



# Why Internet Organizing Benefits Your Organization

## Overview

We all know the perpetual plight of the non-profit: too few resources for too many issues. Whether it's money, staff, or time, we never seem to have all the resources we need to get our jobs done. Which begs the question: why invest the time, money, and staff into developing and maintaining the systems and resources for an online organizing presence when you can barely keep up with the program work you've committed to? The answer is simple. Investing in online organizing strategies is the most efficient and effective way increase your organizing capacity. It will allow you to do what you already do better, and give you new avenues for your organizing. And it's an investment in the survival of your organization.

Electronic communication will soon dominate our world. Just think about the number of email messages that we send. In 1998, the average number of messages sent per day worldwide was about 3 billion. This year, we will send almost 10 billion nonspam email messages daily, according to IDC, a technology analyst and research firm. By 2005, an estimated 35 billion e-mail messages will be sent daily – that's roughly six daily messages for each person on the planet.

If that's not enough to convince you, try this on for size: there are advantages to electronic communications that can't be matched by traditional organizing tactics.

## Reach New Constituencies

### ***Bring new activists into your organization***

There aren't any 800 numbers for people to call up and request information about issues they care about, but they can find your web site through a search engine. And, right now, there are 122 million Americans online, or 44 percent of the total population, according to Jupiter Research. If you have a web site and email, you're one step closer to reaching all 122 million of them. The Internet makes it easier than ever, with a little strategic thinking, to reach new individuals and create new supporters.

### ***Willing and Able***

There currently exists a tremendous untapped market for activism in Internet users. In September 1999, the Mellman Group conducted a study for Craver, Matthews, Smith and Company documenting the socially engaged Internet users. The Mellman Group found that the number of Americans with Internet access who report giving time or money to social causes represents 25% of the adult population, or approximately 50 million people. The number of people who are actually willing to take action on an issue

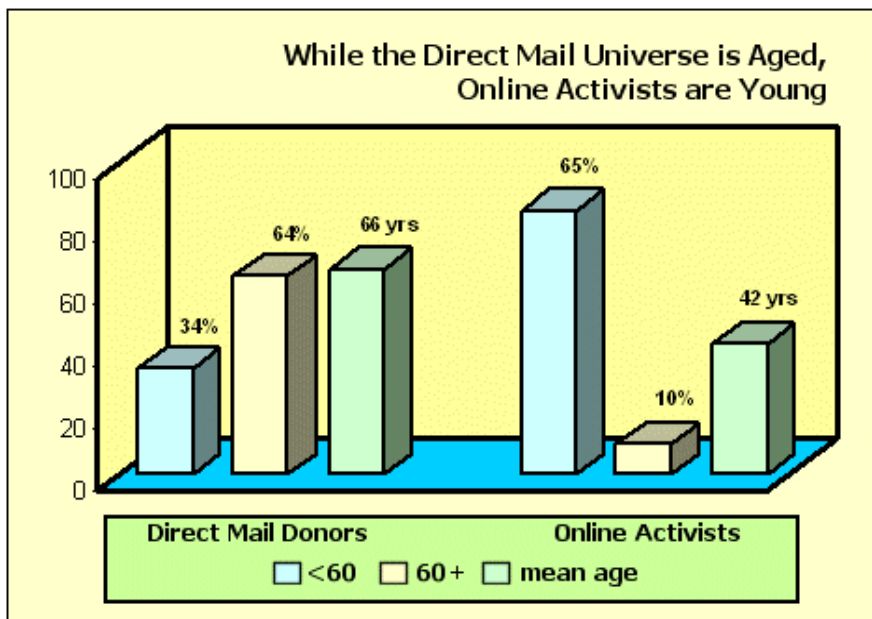


online (by sending an email to a decision maker, for example), is 16% of the adult population, or about 32 million people.

Yet, of those they interviewed, a full two-thirds were unaware of opportunities to take action online. That's 33 million people who are ready, willing and able to take action online, if we reach out to them.

### ***Something Old, or Someone New***

Not only is the potential audience for Internet activism vast, it also represents a heretofore-untapped potential group of activists. National surveys have consistently reported that 65 to 85 percent of Americans describe themselves as environmentalists. Yet only 5 percent of Americans are members of environmental groups. And those 5 percent are being organized over and over again via direct mail and other traditional organizing methods, as they become older and older.



Source: The Mellman Group for Cravers, Mathews, Smith and Company. "Socially Engaged Internet Users,: Prospects for Online Philanthropy and Activism

For example, the average age of the direct mail recipient is 66 years, according to the Mellman Group Report. Compare that to the average Internet audience. The average age of the potential online activist is just 42 years. Internet users represent other valuable demographics as well. The Internet population is very evenly split between male and

female, women making up 50.4%, according to Media Metrix and Jupiter Research.



You can stick to direct mail alone and organize the same constituency over and over, or integrate the Internet into your organizing and reach a whole new set of people. The choice is clear – stick to the same old thing, or reach someone new.

## **Speed**

### ***Faster than a Speeding Bullet***

How long does it take you to prepare and send a direct mail piece to one person? How long does it take you to send 1000 emails? Probably about the same amount of time. The speed of the Internet is one of its great powers, and a definite reason you should integrate it into your organizing.

To sum up the point, consider this. If an email message is sent to five people at 8:00 AM, and each additional recipient sends it on to five new people within an hour of receipt, nearly 10 million people will get the message by 5:00 PM. If letters take, on average, three days to deliver, the same message would take a month to reach the same number of people by conventional mail -- assuming that recipients would spend the necessary time and money. We all know speed counts, and sometimes it's the only thing that counts.

In October of 2000, Amnesty International launched a new e-activism site at <http://amnestyusa.policy.net/torture/>. The first target of the campaign was the Turkish government, who was holding Kurdish activist Sehmuz Temel.

Temel, who Amnesty says was already disabled from repeated torture at the hands of Turkish police from 1994 to 1998, walked free just days after Amnesty members began sending e-mail to Turkish authorities calling for his release. The human rights organization contacted about 5,000 volunteers via fax, e-mail, telephone and beeper Oct. 19, which was the first day of its e-mail alert initiative. Amnesty asked its supporters to send an email to the Turkish government demanding the release of Temel. Turkish authorities received more than 1,000 e-mail messages calling for Temel's release in the first 10 hours of the campaign and more than 2,200 in 48 hours.

"The big difference is e-mail is so much faster," said Janice Christensen, campaign director for Amnesty's U.S. branch. "If we had done an (ordinary) mail campaign, we probably would have gotten 3,000 letters. But it would have taken 10 days to happen. This took two."

## **Viral**

### ***Able to Leap Across Computer Networks in a Single Click***

Which leads us to another good point. On the Internet, it is possible to share information quickly and easily. In a matter of seconds, a recipient can forward your message to every person in his or her address book. It's the ultimate word-of-mouth tactic. In fact, it's such a powerful force that advertising agencies and e-marketers have a name for it: viral marketing.



Just think of email as an e-phone tree. You remember the phone tree, right? You'd call up your volunteers and have them come by your office, or fax them a list of other volunteers to call for an event. Your volunteer would take the list home, sit at the kitchen table, and spend an hour or so on the phone for every 10 people on their list. They'd write down the outcomes and ring them back into your office. Then you would get to sift through all the returned lists (after tracking down several errant volunteers who forgot to return theirs), and tabulate the final results. In the end, all that time and energy meant that you were able to use your volunteers to do your outreach for you.

Your constituents can produce the same effect more quickly and efficiently using the Internet. Viral marketing is any marketing technique that induces Web sites or users to pass on a marketing message to other sites or users, creating a potentially exponential growth in the message's visibility and effect. Simply by asking your constituents to forward your message along when you send out an email, you get the same effect as the phone tree – with the added bonus that your constituent will also probably forward your message to people outside your network bringing new people into your organization.

Not only can your messages spread quickly, but they will spread to a very targeted group. Messages do not spread randomly across the Internet; instead, they tend to reach those who would be most interested in them, since most people consider the interests of potential recipients in deciding to whom to forward a message.

It's hard to wrap your head around just how powerful a force viral marketing can be for your organization. Yet, several organizations have achieved remarkable success by focusing on encouraging viral marketing. An online campaign against President Clinton's impeachment called Censure and Move On (<http://www.moveon.org>) is the perfect case in point. In September 1998, a Berkeley, CA couple launched the movement by sending 100 emails to family members and friends and asking them to forward the message to others. On the first day, more than 350 people visited the site and signed the Censure and Move On petition. After the second day, more than 23,000 people had signed it. By the time the House voted to impeach President Clinton three months later, more than 450,000 people had signed the petition.

## **Efficient**

### ***And You Thought Multi-Tasking Would Help You Get More Done***

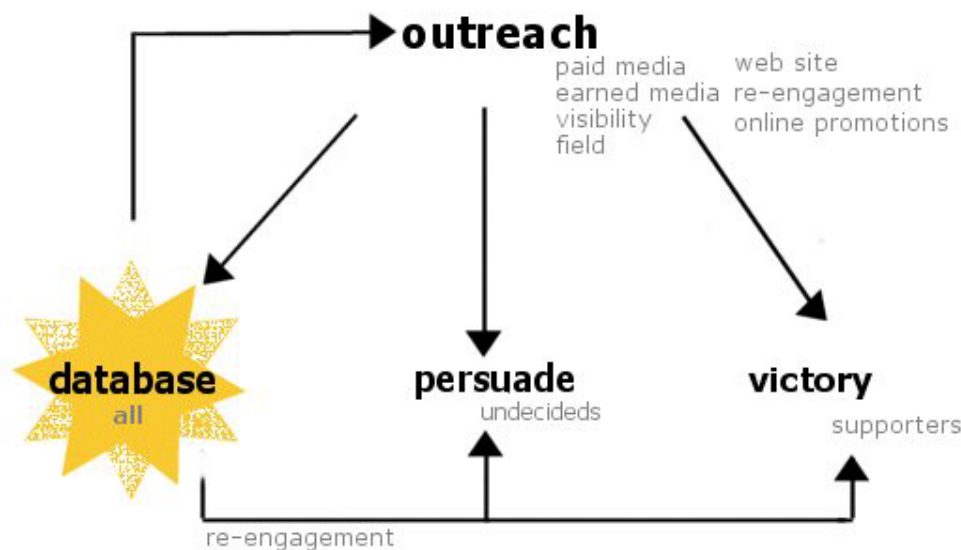
Before the Internet, field staff relied on mail, phone, canvassing, and volunteers to create a word of mouth buzz, all one-to-one transactions that are time consuming, severely limit the scope of people that you can reach. Additionally, after engaging a citizen once, it was often difficult to re-engage him or her and continue contact. These tactics also focus on pushing your message at supporters you can identify, but don't account for the multitude of potential supporters who want to find you. The Internet overcomes all of those limitations.



First of all, Internet organizing allows you to reach your supporters 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. A potential supporter can make a connection with your organization through your Web site whether it's 2 AM or 12 Noon, Monday or Saturday. There's nothing else out there that can so reliably get your message out to the public so consistently.

Secondly, when your field staff and web site collect email addresses, you create a force multiplier for your organizing efforts – a database of citizens you can contact online. With email, you can reach supporters more quickly and for much less money than practically any other organizing tactic. Internet organizing allows you to reach your supporters more effectively and efficiently.

Internet organizing is also an efficient means of leveraging your offline strategies. If you're having a lobby day at the state capital, you can search your database of supporters to identify those in the right geographic area and send them an email invitation in minutes. It won't replace the phone banking you'd want to do, but it's a way to reinforce your phone banking, and will likely increase the number of people who attend your event.



A great example of the efficiency of the Internet occurred in October of 1999 in an effort to ensure protection for the Tongass National Forest in Alaska. The Heritage Forest Campaign, a coalition of state, local, and national environmental groups, had been working to get the Clinton Administration to direct the US Forest Service to create a policy that would protect the remaining roadless areas in our National Forests. In October of 1999, President Clinton was scheduled to issue a directive to the US Forest Service to do just that, but the campaign learned that his directive would omit the protection of the Tongass National Forest in Alaska, allowing new roads to be built in pristine areas.

The campaign had only a few days to act. Fortunately, the campaign had built a large network of online activists through their site at [www.ourforests.org](http://www.ourforests.org). They sent an email to this network to mobilize their supporters. In less than three days, the campaign organized their "netizens" to send 4,000 faxes to John Podesta, Clinton's Chief of Staff.



Not coincidentally, a short time later, the Tongass was included in President Clinton's directive.

## Effective

We'll cover this more extensively in Chapter 2, *Will Decision Makers Listen?*, but it's worth pointing out now that electronic communications are having an important impact on public policy today. As governments move services online, they are increasing their capacity to communicate with citizens electronically, and that's reshaping the way democracy will work.

Jupiter research studied 81 government sites earlier this year, and found that all 81 gave Net surfers the option to send inquiries and comments regarding government processes via e-mail. Most interesting is how citizens and governments perceive the move towards electronic communications.

**E-GOVERNMENT TO MAKE GOVERNMENT MORE ACCOUNTABLE**

**Most Important Benefits of E-Government by Group**

	PUBLIC	GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS
Government more accountable to citizens	36%	19%
Greater public access to information	23%	34%
More efficient, cost-effective government	21%	17%
More convenient government services	13%	23%

DATA BASED ON A TELEPHONE SURVEY OF 1,003 ADULTS (INCLUDING 200 FREQUENT INTERNET USERS), AND A SURVEY OF 150 GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS (75 FEDERAL, 40 STATE AND 35 LOCAL). SOURCE: HART-TEETER FOR THE COUNCIL FOR EXCELLENCE IN GOVERNMENT, SEPTEMBER 2000

Citizens believe that most important benefit of moving towards electronic communications in government is that it will make government more accountable to them. Additionally, most people online expect the impact of e-government over the next five to 10 years will be positive, according to research conducted for the Council for Excellence in Government, a public advocacy group. This sense of empowerment is the first key indicator of the efficacy of the Internet in shaping public policy.

But the proof is really in the success stories to date. There are many, but one of the most interesting Internet organizing victories occurred in California. Insurance Commissioner Chuck Quackenbush had been under investigation by California State Attorney General Bill Lockyer and lawmakers for allowing insurance companies to duck as much as \$3 billion in fines for mishandled Northridge earthquake claims by contributing far smaller amounts to a nonprofit foundation. Critics charged Quackenbush then used the foundation to further his own political goals.

In a matter of weeks, a Simi Valley city councilwoman who had no prior knowledge of HTML, formed a group called People's Veto, and created a website at <http://www.peoplesveto.org>. She posted recall petitions on the site seeking to force Quackenbush from office, allowed visitors to tell their friends about the site on an easy to complete form, and kept regular updates of the campaign's progress.

In just 10 days, and with no paid outreach, 11,000 citizens heard about the site and downloaded the petition, and over 4,000 signatures were returned to the campaign. Shortly after People's Veto publicized that number, Quackenbush resigned.

## A new Strategy for Your Arsenal



### ***Just Think of the Internet as the Next Clipboard***

For all the benefits of the Internet in organizing, it's important to remember that it is not a silver bullet. Email will never replace face-to-face communication in its ability to create lasting bonds between citizens and organizations. Your Web site will never replace a good rally in its ability to fire up citizens. The Internet is another, powerful tool, for your organizing arsenal.

The key to making your Internet organizing successful is to fully integrate it into your organizing plans. Use the Internet to leverage your offline activities, and use your offline activities to leverage your Internet organizing.

