

Using the Internet for Effective Grassroots Advocacy:

Strategies, Tools and Approaches for Inspiring Constituents to Take Action

Includes:

Content from *Online Advocacy: How the Internet Is Transforming the Way Nonprofits Reach, Motivate and Retain Supporters*
a chapter by Vinay Bhagat, founder and chief strategy officer,
Convio; from the book, *Nonprofit Internet Strategies*

Making an Online Advocacy Campaign Have Real Impact
by Sarah DiJulio, senior vice president, M&R Strategic Services



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ABOUT THIS GUIDE

This guide was created specifically for organizations as a handbook about the fundamentals of online advocacy. It describes how to build a file of email addresses, develop strong online relationships with constituents and execute effective online advocacy campaigns that turn those constituents into loyal activists.

Note that this guide covers just some of the basics of email marketing — the cornerstone of any online program. For more detailed best practices information about topics including spam, email communications schedules and message testing, refer to the Convio guide, *The Basics of Email Marketing for Nonprofits: Using Email Communications to Build and Strengthen Constituent Relationships Online*. You can download this guide for free at: www.convio.com/emailbasics.

Throughout this booklet, you will notice words or phrases that appear in **bold** type. These terms are defined in the glossary on page 17. You also will notice tips to make your online fundraising programs run more smoothly. These come from a team of experts with the experience of working on Internet projects with more than 350 nonprofit organizations throughout the United States.



Introduction: The Relationship Approach to Online Advocacy

The Internet is transforming the way nonprofits organize, energize and mobilize activists in support of a cause. It's a low-cost way to reach more activists quickly and inspire more of them to act. Using the Internet for grassroots advocacy — or influencing the public to agree with an organization's opinion and to help influence policy makers through personal contact, phone calls, letters and the media — can be highly effective.

Consider high-profile online campaigns including Moveon.org (a democratic mobilization campaign founded in late 1998 that has grown to two million members) and Dean for America (the campaign for Democratic presidential candidate Howard Dean, which grew its online support base to 640,000 constituents in one year). These campaigns have used the Internet as an integral part of their strategies, employing online tools and techniques to build strong, ongoing support and mobilize activists.

But this online approach is not specific to high-profile political campaigns. As the Internet becomes increasingly powerful in today's advocacy efforts, nonprofit organizations are putting many of these same tools and techniques to work, proving that any organization can use the same principles to mobilize supporters.

What organizations are realizing is that online grassroots advocacy is about more than just sending an email action alert. It's about building an ongoing relationship with a loyal network of constituents ready to support the issues most important to the organization. It's also about engaging constituents in a dialogue with their legislators on issues, not just on specific votes.

This fundamental trend in online advocacy is closely linked to sophisticated online constituent relationship management, or **eCRM**, software. The key to an eCRM approach is to use the Internet to reach new constituents, collect information about them, use that information to motivate them, track their activity with the organization and build relationships with them to encourage loyalty and ongoing support.

An increasing number of organizations are using this approach for online advocacy efforts. These groups are not only reaching new constituents and motivating them to take action, but also developing relationships with constituents so that they become loyal activists and, potentially, loyal donors in the future.

This guide covers the key topics any organization should consider when planning an online advocacy program or strengthening an existing one. From trends in online advocacy to building an email list, creating compelling online advocacy campaigns, fostering loyalty to the organization and measuring online program results, it will help you to create and implement a successful, ongoing online advocate relationship program.

Online Advocacy Trends

As the Internet becomes an increasingly powerful force in today's advocacy efforts, its use is continuously evolving. Any nonprofit professional with oversight for public policy, as well as those managing other organizational functions, should pay close attention to the latest developments. This section covers top trends in online advocacy.

Legislative Offices Becoming More e-Responsive

The primary goal for most advocacy professionals typically is to find the most effective way to reach legislators. The traditional method includes a personal visit by a constituent, followed by a letter, a phone call and, possibly, an email or fax. However, legislative offices increasingly are accepting electronic contact. According to a survey of House Correspondence Management System vendors, an estimated 25 percent of House offices now answer email with email, compared with 10 percent in March 2001.

Representative Zach Wamp's (R-TN) office is a good example of the trend toward online communication. In 1999, email accounted for just 13 percent of the office's total mail volume. Now it comprises almost half of the office's constituent communication. And, while the average volume of incoming email per week has increased by 52 percent, postal mail volume has decreased by 48 percent — reducing the amount of time staff members spend processing mail, and cutting mail turnaround time.

Increasing Use of Web Forms

Because an increasing number of constituents are using email to communicate their views, some legislators are blocking email by forcing constituents to submit their information through Web forms. In fact, 66 U.S. Senators and 226 House representatives do not use public email addresses and are directing constituents to their Web sites to send messages.

The aim is to reduce spam from non-constituents and keep automated messages from reaching offices, as well as to reduce workload for staff members. However, the use of Web forms by legislators has created a unique challenge for organizations: almost every legislative Web form is different, so automating delivery of legitimate messages is extremely difficult.

More Analysis of Online Advocacy Efforts

Fundraisers typically measure the lifetime value of donors based on donors' average gift size, giving frequency and years of support for the organization. Then, they use that knowledge to advance relationships and increase donor value using targeted communications and appeals.

In contrast, advocacy programs traditionally have not measured the participation levels of their activists. The reason: Paper-based communications, or letters to legislators and other decision-makers, are difficult to measure. And, while early online tools tracked total response rates, they yielded little or no information about individual constituent responses. Consequently, organizations could not easily measure the success of their advocacy programs, nor did they have adequate information to segment their activists and target them with communications based on their interests and motivations.

Today's more advanced online advocacy software makes measuring constituent engagement much easier. It allows organizations to assign value to advocacy-related activities — such as taking action online, signing a petition or forwarding messages to friends — and measure an advocate's overall "value" to the organization. As nonprofits begin to take advantage of these measurement capabilities, detailed statistical analysis — rather than basic numbers and educated guesses — will increasingly drive their online advocacy initiatives.

TIP

Look for online advocacy software, such as Convio's, that includes tools for automatically entering constituent data into a legislator's Web site in the correct format. This capability will become increasingly important to ensure effective message delivery.



❖ TIP

Convio's software allows organizations to conduct online fundraising and advocacy campaigns, and collect information from both in a single eCRM database. This helps any organization to more easily convert advocates to donors and donors to advocates through targeted online communications.

Integration of Fundraising with Advocacy

An organization's donors and activists have a strong affinity for the organization — after all, they donated money or time for the organization's cause. Coordinating advocacy and fundraising efforts immediately supplements the pool of potential activists and donors for any given appeal. Progressive organizations recognize this trend. They are beginning to break down the invisible barrier between advocacy and development, sharing lists and coordinating constituent communications for more effective campaigns.

Increased Use of “Viral” Marketing

Online grassroots advocacy tools and strategies create a great opportunity for organizations to reach new constituents and get them involved. **Viral marketing** strategies, in particular, allow organizations to provide supporters with the motivation and online tools to touch the people they know, and allow those supporters to touch the people they know, and on and on for a continuously growing ripple of support and participation.

As spam, or unsolicited email, becomes more prevalent, organizations are emphasizing viral marketing efforts. After all, a message passed along from a friend is much more likely to be read.

More Emphasis on Community-Building

While many organizations are beginning to use the Internet to market to activists so they will take action and encourage their friends to do the same, the most sophisticated organizations are creating opportunities for activists to connect and interact with each other to build communities and more powerful advocate networks. As activists interact with each other through **online community** forums or physical meetings in the offline world, they become more engaged and passionate.

Getting Started: Outreach and Engagement

The first step in any online advocacy program is building a base of supporters with whom you can develop a strong online relationship. This means gathering new email addresses, promoting advocacy among current online constituents, learning about constituents' interests and keeping them informed and engaged. Using the following techniques will help you get your online advocacy program off the ground, or help to improve your existing program.

Recruit New Activists

To build online relationships with constituents and convert them to activists, you must first get email addresses. Consider this: Every time you communicate with constituents, you have the opportunity to collect email addresses. Try these approaches to develop your email file:

GATHER EMAIL ADDRESSES OFFLINE

Planned interactions such as donor appeals, membership drives and event invitations are perfect times to ask for email addresses. Simply add a field for email collection to all response forms. At events where you will interact with a large number of constituents, consider setting out a newsletter sign-up sheet, or offer a giveaway for attendees who drop in a card with their name and email address.

When asking for email addresses, emphasize the benefits your constituents will receive by providing you this information. Remind supporters that by communicating with them online, your organization can save money and administrative work, allowing you to more effectively serve your mission. Also, emphasize the benefit of timely communication: With email communications, you are better equipped to respond to compelling events and inform them quickly of important news, developments, events and programs.

GATHER EMAIL ADDRESSES ONLINE

Your Web site is the best source for reaching new prospects and existing constituents and collecting their email addresses. Visitors to your Web site have sought you out because they are interested in your organization. This existing affinity is a powerful incentive for online visitors to provide you with the information you need to build relationships with them online.

Drive traffic to your Web site with every communication

Maximize traffic to your Web site by including your **URL** wherever you list phone numbers, mailing addresses or other contact information. This includes brochures, ads, staff email signatures, voice messages, phone hold or intro message and business cards. Tell prospects and supporters about the resources available to them on your Web site, and keep the Web site content current and informative so visitors will return.

Provide an online registration mechanism

Use a Web-based form that allows site visitors to register, and that automatically captures the information in an online database. Your registration form should be easy to read and fast to complete. Think carefully about the information you need to capture, and minimize the number of required fields to ensure a quick, easy process for online registrants.

Promote the benefits of online registration

Make registration compelling for your site visitors, and they will register. Create special benefits for registered members, and link to a separate page explaining the perks, such as free email newsletters, advance notification of upcoming events or members-only pricing for ticket sales. Then, invite site visitors to register by using an action phrase such as "Register to receive updates" or "Sign up for our educational newsletter."

Use "quick registration"

Instead of requiring site visitors to complete a lengthy form, consider requiring only basic information (such as name and email address) for a supporter to sign up for more

TIP

When collecting email addresses, be sure to let people know that the organization is collecting this information and how it will be used. Always give people a chance to opt out of receiving email by providing a check box that says something like, "I'd like to receive future mailings," which they can uncheck.

TIP

For more information about building an email address file, download *The Basics of Email Marketing for Nonprofits: Using Email Communications to Build and Strengthen Constituent Relationships Online* at www.convio.com/emailbasics

information, updates or an email newsletter. Once you have captured this information, send follow-up communications and use other mechanisms to gather more profile information about that constituent.

Give site registration prominent placement

Dedicate a consistent area of your home page to promoting online registration. Place it in an eye-catching spot **above the fold** to reflect its importance. And, don't forget to promote registration throughout the rest of your Web site — you may consider including a registration link in your **page wrapper** so the message will be promoted on every page of your site.

Make the most of Web marketing

Issue-related lists and Web sites help many groups to maximize outreach and attract new supporters. For example, online resources including the popular search engine Google helped to spread the word about agencies involved in Asian tsunami relief. In addition, many organizations use search engine optimization and paid search placement for enhanced pull. Another example: running a Google search on "tsunami relief" brings up the American Red Cross among the most popular search links, and Feed The Children as the highest placed sponsored, or paid, link.

Promote Advocacy Among Current Online Constituents

Your existing donors or volunteers are good prospects for activism. Their past activity indicates that they already have a strong affinity for your organization. For example, constituents who read a lot of content on your Web site about children's issues would be more likely to respond to your latest advocacy alert about upcoming child-related legislation. Use email and Web site interactions to identify donors, volunteers and other constituents who are not currently activists, and promote your advocacy activities to them.

Ask Activists to Recruit Other Activists

When you communicate with activists, encourage them to forward your message to their friends and colleagues. Provide "tell-a-friend" links in your Web site and email content that let activists easily forward alerts and other information with a personal note. Also, consider providing email greeting cards, or eCards on your Web site so constituents can send them to friends and family. Because constituents send these communications to others with whom they already have a personal relationship, recipients are more likely to open them and read the content, which in some cases may be a call-to-action. Tell-a-Friend links and eCards, therefore, are an efficient, effective method for spreading your organization's message and acquiring new supporters.

Cultivate Interest

Use the Internet to provide advocacy-related information that will pique constituents' interest in activism. For example, send an email with a link encouraging constituents to visit your Web site to view scorecards that show how legislators voted on key issues. Or, send timely updates about significant votes or new developments. Sending regular updates and other communications help to keep your organization top-of-mind and make constituents feel more connected with the organization. This, in turn, makes them more likely to support the organization when you send an action alert.

TIP

Look for online software, like Convio's, that collects information about constituents and integrates it in a single database. This eCRM approach makes it easy to target donors, volunteers and other constituents with action alerts and other advocacy-related communications.

Mobilizing Activists Through Online Campaigns

Once you have built a file of email addresses and started to create e-relationships, it's time to begin online campaigns that motivate people to take action. While email is the cornerstone of any online campaign, Web site content is a key consideration as well. The approaches in this section will help you to create effective email messages as well as successful multi-phased online campaigns.

Create Compelling Email Messages that Inspire Action

Email is the most efficient and cost-effective way to reach activists immediately. There are many things you can do to increase the effectiveness of each message you send. Keep subject lines short and use them to convey urgency and compel recipients to open the email immediately. Personalize the message by including the recipient's name and noting that he or she is receiving the email as a result of having indicated an interest in the topic at hand. Make the email brief, but provide enough background to trigger action.

Test Your Message

Prior to sending your email to hundreds or thousands of supporters, you should thoroughly test your communication. This important process prevents distribution of emails containing costly and/or potentially embarrassing mistakes. Designate and train a few people within your department or organization, and send test messages to this group to maintain consistent quality standards.

You also should take advantage of the inherent benefits of the Internet by sending test messages to a sub-set of target recipients prior to sending it to your entire email file. Because the Internet allows you to send messages and receive responses quickly, you can compare response rates of different messages and subject lines, then refine your email message before sending it to the entire constituent base — ensuring the maximum response for each email campaign.

Include Landing Pages or Micro Sites

While email is the cornerstone of your online advocacy efforts, it's also important to include a link to a landing page for each campaign. A landing page is a Web page where constituents can go to find out more about your action alert, and where they can take action. Another way to extend the reach of your advocacy campaign is to promote it on pages throughout your Web site to capture the interest of new site visitors and those who do not receive your email communications.

Also consider creating a micro site. This can be a section on your Web site with its own Web address and that has its own campaign branding. Similar to a landing page, a micro site has a very tight focus on a specific campaign to drive people to act immediately.

Use Vote Data

Using the Internet to influence public policy makers before a vote is critical. But, continuing grassroots efforts after votes have taken place also can help ensure ongoing support for the issues most important to your organization. Your online advocacy software should allow you to use legislator vote data to:

- develop scorecards that rate legislators based on how they voted with respect to your organization's position on an issue;
- create vote pages with a description of an issue, vote date, your organization's position on the issue, how constituents' legislators voted on the matter, and the legislators' scorecards;
- provide an option for a constituent to send a "thank" or "spank" message to his/her legislators based on their vote; and
- target action alerts to a subset of your email file based on how individuals' legislators voted on a specific issue, as well as by state, Congressional district, or interest.

TIP

There are many things to consider when sending email communications. For more details about topics including spam, email communication frequency and message testing, refer to the Convio guide, *The Basics of Email Marketing for Nonprofits: Using Email Communications to Build and Strengthen Constituent Relationships Online*, available for free at: www.convio.com/emailbasics



Give Activists Multiple Options for Taking Action

After you've spread the word about your latest advocacy effort, it's critical to give activists a convenient way to make their voices heard. Remember, not everyone wants to take action in the same way.

Provide pre-formatted letters on your Web site that constituents can easily customize and automatically send to the correct decision-makers. Populate any form fields automatically for returning advocates for their convenience. Give activists the option to send messages via email, fax or mail. Your activists will appreciate these conveniences to making their voices heard.

Ensure Message Delivery

Your online advocacy campaign's success will depend largely on getting your activists' messages to the right decision-makers. But, with the growing volume of email aimed at decision-makers today, reaching the right people at the right time has become a challenge. Messages might not get delivered or, if they do, might go unread because staffers cannot keep up with the volume.

To manage the flood of messages, many legislators' offices only accept constituents' input through Web-based forms on the legislators' Web sites. At the same time, an increasing number of advocacy groups are realizing that general email blasts are not always effective, and they are looking for alternatives to ensure their messages get through. The right online tools can help.

LOOK FOR FLEXIBILITY IN TARGETING

Invest in online tools that provide the flexibility to easily and quickly create target groups of the exact decision-makers and influencers required for each campaign. You should be able to organize targets in a variety of ways (legislators, cabinet secretaries and media, for example) to build a rich database for future use.

OFFER MULTIPLE DELIVERY OPTIONS

Don't rely entirely on email to get your message across to decision-makers. With email volume increasing so dramatically, a multi-channel approach that also includes personal letters, faxes and phone calls will help ensure that the message gets through. Look for online tools that will automatically try an alternative means of delivery if a message fails to get through. For example, if an email bounces back repeatedly, your online advocacy software should automatically send a fax as a back-up. When you do use email, be sure to have online tools that can automatically route constituents' messages through Web forms or other technology-based filters, if necessary.

Fostering Loyalty

Keeping your activists involved is key to the ongoing success of your advocacy program. As with any constituent, you must nurture relationships with your activists to retain them. Try the following techniques to keep your activists involved now and in the future.

Deepen Loyalty Through Ongoing Communications

By maintaining an ongoing conversation with your activists, you will keep them educated, interested and involved with your cause. Remember to update them on new or existing issues through Web content and email communications such as newsletters. Be sure, too, that you not only thank them for taking action, but also keep them informed about the results of their action. Like any constituent, activists can feel disconnected with an organization when they take action, and then never hear from the organization until they're asked to take action again. They may ask themselves, "What happened regarding that issue? Did my taking action make a difference?"

To keep activists involved, be sure to always give feedback. If they take action on a specific legislative issue, for example, send them an email update on a regular schedule to let them know how things are progressing. Then, send another update to let them know the outcome. With this simple act, activists will never feel as if their actions were meaningless because they will always know the results. And, they'll be more likely to take action again when they receive your next alert.

Give Constituents a Voice

Constituents who feel they have a voice in the organization are more likely to support the organization's cause. Create an ongoing conversation with constituents through online surveys, polls and petitions. In addition, create a constant narrative by regularly updating Web site content. Supporters will stay engaged online to see how the organization is progressing.

Create a Sense of Shared Identity

In addition to giving constituents the sense that they have a voice in the organization, it's important to make them feel part of the cause. Consider creating an online community as well as online forums (such as Web logs, also known as **blogs**) to allow constituents to voice their opinions, make suggestions and communicate with other supporters as well as your organization's staff. Also consider allowing supporters across the country to link from your Web site to the site Meetup.com to view and participate in regional meetings. The access to ideas and opinions on the site gives each supporter a sense of being part of the organization and part of a community.

Create Personalized Online Action Centers and Email Communications

Setting up an action center, or a dedicated advocacy section, on your Web site will give your visitors a place to easily sign up as activists. Remember to personalize content on each constituent's action center, with action alerts relevant to his or her geographic location and interests, acknowledgement of past participation as well as the latest information on how each action alert has performed. Do the same with your email communications. Making sure that all of your online communications are relevant to constituents not only keeps them interested in your updates, it also shows them that you are concerned about what is important to them.

Track Constituent Action

Sophisticated online grassroots advocacy software allows you to not only track the number of people taking action in a grassroots campaign, but also who, specifically, has taken action. The latter is particularly important for determining who are your strongest activists.

Offer Rewards

Consider offering reward points that constituents can accrue based on various online behaviors such as taking action or forwarding email messages to friends. Allow each registered constituent to view his reward point balance at any time on a personalized Web page, and redeem rewards points online for gifts. Offer special recognition gifts for supporters with high point balances to provide incentives for constituents to increase their interaction with your organization. Convio's online advocacy software allows you to easily create a reward point program.

TIP

Consider setting up meetings around the nation through Meetup.com — a free online Web site that organizes local gatherings about anything, anywhere — and publicize them on your Web site. Chatting with each other on www.meetup.com, your constituents can get together with others in their areas to exchange ideas and voice opinions in support of your organization's cause.

TIP

Look for online advocacy software, like Convio's, that helps you automatically generate personal action center pages based on the information you gather about your constituents.



Measuring Results

Traditionally, it has been difficult to track the number of people taking action in a grassroots campaign. It also has been almost impossible to know who, specifically, has taken action to identify the most valuable activists. One of the major benefits of including the Internet in advocacy efforts is stronger tracking. Tracking both aggregate and individual response is far easier with today's online advocacy tools.

Monitor Status of Active Action Alerts

Be sure to select online advocacy software that helps you accomplish specific goals. For starters, look for capabilities that allow monitoring of the status of active action alerts. You should be able to do things such as check on whether decision-makers are receiving emails, see the effectiveness of each delivery channel and quickly determine what's going wrong when messages fail to make it to the decision-maker so you can make adjustments accordingly.

TIP

Convio's online advocacy software offers comprehensive capabilities to query, measure and analyze advocacy campaign success. It also gives you an in-depth look at online behaviors and histories of constituents so you can cross-market to them. For example, a person who took action on a particular issue might be willing to make a donation to support your organization's work around that issue.

Report on Aggregate Advocacy Efforts

Your online advocacy tool should deliver complete aggregate reports on your advocacy efforts, not just information on the status of individual alerts. You should, for example, be able to view summary reports of all your action alerts over a given period or analyze the effects of your efforts against specific criteria, such as geographical location or donor status.

Making an Online Advocacy Campaign Have Real Impact

by Sarah DiJulio, senior vice president, M&R Strategic Services

In the days of the dot-com boom, nearly every nonprofit organization said, "We need to get ourselves a Web site!" Most groups soon had sites that merely echoed their printed brochures. Eventually, some groups experimented with taking their advocacy online. Today, online organizing can have a dramatic effect on an organization's ability to influence public policy. In many cases, it can be the deciding factor in a campaign's success.

Using the Internet for issue advocacy makes sense for several reasons:

- It's an effective and important means of communication.
- It moves fast and can keep up with the rapidly changing political environment.
- Many people seek information online and this enables groups to communicate with them directly.
- It is interactive, allowing people to learn about an issue and immediately take action.
- Groups can more effectively reach potential supporters via the Internet than with other channels.
- It's relatively inexpensive.

With most organizations stretched thin, the Internet can help scarce resources accomplish more. Organizations that make online advocacy a priority will reap the most benefit in the long run. In what is often a challenging political environment, the Internet can provide the extra boost that it takes to win your campaign.

The nonprofit groups that use the Internet most effectively rely on the same principles that guide their offline work. They motivate people with issues, stories, facts, urgency and opposition. They introduce the problem by telling the story of a victim, not by talking about a new research report. They describe issues in accessible terms and steer clear of jargon and endless statistics. They provide easy opportunities for citizen involvement, starting with a simple activity like letter writing and moving gradually to more sophisticated tactics like district lobby meetings. They look for ways to tie issues to what is happening in the news. Simply put, they are always looking to get new people involved and they make people feel effective when taking part in a campaign.

INTERNET ORGANIZING STRUCTURED AS A CAMPAIGN

A campaign can be anything from a month-long effort to educate the city council about an issue to an ongoing effort to position your issue in a certain frame. A project has a specific goal, a finite timeline and resources devoted to it. Internet outreach works best as a campaign, not a project. Imagine the difference between these two scenarios:

In one organization, the Internet work is done part-time by the office manager. That time goes toward updating the site, posting press releases, sending out a newsletter from time to time, and sending out action alerts whenever there is something important going on.

In a second organization, the part-time office manager spends extra time on the Internet effort for a period of three months. During this time, the goal is to recruit 1,000 new e-activists, to generate 3,000 emails to targets and to get two online articles placed about the campaign. To facilitate this, the media person will pitch the Web site as part of an upcoming press release. The lobbyist will steadily feed the organizer information on three key decision-makers to facilitate getting more emails from those districts, which she will print out and bring to lobby meetings at crucial points.

The second organization only adds a small amount of additional resources to its effort. But the organization makes it a priority, sets goals and tracks progress, makes sure one hand knows what the other is doing, and generates excitement about its Internet work. The organization not only stands a higher chance of success, but it also builds a lasting resource for the organization through a larger, more invested group of activists.

FIVE TIPS TO A SUCCESSFUL ONLINE ADVOCACY CAMPAIGN:

- 1. Build an advocacy page that is a highly effective recruitment tool.** Most campaigns need to have a recruitment component to engage advocates in the issue. An effective "take action" page can compel 65 percent of visitors to get involved. Keep the issue description on this page very brief — around 150 words. You can educate activists further once they are registered.
- 2. Conduct proactive outreach.** Most organizations devote too many resources to building advocacy sites and not enough to promoting their site. As in the offline world, a campaign needs to get people involved by working with partner organizations, conducting media work, and posting information where activists can see it (including listservs, Web forums and blogs on related topics.)
- 3. Write about the issue — not the process.** People don't care that H.R. 26 might pass out of Committee unless they act. They care that their city's drinking water will contain more cancer-causing mercury if they don't act. The Washington bureaucratic process and terminology is irrelevant to most.
- 4. Integrate with offline activity.** Just because you are communicating with them via email doesn't mean online activists are only willing to take online action. But, for those not willing to take offline action, ensure that their efforts happen in concert with offline activity.
- 5. Keep activists informed of the issue and status of the campaign.** Too often organizations ask people to get involved, but don't inform them of the result of their activity. The campaign should appear as a concise narrative to the activists — not a series of unrelated "take action" requests.

Inspiration: Online Advocacy Examples from Successful Organizations

As organizations begin to take their advocacy efforts online, an increasing number of online success stories proves the power of the Internet for improving advocacy effectiveness. Here are just a few examples of online advocacy in action from some of today's successful organizations.

Action Center

A significant component of the American Diabetes Association's (ADA's) efforts to build e-relationships with activists are personalized "action centers." The page includes relevant action alerts (both national and state/local), with acknowledgements of past participation and up-to-date information on the number of others who have responded.

American Diabetes Association. Cure • Care • Commitment®					
Información en Español About Us Donate Membership Volunteer Message Boards Sign up for E-Newsle					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sign Out My Account Legal & Insurance Resources Action Center Call to Congress Community Forum Tell a Friend Advocacy Question? 	<p>Welcome back to the Action Center, Cynthia!</p> <p>We need you to help us with legislation that affects people with diabetes in DC and TX. Please take action today on the items listed in the right column below.</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Action Alerts That You Have Taken</th> <th>Action Alerts That You Have Not Taken</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td> <p>Diabetes Prevention & Treatment Act</p> <p>Urge your senator to co-sponsor legislation that will improve diabetes prevention and treatment methods in the United States</p> <p>You took action on this issue: 2004/03/18</p> <p>773 people have taken action on this issue.</p> </td> <td> <p>Association Health Plans - Senate</p> <p>Protect health insurance coverage for people with diabetes. Urge your senators to oppose S. 545, the AHP exemption legislation</p> <p>Commercial Drivers' Licenses - House</p> <p>Commercial drivers with diabetes face the prospect of losing their jobs - You can help.</p> </td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Action Alerts That You Have Taken	Action Alerts That You Have Not Taken	<p>Diabetes Prevention & Treatment Act</p> <p>Urge your senator to co-sponsor legislation that will improve diabetes prevention and treatment methods in the United States</p> <p>You took action on this issue: 2004/03/18</p> <p>773 people have taken action on this issue.</p>	<p>Association Health Plans - Senate</p> <p>Protect health insurance coverage for people with diabetes. Urge your senators to oppose S. 545, the AHP exemption legislation</p> <p>Commercial Drivers' Licenses - House</p> <p>Commercial drivers with diabetes face the prospect of losing their jobs - You can help.</p>
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Example of a personalized action center on the ADA's Web site.

Compelling Web Site

Replacing its static, brochure-like Web site with a content-rich, compelling site, Citizens Against Government Waste (CAGW) has attracted more constituents and built stronger relationships with them. The organization uses Convio's online software to drive online content, email marketing, and integrated advocacy and fundraising campaigns. Now, CAGW encourages advocacy by prominently spotlighting action alerts on its home page and making it easy for constituents to take action through pre-filled forms and other automated features.

CITIZENS AGAINST GOVERNMENT WASTE America's #1 taxpayer watchdog

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Welcome! Please [register](#) today to receive our monthly e-newsletter and action alerts. To get your own copy of the *2004 Congressional Pig Book Summary*, "the little pink book that Washington doesn't want you to read," [make a contribution](#) to CAGW today. [Members of the Media](#), [click here](#) for more information and to sign up for our e-mail updates.

For every dollar donated, we save taxpayers \$9,000. Now that's an investment worth making!

WHAT'S NEW

Congressional recess drops [Pork Advisory Level](#) to LOW

Press Release: [Taxpayer Watchdog Group Applauds Creation of Congressional Sugar Reform Caucus](#)

Press Release: [Questions Raised on Kerry Health Care Plan](#)

Latest Press Releases

[House Passes Special-Interest Tax](#)

ACTION ALERT Tired of the Government Wasting Your Money? Take Action...
[Click Here to Sign the Citizen's Demand to Stop Robbing the Social Security Trust Fund Surplus!](#)

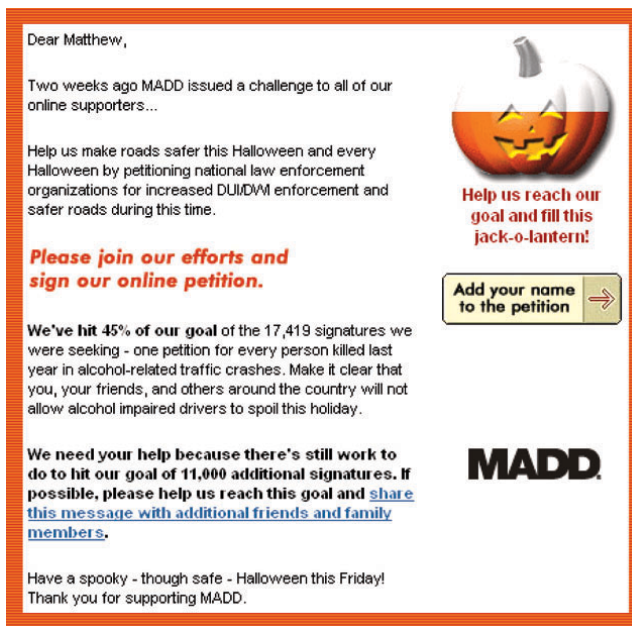
[Virginia Residents: Click Here to Lift the Cap on the Car Tax Cut!](#)

[Iowa Residents: Click Here to Oppose a New Consumer Tax!](#)

The CAGW Web site is designed to make taking action as effortless as possible for constituents.

List-Building Campaign

In 2003, Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) sent an urgent email informing constituents that Halloween is one of the most dangerous times of year for traffic fatalities linked to drunk driving. The email asked constituents to act immediately by signing a petition for increased DUI/DWI enforcement and forwarding the message to five friends. MADD also sent personalized follow-up reminders, telling constituents the status of the petition. The results: MADD had more than 10,500 people sign its petition, 81 percent of whom were new to the organization. Forty-three percent of those new constituents signed up to receive future emails. The campaign grew MADD's email file 23 percent in just 15 days.



MADD's Halloween campaign grew the organization's email file 23 percent in just 15 days.

Online Petition

The Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence United with the Million Mom March quickly built an email list by asking people to sign its celebrity-studded "National Rifle Association blacklist" petition in support of strong domestic policy to prevent gun violence, and to pass it along to friends. In the first three months of this initiative, the campaign tripled its email database to 115,000 people. After five months, 163,000 people had signed the petition and opted-in to receive communications from the organization.

Targeted Email Alerts

The ADA continuously gathers information about its activists so it can target them with specific messages relevant to their geographic location and interests. For example, the organization typically sends three times as many alerts concerning state-specific legislation as it does national alerts. While the organization at one time could not segment its database, it now uses Convio to target specific groups of constituents, and successfully fosters online local grassroots support. The ADA sees an average of 3.8 responses per click-through on state action alerts. In other words, each constituent directs his message to almost four target legislators every time he responds to an alert. This increases legislator exposure to important issues facing the ADA.



Spotlight on Convio: Online Advocacy Software for Advocate Relationship Management

Online grassroots advocacy is about more than sending an email action alert. It's about building an ongoing relationship with a loyal network of constituents ready to support the issues most important to your organization and its mission.

Convio Advocacy Center has all of the online tools you need to increase constituent participation in advocacy campaigns. It helps you gather information about your constituents' interests, history of interaction with the organization and other information so you can communicate relevant information to them. With easy ways to create and send online notification of action alerts, Convio also helps you to ensure your constituents can take action immediately. Plus, your activist base will grow as you invite donors and other supporters to take action, and as your action network forwards information to friends and family.

The Advocacy Center includes:

- email marketing capabilities
- list segmentation capabilities for targeting advocates based on state, Congressional district, interest or how their legislators voted
- configurable online forms and surveys
- advocacy Web page publishing tools
- vote-based legislator scorecards and action alerts
- Tell-A-Friend capabilities to help constituents spread the word
- Convio Rewards for online loyalty programs
- comprehensive reporting tools

A complete view of constituents

The Advocacy Center includes Constituent360™, the online database that comes with all Convio software solutions. It centralizes constituent data and integrates with offline databases, giving you a unified view of constituent interests — key for personalized, targeted outreach and communications.

For more information about Convio software and services, visit www.convio.com, email info@convio.com or call 1-888-528-9501, ext 1.



Glossary

ABOVE THE FOLD

The portion of a Web page or email that is visible without scrolling. The fold varies depending on the resolution settings on a visitor's monitor. At lower settings (i.e. 640x480) the fold is relatively high on the page. At higher settings (i.e. 1280x1024) the fold extends much further down the page. Decisions concerning what goes above or below the fold are often made based on a minimum targeted resolution.

BLOGS

Personal journals that are frequently updated and intended for general public consumption. Blogs generally represent the personality of the author or the Web site and its purpose. Topics sometimes include brief philosophical musings, commentary on Internet and other social issues, and links to other sites the author favors. The essential characteristics of the blog are its journal form, typically a new entry each day, and its informal style.

eCRM (ONLINE CONSTITUENT RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT)

Using the Internet for the process of collecting information about past, current and prospective constituents, tracking their activity with the organization and aiming to build relationships with them to encourage future support.

ONLINE COMMUNITY

A community of constituents sharing common interests, ideas and feelings over the Internet.

PAGE WRAPPER

A consistent, graphical element (usually in the masthead position or along the left side of the page) that is branded to your organization and frames the content of each page of your Web site.

URL

Universal Resource Locator, or the "address" of a particular Web page.

VIRAL MARKETING

Marketing phenomenon that facilitates and encourages people to pass along a marketing message.