

Two trends – the increasing use of computers and other electronic devices to access news and information and the reduced use of paper to help the environment – have contributed to the growth of “paperless” annual reports.

Often today businesses and organizations produce their annual reports on a CD or DVD, or put them on their websites. While these reports are electronic, the layout and format generally resembles that of a printed report.

MaineHousing took it a step further. If it is an electronic report, we reasoned, why make it look like a printed report?

Why not take advantage of what the electronic media offers and, rather than producing a static report that looks like it a book, produce a video report?

A video has several advantages.

- ***It is less expensive.*** A video eliminates the costs associated with designing, printing, and mailing a printed report, as well as the cost of the paper itself. For the past few years our annual report budget was in the \$22,000 to \$25,000 range. The cost of the 2009 video annual report was \$16,000.
- ***It can be used for multiple purposes.*** We have used short segments of the report, generally testimonials from customers and partners, to market MaineHousing programs and services on our website. We also used clips from the report to illustrate housing needs and accomplishments as a kick off to our annual Affordable Housing Conference.
- ***It is accessible.*** Distribution is limitless. Rather than a set number of copies that are printed and mailed, the video is available to anyone who wants it simply by looking on our website. It is convenient – no filing, storing, or misplacing a printed version. And it is closed captioned.
- ***It is in tune with today’s communications methods.*** Many people today rely on electronic media, be it television news or websites, for information. A video annual report is a natural for them, or for anyone who has ever looked at YouTube.
- ***It is a more effective way to share information.*** Affordable housing accomplishments are all about people and their stories – and video can be far more effective than print to show not just what a housing finance agency does, but why it matters.

Our Communications and Planning Unit started the process in December by drafting a scope of work and getting the concept of a video annual report approved by the agency's Executive Department.

In January we advertised for proposals for the report through a Request for Information (RFI). Two of the firms that responded to the RFI were interviewed, and we selected a South Portland-based company (Catama Film and Video) to produce the report. The quality of their work and the easy way they drew sincere comments from the people they interviewed – important for the annual report – were impressive.

At the same time, we prepared a script. The video would include interviews with a variety of partners that work with us in a number of different areas of affordable housing – homeownership, rental housing development, keeping people safe and warm in their homes, combating homelessness, and management of existing affordable housing.

The overall theme of the annual report was how MaineHousing contributed to Maine, not only in terms of affordable housing but also in terms of providing jobs and employment, in revitalizing the downtown areas of the state's urban centers, in preventing sprawl, and in providing hope to people living challenging lives.

The format would include interviews with several partners and customers, along with the department director involved with that particular program. MaineHousing Director Dale McCormick would tie the sections together and provide an overview of the agency and its programs.

We scripted the interviews with agency personnel to ensure that the points we wanted to get across about a program, such as the number of people it helped during the year, were included.

Interviews with customers and partners were unscripted, however, in order to make the video more spontaneous and genuine. Instead, the film company interviewer was provided a summary of what we hoped to get from each interview – and the interviewer asked questions to draw the subjects out.

The results were outstanding – sincere, heartfelt testimony from people who benefitted tremendously from the housing we provided. In a video clip currently being used to introduce the homeless section of our website (originally part of the annual report), a formerly homeless woman has this to say:

*“For me, I was probably in the worst possible position in my life. I was kind of at the end of my road (sic). I didn't know where I was going to live, I didn't know how I was going to afford it, didn't know what I was going to do with my life.*

*“MaineHousing provided my foundation. It gives me obviously a place to live. But if I didn't have housing that is affordable there is no way I would have been able to re-enter ... my community, and go to school, and have my children come home, and do all those things. I would have been struggling, or worse. Housing is so important to people, and I appreciate it. It is where you gotta go every day. That is your rock right there. That is the foundation of your day.”*

The testimonials have been particularly effective as website “clips” to introduce MaineHousing programs and services. As a byproduct of the annual report, these clips were produced at minimum cost. Nothing is better than the words of a happy customer for promoting a program or service.

We also used portions of the annual report video as an introduction to the 2009 Annual Affordable Housing Conference that we sponsor. It drew the audience in, reminding everyone not just what they do professionally, but why it matters every day to people statewide.

The annual report has generated a considerable amount of praise and attention since it went up on MaineHousing’s website, including comments and questions from other housing finance agencies. We are pleased with our first attempt at using this kind of format and are producing another video annual report in 2010 covering the 2009 fiscal year.

To view the annual report please go to:

<http://www.mainehousing.org/DATAFinancialReports.aspx>