Chances are you've visited city Facebook pages for information on local events, city services or elected officials. But how can you be sure you've landed on the city's official page and not a look-a-like? With so many groups and organizations representing a municipality in some way, it can be confusing for a user to determine who can legitimately lay claim to the official city moniker.

The social media giant has been contacting cities and governments across the globe to get them to make adjustments to page names deemed too generic in order to help eliminate some of the confusion. On a webinar given by Facebook in conjunction with the National League of Cities (NLC) on Tuesday, Sept. 11, Facebook's Public Policy Manager Katie Harbath explained what cities must do to properly distinguish their Facebook page as the official hub of the city, such as adding “government” to its name to avoid confusion.

On the whole, the new rules are vague, and Facebook hasn’t effectively communicated the reasons for the change — apologies for which led the discussion. According to the NLC, Munich, Germany, lost access rights to its Facebook page for failing to comply with the new guidelines on the company’s timetable.
According to Harbath, while many cities have been contacted, the company is still working its way through all pages potentially affected.

"People who were connecting to really generic page names, such as Australia, really weren't sufficiently informed about what they were connecting to and who was administering that page," Harbath said. "We were seeing a really bad user experience with these generic pages."

**Whose City?**

Because official city pages should have the word "government" incorporated into the page name, Facebook made a few recommendations for municipalities looking to satisfy this new requirement, using Denver as an example: City Government of Denver, City of Denver Government, or Denver, Colorado Government.

Facebook contends that users are likelier to engage with a page if its administrator is clearly represented. The "government" distinction differentiates a city's official page from other closely affiliated organizations, like tourism offices or chambers of commerce. Similarly, elected officials who use Facebook must clearly identify their pages, with a distinction like City of Denver — Mayor's Office.

Some government pages are opting to incorporate their tagline into their page name — also an acceptable differentiator from look-a-like pages, according to Facebook. The northern European country of Latvia, for example, calls its page "If You Like Latvia, Latvia Likes You."

Cities need not change the urls for their Facebook pages, and the company assures cities that changing the page names won't cause them to lose any fans or content. Facebook's page name change form is available here.

**Making the Most of Social Media**

Harbath went on to offer practical guidance to municipalities looking to maximize citizen engagement via their presence on Facebook. Among the many features reviewed was the ability to time posts, so content is kept fresh even after office hours. This strategy will help encourage engagement between the hours of 9 and 10 p.m., the most active hour of the day on Facebook.

As the No. 1 social media platform in the world, Facebook's 900 million users have undoubtedly noticed a gradual evolution toward a more visually oriented layout. Cities are advised to focus energy on strong images and graphics, as both are likelier than simple links and text to encourage interaction from page visitors and fans.

The company offers several best practices for cities looking to increase the effectiveness of their organization's Facebook page:

- Post succinct content: Posts seeing the most likes, comments and shares average between 100 and 250 characters.
• Post photos and videos: Rich media effectively complements text, encouraging more interaction.
• Post regularly: Find the best interval to keep your content visible on news feeds.
• Be timely: Tie posts to current events or holidays.
• Maximize opportunities for interaction: Ask for your fans’ opinion about a city issue, ask questions using Facebook’s "Questions" tool, or post "fill in the blanks" posts to gather more feedback.
• Give your fans access to exclusive information: offer behind-the-scenes content, staff profiles, etc.