



Chapter 9

Online Organizing

The Newest Frontier in Organizing

A New Chapter of American Political History

Howard Dean's Primary campaign revolutionized the role online organizing in political campaigns. In the subsequent 2006 elections, online organizing proved itself more than a fad. It will continue to play an increasingly significant role in future elections. Of all political skills, online organizing is the newest and most uncharted.

The internet is not a revolution in itself, but instead a tool used to revolutionize existing campaigns. Internet strategies must be integrated into existing organizational/campaign strategies. Online strategy is effective as a compliment to the campaign's Field, Finance, and Communications strategy.

Goals of Effective Online Organizing

The fundamental, overarching goals of online organizing:

- **Build your membership list.** The paramount goal of any online strategy is to grow your list. Constant growth is important because lists shrink over time. Small lists limit your ability to achieve any of your online organizing objectives.
- **Develop your list into a community.** The most successful online organizers develop the members on their email list into a community of activists – people who identify with each other and feel as though they have a say and a stake in the organization.

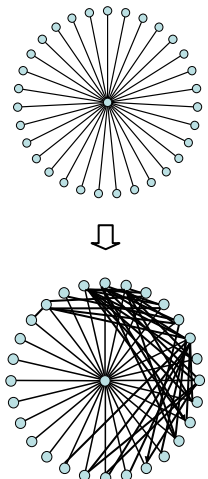
As an organization grows, it will better be able to achieve specific goals of online organizing:

- **Leverage your online community to spread your message.** Online outreach can be a great way to propagate your campaign message. It can be useful for spreading a message to your activists and to a broader community. A well-executed campaign can reach well beyond your own list. All offline and online communication should reinforce your overall theme and message.
- **Leverage your online community to raise money.** Increasingly, online fundraising is seen as a way to build a broad list of small and medium sized donors. Online giving provides donors an easy way to give, and provides organization easy ways to track contributions. Howard Dean shattered records in 2003, now these records seem quaint in comparison to the amounts of money large campaigns raise.
- **Leverage your online community to increase activism.** Calls to action sent online spread much faster than any other form of communication to an organization's activists. An organization with a community building ethic can utilize emails, websites, or social networking platforms to enhance its ability to call its members to action or simply call them to an event.

Growing into a community

Your list starts out as a series of individuals connected to the campaign liked a spoked wheel (at right). The organization grows and expands this list, adding more spokes. The campaign communicates to these activists and the activists communicate with the campaign.

As your list grows, so too should the activity of your members. Your online and offline actions allow activists to *connect with each other*. Offline activism, especially, creates community. Connections develop not only with the campaign, but also among activists themselves - which, in turn, lead to more actions. The spoked wheel begins to resemble a thick web. Activists become invested in the campaign and also in each other.



Major Online Strategies

Accomplishing these goals will require the coordinated use of different strategies, both online and offline. Different online strategies and tools have different strengths. Each have a place in the modern campaign. It's important that each online strategy is recognized for they can do, and what they cannot.

Strategy Area	Strengths / Appropriate Goal
Email Communication	List growth, activism, fundraising
Blog Community	Community building, spreading your message
Social Networking Sites	Community building, spreading your message, activism
Online Video and Sound	Spreading your message
Traditional Media (TV, Radio, Print)	List growth, spreading your message,
Offline events and interaction	List growth, community building, spreading your message, activism, fundraising

None of the strategy areas above should be seen as a standalone strategy. As with most other aspects of the campaign, a given strategy works best when coordinated with the campaign as a whole. Any of the above areas work well with the other online strategies, and any online actions should be coordinated with the campaign's other offline field, finance, or communications strategies.

Email Strategy

Successful emails campaigns will build your online community, increase activism, and raise you money. It can also be a good way to send your message out to supporters (But aware that your opponents and the media frequently lurk on your list). Compared to the other online strategies, email is by far the most effective strategy to raise money and inspire action. It is less effective at building a community or reaching out to a wide audience. For email contact to be effective, it helps when the members on your list feel a part of the organization's community. For this reason, effective email strategy should be combined with a community-building strategy (offline actions or online communities).

List growth.

Obviously, the larger an organization's list, the greater the response to an email will be. Since email is less personal than offline interaction, a large email list is essential for any meaningful number of responses. List growth can be especially challenging due to the tendency of members unsubscribing when the organization sends out an email. All e-mail lists shrink over time unless the organization actively takes steps to attract new members. Use both offline and online methods to grow your list.

Online list growth - Your email list grows primarily from two different sources: referrals from others and campaign media exposure to your website.

When an individual encounters a message from the campaign sent to that individual by another source – a friend or another organization – this is a referral. If the message interests the individual enough to take action on that message, and if that action requires the individual's email, the campaign can grow its list through other people's contacts. Frequently, emails will ask the recipient to forward the message to a friend exactly for this purpose. Organizations will often hold online votes or petitions to increase their list. The organization's list will grow, if the petition or vote is sent around to people not already on the list (via email forwarding or organizations and campaigns utilizing their own list to encourage others to vote). Inorganic growth, such as purchasing email addresses off of another list is another practice. Unfortunately, even if the sold emails addresses are active (many are not), these new acquisitions never asked to be on your list and, consequently, are less likely to become a part of your community.

Examples of Referral-oriented list growth:

Petition drives
 Online votes
 Online advertising
 Online registration for events
 Purchasing, renting, or swapping email addresses

Media exposure is among the best avenues for list growth. Paid or earned media which prominently and repeatedly features the campaign's or organization's website will generate traffic to that website. Steering people to the campaign's website is a big priority for online organizing. As such, be sure that the website is set up to take people's information (discussed later). Blogs like DailyKos and campaign websites like Howard Dean's, experienced spikes in traffic after mentions in the traditional media. The more traffic spikes the campaign generates, the larger the list will grow – provided that the website encourages visitors to sign up. Otherwise statistics show that very few people enter through the "front door" of a website. People need a reason to go to the website. Most people do not spontaneously end up at a campaign website and sign up.

Offline list growth – The most 'organic' form of list growth are those actively sought offline. These are people who give the campaign or organization their email address in person during some kind of interaction. Although the campaign is unlikely to build their list as quickly with a series of offline events as it would with a petition drive, the names it acquires in this manner are more likely to be active in the future. This is especially for emails acquired at an event or offline action. These people have already committed to an action offline and are more likely to continue to be active when contacted again. Because the individual acquired this way has had personal interaction with the campaign, the individual is more likely to recognize and take interest in an email from the organization.

For this reason, people already on the list should be encouraged to take offline actions. They may bring their friends. As attendees deepen their offline interaction with the campaign or organization, they will feel a part of a community. This is a cycle that will reinforce itself over time if the campaign encourages it.

For offline organizing to work, the campaign must have a data capture plan at every event. Every individual – even if already on the list – should be encouraged to check in. This should be a requirement for any event or planned interaction (including rallies, ID'd supporters on the canvass, and even donor meetings). Always be sure to add a field for email and actively encourage people to fill in that field.

As mentioned above, traditional media is generally the best avenue for list growth. Coordinate your existing communications plan to feature your online properties.

The email campaign

The best emails are those which are a part of a larger narrative. Campaigns and organizations should let their members feel as though they are part of a larger movement. Movements are built on stories. Your email campaigns should involve a short term narrative in a series of emails which call the recipient to action and involve the recipient in that narrative. For emails that are not part of a series or campaign, make sure they still reflect the overall story of the campaign to reinforce your existing message.

Your email campaigns should feel like campaigns – they should have an objective. Each email in the campaign asks the recipient to take action and has a mechanism (online or offline) to follow up on that action. Activists can go to a website if they want updates or newsletters – you should use email for active communication only. Every email contains an action or request. Every email furthers a campaign objective.

Email campaigns must be planned just as any other strategy in the campaign. They must begin with a goal, they should have a written plan and a timeline. You will want to set benchmarks and quantify your efforts.

Two kinds of email campaigns:

1) Reactive - leverage existing media attention to build community by reacting to current events. This includes responding to attacks, following up on yesterday's media event, etc. People are more likely to pay attention to these campaigns because the issue on which the campaign is piggy-backing is already on the minds of the recipients, making it more likely that a given recipient responds. An organization should always be ready to engage a reactive campaign with easy-to-set up petitions in order to respond quickly. Even if an unexpected opportunity arises, a slightly sloppy reactive campaign can be more effective than a perfectly polished one that waits too long. Reactive campaigns rely on the feeling of the moment. If that moment passes, the strength of the campaign diminishes.

2) Proactive - focus on building a new and novel message to generate media attention and motivate your email list. The sender does not have the benefit of pre-existing buzz. Instead the sender creates this buzz through his or her own campaign. Ideally, a proactive campaign bubbles up and shapes the media and political landscape. The organization must be willing to stick out it's neck and be the first to carry the message. Some prominent DFA email campaign's which have shaped the political and media landscape include the Dump Delay email campaign, the Downing Street Memo Flash video, and Jerry McNerney winning the DFA All-Stars competition. This last example made the mainstream National Journal and turned McNerney's long-shot campaign into one of the hottest Congressional pick-ups of 2006. The Grassroots Allstar competition was so successful that it has spawned copycats such as the Mapchanger competition and Feingold's Progressive Patriot competition

Either way, your campaign needs to address an issue people care about. As with any good message, an email campaign's message is both value-based and tied to a pressing issue.

Targeting and segmenting your list

Just as with any other campaign communication, online communications must be targeted. Although it's easy to send an email to your entire list, it's not always the best way to maximize impact. A number of factors may make a message more appealing or appropriate for a particular segment of your list. Most common among these factors are: geography, indicated interest, and past activity.

Emails meant to drive offline local action should consider where people live, and cater events and notices to that location. Collecting people's zip codes when they sign up allows you to channel their activity locally. This helps build community offline as well as online. Similarly, members who indicate an interest in a particular issue might continue to receive emails about that issue, while others do not. This kind of targeting speaks to the specific motivations of members without flooding everyone's inbox at once.

One of the most important segmentation criteria is a recipient's past behavior. A basic application of this kind of segmentation is when a person receives a thank-you or confirmation email. The recipient has done something that puts him/her on a particular list. In an email campaign, basic segments could be people who sign a petition versus people who do not. The people who do sign, might get a follow up, urging them to send the petition on to others. Longer term segments could include volunteer and donors lists.

Basic email campaign checklist

Your campaign goal:

The moral purpose (message):

Who will care (target recipients):

Timeline for campaign:

If a petition, directed at:

URL for campaign:

- Logo, links created (sent out to bloggers)
- Email drafted
- Site designed (can be simple, but must have opportunities for people to sign up.
- List segmented to target recipients
- Follow up contact with participating recipients
- Coordinated with field, finance, and/or communications teams.

Frequency of communication

Many campaigns and organizations are uncertain how frequently they should contact their members via emails. The key is to establish a balance between emailing too frequently and not enough. Fortunately, both problems have measurable impacts which allow us to change our emailing behavior.

Organizations which email their list too frequently will see its members complaining and ultimately removing themselves from the list. This is not nearly as big a problem as many people perceive, however. Every email sent to a large list will generate some number of unsubscribes (which is why we're always building a list). A worse problem arises when email are not frequent enough. Unlike the complaints, the consequence of infrequent email communication is silence on the other end. This silence is easy to miss. It's most telling sign is that recipients are less likely to open any emails from the campaign.

What is true in the field, finance, and communications programs in your campaign is also true in your online organizing. The campaign is working to build a relationship. As with any relationship, the campaign needs to make an effort to stay in touch with the supporter. As with other forms of campaign contact, the campaigns needs to deliver a message and should have a mechanism to listen to the recipient.

An organization that does not send an email in the space of month will start seeing its "open rates" drop. For that reason, it is a good policy to engage your list with actions a few times a month or even once a week. Although it's rarely a good idea to send emails for two days in a row, intense moments in the campaign might well justify it. Email campaigns often will engage certain active segments many times in a week over the course of a few weeks.

Email is a relatively impersonal form of contact. The campaign needs to make it as personal as possible, and this requires frequent and consistent contact.

Timing and Timeliness

As much as possible, relate the message to something in today's news or popular culture. The most effective campaigns are synergistic with current events. Reactive campaigns do best when the issue the campaign is reacting to is immediate. Waiting even a couple days will take the momentum off your email. Ideally, you want a reactive email to respond to something that the recipient might see in the evening news. Proactive campaigns also need to stay relevant to the current political mood. Even if the campaign is trying to change the current landscape through an online campaign, the message needs to relate to something familiar and current to the recipient.

The timing of the email itself is also important. What time a recipient receives an email is a factor in whether or not they open it. In general, people check their email most frequently when at work. The rate at which people open your email decreases dramatically when sent on weekends or after business hours. The peak times for email reading is on weekday mornings. Fridays have traditionally also been a bad day for emails, though that trend has begun to change slightly. Earlier in the week still yields higher returns than later on. As a general rule, a campaign should never need to send an email over a weekend or at night.

Silence CAN be golden.

There is such a thing as bad timing. Shortly after Hurricane Katrina, the DNC stopped its fundraising, scrapped its email calendar, and used it's list to point out ways people could help with the disaster. The RNC, in contrast, sent out an email about its next big campaign to abolish the estate tax. This oblivious email reinforced the feeling that Republicans are out of touch.

Your campaign message is not likely to resonate and might even backfire in moments of tragedy.

Develop a timeline for your campaign

Once the organization figures out what kind of campaign to wage, target recipients, and the timing for the campaign, the online organizers will need to figure out a timeline or calendar to bring it all together. Having a calendar organized ahead of time will allow the campaign to take control over the progress of the campaign and better respond to changes in the media and political landscape.

Ideally, your online campaign will complement offline efforts. Planning with other people in the organization will allow your work to be integrated. In the sample email timeline below, the online campaign must coordinate with field, finance, and communications teams to pull off the effort effectively.

Week / Day	Message/Action	Target segment
Week 1, Mon	Launch petition drive	Segment: entire list
Week 1, Wed	Petition follow up (signers update, recruit others) Petition second appeal (sign list before deadline)	Segment: signers Segment: non-signers
Week 2, Mon	Fundraiser: next step Fundraiser: standard messaging	Segment: signers Segment: non-signers
Week 2, Thurs	Petition follow - up: progress and next steps	Segment: signers
Week 3, Tues	Action Alert: offline activity - deliver petition signatures	Segment: entire list
Week 3, Thurs	Action Alert: LTE regarding media coverage of petition delivery	Segment: signers and activists, also geographic segments
Week 4, Mon	Victory email! Soft fundraising ask	Segment: entire list
Week 4, Wed	Action alert: Victory house parties	Segment: activists, donors

As with any plan, it's important to have explicit goals and benchmarks along a timeline. The calendar should provide enough flexibility to enable your group to act on unplanned events as they arise. The next steps for the above sample calendar are to prepare goals and benchmarks for each of the communications. According to the sample checklist at the beginning of this section, there is still work to be done for landing pages, email drafts, etc.

Sender, Subject, and Recipient

After figuring out targets and timelines, the campaign must write one or a series of compelling emails. After the prospective reader opens the email, the content and the format of the emails should catch the reader's attention and compel him or her to take the requested action.

Start with a strong subject line. After considerations such as the quality of your list and when you you're your email, the subject line has a big impact on whether someone opens your e-mails. You will see the best results with action-oriented subject lines that are less than 50 characters in length. Never send an email without a subject line.

The sender listed in the "From" field can also have an impact on the open rate. Prominent or familiar senders are more likely to get a person's attention than a stranger. For this reason, even large campaigns will have only one or two people listed as sending the email. This builds a rapport with your community. Write your e-mails in a casual, personal tone, and send them from a specific person. Each sender should develop a "voice." Of course the person sending the email isn't necessarily the person writing it, but an effort should be made to make the email seem exciting and personable. Sometimes being playful, humorous, or witty can give your emails some personality. Just remember not to force it. And be mindful that your email is still a public communication.

Without fail, every email sent by the campaign should sound as if it is sent directly and personally to that one person. It should never sound like a newsletter; it should never address a crowd or a list. It should only address one recipient.

Effective Messaging and Format

Ask for something specific in each email and avoid a newsletter format. Many groups use a newsletter format that lists many upcoming events and volunteer opportunities. While this format may work well for some groups, in most cases you will get a stronger response by simplifying the email and focusing on one or two priorities. The email should make a strong "ask" for these priorities and be very clear about how volunteers or donors can get involved.

Email communication should move the campaign forward, not just give updates on what's happening. As such the email should use strong, action-oriented language. Avoid passive language in your emails. Instead of saying, "If you have time, it would be great if you could...", you would say, "Write a letter to the editor today."

Give content precedence over form. In general, graphics do not make much difference unless they serve a specific purpose (e.g. a contribute button, photo, or image summarizing the message). Image-intensive emails may make the email look less personal (your everyday friends would not normally send an image-intensive email). It may also trigger spam filters. Many modern email clients (MS Outlook, Gmail, etc) now block images by default, making an image intensive email look broken and ugly. With emails, gloss and polish only undermine your message.

The most effective emails link early and often. Keep the paragraphs short, and vary the length of the sentences. Even though the people who receive your emails are almost certainly intelligent people, it's important to write your email in a way that is quickly digestible. People do not have a long attention span with email and will gloss over anything to complex. It's best to write with punchy sentences at a simple reading level.

Format your email in a way that allows the reader to quickly absorb the message without having to click anything before they take the requested action (often by clicking a link) Consequently, your first link should be "above the fold" – or above the area where a reader would have to scroll down to read more. This is typically two short paragraphs' worth. You can continue to elaborate further down the email for people who do need to read more to take action. Typically the most clicked links are the first link and the last link.

When in doubt, link liberally. Make sure that you spell out your links. Studies show that people are more likely to click through if they can see the whole link (e.g., <http://www.democracyforamerica.com/action> instead of [click here!](#)).

A common but effective format is:

- Paragraph
- Paragraph
- Link
- Paragraph
- Link
- Signature
- PS

Develop a clear unsubscribe process and privacy policy. It is generally good practice to include a method for people to unsubscribe themselves from your list. Be careful, though. Words like "remove" and "unsubscribe" are beginning to trigger spam filters. Instead use phrases such as "If you no longer wish to receive our emails, click this link." If you are using or collecting data, your group has an obligation to post and adhere to a privacy policy. The privacy policy should describe how you will use personal information and how people can unsubscribe from your list. The policy should be publicly available on your Web site.

Democracy for America's privacy policy is available at:
<http://www.democracyforamerica.com/privacypolicy>

Post-Email Process: Evaluate your email strategy based on data.

At the end of the day, you need good data to evaluate your strategy. You should use open rates, click-through rates, action rates, and qualitative responses to guide your strategy.

Your open rate is a measure of how many people open your email compared to how many people received it. The open rate is the first basic measure of email performance. A recipient opens an email because the subject line, sender, or sender's organization is appealing to the recipient. A recipient will also open an email if the recipient feels that he or she has a relationship with the organization or if the recipient appreciated earlier emails sent by the organization. If an organization finds that its open rates are declining, it should analyze what factors contribute to this decline.

In general open rates have been declining across political organizations over the last few years. A number of reasons such as burn-out, aggressive spam filters, over-zealous Internet service providers, and undercounting have been proposed. The likely reason lies perhaps with a combination of these factors.

Open rates are measured by counting how many times a small, one-by-one pixel embedded in the email message is downloaded. Everyone who opens the email must download this invisible picture. An email program counts the downloads and calculates the open rate. Many newer email clients block image downloads by default (notably Gmail and Outlook), and thus distort open rates downward.

Click-through rates, completion rates, and action rates are more accurate measures of activity from your online community. When a recipient clicks on a link on the email, this is called a click-through. This link takes the recipient to a landing page – a web site specifically written for that email and for what the email asks the recipient to do. The completion rate is the portion of landing page visitors who successfully complete the form or action on the web page. For emails which ask the recipient to engage in an action that does not require a landing page, the action rate is a measure of recipients who actually take that action.

Finally, qualitative responses from the email you send out can tell you a great deal about what members of your online community think or perceive. Have someone on hand to read and respond to these messages, even if it is not the sender. This kind of responsiveness will help your organization stand out and build loyalty among your community.

Benchmarks

An organization's benchmarks are unique to the kind of organization and the composition of the organization's email list. There are no categorical expectations, but there are some guidelines. In general smaller, more intimate groups can expect higher benchmarks. Large groups must work to keep their lists engaged in as personal a manner as possible to maintain high numbers.

Groups should experiment and tweak their content and format to see what works well for them. Often an organization will test emails to certain, small segments of the list to figure out which senders, subject lines, or even which messages yield better results. These test results can then be used to modify an email sent to the entire list knowing what works best.

A large, but well maintained email list can expect the following metrics from their full list:

- Open rate: 15-25%
- Click-through rate: 2-10%
- Action rate: 1-10%

Certain segments of your list will perform better than others. Some of these segments will perform better than the list as a whole. A localized message or one that is targeted to a certain group of activists may have open rates and response rates well above the full list performance numbers.

Technology Options for Sending Emails

It is important to find the tool that suits the list's needs. Large lists require much different tools than smaller lists. A good tool should enable you to send a multi-part email with both html and text content. It will also enable you analyze the effectiveness of your email by tracking open rates, click-through rates, and other metrics.

- **Lists with less than 1,000 people:** There are a variety of free or cheap email services for lists with less than 1,000 people. Democracy in Action (<http://www.democracyinaction.com>) is an inexpensive service that enables you to send multi-part emails and track several metrics to analyze their effectiveness. Listbox (www.listbox.com) is another service that enables you to send multiple emails, although it has fewer analytical tools available. You can also use Yahoo, Google, or MSN groups.
- **Lists with between 1,000 and 10,000 people:** There are a variety of very cheap email services for lists with between 1,000 and 10,000 people. You could use Democracy in Action or Listbox. You can also install a program like Civic Space or PHP-List on your own web-host.
- **Lists with more than 10,000 people:** For larger lists, you should use a more robust (and expensive) service to send your emails. These services will help ensure that your emails are sent successfully. They will also enable you to test your emails more extensively than cheaper services and use sophisticated mechanisms to track the effectiveness of your emails. Some of the best services are:
 - Lyris: <http://www.lyris.com>
 - Britemoon: <http://www.britemoon.com>
 - WhatCounts: <http://whatcounts.com>
 - Kintera: <http://www.kintera.com>
 - Blue State Digital: <http://bluestatedigital.com>
 - Convio: <http://www.convio.com/>

Some of these services offer several tools for free, so it's worth checking each of them out. One useful service is Lyris' content checker. It analyzes the content and format of your message and tells you the susceptibility of your message to overly aggressive spam blockers. This tool can be found at <http://www.lyris.com/resources/contentchecker/>

Zephyr Teachout's Tips and Best Practices for emails

Zephyr Teachout organized Howard Dean's pioneering online community. Here's what she learned:

- Aim for the amazing. Draft drunk, edit sober. Shoot for the moon, and if some fall flat, sobeit.
- Tell a story! Each email is a short story with a moral. And it's a poem. People like stories and poems and songs – they like DJ's – you're the DJ for this effort.
- Use your senses. Images always! Plunge people into a world. This is a TV era. Think in images.
- Read your emails out loud to someone before sending them. Reading out loud will force the cadence.
- Experiment! Be willing to try new stuff, and fail – again – it's a relationship, push the limits.
- Involve a short term narrative (i.e., a 5 email series in which something from the last email is always engaged – this is a serial publication, and connections from email to email, storytelling over time, is one of your strongest suits for establishing connection).
- Imagine yourself writing TO someone at all times. Never address a crowd – address a member of the crowd. If you wouldn't send this email to a friend, why not?
- Have one purpose to each email, and repeat it. Don't include multiple purposes except in extraordinary moments.
- The title is key. Experiment. Include action in the title. Limit the subject line to 50 characters or less.
- Length doesn't matter – should fit the purpose of the email.. That said, when in doubt, be very short.
- Use short punchy paragraphs.
- Link early and often. (the same link over and over. In this way it is like a poem or song with a refrain).
- Write 7th grade reading if you can – people read fast online, and it will improve your writing (less abstract, more concrete, fewer clauses).

Website Best Practices

Email should be a major component of your online strategy. It is the best way to build your online community and activate your supporters. But it is also important to build a good website and blog to help mobilize your supporters and propagate your message.

A simple website is a good way to engage new people and speak to the press. It can also become another home for people who want to talk about your work publicly if you have commenting abilities. It's a great place to keep a calendar.

Keep in mind that most people visit a website, not because they have been randomly searching for it, but because they have been directed to it. The most frequent referrers to the campaign or organization's website is your email list and the media attention you generate (media hits which include the website's URL). The website should reflect this reality.

At the very least, the campaign's website should have contact information for the campaign, a means for the campaign to contact and add activists who visit (data capture), and actions for donors and activists. Ultimately slick designs and fancy graphics are secondary in importance. The organization's website should serve a purpose, not just look pretty.

Basic Website Tips

Your message should be obvious immediately. Include a form so that people can sign up for email list. At minimum, you should collect their email address and zip code. Additionally, name and other contact info. Include a prominent link to your yahoo group or blog so people can easily become high-level activists. Include pictures, but not so many as to overwhelm the page. Prominently show ways for people to get involved (e.g., next meeting time and place). People should be able to easily find out how to contribute to the campaign, add themselves to the list, and find nearby events or activists.

Tips to drive traffic to your web page:

- Call reporters and tell them about it when there is a breaking story.
- Include link to page in press releases.
- Include link in all promotional materials.
- Include multiple links in your emails. Create pieces of the website specifically for online and offline actions for people on email campaigns. Be sure to include the website in your email campaign. Both emails and websites are most effective when used together.
- Constantly change content (daily) and include new pictures, especially of other people.
- Find other websites and blogs with similar interests. Comment on them (with a link to your blog in comment). Link to them in posts and then email them that you just wrote about them. Regularly.

Landing Pages

Landing pages are a critical component of any online campaign. These are pages set up to receive visitors who have been lead there for a specific reason. Email and blog campaigns set up these separate pages so that people can quickly and easily take a requested action. Instead of telling potential online activists to navigate a webpage and find the page where they can take an action, the emails and blog posts lead the activists directly to a dedicated page (bypassing the home page and any other site).

These websites are simple and to the point. They provide a means for an activist to take an action, and should, ideally, allow the activist to invite others to take the same action. The best landing pages manage to be both simple and exciting, motivating people to take action, allowing them to feel like part of a larger community, and possibly showing progress toward a goal as more people take that action.

Landing pages should be tested out before launching any campaign linking to that page begins.

Blogging Best Practices

One of the pioneering features of Dean For America, and now Democracy For America, is the organization's vibrant and constant use of blogging and bloggers in political dialogue and action. Because the political blogging world has grown so much since the beginning of 2003, simply starting a blog and hoping for the best is hardly an effective strategy. Making effective use of a blog, in a way that serves its publisher's goals and strategy takes careful planning and diligent effort — and much more than the casual attention of one or two staff members or interns. A good blogger or organization can still cut through the clutter to make its blog a must-see destination that spreads a clear message. Success requires focus and persistence.

Have a Point of View.

It pays to know, before beginning to blog, what you want to say. Keep your goals and the key points on your agenda in mind with every sentence you write — and remember that when a statement somehow fails to advance your agenda, or steers the discussion onto different or distracting territory, it might be better left unpublished. Also remember that a strong blog has to provide more than a recitation of well-known facts or well-used arguments. After all, for straight news, Internet users always have the option of browsing for free through mainstream media webpages. The greatest asset a blogger brings to the Internet is his or her unique perspective. It is a waste to let that asset — your perspective — go unused.

Have a Voice.

Just like email, think of building a community when building your blog. Blogs are more interactive, so it is more important to develop a personality for the blog. The blogging community appreciates candor and scorns stodginess and seemingly homogenized statements. Without sacrificing professionalism or discipline, bloggers from law professor Eugene Volokh [<http://volokh.com/>] to the team at Think Progress, the blog for of the Center for American Progress [<http://www.thinkprogress.org/>], have managed to project themselves forcefully and grow their readerships successfully — and to maintain a playful, personable tone at the same time.

Update Frequently.

If your blog has the resources to keep up a manic pace of updates, go for it. If the campaign can only update a couple time a day, that's fine. As long as readers can come to expect a steady stream of new commentary or information, and can go to your site for updates on a regular schedule and come away gratified, you've done your job. Adopt a fairly structured schedule for blogging.

Establish a Niche.

With so many well-established blogs already serving up information to satisfied readers, a new entrant to the blogging world needs to avoid the trap of adopting a model already used to perfection by someone else. Instead, newer blogs need to fill a void — even if that happens to mean filling a void that no one knew existed. Be specific and don't be afraid to narrow the focus of the blog to your particular niche. If that niche attention becomes the reason people flock to your blog, you will do a disservice to your readers if you digress too frequently.

Prominent niche examples:

- **One-Stop Shop for Expertise.** A great idea for any person or organization able to provide specialized, valuable knowledge. That can mean academic expertise, as with Informed Comment [<http://juancole.com/>], a major source of analysis on the Iraq War, or Semi-Daily Journal [<http://j-bradford-delong.net/movabletype/>], an opinionated source of commentary on the economy by a Clinton administration appointee to the Department of the Treasury.

- ***Becoming a Clearinghouse/Nerve Center.*** When a big controversy or story comes, a smart blogger can position a site to profit by moving to own that topic. That approach also succeeded at the Washington Note [<http://thewashingtonnote.com/>], where Century Foundation fellow Steve Clemons conducted a one-man whip effort to persuade Democrats in the Senate to vote against John Bolton as ambassador to the United Nations. His site turned into a back channel for damaging information about Bolton — and when it drew members of the press who were hunting for leads and stories, that constant stream of negative stories helped to turn the tide against the White House's efforts to push Bolton through.
- ***Delving Into a Topic that No One Else Features.*** Going after a market without its own forum offers a proven route to growth. A number of blogs, for instance, have scored big by focusing on the politics of their states — for instance the Burnt Orange Report [<http://burntorangereport.com/>], which covers the full sweep of Texas politics. Blog publishers can take that concept as far as their hearts desire, from a blog that trades in Washington gossip [<http://wonkette.com/>] to one that deals entirely — with women's shoes [<http://shoewawa.com/>].

Get to Know Others

Networking always helps. The Internet simply exists a giant network. It links together people at nodes scattered around the world — and through building relationships with those people, a blogger can grow his audience. Other sites can provide not only a rich source of material, but also much-needed attention and a steady stream of new visitors. The more a blog publisher communicates with, writes about, or gives credit to writers at other sites, the more those writers — either actively or merely by joining the dialogue — send readers in your direction.

Blogs that build moats around themselves, by contrast, can expect to stay lonely. With so many sites jostling for attention, breaking through that cacophony takes heroic effort — unless a publisher uses generosity as the honey that encourages others to help.

Find the Right Technology for your Website or Blog

It is important to find the web and blog technology that suits your needs. Several good options are:

- **Blogger.com:** Free hosted blogging service.
- **Wordpress.com:** Excellent blogging software. Requires installation on a paid hosting service.
- **Movabletype.com:** Excellent blogging software. Requires installation on a paid hosting service.
- **CivicSpaceLabs.com:** Comprehensive content management and blogging software. Requires installation on a paid hosting service. Requires a fairly high degree of technical sophistication.

Case Study: DFA Campaign Takes On Tom DeLay

In April 2005, Tom DeLay was under mounting political pressure for his ethical violations and ties to Jack Abramoff. DFA decided to put up billboards in his home district to remind voters about DeLay's ethical violations. DFA executed a 10-day campaign to solicit billboard ideas, vote on the best idea, and then fund it.

What is your campaign goal: To remind voters about Tom DeLay's ethical violations and build DFA's grassroots community

What is the moral purpose: We deserve an ethical government!

Who will care: TX-22 voters, TX-22 media outlets, national media outlets, Progressive activists

Timeline for campaign: 10 days to gather ideas and vote on them; then a month to run the billboard

Schedule:

1) April 12: Campaign launch to gather billboard ideas

Subject: Beware of Falling Congressman
 Segments: DFA's national list
 DFA's Texas list
 Results: 15,000 ideas were submitted. DFA picked the top 20 slogans for the final vote.

2) April 18: Vote on top slogan from among the top 20.

Subjects: Did Your Tom DeLay Billboard Make the Top 20? Find Out Now, Pick the Billboard for DeLay's Backyard: Vote Now
 Segments: People who submitted ideas
 People who did not submit ideas
 Results: 35,000 people voted to help select the winning idea.

3) April 20: Announcement of winner and fundraising solicitation

Subject: And the Winning Billboard Is...
 Segments: Non-activist, non-participant
 Activist, non-participant
 Idea submitter or voter
 Results: DFA raised \$40,000 to pay for the billboard placement.

4) Billboard Placement

DFA placed 2 billboards that ran through the month of May with the message: "Lobbyists sent Tom DeLay golfing and all you got was this billboard"
 The billboard was covered by every Houston TV station, the local newspaper, and national media like the New York Times.

A later fundraising campaign referenced and built on the narrative started the DeLay campaign. A sampling of these emails are included in the following pages:

From: Tom Hughes, Democracy for America
To: Supporter
Sent: Thursday, April 21, 2005 8:36 AM
Subject: And the Winning Billboard Is...

Dear Supporter,

The votes are in, and out of the 20,000 billboard slogans, you chose this one:

"Corporations spent millions to send Tom DeLay golfing, and all you got was this billboard."

This was the fan favorite – both in Texas and nationally.

Now, the next step is simple – if you want to see this billboard in Tom DeLay's backyard, give a few dollars to put it up:

<http://democracyforamerica.com/contribute>

The thing about DeLay Republicans – because they can't defend him, they smear you. DeLay's camp says that we're "outsiders" who have no business in Texas.

They try to divide us – by race, by religion, by region. But the Texans who chose this billboard want the same thing as every American – clean government that solves real problems, and politicians who are accountable to the people.

Help Texans send DeLay and his apologists a message:

<http://democracyforamerica.com/contribute>

Republicans in Washington continue to close ranks around DeLay. They can't help it. They defend DeLay because he built their party and the money-for-influence system that they thrive on.

Congressman Roy Blunt – DeLay's chief deputy – drew a line in the sand for DeLay this weekend, saying that he "will stay as leader" no matter what and "is not going to run away from a fight."

But neither will you.

You chose the message – now send it to Tom DeLay:

<http://democracyforamerica.com/contribute>

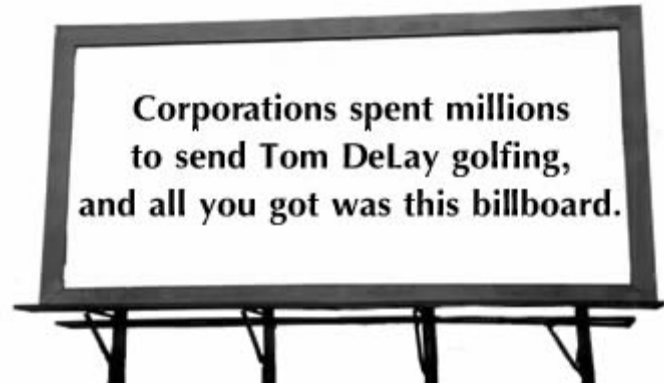
Thank you.

Tom Hughes
 Executive Director
 Democracy for America

P.S. – Desperate Republicans yesterday tried to head off the consequences of their leader's actions – offering fake investigations rigged to never rule against DeLay. Don't let his constituents be fooled:

<http://democracyforamerica.com/contribute>

COMING SOON TO TEXAS:



**YOUR CHOICE FOR THE
 MESSAGE TO TOM DELAY**

----- Original Message -----

From: [Richard Morrison](#)

To: [Supporter](#)

Sent: Tuesday, May 03, 2005 10:52 AM

Subject: The View from Here

Dear Supporter,

You know what I call this? A sign of better things to come:



Your winning billboard on display in Texas

Democracy for America stood with me long before telling the truth about Tom DeLay became fashionable. You made a difference in Texas – with your support last year, my challenge brought Tom DeLay closer to losing his seat than ever before in his political career.

You can see every day on the news that your courage sparked something big. You helped make Tom DeLay the national symbol of Republican excess. He and the machine he built are on the defensive. And they should be – DeLay and his party must be held accountable for the corruption and abuse of power in Congress.

So keep fighting the good fight. Here in Texas and across the country we're onto DeLay and his special interest allies – and we want our country back. Count on me to keep fighting, too.

Your work has made a deep impression on me, and on this district. Keep it up – and keep showing the whole country what you can do.

Sincerely,
Richard Morrison
Resident of Texas's 22nd Congressional District
and Democratic candidate for Congress in 2004

P.S. – I hope to see you firsthand here in Texas for DemocracyFest in June. I'll be there – along with DFA supporters from around the country and national figures who support us. Learn all about it:

<http://www.democracyforamerica.com/democracyfest>

— Original Message —

From: Tom Hughes, Democracy for America
To: T.
Sent: Monday, December 05, 2005 1:58 PM
Subject: Match Dick Cheney and Tom DeLay Today!

Dear T.,

"Congressman Tom DeLay has been an exceptional leader on Capitol Hill and Vice President Cheney looks forward to helping his re-election effort."

Think about that. Tonight Dick Cheney goes to a ritzy district in Houston to host a fundraiser for Tom DeLay – in spite of DeLay's felony indictment in a Texas court. Regardless of our disgust at the wave of indictments, investigations and resignations among Republicans in the last few months, for DeLay and Cheney it's business as usual.

And what a business it is. According to the *Houston Chronicle*, "for \$4,200, a donor gets an invitation to a VIP reception, a photograph with Cheney, and recognition at the event. For \$2,100, attendees can rub elbows at a 'congressional reception' and have their photo taken with DeLay."

DeLay and Cheney make it clear that money is the only language they know. So it's time for us – working together – to raise their cost of doing business. DeLay and Cheney use money to maintain their corrupt hammerlock on Washington, so to beat them we have to match them candidate for candidate.



<http://www.democracyforamerica.com/29candidates>

When we brought the bat back last week, you responded overwhelmingly, raising over \$20,000 in a day. But we're not done.

DeLay has funded 29 candidates for Congress this year. Once we raise \$34,800, we can tell DeLay and Cheney just how we feel about that – to the tune of \$1,200 each for 29 progressive candidates of our own. Make it happen:

<http://www.democracyforamerica.com/29candidates>

Is this a momentary lapse in Cheney's judgment? Not a chance. Right now, his ex-chief of staff faces spending the rest of his life in jail on perjury charges. So Cheney riding to the rescue of Tom DeLay arrives as no surprise. The two are peas in the same, ethically challenged pod.

His mission to support a man under indictment sends a message that top Republicans don't care about the law. They only care about power, and about the money that makes their hold on power possible.

But guess what? We have power in numbers. By coming together we can break their hold on power, and give this country the ethical, progressive leadership it deserves.

So let's get started. Swing the bat:

<http://www.democracyforamerica.com/29candidates>

Thank you,
 Tom Hughes
 Democracy for America