



Recruitment:

Building an Email Action list

Overview

You may already be collecting email addresses from your constituents and engaging them in online organizing efforts. But the Internet is more than just a way to effectively organize the people you already know. It's the perfect opportunity to reach out to new audiences and engage new people in your organization.

In many ways, the Internet is the perfect place to recruit new supporters. Every Internet-related medium allows users to act immediately on their impulses, like their impulse to support your organization. It's also very easy to start a word-of-mouth (or word-of-mouse, if you will) campaign on the Internet. Spreading messages to your friends and family is easier on the Internet than everywhere else.

Yet, the Internet can be an impersonal place, and it's already crowded with tons of organizations competing for your audience's attention. This means that you'll have to choose recruitment tactics that will be tailored to your cause, message, audience (and budget) to get the most for your effort.

Getting the Email Addresses

Before we get into the different tactics for encouraging people to give you their email address, we should probably address the "how" of getting their email address. The method of collecting email addresses can be just as critical to your success in recruiting new email activists as the email, web site, article, or advertisement that made them want to fork it over in the first place. If you don't make it an easy and clear process, it just won't happen, no matter how compelling your message. Additionally, if your supporters are giving you their email addresses in ways that aren't easy for you to add them to your list, it means that you'll have a hard time using them. Here are some options that make it easy for a supporter to give you their information, and easy for you to use it:

Mechanisms For Collecting the Data:

Database-backed web page

For once, a technology tool that is just what it sounds like. A database backed web page is simply a web page that can communicate with a database. Why is this useful? When the web page can communicate with the database, it can send any data collected

on a form directly to the database. You can then access the data online (typically through a web browser), and do what you will with it. This system allows you to collect any kind of information you want to from your activists, and have access to it electronically – no data entry! What's more, a good web site developer can help make sure that your web site database communicates with your database back at the office, or replace it altogether with an online system. It's also very easy on the user side. Thirty seconds of typing and the push of a button later, and your constituents have given you everything you want to know. This is the best system for collecting data from your activists, but also the costliest. Expect to pay \$5,000 or more to develop this kind of system.

Email based web site forms

Another, less expensive way to electronically collect data from your web site is to set up a form that emails results to a specified recipient. You can create a form to collect contact information from your supporters and have their data emailed to you or anyone else in the office. And, on the user side of things, it's just as easy to use as a database backed web page form. These forms are easy to create and inexpensive, but they have a couple of downsides. First, it's an awkward way to handle the data. Getting an email with the data is certainly easier than having to type it all in, but you still have to do the work of getting the information into your database. Secondly, it's pretty insecure. Email is pretty easily intercepted by any dedicated hacker, so you risk letting your supporter's data fall into bad hands. It's a small risk, but it's worth pointing out. Third, many organizations direct these emails to individual email addresses (like [HYPERLINK "mailto:molly@goodgroup.org" molly@goodgroup.org](mailto:molly@goodgroup.org)) and don't have the ability to redirect the email after Molly leaves. If you use this option, be sure to point the emails to an institutional email address, like info@goodgroup.org.

Email

By far the easiest and cheapest option, email is another way to collecting data from your supporters. It's very easy to create a link to an email address on your site and ask people to type their contact information into the email. It's by far the most ineffective option, however. Users have to do a lot of work to send you their information, and nobody likes to spend too long sending an email to an organization they just heard about – you'll lose potential supporters before they ever even send their information. And, it's got all the same technical disadvantages of an email based web site form. However, it's a lot better than nothing, so if you don't have a mechanism for collecting data electronically from your constituents, start here.

By hand

There's nothing automatic about it, but one of the most effective ways to collect email addresses is the good old-fashioned way: one at a time. It seems obvious, but you should remember to ask for email addresses in everything you do – response cards, phone banks, tabling and more. While it means more data entry for you, it's worth it. Someone who gives you his or her email address after a real life conversation is far more likely to be a committed long-term supporter than the person who signed up at your site out of curiosity one day.

Be creative about how to harvest email addresses. Here are some ways that actual organizations have successfully collected more email addresses:

"I've had the most success from getting group email addresses. The like-minded organization blasts an email to their list asking if they want to be added to my list, with a copy of that email going to me. Often these folks are grateful to be included in the email loop."

" Recently, we sent [our] newsletter to all of our identified pro-choice names in the state. A few days later, we followed up with a phone bank to recruit individuals to our Email Action Network. The response rate was excellent and we added over 3,000 new email addresses to our Action Network."

What Data to Collect

One other key thing to consider in the process is what data you should collect from your supporters. Clearly, you want their email address, but it's a good idea to collect other data, like their address so you can district them. After all, you're collecting all this data for a reason – to forward your mission – and you need the appropriate data to make it worth your while. Mostly, you'll be recruiting new people to your organization this way, so you can't ask for too much information or you'll scare them off. However, people are generally willing to give you whatever you ask for, as long as it's justified. Tell people WHY each piece of data is necessary, and they'll generally cough it up. Here are four principles to consider about what data to collect:

Principle One – What Does Your Target Need To Know?

You're reading this because you want to build an electronic communications strategy that will help you further your mission. If you are using the Internet to affect a decision maker, the information you send them about your users will matter just as much as the message. For instance, the US Forest Service requires complete name and address information or it won't count the comment your user submits.

So you'll need to do a little homework. Call the agency, office, or decision maker you are targeting and ask them what their policy is on email communication. Generally, many federal agencies have established guidelines and will tell you what you need to submit. If calling up isn't an option, the general rule of thumb is to ask for full name and address information (and their email address, of course).

Principle Two – What Do You Need To Know?

You've already got these people at your site, and they're already filling out forms. So you might as well ask them to tell you some things that you might like to know. For instance, you may want to know how they heard about you – include a field that allows them to tell you.

Most important, you need to think about your users as more than one-time activists. These are people that you will want to re-engage again online and offline. What kinds of activities will your organization ask your users to participate in? What information will you need to know about your users to facilitate these activities? Perhaps you need their phone numbers, or want to know if they belong to other, similar organizations. Maybe you need to identify all the webmasters that take action on your site.

Additionally, you can use your site to collect information and identify VIPs – doctors,

scholars, celebrities – or local organizations who can aid your campaign.

Principle Three – What Your User Doesn't Want To Tell You

Internet users are not afraid to fork over their information – if you give them a good reason. Need proof? 16.2 million Americans have trusted America Online with their credit card information.

There are limits though. Avoid asking for personal information, like gender, birth date, etc., unless they are necessary. This kind of information is difficult to get out of folks unless it is for a specific and clearly-stated purpose.

Principle Four – What To Ask For When

A good Internet site will follow all of the same rules of etiquette as the offline world. For example, when you meet someone for the first time, you usually make a little small talk, just to see if you two are going to get along. If your potential friend started asking questions like "How much do you weigh, anyhow?" the relationship wouldn't last too long. You'd be offended by someone getting too personal too soon. If that first meeting goes well, though, the relationship might continue, and then you'd have a new friend.

Same principle applies here. You want your user to make friends with your website, so don't let it be rude. The idea is that you increasingly engage your user with each action taken. The first (or first part) of the action should ask for the least amount of information. The user can then decide to continue the relationship, and you can ask for increasingly more information with each subsequent ask. For example, after completing the action, you may ask a visitor to become a volunteer and ask for more personal information, like a phone number. So only ask for what you NEED to know initially, and work your way up from there.

Recruitment Tactics

Now that we understand the mechanics of how to collect the information we want from new supporters, let's address the motivations. There are myriad online tactics out there for attracting new supporters and getting them to become a part of your email network. And, even though new technologies are emerging every day, it should be no surprise that some of the most effective tactics are slight variations on our tried and true favorites. Let's take a look at some of those tactics and see how they work, what they cost, and how to make the most out of them.

Press

Media coverage can catapult your Web site out of obscurity for very little cost, if the conditions are right. We are past the day when a new Web site is newsworthy in and of itself, but you can still use the media to draw traffic to your Web site if the issue your site addresses is hot or you are doing something unique on the Internet.

Traditionally, you can write a press release, be interviewed, or have an article written about you or your issue. The first requires you to take matters into your own hands. It is your opportunity to establish contact and introduce your organization and your cause to the media.

Press Release

If you are able to get your Web site into the mainstream news and online publications, this will drive increased traffic to your Web site. One tried and true method to do this is to write a press release.

An example of this is from GreenCar.org, an online campaign to generate support for cleaner, more fuel efficient vehicles. As gas prices rose to over \$2.00 per gallon in the spring of 2000, media attention on the topic was phenomenal. GreenCar.org took advantage of the situation and issued a press release to launch their site as a place where consumers could take action against high gas prices by focusing on the REAL issue: high consumption. The story ran in 11 online sources and 3 offline papers. Within one week, 6,500 comments were generated.

Specs:
Press releases should follow a certain format: short (500 words or less) with the most important information is placed at the top. Be sure to include clear contact information for your organization, including your direct phone number.
Return:
Media coverage, especially online media, draws attention to your campaign and to your Web site, where you can encourage people to take action.
Cost:
Staff time
Tips:
Use the URL as the campaign name – it's the easiest way to ensure that the URL is included in every piece. The URL should not just be in the header or footer, but in the body of the release.
Concentrate on online media. There are different reporters for the online editions of each news outlet, and their contact information can usually be found on the news site. Readers who view online stories are far more likely to visit your Web site than readers of print editions.
Try to get picked up by a wire service, like Reuters or the Associated Press. Most online news outlets (like http://www.abcnews.com and http://msnbc.com) carry all the wire stories every day, and this will expose more people to your Web site.
Format your release for easy email readability – use short line breaks and test it on a variety of email programs.
Make sure your Web site is ready to handle the attention.
A great online resource for non-profits doing media work is Environmental Media Service's Green Media Toolshed at HYPERLINK "http://www.green-media.org" http://www.green-media.org (You don't need to be an environmental group!)

Articles

You've been working on your issue for a long time. You're an expert! Write articles and

submit them to online publications, like salon.com and other issue sites. It is much more likely someone will come to your site through a link in an online story, than reading it in print and remembering to type that URL later.

Mike Fairbanks, a leading web site promotions expert, can testify to the importance of proactively promoting your organization's site by writing your own pieces. "Writing articles for distribution has brought more traffic and more sales for my site, [HYPERLINK "http://www.website101.com"](http://www.website101.com) WebSite101, than any other technique. It always leads to more subscriptions to my Reading List newsletter, which then lead to more sales, more and better advertising in my newsletter, and more exposure."

OurForests.org has articles printed in both online and offline publications. The article pictured ran on <http://www.mom.com>.

Specs:
Each publication will vary the number of words for an article, but it is good to have a basic article that you can tailor. You can start with 650 words.
Return:
Media coverage, especially online media, draws attention to your campaign and to your Web site, where you can encourage people to take action.
Cost:
Staff time
Tips:
Don't just print stories in your own publication make a list of all the places you go to read information.
Find out who to contact for the online publication and pitch your story to them.
Reach out to online publications where the readers are sympathetic to your cause. If you are working on forest issues, try to get articles in online outdoor related sites.

Interview

Interviews are generally only going to happen if the press knows you are out there. You want to become an expert for a reporter so they always call you as a "source". The best way to do that is to keep in contact with your press list. Give them a "heads up" on upcoming issues you know they write about, or send them notes about articles they've written. You'll soon become part of their arsenal of experts on your subject.

Earned Media

Aside from the traditional print media, the Internet offers lots of free media opportunities. Don't leave any stone unturned since there are plenty of places to go to share your story, and be clever when brainstorming the possibilities.

Links

Many people will come to site through a link from another site. From coalition partners to dot.com websites, you can find sites that are willing to link to your site. It is often done on a trade basis- I link to your site if you link to mine. For helpful ideas go to: HYPERLINK "<http://www.workz.com/content/1560.asp>" <http://www.workz.com/content/1560.asp>

Awards

Be apart of "What's Cool". There are hundreds of places that highlight the best web sites. Take some time to search the Internet and find the "Cool Site of the Day" web sites and submit your site. This is a great way to draw attention to your campaign. Check out "USA Today Hot Sites": HYPERLINK "<http://www.usatoday.com/life/cyber/ch.htm>" <http://www.usatoday.com/life/cyber/ch.htm>

Search engines/Directories

Upon initial creation of your web site, none of the search engines or directories even know of its existence, but it is the single most important thing you can do to guarantee site traffic. Generating media about your issue may drive traffic to your site, but this can be significantly increased if your Web site is registered with search engines and people can find your Web site by searching online.

According to HYPERLINK "<http://www.mediametrix.com/>" **Media Metric**, the top 10 search engines, in this order, are: Yahoo.com, Go.com, Lycos.com, Excite.com, Altavista.com, Hotbot.com, Snap.com, Looksmart.com, Goto.com, and Askjeeves.com. Here are some handy tools for submitting your sites to search engines:

HYPERLINK "<http://www.submitexpress.com>" [submitexpress.com](http://www.submitexpress.com)

Submit your website URL to 40 search engines for free.

HYPERLINK "<http://www.getsubmitted.com/tour/tour2.html>" [getsubmitted.com](http://www.getsubmitted.com)

Get Submitted Lite(Free Search Engine Submission)

HYPERLINK "<http://www.selfsubmit.com/submitmain.asp>" [selfsubmit.com](http://www.selfsubmit.com)

Submit your web site to the top 16 search engines on the internet for free.

HYPERLINK "<http://selfpromotion.com/?CF=Go2.free%252bsearch%252bengin>" selfpromotion.com

Information on how to create high ranking webpages and a free submission tool.

HYPERLINK "<http://www.1netcentral.com/ranking.html>" [1netcentral.com/ranking](http://www.1netcentral.com/ranking)

Find out where your web site is positioned in the major search engines, FREE.

Specs:
Each of these tactics requires various amounts of information about your site and your site administrator. Have lists of keywords on your site, as well as a synopsis about what makes your site great.
Return:
Any link online – whether it's an award, a link in a resources section, or a search engine, will guarantee increased traffic. Search engines have the biggest payoff, so concentrate on that.
Cost:
Staff time, though some search engine services do have fees.

Viral Marketing

Viral marketing is any technique that induces people to forward a message along to their friends and family. The term is inspired by the way real viruses travel – you get a cold, sneeze, and pass it along to the three coworkers who sit next to you, who pass it on to their families, etc. Remember the Balsam shampoo commercial, the commercial began with a couple of women who loved Balsam shampoo and they told their friends and their friends told their friends and so on and so on until hundred of women were buying Balsam shampoo? In the same way, you will forward a viral message to your three coworkers, who will pass it along to their family and friends, and so on.

The potential of viral marketing is vast, if the execution is right.

If you craft a good message that is compelling enough that people want to pass it on, you can run a very effective viral marketing campaign. The key is that viral marketing should be included in everything you do - email messages, online ads, and build it into your web site. The easiest way to get started is to email a list.

Viral Email Messages

Whether it's yours, or another organization's, you can send email directly to people for the express purpose of getting them to send it on to others.

Below is a great example of a text email message that worked on gun control. This message generated a 10% response rate from an existing activist list (30,000 people) and those 30,000 people recruited ANOTHER 30,000 people to take action. All told, well over 60,000 people took action. In particular, this message works because it explicitly asks readers to "send a message to your friends and colleagues."

Viral Web Sites

Build into your site.

After completing an action you should ask them to "Invite their Friends". The user should be able to send an email to their friends from your site to let them know about your campaign. Build buttons or forms into your Web site that let users email their friends and family with a message about or file or story from your site.

Send a thank you!

Once a user has taken an action for you, you should immediately send them a thank you email. The thank you email should encourage the activist to send the email message to their family, friends, and coworkers.

Specs:
Every communication you have with your constituents online or via email should advise them to tell a friend and provide an easy means to do so.
Return:
Expect to grow your list by up to 30% more when you engage effectively in viral marketing tactics.
Cost:
Staff time for email-based viral marketing tactics. You can get basic viral marketing tools built into your web site for under \$1000.

Paid advertising

Buying people's attention can be a really effective way to reach new audiences for your web site. Paid advertising can generate large returns very quickly, but requires money. Although advertising is expensive, it is worth noting that a little bit of advertising money can take you a long way if you do it right. If you can create a compelling ad to drive someone to your Web site, that means that one new person sees your message, can act instantaneously, and you have the opportunity to create a new supporter. This is a far cry from our old notion of advertising, where we hoped someone would see our newspaper ad and call or write.

Email Marketing

More people spend their time online than reading email rather than surfing from site to site, so email can be a highly effective way to generate new online activists. Jupiter Communications reports email ad response rates currently average 5 to 15 percent, an astounding return for any marketing program. But be careful, according to a recent Forrester Research study it is estimated that in 2002, 250 BILLION emails will travel across cyberspace. The challenge- finding the appropriate place to advertise and maximize your return. Today, you can send text email, html emails, and emails which contain rich media, and you can even rent the lists to send the emails to, choosing specific criteria for your recipients like age, income, or geography.

What you should know about renting lists.

Opt-In: Opt-in email has widely been touted as THE answer to anyone doing outreach online because of the way the actual list of email addresses is generated: individuals on the lists must proactively state that they want to receive email solicitations. Look for double opt-in names, these are people who have confirmed more than once that they are interested in receiving more information on a particular issue.

Opt-out: This list builder assumes that the recipient wants to get email but offers the recipient the chance to remove his or her address from the list. The default position for opt-out is yes, and the recipient has to take action to get his or her name off the list. Though proponents of opt-out will argue that the end user does have a choice, we assume that choice is less clear than the chance to opt-in, and, therefore the list is less valuable to the marketer.

Where do they get those email addresses?

If you've ever signed up for a service on the Web, or made an online purchase, you've seen how this works. When you register on many sites, there is a series of questions where you can provide information about yourself. At that time, you can usually sign up to receive information about related products and services. When you check that box – you've opted-in. Web sites then rent these lists of interested individuals to brokers, who then rent them to marketers or online activists.

It makes a difference where list brokers get their names. Remember, members of these lists are not necessarily hard-core buyers or paid subscribers or activist, the likes of which you'd find on traditional direct mail lists. They are people with an interest in one

or several categories that have checked off "Yes, I'd like to receive promotions and announcements on..."

How you can Deliver your Message

Text Email

That message you just sent to your listserv, you can send it to thousands of individuals through an email list broker. It is a simple way to reach a targeted audience and in a short period of time.

HTML Email

This HTML email received a 12.5% return rate from a list purchased from an opt-in list broker. Although, it is more expensive to produce HTML emails, the response rates are much higher.

How to Make it Work:

Find a provider. A few of the big names include:

PostMasterDirect.com

<http://www.postmasterdirect.com>

Yes Mail

<http://www.yesmail.com>

TargitMail

<http://www.targitmail.com>

Topica

<http://www.topica.com>

Some providers allow you to manage the whole process – from identifying lists to assigning specific messages to specific lists – online. Alternately, other providers require you to call and work with an account manager. These providers usually also provide additional value-ads, like assistance developing your ad.

Specs:
Opt-in email messages are generally text-only. However, brokers are building lists of individuals who can receive HTML and rich media email.
Return:
Opt-in email brokers will tell you to expect a click-through rate of 5-15%. In practice, it's often less than 5% for text emails. HTML email returns are much higher than text emails upward of 15%. Although, 15% click-through rates are generally reserved for those emails offering free cars and other big prizes.
Cost:
Typical costs for placement of this tactic range from \$.20 - \$.35 per name. For a 10,000 person mailing, that's \$2,000 - \$3,500. If you require additional segmentation of the lists by specific demographic information, that typically runs an additional \$.05 per name, which bumps the cost up to \$2,500 to \$4,000.
HTML and Rich Media emails production costs can range from \$1,000 to upwards of \$5,000. Although, your web developer may be able to create a simple HTML email for very little cost.
Block out at least a week to find the lists you want to target and get your messages ready. Once you've arranged payment, complete the creative, and you've assigned your messages to each list, your broker should be able to release your message within 24 hours.
Tips for buying a list:
Pick a good list from a reputable broker.
Don't buy a list based strictly on price.
Ask questions about the list.
Don't assume that a list is opt-in just because the list manager says so.
Keep it short and to the point.
Personalize and humanize.
Sign it by a real live person.
Tell the recipients who you are.
Offer an "unsubscribe" option.
Don't forget a "call to action".
Test, test, test! Don't spend all your money on one list.

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Dear Friend,

Like most people, I've been disturbed by the rising violence in our lives. But **Littleton** really brings it home. It seems ridiculous to me that guns can be picked up at gun shows without even a background check. **And why aren't guns regulated for safety like every other consumer product?** Thousands of children could be saved from disability or death by simple child safety standards for handguns. Extremists are still obviously running the show in Washington, but I believe things can change.

I'm helping launch an internet campaign to tell our representatives that we've had enough. It's time for government to accept its proper role in regulating firearms. Will you help? **Just sign the petition at this link:** HYPERLINK "http://www.moveon.org/children/" <http://www.moveon.org/children/>

MoveOn is the group that ran the online anti-impeachment campaign last year. They got a half million people to speak out. And it made a difference. It only takes a minute to sign. And then if you **send a message to your friends and colleagues**, the ball will really get rolling. It's up to us.

Please feel free to forward this message to anyone you think would be interested. Don't send this message indiscriminately. Spam hurts the campaign.