

Online Organizing

Online tools can greatly supplement your organizing and awareness-raising on your campus or in your community. The last two years in particular have seen incredible advances in new tools and the use of those tools to reach new people, galvanize supporters, inspire, and generate action. We've put together some of the most basic tools to use in your efforts, and we are sure that once you start diving in, you'll have lots of other great ideas for your web strategy that we're excited to see.

Before you get going, though, here are few tips to keep in mind in whatever tool or strategy you might employ:

- 1. "What Would I do? What Would Bobby-Sue do?"** No matter what you're doing online - be it creating a video, writing a blog post, putting up a facebook update, uploading photos, etc - ask yourself, Would I want to look at/read this? Would this get me to take action? Would I forward this to a friend? If you respond in the negative or hesitate in your answer, odds are your friends and supporters wouldn't want to see it either. If you answer "yes" to your questions, then ask yourself whether what you're posting would be compelling to someone who has no connection to your work whatsoever and is probably completely uninterested. The proverbial Bobby-Sue. Not everything you put up needs to be incredible, but if your content works for both you and Bobby-Sue, it's probably really good!
- 1. "Listen. Listen. Talk. Listen."** A classic mistake in online organizing or outreach is to think of web 2.0 tools as simply another means to broadcast a "1.0" message. That is to say, while "1.0" was all about telling as many people as you can about your message with no conversation or interaction (e.g. TV, radio, newspapers, magazines), "2.0" is about a conversation and 2-way participation (e.g. blogs, commenting on videos, wall posts, etc). Try to use these tools as much to engage your people by asking questions as often (or more often) as you make statements.
- 1. Cut Through the Clutter.** There are 75 million blogs out there on the web. There are almost 100 million Facebook users. 10 hours of video gets uploaded to YouTube every minute. In all this "stuff" it can sometimes be hard to "cut through the clutter." When you're using these tools, focus on the things that make you, your campus, and Power Vote different. Again, you guys will have no trouble with this!
- 1. Follow Up and Participate.** Just as you would in person, be sure to recognize and thank people who participate in your online work - as well as participate in theirs. As my pappy always said, "If you want people to come to your party, you have to go to theirs." When people see that you and your campaign are investing in their work and conversations, they're more likely to participate in yours!

Facebook/MySpace

Facebook and MySpace, love them or hate them, are great tools for connecting with people on your campus or in your community as the vast majority of youth in the United States are members of one or both of the networks. So take a break from Scrabulous and start reaching out. Here are some ways to get started...

- Go to <http://www.powervote.org> to get connected to the Power Vote Facebook page and MySpace Group. Fan/friend the page and share it with all of your friends.
- Create your own Facebook group. Use 'Power Vote' in the name (example, PowerVote:UCBerkeley) and invite tons of folks to join. Use the group to help get people out to events and to recruit volunteers.
- Create Facebook events to promote the events and actions your group is holding. Make sure you follow up with folks after events to make sure they stay in the loop.

Want to go further? Download this guide on how to use Facebook for activism: www.digiactive.org/wp-content/uploads/digiactive_facebook_activism.pdf

Get Creative: The power of Facebook and MySpace are the 'network effect', make your events and actions creative, locally relevant and lots of fun, then enlist all your supporters in helping you 'go viral'. (See event ideas section.)

Flickr

Flickr is a site for sharing photos. By using a common tag for photos on flickr we can all see photos of each others local events and campaigns. Its an amazing way to see the size and diversity of our movement and get new people excited to become a part of it.

Upload your best photos and tag them "PowerVote08", then go to www.powervote.org to see all the latest photos from across the country.

Get Creative: Got a lot of people together? Find a tall building, spell out "Power Vote," "No Coal" or "Green Jobs" and snap a shot from above. Get your message across and show your strength!

YouTube

YouTube is like Flickr except for video. Video is a powerful medium for documenting your efforts and a fun way to reach and educate people online. Upload your videos and tag them "powervote08", then go to www.powervote.org to watch all the latest videos from across the country.

Get Creative: Making and editing video can take some time and skill, but a good video can take your campaign to the next level. Enlist your theatre friends and video majors to create a viral video for your campaign.

YouTube has some great tips for making good advocacy videos here: http://www.youtube.com/t/ngo_tips



Twitter

Twitter allows you to update others in less than 140 characters (i.e. very short messages) with information. You can also of course ask questions. When used effectively, Twitter can be a great way to stay connected to other activists on your campus, share information (such as articles and ideas), and keep everyone up-to-date with what your local group is doing quickly and easily.

If you are on Twitter, follow updates from Power Vote at www.twitter.com/powervote to keep up with the latest campaign and breaking news.

Type “#PV08” at the end of your twitter updates about Power Vote so we can see updates from everyone across the country at once!

* you can also use “hash tags” (such as #PV08) for your own campus events! For good tips, visit: <http://twitter.pbwiki.com/Hashtags>

To get started:

- 1) Create a Twitter account and search for friends to connect with on Twitter.
- 2) Sync your Twitter with your Facebook account using the Twitter Facebook app and/or the TwitterSync application.

As an example of its usefulness, let’s assume you have an event that you want people to attend (or a pledge to have them sign). By taking 10 seconds to type “Come to X tonight! Go here <insert link for Facebook event> to RSVP” you can not only get that information to show up in the Twitter feeds of everyone following you (let’s say 100 people), but also in the Facebook updates of everyone you know (let’s say 500 people) – each of whom can similarly forward the information on quickly and easily. In ten seconds you’ve just shared information with 600 people, and if even a small number forward the information along, the result is exponential.

Get Creative: Twitter can help you connect with lots of people really fast via text messaging, IM and Facebook. Can you say Flash Mob? Put your Twitter handle in your email signature. Get connected then get creative, mobilize people for special events, protests or impromptu street theatre.

Email Lists

During your Power Vote campaign you are going to have thousands of new names and emails. Just think about the amazing potential to communicate with thousands of your peers! Whether you’re connecting your leadership team or blasting hundreds of new supporters, a good email list is an essential tool for any successful grassroots organizer.

1) Setting up a list

There are many different online list-serve hosts out there. Google Groups, Yahoo Groups, and Riseup.net are among the most popular. Choose your favorite, or the one that best fits your needs and create a list. In the process, be sure to

get your settings right. For instance, an announcement list should only allow admins to post messages, while a collaborative list should allow contributions from anyone. Ask yourself whether you want your discussion list public or private?

2) Different types of lists for different folks

You will be dealing with thousands of emails so we recommend you tier and separate lists of people that you want to communicate with in a different way.

Here are some suggested tiers:

Core leaders- This list is for the dozen or so “core leaders” that are meeting separately from general meetings to plan the direction of the campaign. Generally these are elected positions or those that are really active in the group. This is for “insider talk”

Group List – This is for anyone who has attended a group meeting or expressed interest in being involved in the group.

Content: Discussing group biz, planning, sending meeting reminders, event details, etc

Tips: Google groups work well for smaller groups like this

Volunteer List - Add people that have expressed interest in volunteering (signed up at a meeting or checked the ‘volunteer box’ when pledging)

Content: Upcoming volunteer opps, alerts on upcoming events/meetings

Tips: make it sound easy and fun to volunteer. Let people know that experienced group members will be there to help them.

Mass list – This is for EVERYONE that signs the pledge

Content: Only send messages with a broad appeal, avoid ‘insider’ planning talk, use for kick off meetings, events, and easy/fun ways to get involved. Goal is to move someone from just an email recipient to come someone that attends one of your events/meetings/tables

Tips: Track and Plan your blasts

Tracking- Make a calendar or spreadsheet to keep track of how many are on the list, date of the email blast was sent, content, etc. This is actually fun to track and it will help you plan ahead for what to include in the next blast.

Send no more than one email a week to this list

Point person- Appoint someone to manage this list. This will ensure that someone is adding new names regularly and you don’t have a lot of people sending random messages to it. This could be a job of the Media Guru (MG) or the Pledge Coordinator.

Welcome email- When you add a new person it is good to send them a generic welcome email to thank them for pledging and let them know about how to get involved.



Best list- riseup.net works best for this because you can easily add hundreds of new contacts at once without being moderated and denied mass additions like Google Groups.

Blast it! - What makes a good mass email blast?

Subject line – This is the most important part of a good blast. If you have a boring subject line then no one will open it and your message is lost. Think of short, catchy or sexy phrases that will get people to open it. Steal it- Check out the other email lists you are one. Study them and see what makes them effective.

“New media”- Make the emails flashy with pics, video, cool links, blog links, press hit links, and facebook event links.

Format- Keep your blasts simple and easy to read at a glance. Avoid long wordy paragraphs. (i.e. For an event use an eye catching bold “What: When:Where:” format

Action oriented- Make the content action oriented and exciting

Your Email Signature

Another very simple, and often overlooked, way to spread information is to add links for any of your events, your Facebook groups, videos, or to Power Vote in your email signature. Every time you send an email to list-serves, groups, or even just your friends, it's yet another simple way for many people to see what you care about, and to get more people involved!

Example:

Bobby-Sue Smith
Campus Organizer
University of Awesomeness
Sweetville, TN
Cell: (123) 456-7890
Twitter: BobbySue
Join youth across the country in voting for a new energy future!
www.powervote.org