

# Online Advocacy— Mobilize Supporters to Take Action

*Build support for your cause with these Internet tips.*

BY VINAY BHAGAT

An advocacy group trying to achieve its mission without the Internet is like a carpenter building a house without a hammer. The Internet is an essential tool for advocacy-driven organizations because it enables near real-time mobilization of activists with high efficiency and impact. Online campaigns can also do the following:

- **Publicize** an organization and its mission.
- **Attract** new constituents who are potential donors and volunteers.
- **Deepen** involvement and strengthen loyalty among existing supporters.

Here are tips for waging an effective, online advocacy program and integrating it with other activities for successful Constituent Relationship Management (CRM):

**Tip One: Recruit potential activists through all channels.** In all direct-mail forms, solicit e-mail addresses, zip codes, and permission to communicate. Collect this same information at events, using sign-up sheets. Encourage Web site visitors to register online by offering special content and e-mail updates for “registered users only.” (See Figure 1.) At registration or later, survey registrants about

their interests for future targeting with relevant updates and action alerts. (See Figure 2.)

Identify other constituents (such as donors and volunteers) who currently aren’t activists, and promote advocacy through e-mail and Web site interactions. Donors and volunteers are good targets for activism because they’re already interested and involved. Donors often want to provide support beyond a monetary contribution and *will* take action. Planned Parenthood Federation of America found that non-activist donors and donor

**Biographical Information**

Name: \* First Name: [Susan] \* Last Name: [Tuft]

\* User Name: [stut]

I am a shelter professional:

I am an educator:

I am an animal health/behavior specialist:

**E-mail**

\* E-mail: [susantuft@aol.com]

Yes, I would like to receive e-mail from ASPCA

Preferred Format:  HTML  Plain Text

Figure 1: Obtain e-mail addresses and permission to communicate, as in this ASPCA example.

I would like to receive e-mail about the following selected topics:

Expand All  Collapse All

E-mail interests	Description
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> I want to help further the ASPCA mission	Remain informed of ways to support The ASPCA to continue to make a profound impact on the quality of animals' lives.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> I want to receive the ASPCA News Alert	Receive our weekly e-mail newsletter. Frequent features include the Petfinder Happy Tail of the Week, Health Alerts, and animal legislation updates.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> I'll help lobby for animal welfare	Help promote passage of legislation and citizen initiatives and the adoption of public policies that recognize animals as living, sentient beings who warrant protection and respect.

Figure 2: Ask registrants about interests, then personalize Web content and e-mails.



prospects (e-subscribers/registered users for its online Member Center) responded at a 15-20 percent higher rate to an advocacy appeal than current, non-donor activists. Donor alienation (measured by unsubscribe rates) was close to zero.

**Tip Two: Cultivate activists with engaging content.** Provide relevant information regularly. For example, send an e-mail with a link encouraging potential activists to visit your Web site to view “score cards” showing how lawmakers voted on key issues. Make it easy for site visitors to look up *their* legislators’ records by featuring searchable databases. Send registrants e-mail updates about votes or developments on important issues. (See Figure 3.) Build community by inviting potential activists to participate in message boards, sign online petitions, and post personal stories about their interest in the cause.

**Tip Three: Mobilize activists through e-mail.** Send e-mail action alerts to reach supporters quickly and cost-effectively. (See Figure 4.) Subject lines should be short, convey urgency, and have a call-to-action so recipients immediately open the e-mail. Personalize content with recipients’ names, and note that they’re receiving this e-mail because they previously indicated interest. The e-mail should be brief while providing enough background to trigger action. Include a clear call-to-action with easy-to-follow next steps. For example, include a link that says, “Click here to let your lawmakers know how you feel.” The link should take activists to your Web site for additional information and instructions.

**Tip Four: Enable easy and effective online action.** Enable your Web site to recognize returning visitors and automatically look up their elected officials, based on zip code information they provided at registration. Post a letter that

The screenshot shows the website header with the logo "CITIZENS AGAINST GOVERNMENT WASTE" and "investigations & reports". Below the header is a search form titled "View Congressional Ratings by". The form includes radio buttons for "House of Representatives" and "Senate", a dropdown menu for "State" (set to "Texas"), and a text input for "Name" (set to "gramm"). A "Submit" button is located below the form. To the right of the form is a table with the following data:

Name	State	2001 Avg.	Lifetime	1	2
Gramm (R)	Texas	90	79	+	+
Hutchison (R)	Texas	75	68	+	+

Below the table is a "Categories" section with a list of rating ranges and descriptions: 100% : Taxpayer Superhero, 80%-99% : Taxpayer Hero, 60%-79% : Taxpayer Friendly, 40%-59% : Lukewarm to Taxpayers, 20%-39% : Unfriendly to Taxpayers, 0%-19% : Hostile to Taxpayers.

Figure 3: Convert constituents to activists with relevant content, such as their lawmakers’ positions on key issues, as in this Citizens Against Government Waste example.

people can customize and e-mail, fax, print, sign, and send to lawmakers. Also offer an automated response option where activists simply hit a “reply” button to have the Web site indicate their viewpoints to appropriate legislators. (See Figure 5.) Encourage activists to communicate their views through multiple channels such as input forms on politicians’ own Web sites. Remind activists to also communicate through their personal e-mail accounts and fax.

**Tip Five: Encourage viral marketing.** Ask activists to recruit additional activists after they take action. (See Figure 6.) When acknowledging an action, prompt the

The screenshot shows an email header with the following information: From: ASPCA News Alert [news-alert@aspc.org], To: sullivan@corvus.com, Cc: (empty), Subject: ASPCA News Alert 5/30/02. The main body of the email contains the following text: "\*IMPORTANT\* LEGISLATIVE ALERT FOR CONNECTICUT RESIDENTS Governor Rowland has vetoed Connecticut's SB 78, legislation that would require dogs to be provided with proper shelter and confined in a humane manner. The ASPCA believes these requirements are modest, yet could make all the difference for Connecticut's dogs. Connecticut residents, it is crucial that you contact your legislators immediately and urge them to override the Governor's veto. If you'd like us to fax a letter to them on your behalf, please visit our online Advocacy Center. And please forward this information to all your Connecticut friends' and relatives. Thank you for your help!"

Figure 4: Use e-mail alerts to bring people to your Web site to find information and take action.

The screenshot shows the website header with the logo "Advocacy Center". Below the header is a main heading: "Connecticut: Ask Your Legislators to Override Governor Rowland's Veto of Legislation Requiring the Humane Sheltering and Tethering/Confinement of Dogs!". Below the heading is a link: "Back to Advocacy Center Map". Below the link is a section titled "For Connecticut Residents Only!". The text in this section reads: "Governor Rowland has vetoed S.B. 78, legislation that would amend the Connecticut animal anti-cruelty law to require that pet owners provide their dogs with proper shelter, time during which they are free from tethering or confinement, and the appropriate conditions while they are tethered." Below the text is a button labeled "Take Action Now!".

Figure 5: Make taking action as easy as a few clicks.



*Whenever people return to your Web site, personalize their experience.*

activist to provide friends' e-mail addresses for notification about the issue. Configure the Web site to forward the action alert automatically with a pre-scripted or customized note from the referring friend. Also provide e-postcards with the call-to-action and an URL for taking action so activists have another way to spread the word.

**Tip Six: Build loyalty through ongoing, personalized communications.** Nurture relationships to retain supporters. (See Figure 7.) Whenever people return to your Web site, personalize their experience—for example, by updating them on legislative issues

On behalf of Connecticut's dogs, please contact your legislator's now to urge them to override Governor Rowland's veto of this essential humane legislation. Click the above "Take Action Now" box to view a sample letter on this topic. If you agree with this letter, allow us to fax it to your legislators on your behalf today!



Figure 6: Leverage activists to recruit like-minded friends and relatives.

they've supported and new issues relevant to their interests. Reach out through personalized e-mails when developments warrant an update.

**Tip Seven: Integrate with other functions to pursue cross-marketing opportunities and ensure coherent communications.** So often, advocacy lists aren't shared with other functions, such as development and volunteer recruitment. Advocates are strong donor prospects, and the risk of alienation from a well-crafted solicitation is small. Target non-donor advocates with appropriately

tailored promotions that encourage them to deepen their support through a financial contribution or by volunteering time. (See Figure 8.) Invest in a common technology platform across the organization so all departments can easily share and use constituent information. Effective cross-marketing requires a centralized constituent marketing database or integration between systems if data about different types of constituents are stored separately. ■

**Resources**

- Andrews, Dianne et al., "Internet Savvy Nonprofits: Dot-Orging Your Way to Success," *Nonprofit World*, Volume 20, No. 1.
- Elges, Mary, "Driving Traffic to Your Web Site," *Nonprofit World*, Vol. 20, No. 6.
- Frenza, JP & Leslie Hoffman, "Ten Top Web Site Tips," *Nonprofit World*, Volume 16, No. 1.

These resources are available from the Society's Resource Center, [www.snpo.org](http://www.snpo.org).



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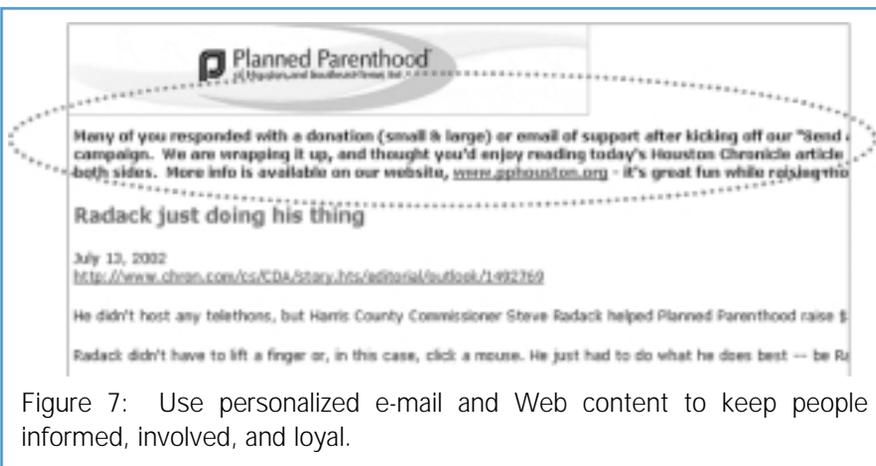


Figure 7: Use personalized e-mail and Web content to keep people informed, involved, and loyal.

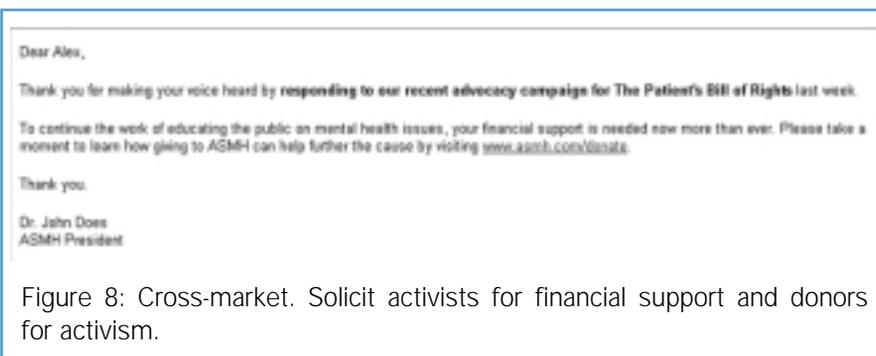


Figure 8: Cross-market. Solicit activists for financial support and donors for activism.