

# Promoting your online campaign

## BEST PRACTICES AND TIPS FROM ECHODITTO

An effective online outreach and promotion plan enables you to both widen your audience and also strengthen your relationship with existing supporters or members. With the proper mix of authenticity, leadership, and sometimes humor, information about your campaign can travel “virally” through thousands of people within hours. Your goal is to capture the attention (and email address) of as many of these people as possible.

There are four primary ways to drive traffic and recruit new participants to your campaign. Each of these strategies will work best when used to support one specific action or activity on your site.

### FOUR AVENUES FOR PROMOTION

1. Earned media
2. Partnerships
3. Paid media
4. Online organizing

### (1) EARNED MEDIA

Earned media is among the top drivers of web traffic. Conversely, successful online efforts can also generate media attention, which further drives web traffic. Your communications and internet staffs should work together to discover for opportunities to bring media attention to your ongoing campaigns:

- Every press release you send should include the URL for the specific campaign. Consider creating a short URL to bring users directly to the walkout page, such as <http://www.savethewhales.com/boycott>
- Consider pitching newspapers and television shows about the campaign. For example, if Good Morning America is running a story on how to fit exercise into a busy working mom’s schedule, offer your Leave the Cars in the Driveway Day as an option. The same strategy applies to newspapers. Target papers that publish personal health or conservation columns on specific dates.
- Consider writing Letters to the Editor in response to newspaper articles that relate to the topics covered in this campaign. Any way you can get the URL in the press will help.
- Ensure that staff, board members and executives mention your campaign URL during all public appearances. It sounds simple, but how your own team talks about your campaign can make a big difference.
- Staff members should include the URL as part of their email signatures.

### (2) PARTNERSHIPS

Partnerships in the context of online campaigning usually consist of an allied organization agreeing to send an email about your effort to its own membership list. Unlike “list-swapping,” which involves selling or trading email lists (a la direct mail), partner emails ensure that

individuals hear about your campaign from a trusted source. In any partnership arrangement, only the people who opt into your list by taking a direct action or signing up will receive further emails. Partnerships can be one of the fastest, most effective ways to grow your list.

Partnerships need not rely solely on email blasts. Another effective way to interact with partners is to ask them to post a button on their website that links to your campaign page, or to mention the campaign in one of their news articles or events. In exchange for sharing your campaign with their audiences, you can promote a partner's website through your existing networks. Take the time to create a few fun promotional buttons/graphics that you can easily provide to partners. The buttons or creative should specifically reference the campaign, not just your organization.

Always take time to think of potential partners when creating an action, and reach out to them early. Consider your organization's existing allies and friends first, as they are easy to approach and more likely to help.

If you have a blog, consider reaching out to your blogroll and asking them to help promote the campaign, either by sending mail to their lists, or posting a button on their sites. If you have ties to local groups, consider tailoring your campaign to more explicitly include them.

### (3) PAID MEDIA

Paid online advertising is dramatically less expensive than traditional TV or print advertising. Most importantly, online advertising offers a concrete return on your investment: when done effectively, online advertisement can spur list growth and attract new participants. When making decisions about types of online advertising, you'll want to consider their "click-through" rate, which is the percentage of people who view the ad that actually click on the ad.

Consult search engine analysis from services like Hitwise.com or Compete.com, website tracking and demographics services, and Technorati.com, a free alternative with results based on incoming links to each site. Also, review your own web analytics to see which search engines and websites are already delivering visitors to your site and consider running a test ad campaign with them for several weeks.

**Google AdWords:** Consider purchasing text ads with Google AdWords. Tailor the ads on your active campaign and write copy to compel new users to participate. Above all, make sure the ads point to a campaign landing page where users can find what they need. You may also want to purchase some new keywords that focus directly on the campaign, like "whales" "stop whaling" "largest mammals" "endangered species" "Free Willy" "Greenpeace" etc.

**Blog ads:** Blog ads are a cost-effective way of distributing the campaign's message to an audience that is both influential and familiar with taking online action. Blogads with the highest click-through rate are focused on a specific action rather than on "increasing awareness." More people will click if they know exactly the action they are expected to take, as opposed to a general "find out more" link. By using a blogad distribution ad service such as Blogads.com, you can save time by buying ads on many blogs at once—or even entire categories of blogs.

**"Top-shelf" online ads:** The most expensive ads are those which appear on high-traffic sites like Yahoo!, NYTimes.com, or other portals. In our experience, these ad buys are simply not worth the money for most campaigns. They can be prohibitively expensive, and the click-through rates are often too low to justify the high cost.

**Co-registration:** Co-registration is an arrangement through which you pay a group or service to send your action on to their members. Care2 is among the most popular, successful, and cost-efficient service

of this kind. It can be a guaranteed way of growing your list, but it's important to carefully integrate those new activists into your campaign through a series of planned "welcome" emails that are separate from your master email calendar. Executed successfully, you could end up with thousands of new activists opting in to your campaign instead of thousands of dead email addresses from a purchased list.

### (4) ONLINE OUTREACH AND ORGANIZING

At a fundamental level, online organizing is no different than offline organizing. Successful online organizing means reaching out to potential supporters (especially influential ones) and engaging in conversation with them about why they should participate in and spread the word about your campaign. There are three types of outreach at the grassroots level:

#### Blogger Outreach

Start by identifying blogs in categories that are relevant to your effort. Examples include:

- Environmental/Sustainable Living
- Health and Well-Being
- Women's Blogs
- Technology Blogs
- Political / News Blogs

There are a number of ways to find relevant blogs, including:

- **Technorati** (<http://www.technorati.com>): a blog search engine and indexing service. A little bit of searching and browsing can yield potent results.
- **Google Blog Search** (<http://blogsearch.google.com>): similar to Technorati, Google Blog Search provides users with search results from blogs.
- **Self-selected blogs**: Are any of your supporters already blogging? Look in your web analytics referrals list and see if you have any incoming blog links already. Chances are these bloggers will be interested in hearing about your latest campaign and what they can do to help.
- **Friends and Family**: Ask your network of friends and family. You might be surprised to learn that your family and friend are avid blog readers or even bloggers themselves.
- **Blogrolls**: Many websites and blogs have a "blogroll" section which feature a network of links that direct readers to like-minded blogs. Following links in the blogroll will help you navigate specific blog topics and find other relevant blogs far more efficiently than a broader search.

Pitching bloggers requires time and research. *Bloggers develop relationships with their readers and they won't break that trust by promoting something that they don't fully understand or believe in.*

To reach a blogger, start by sending an email or picking up the phone. Many of the bloggers you've found will be interested in hearing what you have to say. Remember, though, that this is an emerging media and blogs with massive readerships are run more like mainstream publications. They too have editors and staff writers and are busy being pitched by PR professionals all day. Make sure you are honest and very specific in your pitch as to why a blogger should post about your campaign.

## BEST PRACTICES FOR PROMOTING YOUR ONLINE CAMPAIGN

It is also important to reciprocate when a blogger posts a link to your site. Link back to them from your site or blog. Most bloggers regularly review statistics for their sites and check their incoming links. Bloggers will notice when you link to them, may be inclined to visit your site, and will perhaps leave a comment or write a post linking back to your site.

Finally, bloggers take blogging and the relationship they've developed with their audience very seriously. Make sure that they understand you are reaching out to them individually and are not copying them on an email to 10 other bloggers. Write personal notes rather than rehashing talking points. Address the blogger by his/her first name, be friendly and brief, and don't forget to include a link!

### **Grassroots Organizations**

There are numerous organizations and local groups self-organizing within broader movements that likely share your priorities. By identifying these groups and reaching out to them early on via the web, you will lay the groundwork needed to build support as the campaign ramps up.

### **Online Communities/Social Networking Sites**

Think about all of the other places online where conversations about your issues take place, and then participate in those conversations. Search MySpace, Facebook, Flickr and YouTube and see if there are already communities of people buzzing about your issues and creating their own content.

If you create your own groups on these social networks, be sure you keep these groups active and monitored, and update their content at least several times each week. Search Google and Yahoo! Groups to find email discussion lists and use BoardTracker.com to search online forums and discussion boards.

#### **OH, ONE OTHER THING: WE CAN HELP!**

EchoDitto specializes in all of the activities described above. Give us a buzz to brainstorm your next online campaign, or visit us in Washington, New York, or Boston!

+1.202.285.9455

#### **MORE, MORE, MORE**

For additional tips and best practices, check out our insights page:

[www.echoditto.com/insights](http://www.echoditto.com/insights)

And our blog: [www.echoditto.com/blog](http://www.echoditto.com/blog)