Questions on SWIPCO RFP and Responses As of 11-20-2020

Q: I've been working on recommendations for your RFP and another question came to mind on your target audience. We narrowed down your audience to three categories: elderly/disabled, work route transportation and general public. To go a step further, do you have an age range for these audiences and if it's a mix of males/females?

A: Elderly for us are over 65. Obviously, that trends a bit more female because the overall population trends female over 65.
Disabled for us are almost all adults, primarily between the ages of 18 and 60ish. The majority have intellectual disabilities, although mobility may be an issue as well. Frankly, many of the disabled groups we work with aren't long lived. Male/Female breakdown would as for the general population, about 50/50.
Work Route transportation really trends between 20 and 40. I don't have gender information, it kind of depends on the place of work, it's not a monolithic group but certain industries do trend either male or female.

Q: Does SWIPCO have an overall budget for the project and an overall budget for any paid advertising per year?

A: Yes.

Q: When discussing integration of the website, what specific programs or integrations are you referring to?

A: Integrate the SWITA website with our scheduling system (Paraplan) and payment (currently Paypal).

Q: To what extent are these integrations supposed to be a part of the website?

A: The role of the marketing consultant will be to develop a portal area on the website, I expect this will most likely be a main feature of the home page that will send people to the Paraplan program. The technical aspects of that portal will primarily fall to Paraplan.

Q: What marketing research has been completed or surveys to clients or members?

A: No substantive research. We have basic demographic information that any system would have for reporting purposes to DOT. We would like to see a firm propose as part of the strategy a data gathering plan.

Q: Do you wish to have the ability to update the website internally (custom content management system)?

A: Yes, there are frequently small changes, such as service time changes, that we would not want to have to involve a third party to do.

Q: Reviewing the current site and requirements for the new version, we estimate a site of 15 or fewer pages. Do you you agree with this estimate?

A: Yes.

Q: Until the new scheduling system is integrated, do you have expectation for the new site to contain tools for this process? For example, an online form which can be filled out then sent to dispatchers?

A: Yes and No. For example, we have a major crunch in the late summer when parents register their child for school transportation, and we want to be able to do that—and we expect that to not initially be integrated into Paraplan, but we need the registration date in a user friendly format, and we need the payment. However, we don't necessarily want something at this time where someone would enter a general request for a ride and it be implied that this will be met. That may sound like poor customer service, but we want to make sure they are contacting us directly for those services as often there are many considerations to talk through.

Q: Is there a need for accepting payment for trips on the new site? If so, will an online utility such as PayPal work? If you wish to accept credit cards in a standalone system, we will need to incorporate the appropriate SSL certificate and payment gateway requirements in our estimate.

A: Yes, we currently accept payment for certain services via our website, which has a Paypal link. We don't have any issues with continuing to use Paypal in a new site.

Q: Will SWIPCO/SWITA provide content – text and photographs – for your new website or should development/photography be included in proposal?

A: This RFP is not just for a website, but for a marketing strategy. We fully expect that the firm selected will want to develop new content and have new photography and video done. We don't expect any firm to know exactly what they are going to do now (X number of shots, etc.) but to propose that they develop that plan and then implement it. That being said, we have some decent photos of our services that we would expect to be incorporated, but we expect new content to be developed as well. A major area we are lacking is pictures of people. We are great at taking pictures of a new water tower after we build it, but horrible about getting shots of the guys using the crane to put it up, or of the family that we helped get their roof fixed (which is what people really want to see)

Q: Are current website analytics available for review?

A: That will be available to the vendor that we select, but I can tell you that usage is low and primary interactions are to find our phone number.

Q: Is need for building ridership universal in 8 county region or geographically disparate?

A: As a public transit provider, our goal is to meet the needs in all 8 of our counties. That being said, some areas do have lower utilization and we believe there is unmet need. Part of this will be to work with SWITA staff to fully identify that unmet need.

Q: Is need for building ridership for all services or specific needs (ie., specialized transport)?

A: We have a fairly high utilization by the elderly and disabled. We wish to continue that, however, yes, we are growing our general public ridership—and the two primary sub categories of that are workforce transportation, particularly lower skilled workers from the metro area being transported out to plants in the rural area, and this includes a significant immigrant population, and the second sub category of general public is our school age transportation, which primarily consists of children not served by their school bus service—such as pre-school, daycare, and in-town students.

Q: Are all services available in all areas of service region?

A: Transit yes. There are some of our loan programs that exclude Pottawattamie County and Mills County, but that is very in the weeds but important when working with those programs.

Q: Can you provide current ridership demographics beyond elderly, disabled, children, immigrant to help understand messaging needs?

A: The primary metrics that we track are elderly, disabled, and general public. Typically, someone who is disabled but over 65 is counted as disabled. General public are neither disabled or elderly. For FY20 the breakdown was General Public: 128,232 Elderly: 19,697 Disabled: 158,003.

Q: How are riders finding out about SWITA now? (For example, is it via other agencies, organizations, and riders?)

A: Many of our rides come from referrals from service providers. We do some limited advertising via newspapers and radio. The vehicles themselves are everywhere and many people contact us simply from seeing the vehicle and wondering if they can get a ride. We don't have great data on how people know about us, we expect that research to be a part of the marketing strategy.

Q: Do you serve those who live outside 8 county region and/or provide service to/from locations outside 8 county region?

A: Yes we do, but any service we have must either originate or end in our area. Iowa is divided into transit service regions, so I have no strong desire to actively recruit ridership outside of our 8 counties. However, we work with employers who are brining employees into our region, and if the math works out we will work to serve them because they are coming into our region. We do want people to know that we can take them to appointments (especially medical) outside the region, but honestly, most assume that already.

Q: The RFP states, "The first phase of the project is anticipated to last approximately one year in which the majority of the content and strategy will be developed." Consequently, will the website enhancements be launched in phase two and the infrastructure/development are in phase one?

A: *The phases of this project may not fall strictly on an annual basis. That being said, we have no set hard deadline for when research ends, implementation begins, or when the new website will be launched. However, as a rough guide, I expect that the planning phase will last approximately 3-4 months. During that time I would expect that some work would be moving forward on the website, but primarily technical work, not creative. However, once the plan is developed, I anticipate then more emphasis being made on content development (ads, website design, photography, etc), guided by the plan.*

Q: Does phase one include the development of the integrated marketing communications plan, assuming it will be implemented in phase two - and the strategy, messaging, content development and creative would be a part of phase one so it's ready to launch in phase two?

A: *Yes.*

Q: Has any research been conducted and if so, when - and we assume it will be shared? If research has not been conducted, are you open to a research component in phase one to better understand the customer, customer journey and consideration drivers?

A: *No real substantive research has been done, so we would expect a firm to want to spend some time doing that research to inform the plan.*

Q: Are you looking to redo the swipco.com site as well and not just development of the new swita.org site?

A: *Yes, we anticipate a portion of this work to devoted to updating not just the swipco.org website, but other materials such as brochures, leave behinds, etc.*

Q: Do we know what the scheduling system is that will need to be integrated into the new site?

A: *Paraplan. Paraplan itself is not ready yet to go live with their scheduling, so we want to work with them so when it is live we can move forward quickly. We view the work of the marketing consultant as having two versions of the SWITA site—one without reservation ability, and one with an area devoted to access by the consumer to Paraplan.*

Q: Will your site(s) be hosted by the vendor or internally - if internal are there specific hosting requirements to meet?

A: *We are open to either, we just need the ability to make simple edits (change dates, announce closures, etc) without having to go through another party. Any cost associated with hosting should be considered separate from this RFP and something we would discuss if selected.*