

## FPRA GOLDEN IMAGE AWARDS

DIVISION: B  
CATEGORY: ANNUAL REPORTS

TITLE: DOLLARS & SENSE: YOUR PRACTICAL GUIDE TO COUNTY FINANCES

### SITUATION ANALYSIS

As St. Lucie County's independently elected treasurer, accountant and auditor, Clerk Joe Smith strives to educate the public about their tax dollars. His office produces various financial publications to create transparency in government and inform county residents. While most are very technical and directed toward financial readers, *Dollars & Sense* is written for the general public. It is the office's version of the Popular Annual Finance Report (PAFR), which is voluntarily produced by many government agencies to easily explain public finances. *Dollars & Sense* is a condensed version of Comprehensive Annual Financial Report, a 230-page book of financial statements and documents. All county finance publications are accessible to the public at [www.stlucieclerk.com](http://www.stlucieclerk.com) and consistently promoted by the Clerk's office throughout the year.

### RESEARCH

We conducted interviews and focus groups with finance experts, Clerk employees, and the media to determine items of interest regarding county finances. Then, we performed a content analysis of newspapers, TV, and social media to determine items of interest to the public regarding county finances. Meanwhile, our finance professionals did a secondary analysis of award-winning reports produced by Florida's Clerks.

### PLANNING & CONTENT:

**Goals:** To produce the most visually appealing financial report by any Florida Clerk; To increase awareness of county finances and educate citizens

**Target Audiences:** Civically active community leaders, non-financial readers

**Objective:** To design an educational finance publication that is well received by a minimum of 2,500 citizens within one month of release

**Strategies:** Distribute guides to key businesses and community leaders throughout the county; Participate in local community events, professional association meetings; Promote guide online using the website and email communications, and social media

**Tactics:** Distribute 1,000 guides to local non-profits, chambers, public agencies, elected officials, media, and private businesses; Attend and speak at local HOA meetings, Attorney Bar meetings, and other community events to distribute the guides; Develop online messaging, graphics, and a fun animated video to drive online downloads

## IMPLEMENTATION:

**Theme & Initial Draft:** The Clerk's Administration and Finance departments met regularly from August to October 2014 to review possible themes of interest relating to the county's debt, investments, and spending. An audit of all PAFRs previously produced by other Clerks throughout the state was conducted to determine best practices. Once a theme was determined, the team drafted each page of the guide and began writing material and developing graphs and visuals to accompany each section. To encourage the public to use the report regularly, a planner featuring a monthly calendar with important dates was added to the back.

**Print & Promote:** Once county finances for the 2014 fiscal year were finalized in early 2015, the guide was completed and printed in March and distributed by April. A total of 1,000 publications were distributed to community leaders, elected officials and attorneys throughout the Treasure Coast, the chamber of commerce, and other Clerks throughout the state. An additional 1,320 local citizens received the publication electronically through the office's e-newsletters. In addition, the Clerk's office encouraged the public to view the guide online through website home page messages, a media release, links on external websites, and continual email alerts. The Clerk's office also distributed the guides at local community events and professional meetings. *Dollars & Sense* has the potential of reaching many more readers through our website, which has an average of more than 86,000 visits a month. An animated video, which is currently in production, will be used to engage audiences on social media to learn about key parts of the guide.

## EVALUATION & BUDGET:

An estimated 3,500 people were informed about *Dollars & Sense* through emails, public speaking engagements, community outreach, and the initial distribution to local businesses, chambers and government agencies. All feedback about the guide has been very positive and three state leaders who work closely with Florida's Clerks had rated the guide as the best they have ever seen. Roughly 23 local citizens have requested more copies for their friends and family.

Initial informal interviews with the general public and finance experts highlighted the best parts of the guide that should be repeated or expanded upon next year as well as areas that need better explanation.

## BUDGET:

The total cost to print the publication was \$3,200. To conserve costs, only 1,000 full-color copies of the *Dollars & Sense* were printed.

**ORGANIZATIONAL OVERVIEW:**

The Clerk of the Circuit Court is responsible for safeguarding all taxpayer funds as well as court and official records for St. Lucie County citizens. The office records 126,000 official documents, processes 70,000 court cases, and disburses \$68 million to government agencies annually. Their communications staff consists of three professionals.