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

To 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 a 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 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**


These resources are available from the Society’s Resource Center, www.snpo.org.

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