

**HOW CAMPAIGNS CAN
USE THE INTERNET TO**

WIN

IN 2012

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How Campaigns Can Use the Internet to Win in 2012

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Introduction: How Campaigns Can Use the Internet to Win in 2012

Hell of a political year, eh? The president, 33 Senators, all 435 House members, scores of statewide officeholders and thousands of state legislators, mayors, city councilmembers, etc, all up for election. The presidential race will dominate the year, of course, and many congressional, state and local races will turn on the outcome of the battle between President Obama and the Republican nominee in the Fall.

Still, plenty of elections will buck the national trends, hinging on local issues and local personalities. Plus we'll have the primaries, which for many offices are the only elections that matter. Fifteen years ago, the upcoming campaigns would have been dominated by TV ads to the exclusion of most other political tools, but this is 2012 and the world has changed. From Egypt to Wisconsin, the internet has become a key political battleground, and smart campaigns at all levels — presidential to dog-catcher — will be thinking about how to integrate digital tools into essentially all aspects of their operations.

Here are some of the most important areas to consider:

Fundraising

As now-President [Obama's 2008 campaign](#) showed, an online army can be a powerful source of funds — he raised close to over half a billion dollars online, two-thirds of it directly from someone clicking the “donate” button in a campaign email. The need to build a base of repeat online donors will be a prime motivation behind many campaigns' online work.

Recruiting

Guess what: most of us use the internet in some way, whether on a computer or a cell phone, and online tools from advertising to social media outreach can be great ways to connect with donors, volunteers and voters. Even when supporters meet the campaign in person at a rally or house party, email and social media can help you stay in touch with them and start them on the path to becoming donors and volunteers.

Mobilization

Online tools are great at helping campaigns give people things to do on their behalf. Supporters can canvass their neighbors, recruit friends on Facebook or via email, participate in “virtual phone-banks,” vote on slogans or video ads, and even speak in public on the campaign's behalf, whether on a blog or at an event — all organized digitally.

Grassroots Organizing

Digital tools — particularly mobile ones — are likely to catch on in the world of grassroots organizing in a big way in 2012. Ipads will be everywhere, sometimes [strapped on like a catcher's mitt](#), and

campaigns will use them and other tablets to ease the process of signing people up at live events. Mobile apps and mobile-optimized websites will provide maps, directions, videos and talking points to canvassers along with street addresses. Also, look for the first significant uses of mobile card-readers to process credit card donations on-the-spot via mobile phones — the Obama campaign is [apparently planning to give them a try](#).

Messaging

Digital channels are vital to spreading a campaign's messaging in a modern media environment, with Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Google and a plethora of blogs and news websites all potential propaganda outlets. Campaigns will frequently use advertising and their own and their supporters' social media channels to target particular audiences with messages designed to appeal to them. Campaigns will also reach out directly to reporters, bloggers and online activists behind the scenes. Smart campaigns will employ an integrated mix of paid, social and pitched approaches to influence the online conversation.

Besides distributing messages, campaigns will use the 'net to test them. Online advertising in particular lends itself to the testing of positions, slogans and taglines: a campaign can run clusters of ads on Facebook and Google, for instance, to see which resonate with voters (i.e., which yield clicks, donors and/or volunteers). Sending different variants of an email message to your list and measuring the responses is another way to test messages before going all-in.

Targeting

Top-level presidential candidates seem to get media attention every time they open their mouths, but the problem for state and local campaigns is more often to get noticed at all. In races with limited resources and little press coverage, the inherent ability to target most online outreach at low cost can help stretch a tight budget.

In a densely populated urban or suburban area, for instance, broadcast TV advertising is impractical for many campaigns because too many spots will be wasted on viewers outside district lines. Plus, in a hot political year, many local TV markets will simply be saturated! In that case, (relatively) cheap Google and Facebook ads can work alongside targeted cable TV spots to spread messages and help find supporters, donors and volunteers in a defined geographic area and even among a defined set of voters (previous Republican primary voters, women over 50, etc).

Rapid Response

Finally, campaigns will use the 'net to push back against attacks and unfavorable coverage, using its ability to go around traditional gatekeepers (like journalists) to reach voters and influencers directly. Fast and effective response tools include online ads (particularly Google/search ads on queries related to the story), YouTube videos, blog posts and social media messaging, and of course an old-fashioned email to supporters asking them to help.

To get started, let's look at the essential online infrastructure most campaigns will need to build. Then, we'll put the tools to use.

Chapter Two | Tools and Tactics: The Basics

Using the internet for politics may seem relatively new to some of us, but most online campaigning is a reincarnation of some classic political act in digital form. For instance, you can think of a website as the electronic version of a storefront office, while the process of [working with bloggers](#) is a lot like old-school print or broadcast media relations.

But compared with traditional political tools, the internet truly excels at maintaining relationships with many people at once. Channels like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and email connect campaigns directly with their donors and volunteers, providing easy paths to distribute news, talking points, event invitations and appeals for time and money. With planning and effort, the connection can go both ways, letting a campaign actively tap [the social connections and even the creativity of its supporters](#).

Political professionals trained in the broadcast era can have trouble wrapping their heads around the back-and-forth nature of online communications (TV ads aren't exactly interactive), but the rewards for embracing it can be tremendous. As [Barack Obama showed in 2008](#), campaigns that actively engage their supporters can ask an immense amount from them in return.

The Big Picture

Before we dive into the nuts and bolts, let's talk Big Picture for a minute. Political campaigns (unless you're Ron Paul) exist to do one thing: win on election day. To win, campaigns to get 50% of the vote, plus one vote. Sure, a big margin is great, but elections are a zero-sum game — someone wins, someone loses, and except in very rare circumstances, there ain't no middle ground.

To win in 2012, campaigns need to fulfill three basic functions, all of which can be done at least in part online:

- Recruiting — forming a connection with volunteers, donors and potential voters.
- Mobilization — getting them to do something, whether to give money, phone-bank, canvass or simply turn out and vote.
- Messaging — getting the campaign's political themes out to the right audiences, whether a broad audience (all voters in a district) or a narrow one (journalists, bloggers, Latinos over 40, women under 30, union members, Tea Partiers, etc.).

Everything a campaign does — everything — has a cost, even if that cost is a few minutes of a staff member or volunteer's time. Successful campaigns will be ruthless when it comes to resources like time and money — i.e., they won't waste them unless it's unavoidable. So when someone says, "hey, we should be on FourSquare," the first question a campaign manager should ask is whether or not being on FourSquare helps in any significant way with recruiting, mobilization or messaging — and ultimately, whether it'll help the candidate win. The next question? Is being on FourSquare the most efficient and/or effective way to further that goal. If not, a campaign should question whether it's worth the time and money.

This calculus applies to every tool and tactic we'll discuss in this book. If it ain't worth it, don't do it.

Basic Structure of an Online Campaign

We've talked about essential tasks, now let's talk about essential tools. Most campaigns will end up with [three basic online elements](#):

- A central hub, usually a website.
- A way to stay in touch with supporters, usually involving an email-based Constituent Relations Management system but also including Facebook, Twitter and text messaging.
- Online outreach, to influence the wider public discussion and to recruit new supporters and donors. Outreach can include a wide array of possible channels discussed in the chapters to come, including online advertising, digital video, Facebook, direct pitching to bloggers and other activists behind the scenes, Twitter and more.

Most technologies a campaign employs will fit into one of those three areas. If they don't, see the big questions at the start of this chapter — is it worth the investment?

The Essential Tools

Next, let's examine the basic online infrastructure most campaigns will need to build. In subsequent chapters, we'll zoom in on the ways campaigns can put them to use. In the penultimate chapter, we'll look at the logistics behind an online campaign, particularly when it comes to vendors, consultants and staffing. But first, the tools.

Website

Except in the rare case that Facebook page will do, just about every campaign needs [a website](#) if it intends to use the internet at all. Besides serving as the campaign's public front, a campaign site's primary goal is to help build [a supporter database](#) — remember goal #1 above, recruiting. This means that no visitor to the site should leave without an opportunity to join up and turn an instant of enthusiasm into the potential for real-world action on the candidate's behalf.

A site's looks matter, since a well-designed layout can help make a good first impression, but most voters, bloggers and journalists alike will ultimately come to a candidate's site for substance. When it comes to the process of converting visitors into activists, [content is key](#), as we'll discuss again and again in the chapters to come.

Overall, a website lets a campaign present its case in the strongest possible way, telling the candidate's story through words, photos and video. Integrating the site with other aspects of the campaign's online outreach is important, since the site will be stronger when it's used to aggregate, organize and feature content from YouTube, Twitter, Flickr, blogs and the various other facets of a campaign's online presence. Think of it as a hub around which the rest of a campaign's outreach orbits! And, good content also serves as "Google bait," helping a campaign's website and other online channels rank highly in search engines.

Of course, even the best content is useless if it's hard to find or consume, so a campaign website needs to have a straightforward navigation scheme, with information clearly labeled and broken into digestible chunks. Don't forget those (now ubiquitous) social media "share" buttons! Make it easy for

readers to share your content for you.

Completing the connection, every scattered piece of the campaign's online content should refer back to the main website — people shouldn't be able to encounter the campaign online (whether through Google, YouTube, a blog post or an online ad) without also finding a way to get involved. Online content doesn't just persuade, it recruits.

Microsites

Besides the main "hub" website, campaigns can use employ "microsites," smaller sites designed to reach a particular audience, support a particular program or reinforce a particular campaign audience. One tactic: campaigns often use [microsites to launch attacks on their opponents](#), employing a microsite partly to focus the message and partly to insulate the main site from backlash against the attack. For some recent examples, see this *Campaigns & Elections* piece on [the role of microsites earlier in the 2012 presidential race](#).

Constituent Relations Management

Once supporters have signed up to help the campaign, they're in the hands of a campaign's CRM system, usually a web-based tool rather than software residing on the staff's own computers.

A typical CRM system combines a database and a mass-messaging program to automate the basics of communicating with supporters over the internet. While individual platforms vary in cost and capabilities, just about any CRM is an improvement over, for example, hand-entering supporter information into Excel and mail-merging the results into Outlook. By employing standard web-based forms, CRMs ease the process of joining, leaving or interacting with a list, while on the back end they allow list managers to send messages to some or all members at once and usually at no incremental cost (fees are typically based on features and list size rather than usage).

Most CRMs can also break a list into chunks based on members' location, demographics or past behavior (such as donation history), a capability that lets list managers target messages at people deemed likely to respond. This kind of segmentation is also ideal for testing, for instance to try out different strategies on small parts of a list before rolling them out widely. The more information a campaign requests, the more it has to work with: for the Obama campaign, the neighborhood-level data that came up the chain from volunteers was at times [more accurate than polling](#).

CRMs designed for candidates typically incorporate an integrated online fundraising system, and can also include more advanced modules that allow supporters to organize events, run personal fundraising efforts and download lists of neighbors to visit or phone numbers to call. But regardless of their additional options, most CRMs still use mass email as their primary weapon, though some now integrate social media channels such as Facebook and Twitter.

Why the emphasis on email? Despite the hype about Twitter and Facebook in politics, email is still the most effective tool to raise money, motivate volunteers and keep supporters engaged — for example, roughly two-thirds of the \$500 million that Barack Obama raised online [came directly from someone clicking on a "donate now" button in an email message](#). Email reaches many people who still haven't joined the social web, for one thing, but it also turns out in practice to have a much higher response

rate than other channels, sometimes by a factor of ten or more (in part because you can open an email any time, but you pretty much have to be ON Facebook or Twitter when someone posts an update in order to see it). Email remains the “killer app” of online politics — particularly online fundraising — despite constant predictions of its demise.

Not that we’re talking about spam! Campaigns should use mass email only to communicate with people who have “opted-in” to their list by signing up online or at an in-person event. Except for targeted outreach messages to bloggers, journalists and activists, email messages should serve as a relationship-management tool, not as a recruiting tool (though every respectable CRM includes “tell-a-friend” links to help messages [spread from person to person](#)).

But despite email’s relatively high response rate, smart campaigns will integrate it into their overall communications with supporters — it’s not Facebook vs. email, but Facebook AND email AND Twitter AND the other channels supporters want to use. In fact, many campaigns (and advocacy organizations) are finding that their Facebook and Twitter followers also subscribe to their email lists. In practice, the social channels become places to engage with supporters consistently and over the long term, with individual emails serving spurring action at critical moments.

Social Media

Which brings us to Facebook, Twitter and the rest of the social media universe, a much more back-and-forth environment than email (or TV ads, for that matter). We’ll talk more about how to USE social channels in chapters to come, but first, does a campaign absolutely need to worry about social media? It’s hard to imagine too many races in which social media WOULDN’T play a part, to be honest — with half of the U.S. population on Facebook and most journalists, bloggers and political activists on Twitter, campaigns would be foolish to ignore the social internet.

For a start, most campaigns will need a Facebook Page, regardless of whether the candidate has a personal Facebook profile — Facebook Pages are intended for institutions rather than individuals, and they have features designed to help feed information to a fan base or a following. Note that the new Facebook Timeline layout for Pages [places a premium on visual content](#). Most campaigns will also need a dedicated Twitter feed, and it may also make sense for individual staffers to have campaign-affiliated fields of their own, particularly if they’re trying using Twitter to influence journalists, bloggers and others involved in the ongoing public discussion.

A crucial thing to remember about social media is the “social” part! Unlike television ads, these are interactive channels, meaning that campaigns can’t simply dominate the conversation — they’ll need to listen to what others are saying. And in most cases, they’ll benefit from doing so, since [social media monitoring](#) is an excellent way to test which messages are resonating (and which aren’t) and to pick up early warning of speedbumps ahead. At the very least, campaigns will need Google Alerts to listen to when the candidate’s name is mentioned online, and many vendors offer much more sophisticated products that can analyze the many thousands of online conversations that a high-profile campaign can generate.

Online Video

Online video is a natural for most campaigns, accustomed as political professionals are to the world of

television ads. In recent years, the proliferation of cheap cameras has combined with the advent of free online video hosting and widespread broadband access to make online video a far more effective proposition than before, both for attack and for defense. Video often evokes a stronger emotional reaction than text or still images alone, making it a powerful way to tell stories or make a political point, but [online video isn't television](#) — the kinds of content that succeeds can be quite different, with authenticity and topic typically more important than polished visuals.

While campaigns often embed YouTube-hosted clips on their own websites and social networking pages, the YouTube website has also become a useful outreach channel on its own — many people now bypass Google to go directly to YouTube to look for information, making it effectively the second-most-popular search engine in the U.S. To maximize the chances of people finding their content, campaigns should carefully title, annotate and tag each YouTube clip when they upload it. They should also be sure to include a link back to their website in the clip description, and when possible “watermark” clips with the site’s URL so that it’s visible as the piece plays.

Online video can be a key way to leverage activity in the real world, creating an online/offline integration that can be quite powerful. For instance, video of a campaign rally or event — particularly if it includes one-on-one discussions with supporters, volunteers, staff or the candidate — can help people who weren’t able to attend deepen their emotional connection to the campaign. Similarly, video can help spur action, as when the video clip features a direct fundraising appeal from the candidate or from an average donor explaining why he or she decided to give. And, larger campaigns (whose staff may be spread over a state or the whole country rather than concentrated in a single district) frequently turn to video to help train volunteers or present messaging points to canvassers and phone-bankers.

[The “Macaca moment”](#) gave online video a bad reputation in some political circles after the 2006 election, with campaign professionals horrified at the thought of their clients’ every public mistake ending up as fodder for online hecklers. But YouTube actually turns out to be a good counter to embarrassing content, since a campaign can use its own videos to respond to an offending clip, or at least to push it farther down the list of search results (a tactic sometimes referred to as [“flooding the zone”](#)).

Mobile Technology

Cell phones are likely to be a key part of the future of digital politics, and later on we’ll discuss them extensively in the context of Twitter, advertising and field organizing. Smart phones in particular are likely to play a particularly big role in grassroots work in 2012.

As for staying in touch with supporters via text messages, most CRMs can collect cell numbers but so far relatively few campaigns in this country have put them to use, in part because of constraints built into the U.S. telecom system. Probably the most common use of text messaging in 2012 will be for pre-election and election-day Get-Out-The-Vote efforts, though some will also use them as a two-way tool by soliciting information from supporters through polls and such. If you’re really ambitious, you’ll use them to announce your vice presidential pick! If your campaign does decide to employ a text program, one good way to build your list is at live events, if you’ve set up the capability for people send you a short text message to sign up at that moment.

Also note that cell phones have particular high penetration and usage rates in some communities that aren't as likely to be on the traditional internet, making them potentially an ideal tool for reaching groups like urban black and hispanic voters.

Mobile now means more than cell phones, though — iPads and other tablet computers are proliferating on campaigns (sometimes of [the strap-on variety](#)), particularly to help sign supporters up at live events. Also, we're seeing [the first signs of mobile fundraising](#), again particularly at events to process donations on the fly.

Other Tools

Some campaign somewhere will no doubt try just about any online tool you can think of in this political season, from [FourSquare](#) to [Pinterest](#) to those [funky QR codes](#). But the ones above are most likely to prove essential, and anyone considering a shiny new toy should seriously look at the questions with which we started this chapter — i.e., is it worth it?

Other Tasks

Wait, what about fundraising? Or advertising? Or field organizing? These are key programs/projects for political campaigns, absolutely — but they're more questions of procedures and tactics than of technology and infrastructure. We'll cover them and more in the chapters to come.

Technology Isn't Strategy

To think about it another way, tools are important, but only fools ignore the vast difference between having the technology and using it effectively. Successful campaigns spend as much time planning their activities and developing procedures as circumstances allow — they know that while anyone can send a mass email, [getting the most out of an email list takes an actual strategy](#). As simple or sophisticated as a given tool is, what really matters is how you use it.

Next up: let's look at online outreach, followed by mobilization and fundraising.

Chapter Three | Online Outreach

Once a campaign has the basic technology in place, it can begin to take full advantage of the internet's ability to deliver donors, volunteers and voters. Much of a campaign's online outreach will take place in the very public venues of blogs, Facebook, YouTube and Twitter, but politicians and staff can also reach out behind the scenes. For instance, you can send emails or Facebook messages to selected bloggers, Twitterers and other online activists, usually in the hope of creating connections that will lead to more public affirmations of support.

The variety of outreach outlets available to online communicators can be overwhelming, so let's start with a few basic principles to help sort out the options.

Go Where The Audience Is

If you want to get the most bang for your campaign buck, [go where the right people have already gathered](#), which in 2012 will usually mean Facebook, Twitter, blogs and other content websites — it's usually much easier to tap into an existing community than to create one of your own.

Have a Clear Connection Back

Regardless how someone encounters a campaign online, they can't act unless they have a way to follow up. Every element of the campaign's online presence should link to a recruitment form, and when possible individual "landing pages" should be tied to the source. For instance, a Google Ad about a candidate's policy on taxes should link to a page that both talks about the topic and that invites readers to join the campaign based on that particular issue.

Content Supports Outreach

An outreach campaign doesn't have much to stand on without content, since video, words and images provide the raw material to attract notice and make the candidate's case. Without good content (a good story, essentially), it's hard for anyone to break through the constant online clutter — if you don't have something to say, people aren't too likely to listen. Another consideration: just about any campaign can also benefit from having a body of clear, topical and targeted content on published on the web in a variety of outlets, since voters, bloggers and journalists alike will be turning to Google and other search engines for basic information about races and candidates. You want to have YOUR spin on as much of what they see as you can.

Integration is Key

Ideally, the separate elements of an online outreach campaign reinforce each other. A candidate can use his or her email list to promote a new YouTube video or Facebook app, for instance, while outreach to bloggers and prominent Twitter activists can introduce the campaign to new audiences, some of whose members will go to the campaign website, join the list and become potential outreach agents themselves. Good campaigns create a "virtuous circle" in which the different individual

initiatives reinforce each other. By contrast, campaigns that let the various pieces exist in isolation will likely waste resources and miss opportunities to turn voters' passing interest into support — and money.

Online/offline integration is equally key, since much list-building takes place at real-world events. Don't forget to include the website address on yard signs, car magnets, t-shirts and every other piece of collateral material possible!

Not All Your Outreach Will Be Targeted

Sometimes online outreach works best when it's directed like a rifle at a particular target, but a good shotgun still has its place. The ease of [online self-publishing has created a whole new class of "network influentials,"](#) a category that includes national and state-level bloggers, prominent Twitterers, individual activists with large personal networks and the administrators of sizable email lists — basically, anyone with a following. Sometimes a campaign can identify and target the right individual voices intentionally, but often it can be hard to predict which story will catch which person at the right moment to break through.

The best answer seems to be a combination of targeted and untargeted outreach: online communicators can use a sharpshooting approach when appropriate, connecting personally with chosen bloggers, Twitter enthusiasts and journalists, while still blasting information out via mass email, YouTube, Tweets, Facebook updates and blog posts. The targeted approach will often give the best results, but at other times a random and potentially overlooked channel can actually turn out to be the most productive.

If You Build It, Sometimes They Will Come

Some online supporters won't need your outreach; they'll hit your website, Facebook Page or Twitter feed entirely on their own and without any prompting from a campaign, driven by word-of-mouth or by news in the race. After Sarah Palin's convention acceptance speech in 2008, for instance, Barack Obama's website saw a huge influx of cash even before his staff had time to send out an email solicitation — people who liked him didn't care for what the Alaska governor had to say and were eager to let it be known. Consequently, it behooves a campaign to make it as easy as possible for spontaneous donors and volunteers to act, ensuring that the website's "donate" and "sign up" buttons are prominent and that the transaction itself doesn't have any speedbumps.

To maximize the chances of capitalizing on such "drive-by" support, as we mentioned above, a candidate will want to be visible in as many places online as possible, either via advertising or through campaign-created content. Once again, online recruitment is all about [being where the potential donors are](#), whether it's on Google, YouTube, Facebook, political blogs or local media sites.

More often, though, politicians won't need an umbrella to ward off an unanticipated rain of support: they'll have to work for every volunteer and every cent they get.

Putting the Tools to Work

Facebook and Other Online Social Networks

[Facebook](#) has become the modern equivalent of a town square, a place where people from all walks of life can mingle and connect in a public environment. MySpace may still have political potential in some parts of the country, but Facebook has essentially blown it out of the water in the past few years, though besides Facebook, many campaigns may want to explore on niche social networks such as [Black Planet](#) as well.

Facebook pages are easy for campaigns to create, but they do require follow-on work to reach their full potential. It helps to connect aggressively with potential “friends,” perhaps starting with the candidate’s own social connections and moving on to party activists, local officials, bloggers and the members of your own supporter list (include a link to your profile pages in mass emails and people will do some of the work for you). Regular updates keep a campaign in front of supporters’ eyes, and asking people to repost your content to their own profiles will expose it to their own extended social networks.

But besides just posting links to videos and other content, campaigns are now learning to engage their social media supporters, for instance by asking questions on the Page and by participating in discussions taking place in the comments on posts. Facebook is a powerful tool to keep the campaign in front of its most committed supporters, catching their eyes day-to-day with fresh content and fresh discussion, something that works best if you’re willing to go back-and-forth with people. That way, when your email asking for time or money arrives, it’s not dropping in out of the blue — you’ve primed supporters to be ready to help.

To highlight content or brand particular initiatives, campaigns can create Facebook “tabs” that effectively function as sub-pages within their main page. Commonly, tabs might feature different issues and potential actions for people to take, and many of the CRM vendors now offer the ability to incorporate action alerts and signups into tabs. And just like individual profiles, pages also include “walls”, where most of the engagement described above actually occurs. When followers leave comments on a page’s wall and get involved in conversations amongst themselves and with campaign staff, we’re talking about a truly interactive medium.

Conversation’s great, but broadcast-style content distribution on Facebook still matters, particularly since your supporters can amplify your work by sharing it with others. Facebook has become a crucial path for videos and other pieces of creative work [to spread virally](#). So even if you can’t always interact with people, at least post your content!

One rule of thumb in social networking outreach: move people onto your email list as quickly as possible, because email appeals have a much higher response rate than Facebook posts or MySpace messages. Not every one of your “friends” will join your list, but a campaign is likely to get more work and more donations out of the ones who do. Still, campaigns will frequently find that their most-committed supporters “hang out” on the campaign’s Facebook page whether or not they’re also on the email list. As we’ve said before, don’t think of email and Facebook as an either/or proposition — ideally, they play well together.

Twitter

The explosion of [Twitter](#) marks one of the biggest changes in the digital political landscape in the last four years — Barack Obama had all of 100,000 followers by Election Day '08, a number that's well above 20 million today. Though the two sites are often lumped together in the popular mind, Twitter isn't quite a mass medium in the same way Facebook has become — it's more of a channel to reach those "[network influentials](#)" we discussed above, since it's particularly popular with [bloggers](#), [journalists](#) and activists.

Functionally, Twitter is the very short equivalent of blogging, with a dash of social networking thrown in: individual Twitter messages ("tweets") are limited to 140 characters in length, and people generally have to choose to "follow" someone's Twitter feed in order to see their updates. As with Facebook, essentially anyone or any organization can create a Twitter feed, but in some sense Twitter lacks the reciprocal nature of a true social network — plenty of feeds have thousands of followers but follow far fewer people in return themselves (do you think that Lady Gaga really pays attention to what you say?).

One important consideration — Twitter's a useful tool for campaigns, but its real political power may lie in what campaigns CAN'T do on it, which is to dominate the conversation. Twitter is truly a democratic medium (with a small "d"), and content and opinions spread on Twitter very often find their way onto blogs and cable news and into newspapers. Twitter helps create the sea of information in which modern campaigns swim, and whether or not they're active on Twitter themselves, microblogging is likely to shape the political communications environment in which campaigns operate.

What to Tweet?

A common perception of Twitter is that it's an inherently trivial medium — it's often spoken of as a way to tell the world what you had for breakfast. But in practice, normal people who fill Twitter's "airwaves" with self-indulgent drivel generally don't pick up much of a following (for celebrities, that's unfortunately NOT so true). In fact, perhaps the most common single use of Twitter is to spread links to blog posts, videos, news articles and other pieces of in-depth content, making the 140-character limit less of an issue.

In general, as in so many other parts of the online advocacy space, readers aren't likely to pay much attention to you unless you have some kind of value to offer them. People who tweet too much trivia too often can find their followers dropping off in droves, so be sure to pay attention to the KIND of information you distribute. Not every tweet needs to be a haiku-like gem of wisdom, but it rarely hurts to think for at least a minute or two about your ultimate communications goals before messaging the world. How often people Tweet varies immensely — I have friends who've sent out 10 or 20 times more messages over time than I have, for instance. It really depends on what you have to say and the kind of following your campaign has.

Building a Following

Once you've established an initial base of content on Twitter, let's start building that following. Unfortunately, short of being mentioned in the Twitter feed of someone famous, finding an audience

typically takes time. Start by following the people you want to follow you — your staff, political activists, local bloggers, journalists, etc., since at least some of them will follow you back right away. Once they do so, you have the opportunity to reach them — and potentially, their own audiences through them.

Engaging the Community and Connecting with Prominent Voices

The most effective way to build your following over time is to actively engage the Twitter community, a process that can take several forms. The most straightforward is to use an “@reply,” in which you reference another Twitterer in your own post (i.e., “@epolitics why don’t you just shut up about this crap”). You can use @replies to hold a back-and-forth conversation with someone, plus they’re a good way to get the attention of someone with whom you’d like to connect (Twitter.com and other Twitter-management tools typically make it very easy to see who’s @replied you).

@replies also play a role in “retweeting,” which is the forwarding of someone else’s posts to your own followers. Retweets are one of the signature characteristics of the ongoing Twitter conversation, since they let people provide value to their readers without having to write new content themselves. Plus, retweeting someone more prominent than you can be a good way to come to his or her attention, particularly if you use the old-school “RT @reply” method rather than Twitter’s newer built-in retweet function (RT’ing a tweet as an @reply also lets you add a comment, another valuable feature).

Besides RT’s, the other common bit of Twitter shorthand you’ll commonly encounter is a “hashtag,” a word or abbreviation preceded by the “#” sign. Twitterers use hashtags to refer to a topic that’s being discussed by several people at once, for instance an issue, event or public figure, and people often use Twitter’s search function to follow the extended discussion around a particular tag. This tendency makes hashtags a valuable way to gain exposure to new followers and to find yourself retweeted, assuming of course that you have something interesting to say. Some websites attempt to keep track of common hashtags, but the easiest way to find the terms in general use is to use a Twitter search to note the terms actively employed in the discussion around an issue.

Engaging the Twitter community is obviously time-consuming, since you have to pay attention to what many different people are saying — you can’t participate in the conversation unless you’re actually listening. Besides hashtags, dedicated Twitter-management tools like Hootsuite and TweetDeck let you break the feeds you’re following down into various groups by their characteristics, for instance based on topics they cover, and they also tend to speed up the process of posting content vs going through Twitter.com itself. A good tool will typically allow you to pre-schedule Tweets for publishing, something that’s particularly handy if you have content that needs to go out over the weekend.

Besides public conversations, you can also “Direct Message” someone behind the scenes if you are following each other reciprocally, and I’ve known people who’ve been able to connect with a blogger or reporter via DM whom they’d never been able to reach via email.

Advanced Tactics

Twitter has given rise to an impressive array of different tactics and practices in its short time on Earth. “Live-Tweeting” an event involves covering it comprehensively as it happens, and social media-friendly conferences and seminars typically promote the use of certain hashtags to facilitate the

process. Activists or groups can also pre-arrange TweetChats, which are public discussions at a particular time and around a particular hashtag. Many people pay attention to the hashtags that are “trending” on Twitter, i.e., becoming widely discussed, and the goal of a TweetChat or live-tweeting is often to either encourage a topic to trend or to ride the wave of a subject that’s moving up the popularity ladder. Finally, a Twitter interview can be an interesting way to run a one-on-one public conversation, though it practice it can [feel like competitive poetry](#) or a freestyle rap showdown — i.e., a public balancing act on a very narrow wire.

Twitter and Cell Phones

A common question about Twitter: why the 140-character limit? The answer is [cell phones](#) — Twitter is designed to be used like SMS text messages, making it one of the few online tools that’s commonly and easily used on handheld devices. Some organizers have taken advantage of this fact to use Twitter to help communicate with and ultimately rally communities in which cell phones are more common than access to the traditional internet. Others have used the Twitter/phone connection for on-the-spot coverage of rallies and other events, particularly as a means to distribute photos and videos shot with their phones. Finally, some campaigns in 2012 are using “protected” Twitter feeds — ones that can only be followed by people “approved” by the feed owner — [to organize field staff and volunteers](#) on the fly.

Advertising on Twitter

Twitter’s still new as an advertising platform, particularly compared with Google and Facebook, but political campaigns can use “promoted tweets” to put themselves in front of potential followers. This tactic can be relatively expensive, however, and many campaigns may find other channels to be more cost-effective.

More Ways to Stumble

A note of caution: electoral campaigns in particular need to be careful to distinguish between a candidate or officeholder’s Twitter feed and one updated by staff, since Twitter as a community tends to value authenticity. If Twitterers find out that a “candidate’s voice” is not actually his own, the campaign’s credibility can take a hit. Campaigns can use both approaches in a single feed if it’s clear whose voice is speaking at any given time, and can even turn a relatively rare candidate appearance on his or her own feed into an event to promote. Another consideration for electoral campaigns: some politicians have taken to Twitter like a duck to water, but the results of unfiltered Twitter-posting can be dangerous to a political reputation (plenty of room for a stupid mistake in 140 characters).

One final thing to remember: once a campaign has a Twitter feed, people will expect to be able to follow it and interact with the author(s). Don’t start a feed only to let it die of neglect.

Blogs

If social networks are the modern town halls, blogs are more like watering holes, places where the like-minded stop by for news and gossip. Campaigns often try to reach blog readers by [connecting with authors behind the scenes](#) to pitch stories and influence coverage. Note that since many (most?)

bloggers have also now joined Twitter, it's also a good venue in which to try to catch their attention.

Campaign staff can also participate in the online discussions taking place in the comments sections of most blogs, and candidates themselves can take advantage of opportunities to guest-publish or answer questions on popular or relevant sites. Finally, campaigns can consider advertising on political blogs, particularly since ads on state- or local-level blogs are often a cheap way to reach a concentrated political crowd (plus, bloggers tend to notice who's advertising on their sites...).

Blog outreach may be more of a priority for a local candidate than a national one, since state and regional political blogs (and Twitter) provide convenient gathering places for local political activists, somewhere you can reach them without necessarily having to spend money. Like many other forms of social media outreach, blogger relations is usually cheap financially but expensive in time, a good fit for scrappy campaigns with more enthusiasm than cash.

The first step in blogger relations is research, since time spent contacting the wrong sites is wasted. Google is a great place to start — just run a search for “political blogs” and your state or region and you'll be on your way (most bloggers actively link to others in their interest area, so finding one site can introduce you to an entire network). Campaigns can also seek out blogs that focus on a particular issue dear to the candidate's heart, whether it's immigration, gay marriage or science funding, hoping to pick up financial or other support from outside their immediate districts.

Should a campaign have its own blog? A blog can be a good way for a candidate to show a more personal side than a press release, but they can also consume an immense amount of time. Few campaigns not gifted with a natural writer on hand will be able to devote the resources to keep a blog up to date.

Online Advertising

Like Twitter, online advertising options have expanded exponentially over the past few years. Likewise their targetability — some vendors can even match voter databases with commercial databases to hit ONLY past voters in a given Congressional district, just one example of the ability of search advertising to reach a defined audience with the right message at the right time. Google Ads, for instance, can actually be targeted on several levels, not just by topic (“keyword”) but also geographically. (For more on digital ad targeting, see [this recent Campaigns & Elections column exploring the options.](#))

Online advertising can be [remarkably effective at volunteer/donor recruitment](#), so much so that many online organizers argue that recruiting ads should start running as soon as a candidate announces, so that no potential support is wasted. Besides recruiting, campaign can use digital ads to persuade voters and spread messaging. And as election day closes in, most campaigns will switch the emphasis of their online advertising to driving voter turnout.

One final consideration: how do you pay for ads? Sometimes online advertising is like television or radio, where you're paying for a particular number of impressions (typically measured in CPM, or cost-per-thousand). With Google and Facebook ads, however, you only pay when someone clicks.

Online Advertising Channels

Display Ads

Display ads are the descendents of the banner ads that sprang up everywhere during the first dot-com boom, but the family has now expanded to include sophisticated video pieces, Flash animations, database interactions and “floating” pop-overs. Display ads remain popular for both recruiting and message-distribution, but they can present one difficulty: they often have to be tailored to the particular requirements of a given website or publisher, particularly if they include higher-end features.

Also depending on the publisher, display ads can be targeted at particular site users, particularly on sites like web portals and social networks as well as newspapers and others that collect financial, demographic and usage data on their readers. An advertiser on Washington Post web properties, for instance, can aim ads at employees of particular companies, showing them only to readers coming from the selected .com domain(s). Of course, advertisers can target by interest as well as by demographics, running ads only on special-interest sites or on special-interest sections of mass-audience and news sites.

Contextual (Google) Ads

Our second common online advertising channel deploys text ads on web pages based on the content of those pages. Google Ads are the classic example, with ads being served to a search results page based on what the person searched for. Google also sells text ads on thousands of sites across the web (including Epolitics.com), also targeted based on the content of their individual pages, and similar ad networks have sprung up as well.

Contextual ads have proven to be very effective for both commercial and political advertisers, with easy and obvious targeting based on a variety of factors including keyword and reader location. Most also feature easy testing of alternative ad message/keyword combinations and the ability to change ads and ad runs mid-stream. In practice, [Google Ads have turned out to have an excellent Return On Investment](#) when used to build fundraising lists.

To get the most out of contextual ads, testing and tracking are vital. Since ads on a particular page are arranged and emphasized based on the amount each advertiser has “bid” to purchase those keywords, a campaign may be able to reach more people for the same amount of money by advertising on more-specific queries. For instance, advertising on the word “outdoors” is likely to be expensive, since lots of different retailers, outfitters and advocacy groups will be competing for it. Advertising on “alternative fuel biodiesel,” on the other hand, may be much cheaper, and its superior targeting may also yield better results per-ad-viewed. Smart advertisers will test many different keyword/ad combinations to find the best and most cost-effective results.

Two other considerations about Google and other contextually targeted ad systems: first, if you target well, they’ll reach people at the moment when they’re potentially interested in your issues, since they’re either searching for it or they’re on a page that’s somehow related. Second, Google ads have a secondary branding effect, since they put your message in front of web searchers and readers regardless of whether they actually click on them. Some research has even shown that it’s beneficial

to have a Google Ad show up on a page that also has your site in the organic Google search results — if a page contains both your ad and your link in the Google search results, more people click on your link, as if the ad somehow delivered extra visibility or credibility.

Facebook Ads

Facebook has significantly expanded its place on the online advertising playing field over the past couple of years, in part because ads on the social network can be easily targeted at people based on the interests and demographic characteristics they've listed in their Facebook profiles ("men aged 25-34 who like football" would be an targetable group, for instance). Unfortunately for our purposes, Facebook constantly changes its features and offerings, making it difficult to write about definitively! Websites like [Mashable](#), [AllFacebook](#) and [InsideFacebook](#) track these changes closely, making them essential resources for people running social ad campaigns.

Though the specifics may change by the time you read this, we CAN talk about some basics. First, Facebook ads are easy to buy — anyone with a Facebook profile and a credit card can set up a campaign. Second, the creative elements are equally simple, with a small image and a few words of text, along with a "Like" button and a link to the appropriate landing page (ads can point to a Facebook page or to an outside website). Finally, up to this point at least, Facebook ads have been relatively cost-effective, with the price-per-click sometimes as low as a few tens of cents. Note that the cost is highly variable, and that at least for now, [Facebook's price structure rewards success](#): the higher the rate at which a particular ad run is clicked, the lower the cost moves over time. As a result, Facebook effectively rewards experimentation, and as with Google ads, Facebook advertisers frequently test many different combinations of creative elements and targeting to find the final versions on which to concentrate resources.

For inspiration, see this excellent case study of [how Facebook Ads helped defeat a Florida ballot initiative in 2011](#). Also note that Facebook now offers "sponsored stories" and other options as alternatives to the ads described above, though they remain the most common form of advertising on the site.

Video Ads

One interesting trend for 2012 and beyond is the steady growth of opportunities to place advertising on web videos. Many YouTube clips now have a text ad overlay or are preceded by a video ad, for example, and another opportunity lies in "pre-roll" ads on the internet versions of tv shows. Sites like Hulu.com, for instance, stream thousands of programs to people across the country, and campaigns have begun placing web versions of their tv commercials at the beginning of web clips on the sites. Other opportunities exist on sites for networks or individual shows (on episodes hosted on the Daily Show's website, for instance), and it's likely that pre-roll video will only increase in popularity. For one thing, it's close enough to traditional television advertising that media consultants can adapt their content to it quickly!

Blog Ads

As we discussed above, campaigns can buy advertising on blogs, either through the Blogads.com site

or through other blog advertising networks. These ads are naturally targeted based on each blog's particular niche, and ads on specialized sites such as local or regional political blogs frequently reach very influential audiences at a low relative cost. Note that very large sites like HuffingtonPost sell advertising directly, just like WashingtonPost.com and NYTimes.com.

Mobile Advertising

One new development in the 2010 election cycle was the first significant use of mobile advertising, particularly ads on the cell phone-optimized versions on websites and search engines. Because of the GPS features built into modern "smart" phones, mobile ads can be geo-targeted as well as aimed at people based on their search queries. Congressman Michelle Bachmann reportedly bought ads aimed at people at the 2010 Minnesota State Fair, for instance, and other candidates attempted to reach people [finding their polling places or even researching candidates](#) while standing in line to vote. Mobile advertising is still very much a niche application, though that situation may change if cell phones start to dominate Americans' internet usage as they do in some other countries.

Advertising and Message-Testing

Pollsters beware: Facebook and Google ads give campaigns the ability to test messaging without focus groups or phone-banks — while recruiting supporters in the process. For instance, a campaign might test several different messaging options around a single set of interests (as revealed by keywords), with the rates at which the different messages are clicked revealing which ones resonate and which don't. If no one clicks on a certain headline, that's a good sign that it's not working!

Likewise, a campaign can define a demographic on Facebook (women over 40 who like Oprah) and target several different ads at them and see which ones they click. Which text is most effective? Which images draw the eyeballs and resulting clicks? The best part: if no one clicks on a Google or Facebook ad, you don't pay anything.

Outreach through Other Online Communities

We've mostly talked about reaching public online communities so far, but campaigns can also try to reach people through internet conversations taking place a little more out-of-sight. For instance, many people participate in email lists and discussion groups, but it's likely to take some creativity to find and interact with them. One possible strategy is guest-posting, for instance approaching the administrators of the email newsletter of a union or trade association in your state or district with an article aimed at their readers. More often, though, you'll connect with less obvious online communities like these as a byproduct of your overall outreach — your supporters will be your voice in the individual channels they use.

All right, enough about how to recruit people. In the next two chapters, we'll talk about putting them to work.

Chapter Four | Mobilization: Getting People to Act on Your Behalf

Mobilization is simple in concept: it involves persuading people to do things — donate, vote, volunteer, make phone calls, whatever. For instance, [as the experience of the Obama campaign showed](#), one of the most effective ways to spread a campaign’s message online is to get someone else to do it — every supporter is a potential outreach hub in his or her social universe. Campaigns can make the process easy by preparing banners, badges, buttons, videos and other content that fans can post on their own pages. But to get someone to act, first you almost always have to ask — and their answer determines whether or not you’ve succeeded. Therein lies the complexity — how, when and what do we ask of people to help them realize their true political potential?

Motivating Donors and Volunteers

If political support ultimate comes down to emotion — how a potential donor or volunteer feels about a candidate or a race — each contact people have with a campaign influences their propensity to give time or money. Every interaction matters: their experience at an in-person event or a storefront office, what they see online, the ads on their TVs and radios, and of course any direct communications they receive via email, Facebook, Twitter, phone or direct mail. Successful online organizers realize that they are essentially managing virtual relationships with many people at once.

Like any friendship, a political relationship that heads downhill can be hard to salvage (disillusioned donors are unlikely to open their wallets again), and unless a campaign is entirely short-term and doesn’t mind burning bridges, properly managing and motivating supporters over the course of a race will be paramount. List size matters, and campaigns should take every opportunity to grow their own, but list response is just as important, since a relatively small number of motivated people can outperform a much larger group whose members don’t have much coordination or reason to care.

One excellent way to turn people away over time is to treat them like cash machines, something that’s entirely too easy for political professionals to do. In fact, early in the Obama campaign, manager [David Plouffe frequently had to mediate](#) between a fundraising team eager to maximize short-term revenue and a new-media team with an eye on the long game.

At a basic level, not every communication from the campaign should ask for money. Instead, campaigns should think of ways to provide value to supporters in the form of news, information and giveaways, as well as of non-monetary ways they can contribute. Getting people to recruit ten friends via email, for instance, is an easy way for them to participate without having to part with a dime — and once they’ve taken that action, they’re more involved and committed than they were the day before.

The Ladder of Engagement

A common approach to supporter management is to provide activists with [escalating levels of involvement](#). Like a the rungs of a ladder, each higher engagement level requires more work and holds fewer people, but it ideally also creates more value for the campaign or cause. Over time, list managers will obviously try to move people to higher tiers, converting casual list-members into

donors, donors into volunteers, and volunteers into precinct leaders. With a sophisticated CRM, campaigns can get creative in how they track supporters, noting the most reliable activists in the database and putting these “super-volunteers” to work in ways that use their skills, connections and time.

Tiers of engagement work in the other direction as well — if you’re planning a [social media-style create-a-video contest](#), for instance, find a way to involve people who AREN’T actually doing the shooting and editing, perhaps by asking them to rate or comment on the submissions. The overall goal: keep the most casual supporters working at a basic level, while also providing more strenuous outlets for the smaller core of true activists.

More Than Money: Mobilization Means Votes

Political campaigns often focus on wringing donations out of their online supporters, but real people are worth more than just the contents of their bank accounts — smart campaigns will try to tap their brains and time as well! The 2008 Obama campaign relied on volunteer enthusiasm to a remarkable degree, with hundreds of thousands of people downloading “walk lists” of houses to visit in their neighborhoods and phone numbers to call. They reported the results of their outreach work through a comprehensive grassroots data collection system, in turn giving the leadership [priceless data about how the campaign was playing out at a neighborhood level](#).

This kind of sophistication had been out of the reach of most state- or local-level campaigns, though that situation is rapidly changing. Regardless of their level of technical sophistication, though, campaigns can still use online communications to mobilize supporters to perform just about about every traditional political task — and plenty of new ones, too. Among other things, campaigns can ask people to:

- Show up for in-person events (rallies, house parties) and invite friends and family.
- Volunteer at local offices.
- Phone-bank, either at a campaign office or over their own cell phones (“virtual” phone-banking).
- Connect with their neighbors door-to-door.
- Spread the word about a fundraising push.
- Recruit friends via email, Facebook or Twitter.
- View a YouTube clip, blog post or other online content and spread it virally. When supporters post content to Facebook and Twitter, it turns their profiles into a “virtual yard signs.”
- Put up (actual) yard signs.
- Create content such as blog posts, Tweets or online videos all on their own.
- and of course, **vote!**

The importance of that last bullet cannot be overstated for down-ballot candidates, particularly if they’re trying to buck a national trend in their own districts!

Rapid Response

We discussed the role of online video in “flooding the zone” to push unflattering content down in

search results online earlier, but video and other online pushback doesn't spread itself — in fact, a campaign's supporters can be its best defense online. For one thing, people tend to make political decisions based on the opinions of friends and family, and how they react to a scandal or other negative event may be filtered through what's said by people they trust.

If your supporters are out there speaking on your behalf, either in person or on Facebook, Twitter and their own blogs, it's likely to be a better defense than any "facts" you can muster. As an example, Obama '08 went to great lengths to [recruit their followers to fight back against the Manchurian Muslim Candidate meme](#), to some success — though that particular little legend had long legs and still refuses to die, even in 2012.

Field Organizing

One area that's REALLY changing fast is online-enabled field organizing. For an example, in the 2010 senatorial special election in Massachusetts, both Republican Scott Brown and Democrat Martha Coakley deployed tools that leveraged the internet to improve the classic on-the-ground campaign activities of block-walking and phone-banking, connecting individual volunteers with information from the Democratic [Voter Activation Network](#) (now NGP/VAN) and the Republican [Voter Vault](#). Both campaigns made it possible for supporters to phone-bank from home, for instance, with Brown using [technology from an independent vendor](#) and Coakley an equivalent developed by the DNC to connect volunteers with potential voters' phones without disclosing personal details in the process.

Both campaigns also produced database-generated "walk lists" for local volunteers to use while canvassing their communities, but Brown supplemented them with [a clever web-based application](#) optimized for iphones. By geo-locating users through native iphone features, the app could show volunteers the nearest house to visit, directions to get there and talking points to use during the conversation.

Once they'd gathered the responses, [organizers could enter them into a Google Docs spreadsheet](#), a free online tool that helped the Brown campaign assemble the same kind of granular data that [benefited the Obama campaign during the 2008 race](#) — a powerful development, and one likely to be widely copied.

As an alternative to platform-specific apps, many vendors are turning to mobile-optimized websites, which can provide similar functionality without requiring different technology for iphones, Android phones, Blackberries, etc. We can expect these tools to be widely used in 2012 by campaigns up and down the scale, since vendors like NGP/VAN on the Left and Engage on the Right provide them to clients as a matter of course. Sophisticated field operations are no longer limited to the big players!

Field Team Structure

I'm no field-organizing expert, so if you're going to create a robust grassroots operation, be sure to hire someone who is! But it never hurts to look at the best model we have, once again turning to Obama '08. From the ["Learning From Obama"](#) e-book:

Volunteer Management — Context, Training and Accountability

How the Obama field operation organized their volunteer teams deserves special mention, in part because their grassroots GOTV technology depended on it and also because it provides an excellent model for community-based organizers of all flavors. The structure evolved in the primaries and went national during the general election season. Its critical features:

- The campaign developed a clear team structure for the volunteer operation, replicable just about anywhere and with standard roles for each member. Each volunteer team included a leader (to hold everyone accountable), a data manager (because data doesn't exist unless it gets in the system), a phone bank coordinator, a campus coordinator and a volunteer coordinator.
- Training was absolutely vital, both for team members and for the individual neighborhood volunteers they organized.
- Teams had clear vote-getting and voter-contact goals and were held accountable for them.
- Example: for the general election, the Obama organization fielded 400 teams in the state of Missouri, supervised by paid campaign staff, with each team covering 8-12 voting precincts and starting work weeks or months before November 4th.

One thing stands out about this system: it required a lot from volunteers, both in terms of training and in actual sweat. To keep them working, the campaign was careful to let them in on the kind of strategy details that campaigns usually strive to hide. One trick to motivating people: let them know how their efforts fit into a larger framework, in this case via David Plouffe's online video briefings, so that they know that their work has context and is actually valued.

If you want to create a successful national grassroots outreach effort, focus on context, training and accountability. I.e., take your people seriously and they'll return the favor — they want to know that they aren't just blindly making calls or knocking on doors.

Note that much of the training discussed above took place via online video, particularly in areas outside of battleground states, where the campaign invested less in on-the-ground staff.

Social Tools for Field Organizing

Field organizers can obviously use social media in their work, from Facebook Pages to Twitter feeds (protected or otherwise), but a new development for 2012 is the advent of tools that mine followers' social connections for data useful to the campaign. Also developing fast: dedicated platforms like National Field that use a social model to create behind-the-scenes channels for field organizing. For

more on both of these developments, see [this recent C&E Technology Bytes column](#).

Custom Social Networks

Some campaigns provide additional opportunities for volunteers by creating custom social networks along the lines of MyBarackObama.com. [Bob McDonnell's 2009 campaign for Virginia governor](#) featured a community based on the [Ning platform](#), as did that of [2010 Massachusetts senatorial candidate Scott Brown](#), both of which provided an outreach and fundraising hub for activists.

A custom social network turned out to be a useful tool for Obama volunteers, particular when it let them organize themselves in [places where the central campaign's infrastructure wasn't fully built out](#). But Obama's campaign also had an enormous supporter list to populate MyBO from the moment it launched, and other political social networks risk sputtering out if they can't reach a significant scale right away (a site is neither social nor a network if no one's using it). Most down-ballot campaigns will be better served by focusing on reaching people in the online spaces they already frequent, rather than trying to get them to join a new one.

Next up, the big kahuna of online mobilization: fundraising.

Chapter Five | Online Fundraising

What Dean and Kerry suggested in 2004, Barack Obama proved in 2008: an army of motivated online donor/volunteers can be a truly decisive force in politics. And with software designed to allow campaigns to tap the enthusiasm (and the wallets) of supporters both within their districts and around the country now widely available, 2012 should see an explosion of online fundraising at the state and local levels.

A campaign benefits immensely if most individual donations, even the big ones, come in online rather than as paper checks. First, money collected via credit cards is available instantly, allowing a candidate to take immediate advantage of an overnight surge of income. Plus, online donation details automatically end up in a database, simplifying accounting and reporting. By contrast, physical checks present a logistical burden, since each has to be processed individually whether it's collected at a fundraising dinner or arrives in the mail.

As the Obama campaign found, online fundraising also lets a campaign tap the vast number of politically interested people who can't donate hundreds or thousands of dollars at time but whose smaller donations can add up to a princely sum. Obama's grassroots donors tended to send relatively small amounts repeatedly, which in turn shows why a small-donor list is such a valuable resource — it's the gift that keeps on giving, quite literally. Unlike traditional big donors who often reach their quota for a given candidate with a single check, [small donors can contribute again and again](#), providing a financial consistency that's useful in a short campaign and priceless in a long one.

The Basics

So, how does online fundraising work? Essentially, giving to a candidate is just like buying a product online — aspiring donors go to a website and enter a credit card number and the necessary personal information, then click the “donate” button. Once the transaction is processed, the money passes to the campaign's bank account, either immediately as a single transfer or periodically as donations add up. Obviously, the easier this transaction is for users, the more likely they are to complete it. Don't hide the “Donate” button on your website!

Depending on the details of the campaign's Constituent Relations Management system and the extent of its integration with the fundraising system, donation details may automatically populate the same database used to track supporters and volunteers. Otherwise, staff may have to download the data and integrate it into the CRM as a separate step — something that would definitely suck. Obviously, the closer the two systems work together, the more easily a campaign can track top donors. Testing is absolutely key — successful fundraisers test which messages perform well over time, separating out when possible how well they resonate with particular demographic segments of their lists. Test, rinse, repeat — a digital fundraiser's mantra.

Successful Email Fundraising Campaigns

Regardless of what a campaign is asking supporters to do, they're likely asking it via email. As we've covered before, email remains the most effective way to stay in consistent online contact with many

people at once, despite the growth of Facebook, Twitter and other social tools — and it's [the best online fundraising channel we currently have](#).

Of course, anyone can send an email message asking people for money, but getting the most out of a list over time takes skill, planning, good execution and testing. Let's look at some basic principles that help maximize a list's long-term performance:

- Emails should perpetuate core messages and goals of the campaign. A key idea: the three Ms of political email are messaging, mobilization and money.
- Emails must also do no harm — list managers must take care not to alienate people on the list.
- The more personal, informal and direct a message is, the better (usually). Messages may appear to come directly from the candidate, from staff, from prominent supporters or from individual campaign volunteers, depending on whose voice the campaign needs to amplify at that moment. Regardless of the apparent sender, authenticity is key.
- Make the ask clear and the action links easy to find.
- Targeting helps get the most out of a list. For instance, list members might receive messages with different content based on their locale, their interests, their demographics or their past pattern of actions on behalf of the campaign. A good CRM is a targeter's friend.
- Email may start the process, but the landing page finishes it, so make sure that each message links to a donation or action page that matches the ask in the message.
- Use the email initiation sequence to start a relationship off on a good foot, sending new list members a pre-set series of messages after they sign up. The sequence might steadily "scale the ask," encouraging newbies to move up the ladder of engagement.
- Besides scaling the ask, savvy fundraisers also tailor the ask over time, for instance soliciting different amounts based on a person's donation history — a \$10 donor might be asked to donate \$20 the next time around, but someone who'd donated \$150 might be safe to hit up for \$200.
- Campaigns should also vary the ask — as discussed before, not every communication from the candidate or his surrogates should be about money. Some might deliver talking points, others strategy or context, while a few may be straightforwardly inspirational.
- When possible, staff should map out email narrative arcs in advance, with each message forming part of the stream while also able to stand on its own. But this approach shouldn't preclude seizing on emotion and the moment, such as capitalizing quickly on an opponent's mistake.
- Campaigns should also consider the "value proposition of fundraising," being careful to portray donations as doing more than just providing abstract support. To that end, campaigns often make it very clear where money is going, for instance raising funds for a particular stated task such as running TV ads or supporting grassroots organizing in a defined area.
- Even if a campaign is overwhelmingly relying on email, [content integration can be key](#), with online video and social networking outreach in particular serving as a powerful adjunct to email fundraising. For instance, a particular message might ask people to watch a video and spread it via Facebook, with the video itself and the landing page on which it's hosted doing the heavy lifting of soliciting donations.
- Despite the best targeting, different emails activated different people at different times. No

one message has to connect with every supporter or every voter — if you miss ‘em this week, you might get ‘em next week.

How Much is Too Much? (The Importance of Metrics and Testing)

How many messages can a campaign send to supporters before they click the “unsubscribe” button? To find out, email communications managers can monitor statistics, since modern CRMs will track when people sign up, when they drop off, which messages they open and what kind of actions they take.

Lists turn out to have their own quirks: while one could be very open to tell-a-friend or volunteer requests but not so good at giving money, another might respond in exactly the opposite way. Each mass email you staff sends provides raw data about that campaign’s specific supporters, helping to identify the kinds of appeals that work and which to avoid. Metrics and list segmentation can even assist with message development, since campaigns can try out different ideas on relatively small groups first.

Of course, as an election or other deadline approaches, managers can get away with sending many more messages than usual, since people will understand the urgency. Don’t forget to follow up after the vote, particularly if your candidate plans to run again!

Social Media Fundraising

Although email has proven in practice to be the most effective tool to raise money consistently, online fundraisers shouldn’t ignore Facebook and Twitter completely. It’s easy to post appeals to the campaign’s social channels at the same time that they’re sent over email, and even if the amounts raised aren’t likely to be high, a dollar is a dollar regardless of where it comes from. Campaigns are likely to find that Facebook and Twitter are more useful as engagement channels, however, keeping loyal supporters involved and therefore primed to respond when an email or direct mail appeal arrives.

Viral Fundraising

An aspect of the 2008 Obama fundraising machine that other campaigns should consider copying is its [peer-to-peer](#) component, the personal fundraising campaigns that individual volunteers launched through their MyBarackObama.com accounts, alongside [all of their other online outreach](#).

Supporter-driven distributed financial outreach raised a few tens of millions of dollars directly for Obama’s campaign, but perhaps more important is that it helped mine individual fundraisers’ social connections for new donors, who would then find themselves on the main email list and subject to the kinds of “encouragements” described above. Though likely less of a priority for smaller-scale campaigns, the capability to create friend-to-friend donation drives is included in many CRMs and is built in to the technology of sites like ActBlue.

Now that we’ve gone through the recruitment, mobilization and fundraising, let’s circle back to the technology itself and look at what a campaign needs to consider as it’s building a digital base of operations.

Chapter Six | Technology, Time and Resources

“Amateurs talk strategy, professionals talk logistics” — it’s an old military adage, but it has some truth in the world of digital politics as well. The tools are only as good as the human systems that make them work!

As we’ve seen, a modern online campaign can get intricate fast. At the very least, most campaigns will need to create a website, administer a supporter list via CRM, create a Facebook Page and Twitter account, run digital ads, post videos to YouTube, connect with bloggers and other online activists, and create the infrastructure to raise money online. Those are just the tools — to put them to work, the campaign will need an email strategy, a recruitment strategy, a social media strategy, a grassroots strategy (often including a mobile component), an advertising strategy, a fundraising strategy, and last but not least, a turnout operation to actually get people to vote. And that’s pretty much the minimum, at least for a Congressional or statewide race. Whew!

Staff vs Consultants

So who should do the work, campaign staff or consultants? I don’t know very many experienced digital campaigners who would argue that a campaign should outsource its entire online operation — unless those experienced campaigners’ are consultants and their own bread and butter happens to depend on them saying so. The internet has become such a central part of how we communicate with each other in 2012 that it’s pretty much essential to have the online staff fully integrated into a campaign. In fact, talented friends of mine in the field argue that [a campaign’s FIRST hire should be a digital director](#), supplemented as needed by a big-donor fundraiser — because what the digital team does is effectively the backbone for the rest of the campaign.

Similarly, it doesn’t make sense for a modern campaign to launch without a basic digital foundation in place, starting with a website, CRM and search advertising. Why announce without a way to leverage that initial burst of attention? Why hold even the very first events without a way to sign people up and keep track of them? Why let voters, bloggers, journalists and activists hear your candidate’s name without a way to find him or her online? A missed connection equals a missed vote — or a missed donation.

But where should the digital staff “live” inside a campaign? If you could ask the 2008 Obama operation, the most successful internet political machine to date, they’d say that [the online team should be at the leadership table](#) and equal with field, fundraising, communications, IT, etc — it should be an entity of its own, not stuck under the tech director and hidden in a basement somewhere. At the same time, digital staff should also be integrated with the rest of the campaign, working closely with their peers on other teams. Separate, but integrated!

For an example of why, I once heard an online advertising consultant for a top-level 2008 Republican presidential campaign talk about how he could see trends in the political environment days in advance by looking at how different Google ad variants performed. But because he was functionally off in a silo and not interacting regularly with the rest of the staff, they could rarely take advantage of the trends he saw.

Of course we're talking about campaigns of a certain size — someone running for mayor in a small town likely won't have staff at all, just family and volunteers. But serious Congressional candidates and many people running at the state and local level will need to hire dedicated digital people if they're going to take full advantage of the opportunities the internet offers.

But it DOES often make sense to outsource tasks that require particular technical skills or particular knowledge. Mobile strategies are a good example, since relatively few people in the business know much about the complexities of campaigning via cell phone. Digital advertising is often another, since Google and Facebook ad campaigns benefit from extensive experimentation with keywords and demographics, something that's difficult to do well if you're learning on the fly. But campaigns shouldn't treat even the best consultants as "black boxes" into which to pour money in exchange for results. Instead, they should work closely with their outside experts to get the most benefit from every dollar they spend.

Technology Vendors

Ten years ago, most online campaigns were minimal or hodge-podge affairs. The websites were usually custom creations, done by a random vendor or by someone's nephew, and CRM systems were in their infancy. As was online fundraising — the masses had yet to become comfortable giving up their credit cards to the internet demons.

Nowadays, many state- and local-level campaigns still piece together an online presence, perhaps combining an email system like [MailChimp](#) with a website built by their media consultants or a local firm. But candidates can also choose from an array of tailored professional offerings, since most online consulting firms offer their clients websites, CRMs and similar technologies as a package.

Besides proprietary technologies specific to particular consultants, campaigns can also take advantage of standardized and widely used systems. In 2008, hundreds of state-level Democratic campaigns used [DLCCWeb](#), a website/CRM package integrated with fundraising site [ActBlue](#), and hundreds more will do so in 2012. Campaigns on both sides can turn to NationBuilder, a relatively new integrated website/CRM package that also includes robust tracking of social media interactions.

A word to the wise: it very rarely makes sense to have custom technology developed to perform standard tasks, unless your name is Barack Obama. Newt Gingrich's [\\$800,000 website/CRM combo?](#) He could have bought the same capabilities off the shelf for next to nothing and likely paid a few thousand dollars for configuration and customization. Oopsie!

Online Budgets

A big question: how much should campaigns spend online? In past cycles, most campaigns spent relatively little, perhaps a percent or two of their overall budget. Even the Obama campaign's 2008 online spending was a tiny fraction of what he invested in TV ads. This situation is finally changing — by 2010, many campaigns were starting to allocate 10% of their total spending to online channels, particularly advertising. Already in 2012, the [Obama reelection campaign is spending more than that](#), though the percentage is likely to decrease once the Fall television frenzy begins.

But hard numbers will vary depending on the specifics of a race. TV ads are usually still the best way to

reach uncommitted voters (though not always — what if you're running in a small district buried in a big media market?), but the internet builds connections that can be tapped again and again, making the two hard to compare. Plus, costs aren't always costs, since an online fundraising program can pay for itself ([as the Obama campaign proved](#)), and many campaigns have found [the Return On Investment from targeted Google Ads](#) to be surprisingly high.

Rather than thinking of "online" as its own separate world, smaller campaigns should follow Obama's example and [integrate the internet more broadly into their operations](#). For instance, traditional media relations and blogger relations require most of the same skills and employ many of the same tactics, so even if resources aren't available for a standalone blog team, the press folks could include bloggers and Twitterers in their outreach portfolio. On other fronts, campaign's media consultant can produce online video clips, though they'll have to adapt to [a very different world than that of campaign commercials](#), and field organizers can embrace Facebook and other social networks as well as cell phones and individual text messages.

In some ways, more important than the resources devoted to online outreach is when they're employed, since list-building and much of the rest of online outreach are incremental and hence reward an early start. For instance, even if campaign has yet to pick a full-fledged CRM, it should still collect names and email addresses whenever possible. The candidate can always bring a laptop/iPad and a staffer or volunteer to real-world events!

For a small or even solo campaign, aggressive online activism may not take up too much time. Once the website is created and the CRM configured, social media channels like Facebook take only minutes to set up, and even buying Google Ads can be relatively straightforward if you're not trying many keyword/content combos. Since an active campaign should be creating a constant stream of content in the form of announcements, press releases, videos, photos, position papers, etc., the main time commitment (beyond direct outreach to online influentials) is usually keeping the various channels fed, egos massaged and incoming messages answered. Of course, we're talking about the bare minimum — real engagement will take time.

If you're a small campaign with a single staffer, try to spend at least 8 hours planning and executing your online-specific strategy per week, particularly at the beginning, remembering [that those early hours can be far more valuable than time spent right before the election](#).

In any case, keeping up with a campaign's internet presence needs to be someone's defined responsibility, since otherwise it tends to fall through the inevitable cracks. Obviously, as we move up the scale campaigns should devote more resources to online outreach, particularly to the process of turning passive followers into active donors and volunteers. Regardless of their size, campaigns will constantly be buffeted by outside events, but they should take care to keep the steady process of building a supporter base on track even as day-to-day events scream for attention.

Putting It All Together

That's it for the essentials of internet political campaigning — not bad at all. Next, let's pull it all together into a basic online communications plan.

Winning in 2012 | A Sample Campaign Plan and Related Reading

Regardless of the national dynamics at play, local factors will determine the outcome of many an election in 2012, and a campaign's own hard work is part of that equation. As we've seen, smart campaigns can turn to the internet to increase the effectiveness of almost all of their activities and shift the odds in their favor. The internet absolutely excels at providing channels for campaigns to maintain connections with individual voters and energize them to recruit their friends, donate their money and volunteer their time. Extra bodies equals extra votes.

Of course, online tools aren't likely to win many elections on their own, but campaigns that employ online strategies intelligently and with real-world goals in mind should have a significant edge over their rivals, particularly in tight races. Not-so-bold prediction: online ads, online recruiting, online messaging, online mobilization and online fundraising can (and will) make a difference in elections for the Senate, Congress and state and local offices in 2012. TV still matters, field organizing DEFINITELY still matters, but for more and more political fights the key battlegrounds are in virtual space. Ignore that ground at your peril.

And if you want to know more, or are a journalist working on a story, [let's chat](#).

A Basic Online Outreach Plan

Now that we understand the essential tools and tactics of online political organizing, let's put them together into a coherent plan to win an election.

Phase One: Getting Established

At the start, campaigns need to focus on getting the basics right, a process that may take from a few days to a few weeks. For a presidential race, this stage should have taken place a year before the first primaries. Other campaigns are likely to get a much later start, taking these steps between a few months and a year of the primary or the general election, depending on which will be contested. The initial steps:

- Begin monitoring the race; set up Google Alerts on the candidate and opponent.
- Build and launch website with integrated supporter signup/CRM/fundraising system.
- Establish Facebook page and Twitter feed and connect with local political activists.
- Establish YouTube channel with initial content (even if only a single clip).
- Identify relevant (usually local) political blogs based on audience and topic.
- Identify other prominent online voices, including those on Twitter and blogs and frequent commenters on local political sites.
- Begin connecting with these online influentials and persuade them to support the campaign when possible.
- Begin running Google and Facebook ads to build the campaign's list, even if the initial buy is only a few dollars per day.

Phase Two: Feeding the Beast

With an infrastructure in place, a campaign moves into the long middle period between the candidate's announcement and the actual voting. List-building and fundraising will be usually be the highest priority, supported by outreach and content creation.

- Integrate website promo into all print materials and broadcast advertising.
- Recruit new supporters/list members at in-person events.
- Continue online advertising aimed at recruiting donors and volunteers, particularly on Google and Facebook but also on blogs and local media sites if possible.
- Begin comprehensive email-based online fundraising via CRM.
- Solicit and organize supporters' volunteer time, also via CRM but possibly through custom social network or other tools.
- Expand/improve campaign website content.
- Expand connections on social networking websites and Twitter; post new content regularly.
- Encourage supporters to spread the word and recruit friends through their online and offline channels.
- Post additional online videos to YouTube profile and campaign website as needed and as available
- Build relationships with and aggressively court local bloggers, Twitterers and other online influentials, with an eye to pitching stories and arranging opportunities to speak directly to their audiences.
- Continue monitoring independent online content posted about the race; respond as necessary and able.
- Two-three months away from the beginning of early/absentee voting, begin grassroots canvassing operation, facilitated by technology if possible.

Phase Three: Run-Up to Election Day

Once an election is close, an online campaign will shift into full mobilization mode. This phase typically begins roughly a month before voting begins

- Begin final field-organizing push, including canvassing and phonebanking.
- Organize volunteer teams for turnout operation.
- Begin early/absentee voting push, if applicable.
- Send urgent fundraising appeals, stressing urgency of race.
- Encourage last-minute supporter online evangelism on Facebook, personal email, etc.
- Ramp up email campaign intensity via CRM to support all of the above activities.
- Switch emphasis of online advertising from recruitment to persuasion of fence-sitters.

Final Push

- Field organizers switch to pushing voter turnout, particularly in targeted neighborhoods and demographics.
- Online ads switch to a mix of persuasion (to reach voters still making up their minds) and

turnout-boosting.

- Email/Facebook/Twitter program pushes last-minute donations.
- Email/Facebook/Twitter program also pushes voter turnout, with an emphasis on tell-your-friends asks.
- On Election Day, send final appeals via email, social networking outlets, text messaging, campaign website, Twitter, semaphore, smoke signal and all other available channels. Field teams get people to the polls. Hope for the best.
- After the election, send follow-up message to supporters.

For More Information

Other Guides from Epolitics.com

- [Learning from Obama: Lessons for Online Communicators in 2009 and Beyond](#)
- [Online Politics 101](#)

Related Articles

2012

- [As Obama's Online-Enabled Grassroots Operation Takes Shape, Do Republicans Have Anything to Match It?](#)
- [How the Presidential Campaigns are Using Facebook: A Side-by-Side Overview](#)
- [Glimpsing Obama Campaign Fundraising Segmentation and Micro-Targeting](#)
- [2012 Online Advertising So Far: Dems Outspend Repubs by a Factor of Two](#)
- [Obama Campaign Spent \\$4.3 Million on Digital Ads in January — and \\$3 Million on Staff](#)
- [How Online Advertising is Playing in the 2012 Presidential Race](#)
- [Obama Campaign Goes Big on Mobile Fundraising](#)
- [Spam Alert: Is Rick Santorum Buying Email Addresses?](#)
- [Obama Campaign Hiring Still Hiring State-Level Data Directors](#)
- [Meanwhile, Obama's Re-Election Machine Rebuilds His 2008 Online Army](#)
- [Obama Campaign Recruiting \(Buying Names\) on Care2 & Change](#)
- [Republican Presidential Sites \(Largely\) Fail Usability Test](#)
- [Fun with NewtGingrich.com](#)
- [Newt Gingrich's \\$800,000 Tiffany Website Puts His Campaign into Debt](#)

Strategy

- [Online Politics is Usually Trench Warfare, Not Blitzkrieg](#)
- [Scott Brown's Massachusetts Insurgency Shows How Online Organizing Has Shifted the Political Calculus](#)
- [The Online Strategy Behind Scott Brown's Victory, Plus Details on His Massachusetts Moneybomb](#)
- [Bob McDonnell's Impressive Online Campaign for Virginia Governor](#)
- [Learn from this City Council Candidate](#)
- [If You Want to Change Congress, Fund Challengers' Staff Early](#)
- [Twitter is NOT a Strategy](#)
- [Video: Applying Obama Online Lessons to State, Local and Advocacy Campaigns](#)
- [Ten Ways to Blow It Online in 2010](#)
- [More on Scott Brown and Internet Politics](#) and [More Brown/Coakley Online Politics Post-Mortems](#)
- [An Internet Politics Index to David Plouffe's The Audacity to Win](#)
- [Overview: Social Media and 2012 Political Campaigns](#)
- [Prop 8 Battle Shows that the Left has No Monopoly on Internet Activism](#)
- [Strategic Social Media 101: Where to Begin](#)
- [Overview: Social Media and 2012 Political Campaigns](#)
- [What Matters More in Politics: Message or Mechanics?](#)

Tools & Tactics

- [Inside the Obama Numbers: Tiers of Engagement](#)
- [Reaching the "Network Influentials"](#)
- [The Enduring Value of the Online Communications Tripod](#)
- [Campaigns Turn to Protected Twitter Feeds for Volunteer Organizing](#)
- [Pinterest for Politics: Not Just a Shiny New Toy](#)
- [Using FourSquare, Gowalla and Facebook Places in Political Campaigns](#)

- [Video: Talking Campaign Social Media with Meltwater's Kimling Lam](#)
- [Case Study: How Facebook Ads Defeated a Florida Ballot Initiative](#)
- [Integrated GOTV: Getting Out the Vote Online](#)
- [Using Google Mobile Advertising to Catch Voters Waiting at the Polls](#)
- [Six Questions a Candidate Should Ask before Tweeting, Blogging or Posting a Status Update](#)
- [All Buzz is Good Buzz: Taking Online Rapid Response to the Next Level](#)
- [Online Fundraising that Respects your Supporters: The Essentials](#)
- [Using Social Media to Build Your Email List and Vice Versa](#)
- [Online Advertising Late in an Election Cycle: Focus on Persuasion](#)
- [Online Advertising Early in an Election Cycle: Focus on Acquisition](#)
- [Time for a Change: Facebook Timelines for Political Campaigns](#)
- [Brilliant Jane Corwin Parody Campaign Site \(Or, Why Campaigns Should Buy Alternate URLs\)](#)
- [Political TV Saturation Driving Commercial Advertisers to Google In-Stream Video Ads](#)
- [Digital-Age Media Relations: Pitching Stories in a Challenging News Environment](#)
- [David Plouffe: The Obama Campaign Used Grassroots Data and Computer Modeling to Allocate Resources in Real Time](#)
- [Illuminating the Presidential Campaigns' Internet-Driven Ground Game](#)
- [After the Debates: Using the Internet to Win at the Water Cooler](#)
- [Obama Email Pushes Voter Registration](#)
- [Obama's Texting for Turnout during the Potomac Primary](#)
- [Measuring the Effects of Social Media Marketing](#)
- [Ten Rules for Blogger Outreach](#)
- [Targeted Facebook Ads Aren't Just for Big Political Campaigns](#)
- [Two-Thirds of Obama's Online Fundraising was Via Email](#)
- [Content was Key \(and Overlooked\) Part of Obama's Online Juggernaut](#)
- [Four Steps for Effective Social Media Monitoring in Politics](#)
- [You've Got a Friend in Barack Obama: Integrating Social Networking Tools into Political Campaigns](#)

- [The Enduring Power of Small Online Donors](#)
- [Obama Campaign Saw “Ridiculously” High ROI from Google Ads](#)
- [Getting the Most Out of Google Ads and Other Pay-Per-Click Advertising Campaigns](#)
- [Creating Effective Political Video for the Web](#)
- [Ten Commandments of Campaign Social Media](#)
- [PerryForPresidentFML: Clever Site Helps You Tweet Against Rick Perry](#)
- [Scott Brown Used Google for Field Organizing, Not Just Advertising](#)
- [Don’t Copy this Al Gore Email](#)
- [Michele Bachmann’s Strap-On iPads: New Tools for Field Organizers](#)
- [Four Ways Political Campaigns Can Use QR Codes](#)
- [C is for Cookie: Why Do I Keep Seeing the Same Allen West Political Ad?](#)

Staff & Infrastructure

- [A Political Campaign’s First Two Hires: A New Media Director and a Fundraiser](#)
- [What Makes a Good Campaign New Media Director?](#)
- [Obama Campaign’s New Media Staff was NOT a Part of the Tech Team](#)
- [Five Talents Campaign Managers Should Look For in a New Media Director](#)
- [What a Modern Communications Team Looks Like](#)
- [Top Ten Signs a Social Media Expert Isn’t](#)

About the Author

Colin Delany is founder and chief editor of Epolitics.com, a site that focuses on the tools and tactics of Internet politics and online political advocacy. Epolitics.com received the Golden Dot Award as “Best Blog – National Politics” at the 2007 Politics Online Conference, and Delany participated in DC Fox affiliate WTTG-25's live coverage of the 2008 general election night. He was honored as one of “Ten Who Are Changing the World of Politics and the Internet” at the 2010 World E-Gov Forum in Paris.

Besides “Winning in 2012,” Epolitics.com features two additional downloadable e-books, “Online Politics 101: The Tools and Tactics of Online Political Advocacy” and “Learning from Obama,” the definitive guide to Barack Obama’s 2008 online campaign. “Online Politics 101” and “Learning from Obama” together have been downloaded from Epolitics.com over 50,000 times.

Delany started in politics in the early '90s in the Texas Capitol (where public service is considered a contact sport) and moved into the online political world in 1995. In 1999, during the first internet boom, he helped to start a targeted search engine for politics and policy, which lasted about as long as such ideas usually do. Since then, Delany has worked as a consultant to help dozens of political advocacy campaigns promote themselves in the digital world, and between 2003 and 2007 was the Online Communications Manager at the National Environmental Trust. Besides editing Epolitics.com, he currently serves as the Director of Outreach and Online Communications at the National Women’s Law Center, and occasionally plays bass in a rock and roll band.

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