



# YEAR IN REVIEW 2025

Communications Division



# YEAR IN REVIEW

2025

*The Communications Division provides a range of services supporting departments across the corporation. In addition, the team supports the Mayor through the provision of remarks, media relations support and graphic design services as requested.*

This document recognizes the commitment of the Communications Division in carrying out its responsibilities and notes the specific sub strategies for the areas of public engagement, internal communications, issues and crisis management, media relations, social media, website & AODA, advertising and graphic design.

## BACKGROUND

The services and how they are provided by corporate communications continue to evolve, driven by need, new technologies and best practices. The staff team provides a full suite of specialized disciplines and takes an integrated approach to ensure that initiatives and services receive wrap around support. Under this model, communications staff manage specific portfolios, while also carrying responsibilities as a communications lead for various client areas.

## WHAT WE DO

The Communications Division manages and provides services for a wide range of disciplines including communications (strategy and execution, internal), public consultation, social media, issues and crisis management, media relations, advertising and graphic design.

The division produces high value, professional-looking products and regularly provides advice on a range of issues regarding promotion, issues management, education and public engagement. Staff manage 3 websites, 6 social media platforms, produce various collateral, publish a corporate e-newsletter and provide oversight of other digital publications.

In 2025, Communications opened a Bluesky account to expand our social media presence and offer residents another reliable platform for updates and engagement. As more users moved away from X, establishing a presence on Bluesky ensured we could continue reaching our community where they are, providing timely information and fostering meaningful connections across multiple platforms.

**In September of 2024, Communications assumed responsibility for the Town's intranet, The HILLS (Home for Information, Listening, Learning, Sharing). In 2025, staff made significant progress in improving the site, leading efforts to remove outdated materials, standardize page and structure, and improve overall navigation.**

**Further site enhancements are anticipated in 2026.**

## GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The Communications Division takes a collaborative and continuous improvement approach to work that leverages all channels while remaining flexible in an environment of change. The team adheres to the following guiding principles:



Deliver communication services in a proactive, timely & transparent manner.



Provide professional advice, guided by industry best practices & experience.



Uphold the tenets of the Town's Public Engagement Charter.



Proactively identify & mitigate issues of reputational, legislative or financial concern ensuring senior staff are engaged.

## STRATEGIC ADVISORY GROUP

Increasingly, the role of communications has expanded to support senior leadership and borne out of a need to support the CAO has been the development of the Strategic Advisory Group (SAG). Membership includes the CAO, Commissioner of Corporate Services, Director of Communications, Strategic Initiatives staff and the Treasurer. On a weekly basis the team meets to address ongoing, new and emerging issues, support the agenda for the Mayor-CAO meetings and the bi-monthly senior management meetings to discuss political and strategic issues.

## CHALLENGES

### Workload

Similar to last year, demand for communications services remains high. In 2025, the team supported approximately 25 new initiatives (on top of the annual work program), including oversight of the Town's intranet, The HILLS. The team also supported many complex and unforeseen projects, which continue to strain the resources of a small team. Adding to the workload has been the website development project which has placed significant demand on staff. Staff logged over 500 hours to meet needs. Going forward, at least one new resource will be requested to keep up with workload demands and maintain the high quality of work that the team prides itself on.

### In preparation for the website development project, a significant amount of work was undertaken:

- **Content auditing:** Assessed pages for migration, revision, consolidation, or retirement.
- **Reorganization for new site:** Re-mapped content to align with approved information architecture, page types, and user journeys.
- **Accuracy & compliance:** Verified content accuracy, currency, ownership, accessibility, and plain-language compliance.
- **Pre-migration preparation & governance:** Prepared content for templates and implemented freezes, tracking, and approvals.

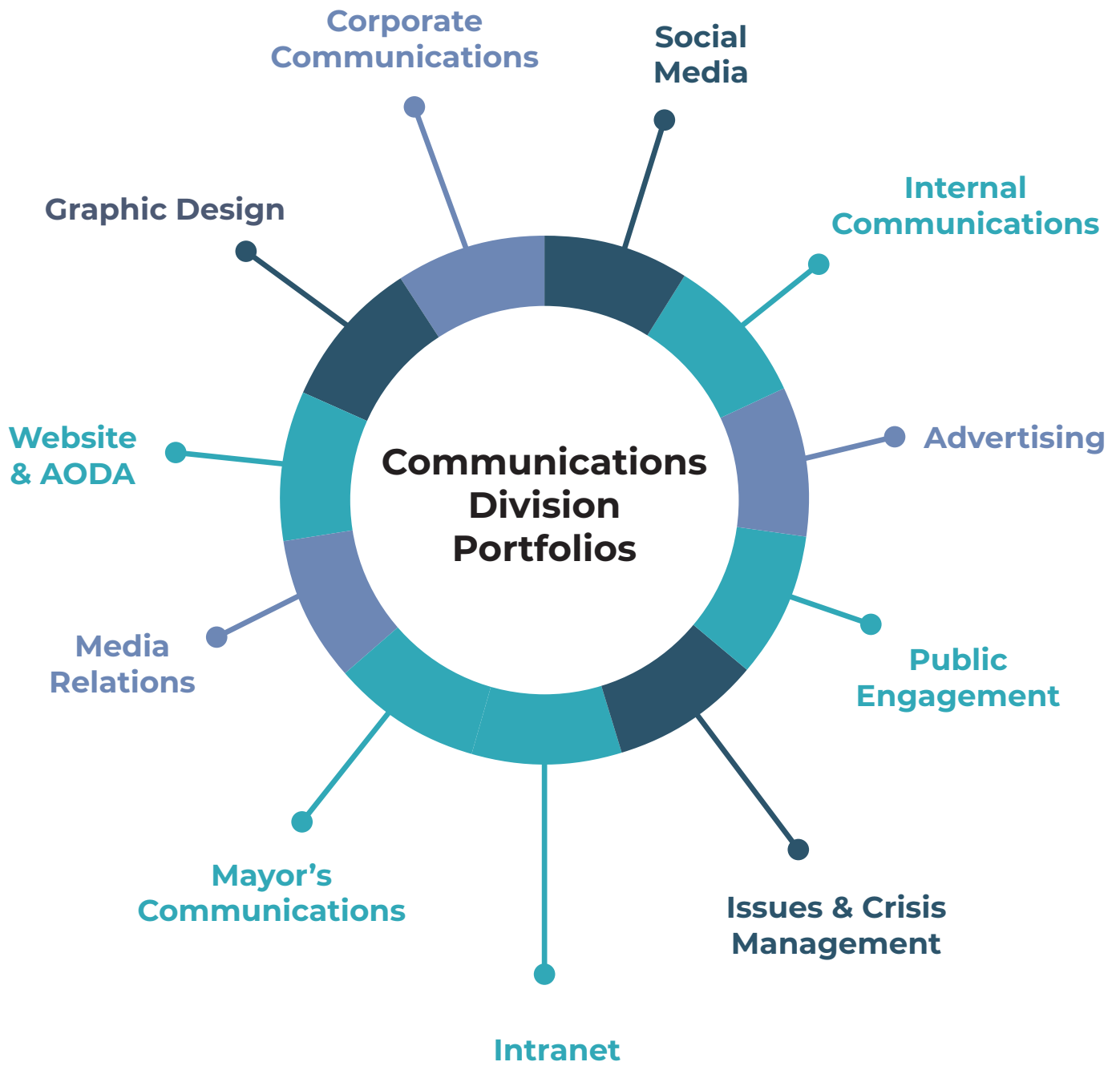
### Online

Managing the digital space has become increasingly challenging as the volume of online 'noise' grows and the competition for public attention intensifies. Staff work to provide content in a compelling and interesting manner with eye-catching imagery. Trolls and keyboard warriors on community sites occasionally challenge the information shared by the municipality. However, the Town's practice of allowing the community to self regulate often results in residents stepping forward to support and champion the Town's message. This organic, third party endorsement serves to reinforce the Town's credibility and strengthen its reputation.

## FUTURE OUTLOOK

Communications staff are well positioned in the municipality working collaboratively with staff across the corporation. Several key initiatives (Website Redevelopment, municipal election) will take significant effort in addition to annual work programs. Future investment in the team to provide redundancy, address growing backlogs and align with projected growth needs is required.

Looking ahead in the communications industry, one of the most important areas continues to be in artificial intelligence (AI). AI has leveled the playing field between writers/content creators and the general public who remain unchecked as to authenticity. The Town must continue to communicate in a transparent, open, honest and data-rich manner, to uphold the trust and confidence of the community. Although AI has been rolled out corporately at the Town with understood benefits for efficiencies, communications staff must work to ensure information integrity (content quality), combat false narratives (honed by AI given its availability to the broader public) and drive authenticity to support connection and credibility through a mix of content across multiple platforms.



# Mayor's Communications

## BACKGROUND

It is recognized that while the Office of the Mayor runs independently from the Office of the CAO, it is integral that she receive professional communications support, recognizing her position as head of Council and as the face of the municipality.

The Mayor is supported by the Director of Communications and other members of the team in the areas of writing, media relations, graphic design and issues management. Mayor's communications such as remarks, media quotes and design projects, aim to reflect her personal voice and style.

Communications staff also provide support to the Mayor when issues arise, preparing briefing notes, conducting research and proactive media relations.



## GOALS

- Support the Mayor in conveying her messages to the public, stakeholders and media.
- Provide professional advice on tactics and issues predicated on best practices.
- Proactively identify and mitigate risks that could impugn the Mayor's reputation (and by extension the Town).

## IMPACT & RETURN ON INVESTMENT

- Upholds the Town brand as transparent, credible and engaged.
- Amplifies Town messages



**135** REMARKS & CORRESPONDENCE



**209** BUSINESS CERTIFICATES



**12** GRAPHIC DESIGN PROJECTS



## BACKGROUND

The internal communications program has grown over the last 5 years and currently includes:

- A monthly message from the CAO
- 2 Town Halls annually
- Pulse surveys
- Bi-annual staff surveys (including a comprehensive analysis and follow up program to action recommendations)
- Management of The HILLS (the Town's intranet)



## GOALS

- Provide staff with timely and relevant information.
- Foster a caring, supportive and team-focused culture.

## IMPACT & RETURN ON INVESTMENT

- Increased staff satisfaction, engagement and productivity (willingness to 'go the extra mile')
- Reduction in employee turnover
- Voluntary participation in staff-led committees.



Strong response to intrnal committee recruitment



Staff attending bi-annual Town Halls



Staff intranet views up **38.8%** compared to 2024

**Trust Drives Measurable Business Results: Companies with high-trust cultures consistently outperform competitors in financial performance, market resilience, and retention.**

- Source: [Greatplacetowork.ca](https://www.greatplacetowork.ca)

# Corporate Communications

## BACKGROUND

The communications team works with staff across the organization to meet internal and external communication needs. Communications staff establish or clarify corporate or project-specific communications objectives, develop strategic communications plans and identify a range of tactics. As a team, staff executes the tactics ensuring consistency amongst content and visuals, measures and evaluates impacts and results and provides quantitative and qualitative metrics to staff to inform decision making.



## GOALS

- Communicate important municipal information, issues and decisions in effective and meaningful ways.
- Enhance public communications by staff through the use of templates and training.
- Provide timely and accurate professional advice predicated on best practices.

## IMPACT & RETURN ON INVESTMENT

- Qualitative benefits of strong communication include strengthened stakeholder relationships and increased public trust which supports risk mitigation.
- According to research by Constant Contact, the government sector's average open rate is **23%** with a **1.4%** click rate.



Produced and distributed by Corporate Communications:

**15**  
Editions

**991**  
Subscribers

**62%**  
Average  
open rate

**7%**  
Average  
click rate

**“The difference between the almost right word & the right word is the difference between the lightning bug & the lightning.”**

- Mark Twain

## BACKGROUND

The Communications Division manages the Town's public engagement program which includes:

- A Public Engagement Charter (to guide staff and public around engagement expectations)
- A dedicated website, letstalkhaltonhills.ca (staff manage the engagement platform, content analysis of survey inputs and produce reports)
- Virtual consultations (staff support on an as needed basis)
- In-person consultations (staff develop and review content, prepare remarks and agendas, create display boards and PowerPoint presentations).
- Resources (staff prepare an array of resources for Town-wide use):
  - Staff Guide to Public Engagement
  - Staff & Consultant Guide Virtual Consultation
  - Virtual Consultation Event Form



## GOALS

- Encourage community participation in the Town's public consultation opportunities.
- Work with staff and consultants on project-specific consultation objectives, tactics and execution.
- Leverage the letstalk platform for all consultation needs.
- Report on survey/outreach findings.

## IMPACT & RETURN ON INVESTMENT

- Supports resident satisfaction by inviting participation.
- Builds trust through public collaboration and consultation.
- Saves time and money by understanding public interests and concerns.
- Mitigates risk through early identification of issues.



### Let's Talk metrics in 2025:

**32**  
Projects

**843**  
New  
registrations

**67.3k**  
Total visits

**5.2k**  
Engaged  
visitors

**5** in-person public engagement events  
=  
**250+** in attendance

# Issues & Crisis Management

## BACKGROUND

Issues management refers to actively identifying and tracking issues that would negatively impact the Town from a reputational, legal, health and safety or financial angle. Communications has been involved in several issues with a focus on keeping Council informed through clear and timely briefings and preparing information for stakeholders, the general public and internal audiences as required.



## GOALS

- Proactively identify issues to facilitate early mitigation to reduce the chance of escalation.
- Support staff by crafting Council briefing notes and public communications.

## IMPACT & RETURN ON INVESTMENT

- Early identification of issues allows for intervention before escalation which can damage the Town's credibility and reputation and take significant resources and money to manage.
- Regaining public trust following an issue is much harder and takes significant effort than if issue can be mitigated.
- Keeping Council informed early and ongoing, supports consistent messaging.

The communications team actively monitors both internally and externally at the Town to anticipate and be prepared for emerging issues. This monitoring includes tactics such as:

- Identifying a trending issue or misinformation in the community and informing Council and staff (department directors and ServiceHH).
- Consistently connecting with departmental staff to stay informed on Town projects/initiatives that may be hot topics or affect a certain group.
- Proactively addressing misinformation and/or community inquiries using targeted messaging (social media campaigns, Q&A's to staff and Council, public engagement platform).
- Consistent media messaging.

**Issues and crises have become more frequent and more visible for several linked reasons. First, digital connectivity accelerates information flow. Incidents that were once local can now spread across stakeholder groups within hours. Second, public expectations about corporate behaviour have broadened: audiences judge brands on sustainability, ethics and social responsibility as part of a single reputation assessment.**

*- Source: Guild of Communicators*

## BACKGROUND

The Town works with various media outlets to share information with the public. This includes print and online channels, as well as a range of self-described 'media', which are locally-based, small scale opportunities (primarily digital) that reflect a specific reach and audience. In cases where media attendance is limited (or at the Town's discretion), municipal communications may not be shared with all outlets.

Communications has cultivated strong relationships with local media, resulting in a 100% pickup rate for media releases. This success is a prime example of earned media, which refers to the publicity a brand receives through non-paid channels. Earned media can include mentions in news articles, positive reviews, social media shares, and word-of-mouth recommendations.



## GOALS

- Build strong relationships with local media to support accurate, fair and balanced media coverage.
- Grow the number of goodwill/positive stories in the media.

## IMPACT & RETURN ON INVESTMENT

- Earned media (media content that the Town does not pay for, such as media releases and interviews) is seen as higher value than advertising.
- The 2025 earned media value for Halton Hills Today, TheIFP, Insauga, and Milton Now was an estimated total of \$70,000.
- The cost to address reputational damage exceeds investment of time to foster positive relationships.



**116**

Media requests



**65**

Media releases



**13**

Interviews



**\$70k**

Estimated earned media value

# Social Media

## BACKGROUND

The Town uses social media to share information, educate and inform the public about municipal projects, programs and services. The use of social media allows the Town to communicate in real time to a large audience and amplify messages about topical and important initiatives.

The Communications Division manages six corporate social media channels: X (formerly Twitter), Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram, Bluesky, and YouTube (which serves as a repository for videos).

In 2025, staff brought forward a report to Council announcing the addition of Bluesky as a corporate channel to ensure continued reach and engagement as residents increasingly migrated away from X. While the audience on Bluesky remains modest, it offers an additional avenue for connecting with residents who prefer emerging platforms.

Staff primarily utilize these channels to push information out as resource limitations prohibit active, online engagement on community platforms.



## GOALS

- Proactively use social media channels as an anchor to the Town's promotional efforts and public engagement program.
- Utilize social media as a tool to identify and manage issues and disseminate factual and time-sensitive information as quickly as possible.
- Foster a favourable and on brand identity to enhance and protect the Town's reputation.

## IMPACT & RETURN ON INVESTMENT

- The use of social media has allowed staff to reduce advertising costs.
- Build relationships and increase brand awareness.

In 2026, attention is the most valuable commodity – and the scarcest. Different generations are responding to very different cultural signals. The chaos culture and nonsensical 67 memes dominating TikTok connect with Gen Alpha's absurdist sense of humor. Millennials and Gen Z are finding comfort in relatable work/life balance memes. And Gen X, the oft-overlooked generation that actually has the biggest wallets, is leaning hard into nostalgia from their '70s and '80s youth.

- Source: Hootsuite.com



Followers: **7,193** (885 new followers in 2025)  
Published Posts: **602**  
Engagements: **157,928**  
Engagement Rate: **4.6%**



Followers: **7,744** (41 followers lost in 2025)  
Published Posts: **502**  
Engagements: **4,715**  
Engagement Rate: **3.2%**



Followers: **7,540** (2,181 new followers in 2025)  
Published Posts: **573**  
Engagements: **12,045**  
Engagement Rate: **1.4%**



Followers: **7,905** (1,186 new followers in 2025)  
Published Posts: **79**  
Engagements: **10,050**  
Engagement Rate: **7.2%**

**Note:** Bluesky does not yet provide back-end performance metrics. To date, the Town has a total following of 163 and published 411 posts in 2025.

# Website & AODA

## BACKGROUND

The Town began the Website Redevelopment Project in 2025. This initiative led by Communications and I.T., will see a new web platform to unify the backend of 4 websites (Town, Library, Invest and tourism sites) and improve the Town's ability to meet legislative, AODA requirements.

The new sites will be a significant enhancement and will support the Town's efforts to increase online services, support efficiencies and adopt best practices.

In preparation for the project, the Town completed a Unified Website Strategy in 2024 that pulled together recommendations from various plans and strategies (e.g., Customer Service Strategy, Digitization, and IT Strategies).



## GOALS

- Maintain up-to-date, user-friendly websites that support positive experiences from easily finding information.
- Prepare for the new websites through staff engagement, document review and training.
- Ensure new platform can readily meet AODA requirements and reporting standards.

## TOP PERFORMING ONLINE SERVICES

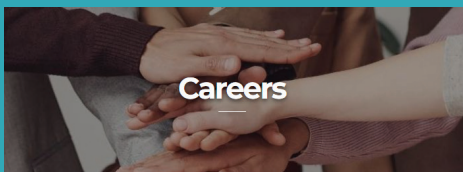
11,204 total online form submissions

1. **Submit a Job Application**
2. **Burn Permit**
3. **Halton Hills Facility Request**



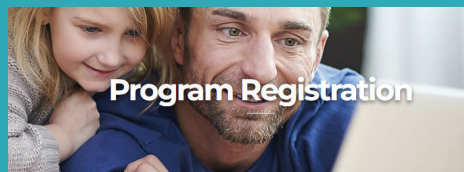
**559** Total pages  
**1100+** Website requests

## TOP PERFORMING PAGES



Careers

**96k** pageviews/year  
up from 81k  
**+18.5%**



Program Registration

**57k** pageviews/year



Recreational Swimming

**60k** pageviews/year  
up from 59k  
**+1.6%**

## IMPACT & RETURN ON INVESTMENT

- One-stop shop to support Town's information to residents
- Fewer calls to staff – saving staff time
- More AODA-friendly documents supports increased compliance

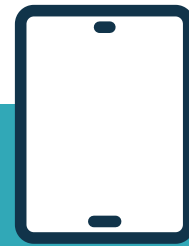
## WEBSITE VIEWERSHIP



Desktop  
**51.2%**



Mobile  
**47.2%**



Other  
**1.7%**

**1.4m**  
Total views  
in 2025

**113k**  
Average  
monthly views

**4.2m**  
Site files  
accessed

**52.4%**  
Engagement  
rate

## WEBSITE USER DEMOGRAPHICS

Top ranking  
**25-34**  
age range



**54.8%**



**45.2%**

# Graphic Design

## BACKGROUND

The Communications Division manages design requests and introduces graphics to support communication goals for specific projects. The majority of graphic design projects are managed in-house, which has proven to be an effective resource to support story-telling and position the Town in a professional and consistent manner that reflects well on the municipality.



## GOALS

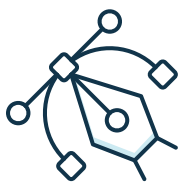
- Use design to convey complex information in a friendly, easy-to-understand manner. (E.g., infographics)
- Create aesthetically pleasing and Town-branded collateral.

## IMPACT & RETURN ON INVESTMENT

- Increased public understanding as complicated material is more readily understood by the public which supports communication and engagement
- Supports reputation management and builds credibility with the public through consistent brand and design.
- Growing catalogue of digital assets for annual promotions reduces future effort of staff.

**“With countless posts competing for your focus, visually appealing graphics can make all the difference in whether you stop to engage or simply scroll past.”**

- Nossi College of Art



**25+** graphic design projects



## BACKGROUND

The term 'advertising' refers to paid campaigns versus public relations or promotion. The Town has a comprehensive advertising program of print, digital and audio options and continues to investigate and add new opportunities to extend its reach to different audiences. The current program includes digital ads on Haltonhillstoday.ca, Theifp.com, Spotify, Facebook and Instagram, screens at the Georgetown Marketplace Mall, Coffeetime tabloid, a GO Station platform poster and mobile signs.

Communications works with staff across the organization to plan, advise, design and place ads in the appropriate medium. It is anticipated that some of the advertising budget will be redirected towards supporting the Public Notification Program which includes the use of home-delivered unaddressed postcards to advise on geography-specific initiatives such as road construction.



## GOALS

- Utilize a range of advertising opportunities to reach specific audiences, complement the Town's promotional program and/or meet legislated requirements.

## IMPACT & RETURN ON INVESTMENT

- Supports brand awareness positioning the Town as the credible source for municipal information.
- Expands the reach of the Town to inform and engage residents.



### HALTON HILLS TODAY

- **100+ public notices placed** (in combination with theIFP.ca)
- **40,000 monthly readers**
- **6,000 subscribers reached through daily emails**
- **60,000 alert banners directing readers to Town page**

### COFFEE TIME NEWS

- **52 ads**

### INDEPENDENT FREE PRESS

- **30,000 local (Halton Hills) ad impressions**
- **Average Click Through Rate (CTR) of .15%**

### OTHER

- **GO Train Bus Shelter**

### SPOTIFY

- **8 campaigns**
- **Average CTR of 0.22** (440% more efficient vs. average)

### MOBILE SIGNS

- **28 signs**

### BOOSTED SOCIAL MEDIA POSTS

- **370** (Facebook, Instagram & LinkedIn)