

DHT launches new online services

Herald-Tribune staff

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Grande Prairie is becoming increasingly connected, developing online communities and reaching out to others around the world, according to some local experts. Now the city's newspaper, the Daily Herald-Tribune is joining as well, proudly announcing new online services today.

Are you one of the millions of Facebook fanatics, do you love to tweet on Twitter? Want the latest insight into the newspaper and get the latest news as it happens. The Daily Herald-Tribune has now launched its own Facebook page featuring streaming headlines, reader forums, the ability for readers to upload their own photos, suggest stories and more. Find the page by searching for "Daily Herald-Tribune."

Facebook has become one of the most popular websites in the world with a membership that grows every day. Some recent estimates have shown as many as 200 million people using the Internet phenomena.

There are hundreds of groups on Facebook dedicated to Grande Prairie, including everything from sports activities and schools to unique issues.

One local web expert says it's increasing important to be online.

"I think Canada, specifically, is hitting the online world hard," said Nicole Baker, owner of Digital Blues, a local website design company.

Despite being a smaller city in population, the influx of people from across Canada and world in recent years to this area has helped develop Grande Prairie's online community as many people are using social networking sites to stay in touch with friends and family living elsewhere.

Baker, who is originally from Nova Scotia, said she recently used a social-networking to site to reconnect with a friend living in New Zealand that she hadn't seen in 20 years.

"She said to me, she can't find anyone from New Zealand online, but she find anyone from Canada."

Another new service being used by the Daily Herald-Tribune is Twitter. While not as well-known as Facebook, Twitter is a website that specializes in micro-blogging. Users have 140 characters to write what's on their mind or to share information and links with other people following their feed. The Daily Herald-Tribune is using Twitter to transmit breaking news headlines. Anyone on Twitter can find the newspaper by searching for "GPheraldtribune."

Darrell Winwood, new media editor for the Daily Herald-Tribune, says the new initiatives are about reaching readers the way they want.

"Newspapers are constantly trying to adapt and engage our communities in new ways," said Winwood. "If some people find it easier to get their news via Twitter or Facebook or other ways then we're going to deliver it that way."

The new forums allow for instant feedback from readers and allow people to contribute ideas and information to the newspaper.

"Readers today want to be a part of the news. We want people to feel like they can contribute and be a part of the news, not just have it simply delivered. I hope people will use these new services to interact with us."

One Grande Prairie real estate agent says using social networking services has helped her stay current on local affairs and connect with clients.

"It's a great way for me ... to get an edge," said Sandra Easton with Exit Realty. "A lot of my work comes from being online."

Easton was one of the first to subscribe to the new online features from the Daily Herald-Tribune, saying it's the most convenient way for her to get news, with headlines beamed directly to her account.

"Twitter is definitely my favourite. Before Twitter I never went to any news sites ... now if you want more info it's only a click away," she said.

Baker believes online sources are quickly becoming the dominate way to find information, including news.

"I don't even use the Yellow Pages anymore. If someone applies for a job with me I Google their name."

The website developer said that while she hasn't explored Twitter herself, it's not surprising to hear of news delivery this way.

"I expect it'll take off for sure."

For more information on the new services visit www.dailyheraldtribune.com or search for the paper on Twitter and Facebook.