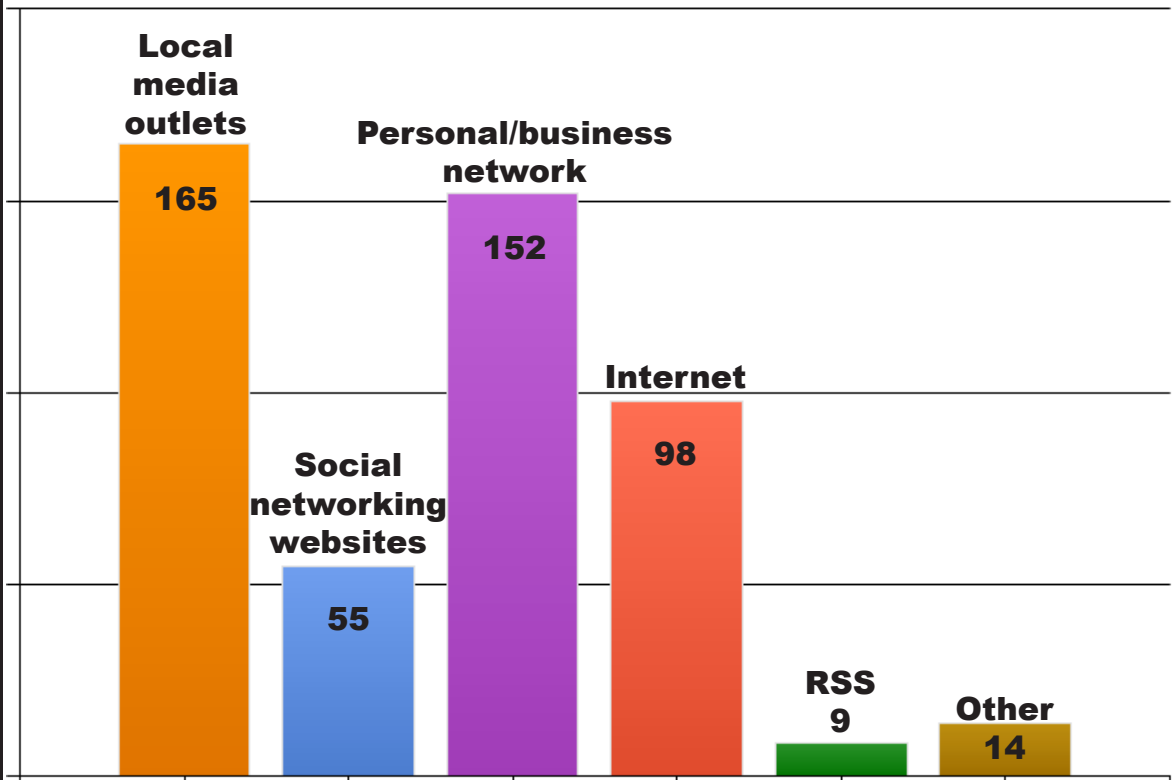


**Weekly - 0%**  
**Daily - 0%**

If REDI had a blog that allowed people to post and share thoughts regarding local businesses, how likely is it that you would read and/or post to it?



How do you get your information about the Columbia area? Please check all that apply.



Popular 'other' responses:

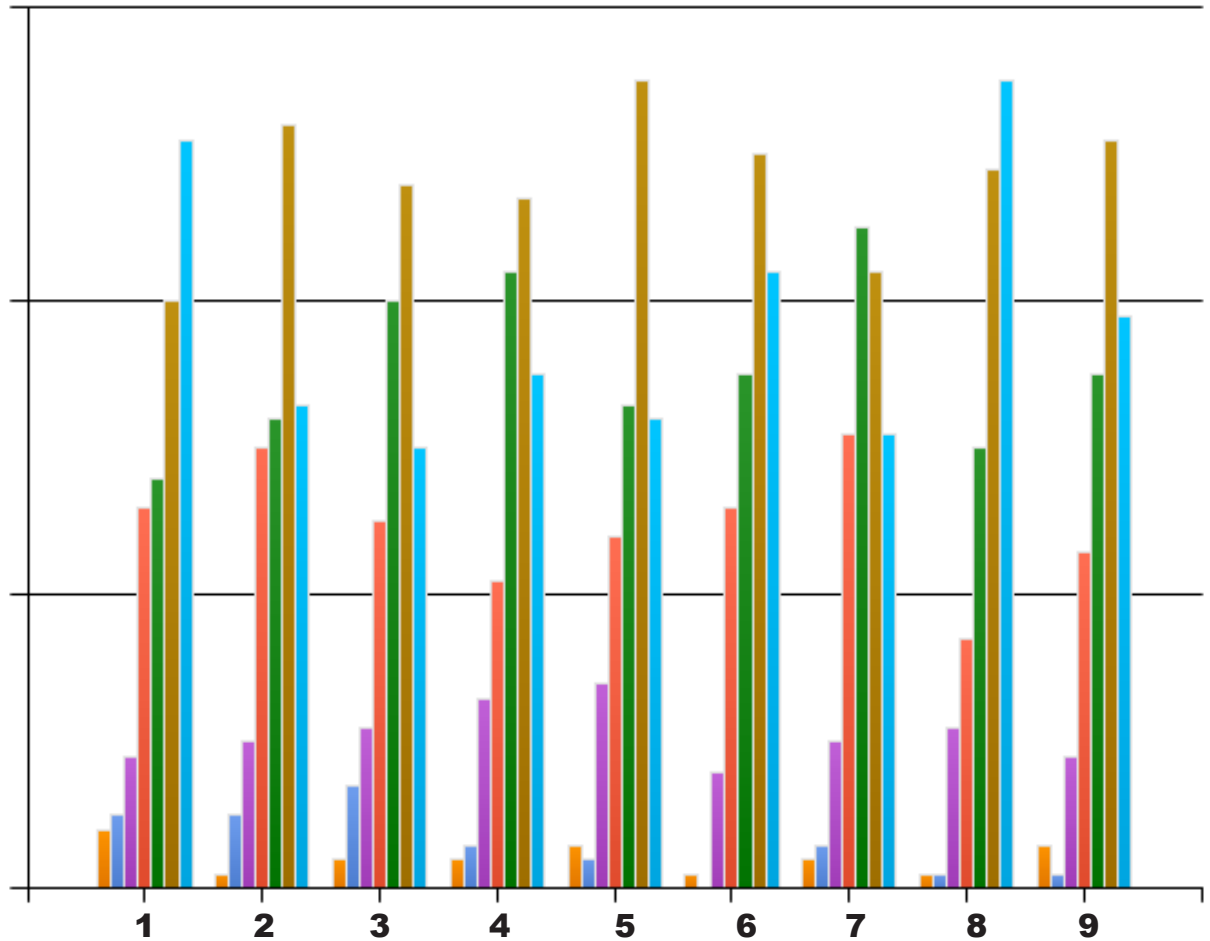
- Word of mouth
- Chamber of Commerce
- Community organizations

What Web sites do you use to get your information about the area? If none, please leave blank.

Popular responses:

- Columbia Tribune
- Columbia Missourian
- KMIZ
- KOMU
- GoColumbiaMo
- Chamber of Commerce
- KBIA
- Columbia Business Times
  
- ShowMeBoone
- Facebook

Please rank each of these types of local information on the scale below in terms of how important it is to you that each is readily available.



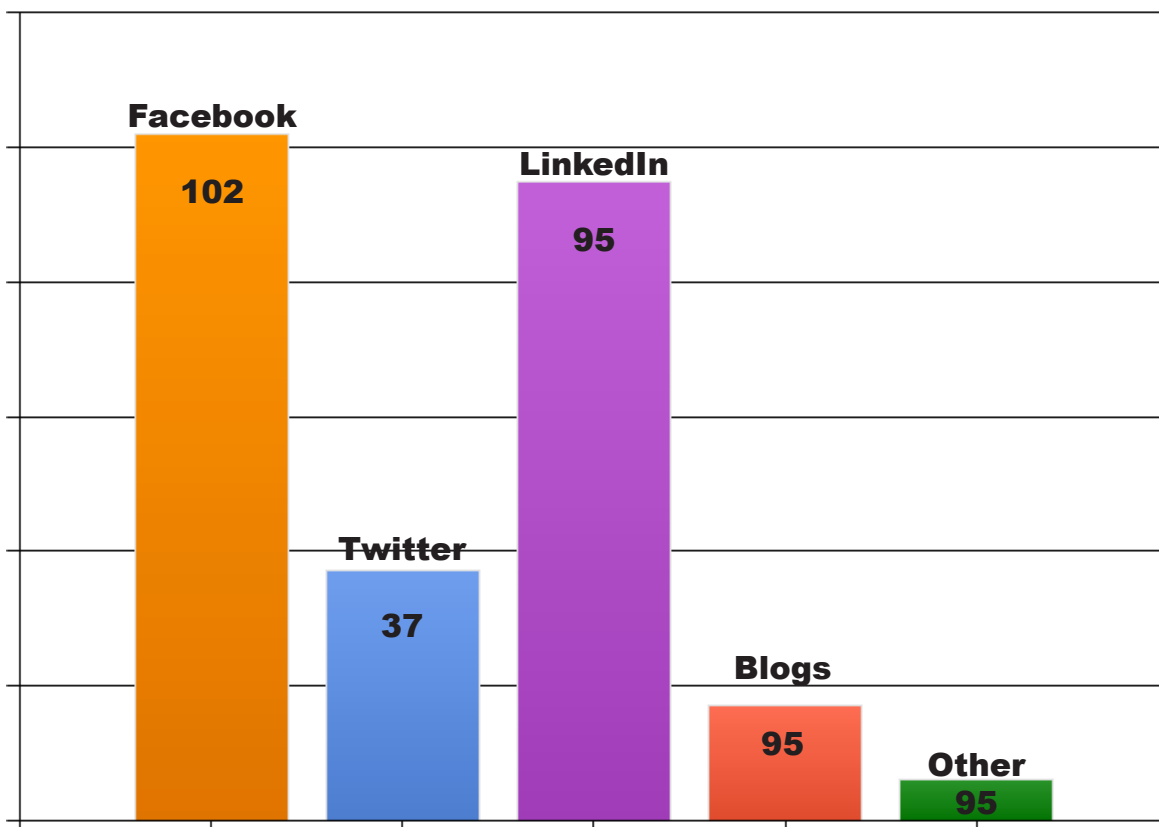
Information code

Scale

- 1 - Unemployment
- 2 - Income/earnings
- 3 - Housing
- 4 - Skilled workforce
- 5 - research/development
- 6 - Infrastructure
- 7 - Productivity
- 8 - Education
- 9 - Investment (internal/external)

- Orange - Not at all important
- Blue - Extremely important

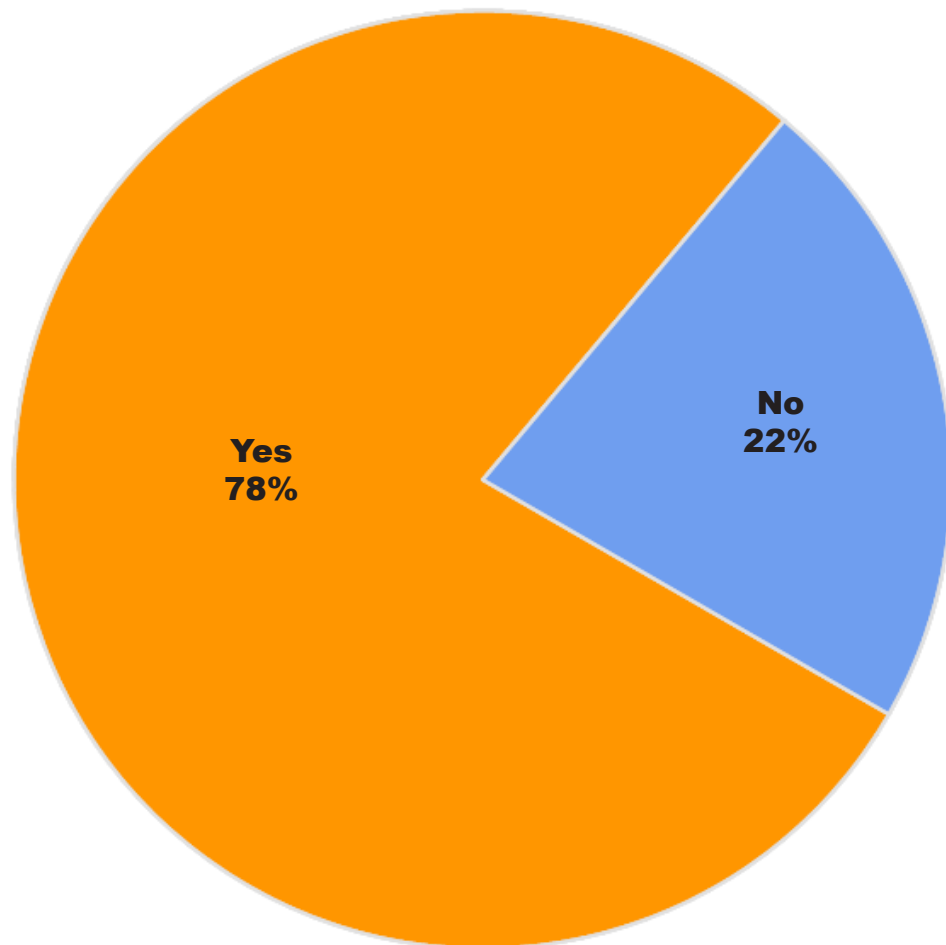
What social media outlets, if any, do you use? Please check all that apply.





Popular 'other' responses:

- None
- Columbia Tribune comments

Would you be willing to keep REDI updated and informed via e-mail regarding accolades and public relations news items regarding your business for posting on columbiaredi.com?



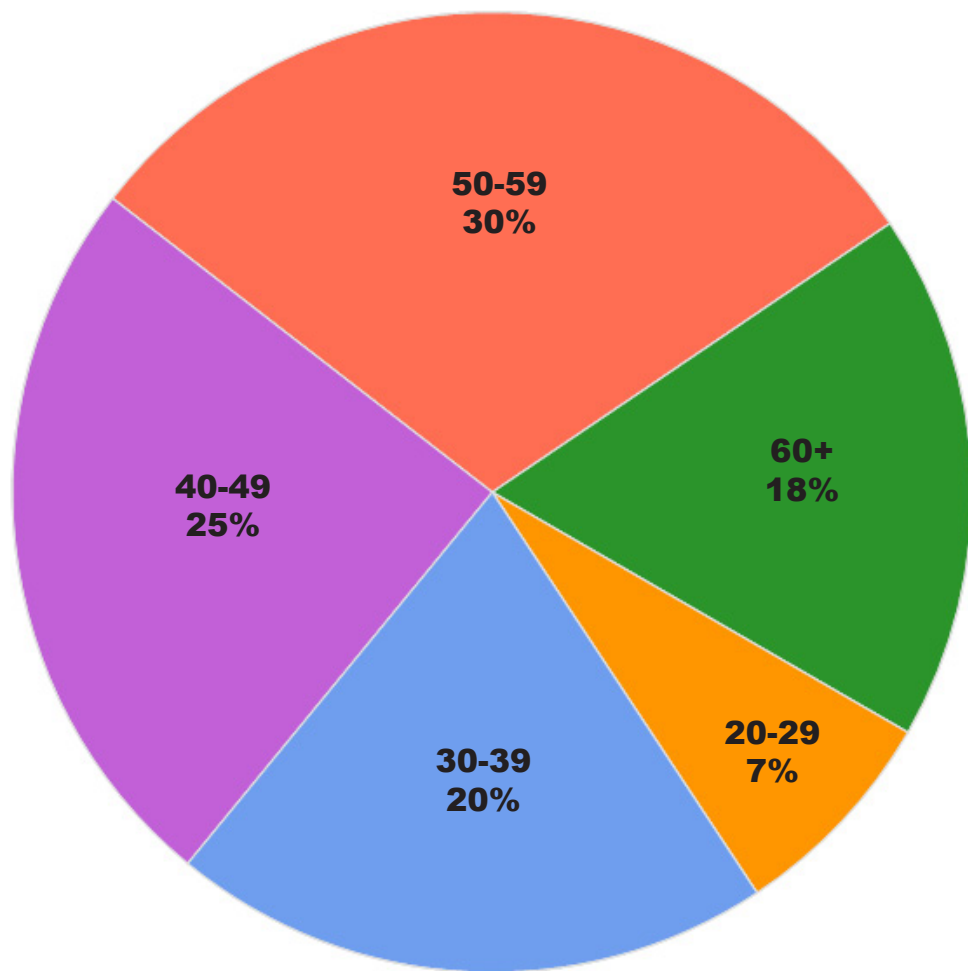


What information do you wish you would have known about the area prior to establishing your business or organization? If this does not apply, please leave blank.

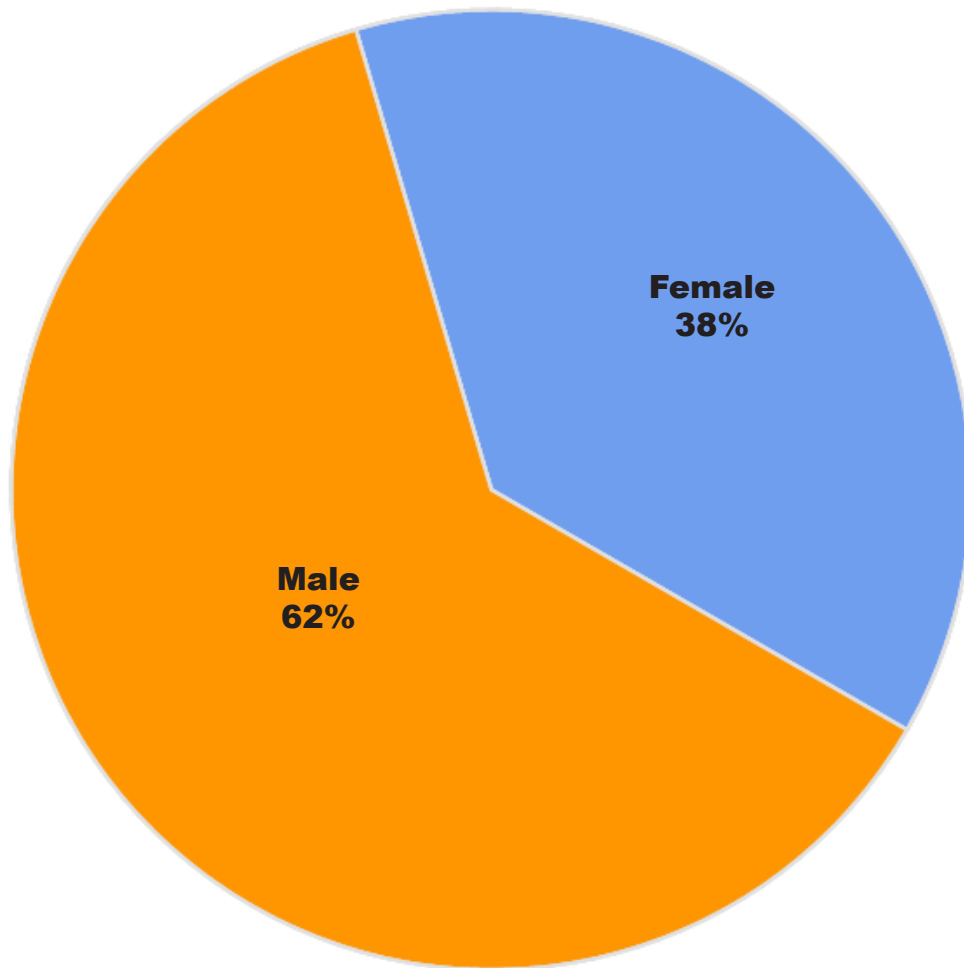
Popular responses:

- Plans for Southeast Columbia development
- Tax structures
- Community culture/social scene
- Real estate

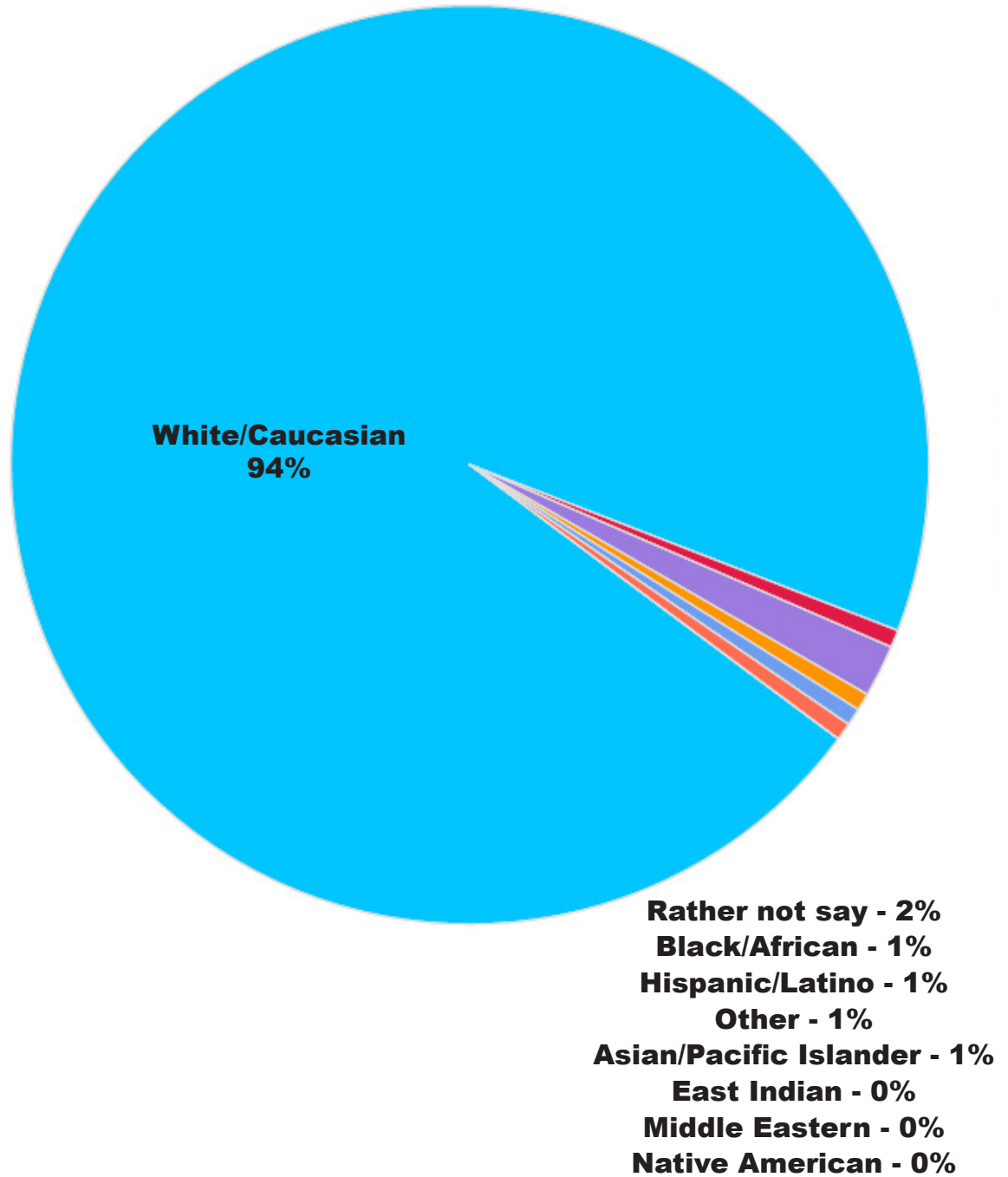
What is your age?



What is your gender?



What is your ethnicity?





# wordpress guide

## Logging in

[www.columbiarediblog.com/wp-admin](http://www.columbiarediblog.com/wp-admin)



Username: ColumbiaREDI

Password: Capstone

## Creating a New Blog Post

Locate and click the Posts Tab on the left sidebar. A new window will appear displaying all of your posts, at the very top there is an 'add new' button. Select this and you begin writing the blog post. You can save any post and resume it later by saving it to your drafts. When finished make sure to add '**tags**' and select which **category** the post falls under.

## Hyperlinking within a blog post

First you must decide what text you would like to make a link. Then highlight the text you want to link and click  this button. Once you click this it will ask where you want the link to go, set the target 'open link in a new window.' This will keep people on your site. Then you need to copy and paste the link into the Link URL space. If you would like to delete a link you can just highlight and delete the link and text, or highlight the link and click .

## **Adding Media**

### Photos



See image above: Rollover text will appear when you hover over the first icon that will say 'Add Photos.' Click here, and then find the photo on your computer that you wish to add. (.jpeg, .png, .gif files work the best.) A box will appear with many options (see below).

**Link URL**

None
 File URL
 Post URL

*Enter a link URL or click above for presets.*

**Alignment**
 None
 Left
 Center
 Right

**Size**
 Thumbnail (109 x 150)
 Medium (219 x 300)
 Large
 Full Size (270 x 369)

[Delete](#)

You can select where you would like the image to appear on the page by choosing an alignment and a size. When you are finished click 'Insert into Post.'

#### Video

Click the second icon from the left next to the Upload/Insert – and repeat the steps above. When you add an image or video for the first time, they will be added to your 'Media Library' automatically. If you would like to re-use a photo/video that has already been uploaded you can select it within the media library.

 *Edit Post*

**Press Release**

Permalink: <http://columbiarediblog.com/2010/05/06/press-release/>

Upload/Insert     

#### Adding Links to the Blog Homepage

These are different than hyperlinks within a post, because they will stay on the homepage. To add long-term links to the homepage click "Links" --> Add New --> then enter the Text in the Name for the link and paste the link into the Web Address.

## Add New Link

Name

Example: Nifty blogging software

Web Address

Example: `http://wordpress.org/` — don't forget the `http://`

Description

This will be shown when someone hovers over the link in the blogroll, or optionally below the link.

Categories

All Categories  Blogroll

Leave the Description field blank, and check the categories boxes that apply to the link. The name “Blogroll” can be changed by selecting “Link Categories” under the Links Tab. Here you can add new Link Categories ex: Local Government, Columbia Entrepreneurs, Site Relocation Specialists.

### Blog Stats

The best way to track the activity on the blog is by checking the traffic. You can see a simplified version of your stats by clicking “Dashboard” on the left toolbar and scrolling down. To see an expanded version of blog stats click “Dashboard” and then select “Blog Stats”

### Settings

Located on the left sidebar on the bottom. Several additional options become available by clicking the Settings tab.



General- Controls the name of blog, tagline, icon, date, and E-mail address

Reading – Controls # of posts on homepage, full text/summary, post sharing options.

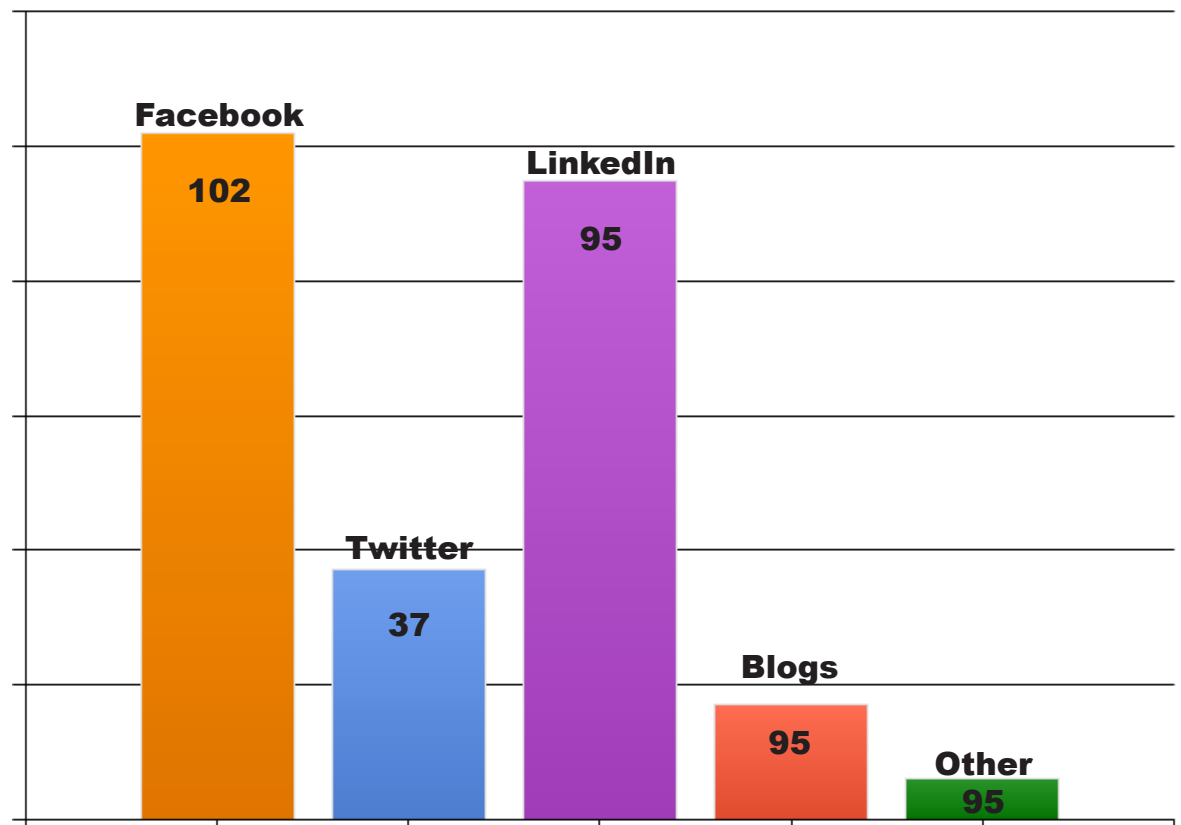
Writing – Controls size of post box, and default post and link categories.

Discussion- Controls comment settings, moderation settings and e-mail notifications.

Privacy- Controls how findable the blog is by search engines.

# facebook guide

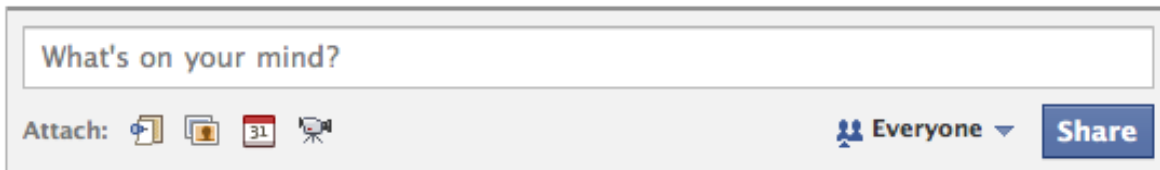
With 85 percent of the Columbia Chamber of Commerce list reporting that they have a Facebook account, the social networking site is definitely the most popular choice for connecting on the Internet. Businesses can take full advantage of fan pages to promote everything about the business, and that's exactly what we wanted for REDI when we set up its very own fan page.



The idea of a fan page is to increase communication and conversation between the business and those who are invested in it. That's exactly what REDI can do with its posts. As of right now, the REDI page averages about 10 pages views, but that number spikes on days when page posts are made. Good things to post on the page wall include links to REDI blog posts with very short descriptions, links to relevant news articles, event descriptions or short thoughts about economic development issues. Keep in mind that although there is no limit on the number of characters a Facebook wall post may have, shorter means better. People don't want to read long paragraphs on Facebook – that's what the blog is for. A link to an external site, such as the REDI blog, will be much more successful in getting users to read or view what you want them to.

### How to post to the wall

This part is easy. On the Columbia REDI page, the default page is the wall. Anyone can share (post) something to the REDI wall. If you have a URL to go along with your post, pasting the URL along with the text will automatically link it to the appropriate page. If you want, you can even delete the URL text itself after the link is established if you want a more polished look.



Once you click the blue 'share' box, the post is published to the top of the wall, pushing all other content down, the same way as a blog. The post will also show up at the top of all REDI fans' news feeds. If you include an external link, fans can go to it without going to the REDI fan page, although they have the option to go there first by clicking on the Columbia REDI page link that appears before the post.

### Commenting and sharing

The best way for more people to know about the post is by commenting on and sharing the post. Below every single published post is a comment link. Clicking the link pulls up a small comment box below the post. Anyone can type a comment and click the blue 'comment' box to have their comment published below the post. Once a comment is posted, the original publisher and the person who commented will receive notifications (highlighted by a red number over the small globe in the upper left corner of the Facebook window) whenever there are any follow-up comments. As more people comment, more people will start to receive notifications about comments. We want those people to come back and post follow-up comments in reply to others. That's how the conversation gets started.

While comments are very good for conversation about a particular topic, they do not necessarily attract new users to the post. Therefore, in addition to commenting, sharing the post is important. Once you see that a post has been published, you know that all of REDI's fans can view it. But what about people who are not fans? That's where you come in. At the bottom of every post, along with the comment link, is a 'share' link. If you click that and confirm, you are publishing the post to your personal wall, which in turn allows it to show up in all of your friends' news feeds. Assuming all of your friends are not fans of REDI, there will be new eyeballs on the post as a result of you sharing. Hopefully, those people

will also share it, and the number of people who see the post will expand as the process continues.



**ed** Economic D **Columbia REDI** Check out this presentation on the importance of social media in economic development. Is there anything you see on here that we should be doing?

**SOCIAL MEDIA 101**  
for Economic Developers

**Maximizing Your Success With Social Media in Economic Development**  
www.slideshare.net

Economic developers around the nation understand the importance of integrating social media into their marketing plans.

22 minutes ago · Comment · Like · Share · Promote

**ed** Economic D  **Comment**

### Suggesting fans

Sharing is a great way to tell your non-REDI fan friends about a REDI post. However, if you have friends on Facebook who you think should be fans of REDI, it is just as easy to suggest they become a fan of the REDI fan page. There is a 'suggest to friends' button in the upper left section of the page right below the logo. Clicking on it will pull up your list of Facebook friends. You can select whomever you want from the list, and they will receive a notification to be a fan of the page. Again, the more fans REDI has, the more people who are able to see the post in their news feeds when it is published.



**redi**

**Regional Economic Development Inc.**  
*Serving Columbia/Boone County, Missouri since 1988*

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### Automatic feed to Twitter

Whenever a post is published from the administrator of the REDI fan page, in this case the REDI staff, the exact text of the post is automatically tweeted on the ColumbiaREDI twitter account. This is why it is so important to keep the posts themselves short and include links to longer content if needed. Twitter only allows for 140 characters, so if you want all of your Facebook post text to appear, you will have to make it about 120 characters or fewer to allow the tweet to also include the link back to Facebook.

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