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# MOVERS - A stream of data on downtown flows on Web

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A north downtown business that is using its technological expertise to involve the community in the city's new downtown master plan also shows how young professionals are trying to change the civic process.

In just three hours, SecretPenguin, a graphic design company, whipped up a Web site to stream live video from the last few public meetings on the master plan. And now that the series of meetings is over, the site is collecting public comments.

SecretPenguin got involved after last Tuesday's meeting.

Omaha planning officials and architecture firm HDR Inc., which is creating the plan, kicked off the series of informal public meetings last Monday, holding one a day, with the final one on Friday.

At the Tuesday meeting at the W. Dale Clark Library downtown, Beth Katz, a board member of the Young Professionals Council, asked if there was a way for people attending to comment later, after digesting the information, or for others who couldn't attend to comment.

"It just seemed to me like it would make sense to look for some alternative avenues to collect that information," Katz said.

The Internet seemed the obvious choice.

The meeting facilitator seemed open to the idea but didn't know how to set up the technology, Katz said.

After asking the question, Katz typed a message on her iPhone to Dave Nelson, owner of SecretPenguin, using a social networking Web site called Twitter. She asked if he would talk to city and HDR officials and offer to set up a Web site.

The next morning, Nelson worked from 4 a.m. to 7 a.m. to build the Web site, omahadowntownplan.com.

It initially just contained links to the City of Omaha's Web site about the meetings as well as links to a map of downtown. But Nelson later filmed and streamed remaining meetings.

The first meeting with live streams attracted 111 viewers, Nelson said. "It just kind of proved that there's a need for that."

The site also has a blog.

The city will unveil the master plan in May.

"These sorts of big public decisions affect us all, and they need to be made with everybody's input," Katz said. "I hope it becomes a concrete example of how we can open up the process more. And I hope it inspires leaders to utilize technology more, to see technology as another form for input and creating a more transparent and inclusive process."

On Omaha.com

A link to the Web site.

Contact the writer

444-1183, christine.laue@owh.com

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