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When traditional advocacy goes high-tech

Teresa Carroll

When Traditional Advocacy Goes High-Tech

By

Teresa Carroll

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B. Thomas Golisano College
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Abstract

This thesis defines the essentials of activism and gives examples of online technology that can assist grassroots organizations in promoting positive change within their communities. I discuss existing online technologies that make it possible for grassroots organizations to enhance the traditional (non-Internet-based) approaches to activism. Online activism is a growing trend among non-profit organizations. Several online awards are given to organizations that have noticeably pursued online pursuit of electronic advocacy. From making telephone calls to organizing demonstrations, grassroots groups can begin saving money, time, and human resources.

The Internet frees people from physical barriers and borders. I have investigated current online technologies that can be used to supplement traditional activism services. I give one example per approach that can be used online. The examples include self-education, promoting your organization's message, successful online actions, information distribution, corporate utilization, and the future of online activism.

Examples of activism in this report focus on non-violent advocacy or civil disobedience. I have researched online activism through the use of periodicals, books, World Wide Web Internet searches, and interviews with advocacy specialists.

This report offers evidence that the Internet has changed, and will continue to change, the paradigm of political and social activism. By providing increased access using new, fast, and efficient technology, more people are able to have a greater say in shaping their worlds.

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Background

Activism effects change in laws, public policy and institutions that citizens find objectionable. Today, taking responsibility for improving the world in which we live has taken a new form. Today's activists are utilizing the efficiency of online communication to make a political impact. Paradigms can be changed using the Internet. Online technologies can assist people in becoming part of political and social change by using cyber tools. "But the Internet has become more than a mere organizing tool; it has changed protests in a more fundamental way, by allowing mobilization to emerge from free-wheeling amorphous groups, rather than top down hierarchical ones" (Lee 2003).

Although many of the positive changes that have occurred in our society are due to activists using the Internet, it is not a magic wand. Many long hours organizing, campaigning, and developing strategy is still necessary to achieve change.

> [. . .] it is a truism that the Internet, for all its potential, will not by itself make people smarter or the world a better place. Similarly, an online computer network introduced into an existing real-world community will not serve as a panacea for that community's ills. At best, the online community computer network is a tool, an arena for on-going community discussion, debate and problem solving, and, as with most tools, it will only be valuable if the tool is used wisely and safely (Hunka 2002).

Activism has found a niche online. The Internet has proven itself to be a new vehicle in assisting with social change.

> While online community networks are most often independent non-profit organizations, it's important to see where the impetus for these organizations

> originates. [. .] While other networks have been organized on an ad-hoc basis, those networks associated with an institution with long-standing presence in the community have been most successful and able to bear the risks of innovative, technically complex social ventures. This is not to say that networks without the support of large pre-existing institutions have been unsuccessful. Many grass-roots organizations have established vibrant online communities without the original support of local institutions. However, these grass-roots organizations have had to contend with financial and organizational pressures that would have been less problematic otherwise. Institutions with significant history and funding sources provide an unparalleled support source for community networks (Hunka 2002).

Online activism can be used to inform, update, and coordinate before, during, and after traditional activism techniques such as protests, demonstrations, neighborhood forums, lectures and social gatherings. Locating resources and people who have found similar solutions to common problems, organizing others, and rallying to protest against injustices are now easily possible because messages about problems and victories can be sent and received instantly and cheaply.

As technology evolves, so does ease of use. Improved interfaces, greater bandwidth, and sophisticated computers are becoming commonplace in private homes. Technology adds many conveniences to help organize the essentials of activism.

> This means that community networks can offer a variety of services at start-up via the graphical interface. The basic requirements for a community network that serves as an information and communications medium remain the same as

they have in the past, but only recently has Web technology met these requirements. These include:

- Provision of local (not necessarily Internet) e-mail accounts for one to-one communications;
- Provision of bulletin-board services (frequently called "forums") for many-to-many communications;
- Provision of basic community information for one-to-many communications (Hunka 2002).

Many traditional types of grassroots advocacy methods impacting social change have moved online. One prominent example is free hosting of public online petitions for responsible public advocacy petitions:

> Our free online petition system automatically formats your petition for the Web, hosts the petition here on fast, secure Web servers, and collects, displays, and maintains the all-important petition signatures. [. .] Each petition here is self-contained and functionally complete. [. . .] PetitionOnline is like an automatic signature-collecting clipboard, that can be everywhere at once, never gets rained on, never runs out of signature forms, collects every signature instantly, and always has an accurate up-to-the minute count of your progress (PetitionOnline.com 2003).

Online activism takes on many forms. Traditional advocacy has been enhanced by online technologies that expedite much of the structure of the previously mundane tasks needed to organize grassroots programs.

Introduction

There are numerous ways to advocate. Each act to improve a situation builds on previous attempts to reform unfair treatment experienced by someone. Activism is defined as "a doctrine or practice that emphasizes direct vigorous action especially in support of or opposition to one side of a controversial issue" (Merriam-Webster Online 2002). "You don't need to be nationally recognized in order to help improve your world. The people who lick envelopes once a month, the people who attend a demonstration, the people who send a letter to the president, the people who sign a petition—these are the people crucial to a successful movement" (Gino 2002).

Self-advocacy is where individuals present their own cases and take an active role in decisions relating to their lives. One person can truly make a difference. Often one person's discontent with the system is enough to get the ball rolling. Exposing unjust situations they have experienced can alert others who are having similar difficulties, and a "snowball effect" can occur. Distributing information can be as simple as writing an editorial to the local newspaper or as complex as organizing a direct action. "As a member of your community [. . .] your attendance at events shows that you care and that you believe in the cause. It is like an election in which your vote is counted by your involvement. The events which get the most votes are the ones which get the most attention" (Gino 2002).

With citizen/agency advocacy, volunteers or paid advocates help to present the views of a group of people. This is often known as peer advocacy—advocacy by people of the same age or in the same circumstances. This style of advocacy can often be found in centers for independent living (CILs). These centers are state and federally funded with a mission to advocate for people with disabilities. Many times CILs have a board of directors or staff comprised of people with

disabilities, with the focus on living independently in the community. CILs act as advocates for someone in a short-term crisis situation or with long-term system advocacy.

When a group of people joins together to campaign it is called systems advocacy. "Protest has long been a way that the common people can assert power over the ruling class. The specific tactics have differed and changed based on the goals of the protesters, but the idea of, 'Fight the powers that be,' has pervaded throughout time" (Gino 2002). Systems advocacy organizations campaign on issues that affect more than one person. These organizations can draw attention to issues with broad appeal such as AIDS awareness, hate crimes, censorship, abortion, gun control, disability rights, and women's issues.

Examples of activism in this report focus on non-violent advocacy or civil disobedience. Some activist groups organize direct nonviolent actions. Remaining calm when advocating social change can be a powerful instrument. "Martin Luther King, Jr. considered nonviolence as the only social change tool that is both socially effective and morally acceptable, writing in the 1958 that it was one of the most potent weapons available to oppressed people in their quest for social justice" (Maceachern 70). When a large group of people collectively objects to a public policy, they can bring attention to an unjust situation. Often this is the only way to get the attention of the "powers that be." By knowingly breaking a law, civil disobedience can evoke change within the community. Many activists adopt nonviolence as a philosophy by which to live. There is a rich history of activists who opposed unjust and morally degrading laws. Examples include Henry David Thoreau, Susan B. Anthony, Mohandas Gandhi, and Rosa Parks.

The topics of the 15 cyber-advocates I interviewed include disability civil rights, women's rights, economic justice, lesbian rights, opposition to war, freedom for political prisoners, stopping sweat shop labor, environmental, corporate accountability, affordable

housing, and community networking. Many of the activists are interested in multiple topics of online activism. The average age of these individuals is 40.6. The median age is 41. The oldest person is 68, and the youngest is 23. The participants included individuals located in the United States and the Netherlands. The average number of years that the participants have used the Internet to resolve issues is 5.73. The median years for use of the Internet for online advocacy are 7. The participants were found by contacting online news groups, advocacy oriented Web sites, and by word of mouth. Participants contacted me via e-mail and were asked to answer a list of questions. They had the choice of answering questions in electronic form or in recorded telephone conversations. Twelve answered the questions electronically. Three participants had the questions read to them over the telephone. The conversations were electronically recorded on a Macintosh G4 and submitted electronically for transcription. I used a PowerBook G4 with its internal 56K modem, and a piece of software called Audiocorder vs 3.5.062, which allowed me to record conversations directly from the modem into the computer. It saved the audio in AIFF format, which later was converted to MP3 format for transcription.

Online technologies can assist people in becoming a part of political and social change by using cybertools. Paradigms can be changed using the Internet. The implications are significant. Activism has found a niche online. The Internet has proven to be a new crucial medium.

New York State Senator Rick Dollinger has had practical experience in using online technologies. As a politician he suggests using the Internet as a tool. "The best use of technology is to 'spread the word.' The Internet provides a way for a group to gather 'issue specific' information and then use the conventional methods—mail, phones, personal contact, to approach the political world. [. . .] [A] disability Web site, for example, is the perfect example of how to get on the radar screen of elected officials" (Dollinger 2001).

Grassroots organizations are groups of people, often denied power within a given society, who work at a local level rather than at the center of major political activity to change policies within their community, country, or globally. Campaigns can be based on word of mouth, but issues can circulate more quickly on the Net. Information is passed along from friends or distributed though listservs. Information spreads faster than it would if traditional news wire agencies picked it up from press releases. According to Bouchier:

> The vast majority [of people] are fully involved with their private lives and thoroughly convinced that the costs of independent political action will exceed the benefits ("you can't beat the system"). If a significant number of citizens are moved to act in some cause, this is prima facie evidence that the anxiety, outrage, fear, or anger aroused by that cause are unusually intense. Every such episode represents a kind of desperation, a last ditch struggle against some overwhelming social force. Radical movements, in short, are a litmus test for what social issues really matter to people (Bouchier 5).

Often these groups provide the groundwork to establish a change within society. This can encourage individuals or groups to generate, for the first time, issue-oriented campaigns. This potential for spontaneous recruiting and mobilization can change and improve the efficacy of established advocacy networks. When policies are about to be implemented often there is no time to create a Web site containing the facts of the issue. Advocacy groups learn of topics at the last minute. Speed is vital in order to respond to pending legislative proposals. Grassroots organizations have begun using the power of the Net to enhance the participation of their members and effectiveness of their resources.

The Evolution of Online Advocacy

Online activism has two emerging components. Some online community networks are an extension of pre-existing groups that decided to bring their message into the format of the graphical user interface found on the World Wide Web. Groups that were well established before joining Internet communities usually are able to survive longer because they have an external funding source. They are able to rely on their reputation to convince funders to donate time and resources and recruit new members. Other groups develop directly on the Internet. The mission of these groups is most likely on a smaller scale with a specific vision. The scope of these groups is formed to bring attention to a specific or immediate problem. The growth of these types of organizations also relies on word of mouth and traditional media venues.

> The Internet used to be interesting, just because it was the Internet. If you want to get some publicity for your local pub, café, or psychiatric practice, you decide to announce it had "gone online" and you'd be guaranteed some local radio coverage and maybe even a brief mention in the national press. Ask the landlord of the Six Bell Pub in Cambridge [England], who put a PC in the bar in 1996 and never looked back. Now it's changed: The Net seems to be everywhere, and just connecting is no longer newsworthy. Even in the political arena, being "wired" has stopped being the story. Now every MP, political party, and government department has a Web site (Thompson 1999).

Both of these types of networking are creative solutions to promoting positive change within our society. Online activists and the organizations they represent have been evolving with the pace of online technologies where funding permits.

Twenty years ago information was shared over bulletin board systems with the agonizing rate of 2600 baud. The financially strong and technology savvy activists were able continue to pursue their causes and with stand the evolving distribution of information. Some online communities could not compete with the technological advances that other service providers supplied and as a result many dial-in services went out of business. With the introduction of the World Wide Web graphical interface, and the speed at which information can be shared, online activism became more user-friendly and the most economically fit survived.

> These networks, which have attempted to provide wider public access to new technologies while serving as an information and communication resource to meet the varying social and political needs of geographical communities, represent one of the most significant developments in democracy and governance since the introduction of television and radio. [. . .] While online community networks are most often independent non-profit organizations, it's important to see where the impetus for these organizations originates. [. . .] While other networks have been organized on an ad-hoc basis, those networks associated with an institution with a long-standing presence in the community have been most successful and able to bear the risks of innovative, technically complex social ventures. This is not to say that networks without the support of large pre-existing institutions have been unsuccessful. Many grassroots organizations have established vibrant online communities without the original support of local institutions (Hunka 2002).

Although the World Wide Web grew out of previous text-based protocols, acceptance for the majority of current users of the Internet has grown out of the ability of the end user to use the

simplistic interface of most Web browsers. Equipment that is only capable of displaying text characters is of no use to organizations whose members are unfamiliar with antiquated platforms and operating systems.

> Perhaps the most significant and problematic development in community networking technology is the popularity of the Web, and it appears that any community network that attempts to establish a presence will require a graphical user interface. [. . .] In addition, the Web in its early years was not well integrated with other Internet technologies and so served more as an informational medium instead of a collaborative medium for synchronous and asynchronous communication. Given the ubiquity of the Web as an Internet protocol, new and recent users of the Internet (which will include all those individuals community networks hope to serve) will not want to devote the time to the steep learning curve that some command-line interfaces demand (Hunka 2002).

The evolution of computers will assist grassroots organizations. They will be able to offer a variety of services with the assumption that the communities they are recruiting and servicing will have computers capable of processing the online technologies and software provided by the organization, because graphical user interfaces have absorbed many of the services that were once solely text-based:

> For example, in text-based Unix systems, e-mail was accessed via the Pine or Elm programs and Usenet newsgroup required the use the tin or nn newsreaders. Similarly, users connecting to the Net via SLIP/PPP protocol required differing programs such as Eudora for e-mail, Agent for Usenet, and

> Mosaic for the Web. Because Web technology has reached the point at which most existing Internet protocols, such as electronic mail, file transfer protocol and Usenet newsgroups have been absorbed into its graphical interface, a Web or Java-based interface can now provide services previously requiring different application software. This means that community networks can offer a variety of services at start-up via the graphical interface. The basic requirements for a community network that serves as an information and communications medium remain the same as they have in the past, but only recently has Web technology met these requirements. These include: The provision of local (not necessarily Internet) e-mail accounts for one-to-one communications; the provision of a bulletin-board service (frequently called a "forum") for many to-many communications; [these are] provisions of basic community information for one-to-many communications (Hunka 2002).

The evolution of online advocacy is a product of improved hardware and the innovation of the advocates using the Internet. As people have become more comfortable negotiating the World Wide Web they have been integrating online advantages to improve the world around them. They like the speed and volume of information exchange, the reduction of many costs, the ease of research, the increase of contact with other advocates. Some advocates interact with others using online technologies while others see their roles as more informational. There is a mix of multimedia preferences among the advocates whom I interviewed, depending on proficiency with technology and budget constraints. Each advocate develops preferences depending on ability, the technology available, co-workers' proficiency, and that of the individuals to whom they provide services.

Technology has increased the options for activists to organize more efficiently. There are new areas where previous methods could not adequately meet the need for activists who were eager to resolve issues. According to Kevin Jardin, the chief cyber-organizer for Greenpeace, it was necessary to establish a New Media Department, which expanded upon the methods of communication with outside media sources and within the Greenpeace organization. "It was separated from the Communications Department, which deals with traditional media outlets like newspapers and radio stations. New media, which involves the Web, e-mail, mobile phones, is inherently interactive, so that opens up a range of possibilities that traditional media just doesn't have" (Jardin 2002). The area of new media is another example of how the expansion of the Internet has been utilized to support the increasing demands of online activism. Increasing the types of interdependent technology allows more flexibility for individuals wanting to change status quo. There is growing appeal for the idea of becoming less tethered to standard types of additional technology and communication systems.

The online agency Action Without Borders provides:

> [. . .] a one stop shop where people who wanted to get involved in whatever mission they were working on would be able to go to one place and have a lot of information at their fingertips. It was around that same time that the Internet was getting big and she (the founder) saw a clear way that the Internet could be of service in this regard, and I think our numbers say pretty much everything. [. . .] We have over 30,000 organizations on the site and 20,000 people visiting the site every day and another 80,000 who are subscribed to receive daily information from us about the causes that they care about (Stark 2002).

Several of the people I interviewed mentioned saving time while using the Internet as an advocacy tool. Penny Huff, a disability activist, is able to "get much more information faster than through non-online resources." She adds, " [. . .] and being just ever so slightly curious with searches generates many answers" (Huff 2002).

Not having to replicate information is another reason to use the Internet. For interviewee Joanne Tosti-Vasey, a women's rights activist, there are four things she sees as benefits while using the Internet. First there is a "reduced cost for long-distance, mail, etc." Second, there is a "quicker turnaround time." Next, "material is already typed—I don't have to retype it in order to use [it]." Last, she can "contact more people more quickly" (Tosti-Vasey 2002).

In addition to saving money and time there is an additional advantage to using the Internet: the many forms of convenience of sharing information. Interviewee Tim Wheat, a disability rights advocate, describes a benefit. "In organizing local direct action, providing information on the Internet gave us added confidence. When reporters asked for more information, we could respond that it already exists on the Web, rather than the nebulous 'I will get that information to you'" (Wheat 2002).

Habitat for Humanity representative Caroline Self discussed the fact that their agency's page could contain information on eliminating problems with housing and preventing poverty because a Web page on the Internet is able to contain voluminous information. "We have probably over 1,000 pages on our Web site" (Self 2002). Furthermore, the ability to share information about an organization from its Web site has become an automatic response to facilitate the distribution of information. One of the people I interviewed referred me to their Web page to get answers regarding my questions. It is assumed today that others will have

computer access and skills to retrieve this information. Being comfortable with this technology shows that many people have acquired the skills necessary to navigate the Web.

Using the Internet has become a part of life for many people on a daily basis. It has evolved as an accepted way to share information. Numerous conveniences have been cited as a rationale for using the Internet. Time and money seem to top the list. A profound benefit is not having to establish offices in remote areas, according to the new media coordinator for Greenpeace International, Kevin Jardin. He stated in his interview:

> Greenpeace has offices or official offices or some kind of campaign presence in about 40 countries, whereas we have cyber-activists from 213 countries and territories. So it's a way of significantly increasing our global reach in terms of our campaigns. [. . .] Every country on earth has lots of people who have heard about Greenpeace, so the potential for mobilizing people is great [but] we just haven't had the staff to do that. But through the Internet we can do it in a way which is much simpler than actually having to open up an office and put people on the ground (Jardin 2002).

Reduced phone calls, travel, and direct mail can contribute to the reduction of expenditures. Likewise, the "cut and paste feature" and forwarding messages can be time savers. There are an increased number of opinions being exchanged. Research time can also be reduced when using the Internet. In an effort to reduce duplication of labor it is not unusual for groups to merge to form a stronger coalition. This can be a great way to save on limited resources.

One drawback to the Internet is that it cannot effectively replicate human interaction on a one-to-one basis. Direct telephoning can help. Although you can facilitate communication, knowledge, technology, and information, caution must be used not to pass along inaccurate,

outdated or partial data. Overwhelming activists with numerous requests for action can have a negative effect. People begin to delete e-mail message requests. This can reduce the effectiveness of organizing online. People can begin to assume that the issue is being taken care of by others and their efforts are not needed. Using traditional methods such as phone trees can still be effective for keeping the issue alive.

Self-Education, Activism, and the Internet

If it is true that "knowledge is power," then the Internet is the premier self-cultivation arena for activists. Knowledge is information that can be used constructively. Any subject can be located, researched, followed, discussed, and debated using the Internet. Online technology tools can be very helpful in tracking the progression of an agenda. Educating oneself about an issue is a necessary chore for any serious advocate. The phrase "armchair activists" can now be taken literally. There is even a growing list of Web sites that assist anyone interested in activism. A couple of examples:

- WebActive, "where surfin' ain't enough" (http://www.webactive.com)
- SpeakOut (http://www.speakout.com)
- Neighborhoods Online (http://www.neighborhoodsonline.net/
- ServiceLeader, volunteer activism via the Internet (http://www.serviceleader.org)
- Online Activism Resources (http://www.eff.org/EFF/activists.html)

Anyone with an Internet connection can begin researching information from his or her own home. People who are hesitant to take an active role in social movements can make an impact more easily and less visibly.

> For all activists, the first task is to stay informed [. . .] and share your discoveries with the world. [. . .] Besides researching, [. . .] you'll be learning the skills it takes to navigate the [. . .] system. Much of this knowledge is best acquired by first hand participation but the next best thing is to ask someone who's been there. If this is your first attempt to get politically involved, reach out to other activists who can show you the ropes. If you're lucky, you may even find yourself a mentor. And before long, you'll have your own

> information worth sharing. [. . .] Your research will be much more useful if you put a little thought into organizing it (Schwartz et al. 1999).

Another way to find information is to find online resources that provide documentation about the opponents of the issue you are supporting. The advantage to having numerous e-mail accounts is that you can join any mailing list to learn agendas or anonymously request a response to a question.

The Internet has become part of American culture. Americans are using the Internet to form opinions and participate in online campaigning. "Researchers have found that independent of social and economic status, Internet users are more likely to vote, are better informed, feel more empowered, and have more faith in the democratic process than non-Internet users" (Mind Share 2002). The Internet is transforming the way individuals and organizations get involved politically locally, nationally, and internationally. Online research can be found at numerous areas of the Web—for example, library data banks, publications, pending or past legislative and policy decisions, speeches, debates, the congressional record, notification of future hearings, texts of legislation. However, it is important to know that the online resource you are collecting material from is credible. It is vital to check the credibility of the information before going public. An example of a reliable Web site on legislation by elected officials can be found at shtpp://thomas.loc.gov.

Examples of Online Technologies

Telephone and Fax Resources

Many traditional types of grassroots methods used to impact social change are currently online. Let's look at traditional techniques and see how online technologies can improve each step in the advocacy process.

Electronic communication is not a cure-all. Traditional faxes and phone trees are still needed. However, free online technologies can provide needed tools. Making telephone calls over the Internet with online technology can reduce the cost of advocacy. Long-distance calls to coordinate projects nationwide can be done using software like Dialpad (Dialpad Communications, Inc., http://www.dailpad.com/company/).). According to Dialpad's Web page:

> The call is initiated from a Dialpad client connecting to a Dialpad server. The server sets up a call between a Dialpad client and Internet Telephone Services and Products (ITSP) voiceover Internet Protocol (VoIP) gateway. Voice packets stream directly from Dialpad client to ITSP's VoIP gateway. Calls are routed through a Public Switched Telephone Network (PSTN) and terminated at a phone (Dialpad 2002).

But there are several drawbacks. The person placing the phone call must have a computer and bandwidth capable of placing the phone call. Depending on the Internet service provider or time of day, bottlenecks can delay your message. Also, not being able to move away from the computer during the conversation could become problematic.

Faxing information through the Internet is also a possibility. A free faxing service is available online. The fax can be delivered to an e-mail account, which is handy if the fax is to be sent on to additional recipients. On the receiving end it is more private than a traditional fax

machine. Individuals can choose whether or not to print the document. Faxing the letter on a computer is just a few clicks away. There are, however, several drawbacks. The phone number assigned by the provider may not be within local area codes. On a national issue it is typically not a problem for someone out of the local area to call, but individuals locally often question the long-distance charges.

eFax.com (j2 Global Communications, Inc., http://www.efax.com/) provides the ability to receive free faxes in the form of attachments or e-mail. For a monthly fee eFax.com offers two way Internet faxing and a local or toll-free number. Other services included with the charge are fax-to-e-mail, voicemail, and voice-to-e-mail capabilities (EFax 2002).

E-mail

E-mail usually refers to:

> [. . .] electronic text mail, as opposed to electronic voice mail, or electronic image mail. Sometimes electronic mail is written as "e-mail." These days, electronic mail is everything from simple messages flowing through a local area network or from one cubicle to another, to messages flowing across the global X.400 or SMTP network. Such messages may be simple text messages containing only ASCII or they may be complex messages containing embedded voice messages, spreadsheets and images (Newton 263).

Online activists are able to organize quicker when causes are targeted. E-mail directed from groups representing issues allows a quicker response time from members. Not having to rely on traditional media or mailings from current activists can help recruit new people. Printing and bulk mailings do not offer ample time to address time-sensitive issues. Office space can be

reduced to cyberspace. When used effectively, the Internet can lower overhead costs, including research, long distant phone costs, and printing expenses.

> The question isn't about values—whether or not the issue intensively merits your attention or concern. Ultimately it is about resources. You can't tackle every issue, and you probably can't win every campaign you wage. Given the fact the most activist groups are under-funded, under-staffed, and over-committed, organizations may need to pick their fights carefully. Waging one campaign successfully is a better social change strategy then struggling through several worthwhile—but losing ones (Maceachern 16).

The decision to choose an issue to tackle can be made easier if some of the manpower is delegated by the variety of services found on the Internet. E-mail, when used strategically, can be a very effective tool.

Most Internet providers supply an e-mail account with a monthly connection fee. For individuals who want to be active but cannot afford the monthly fee, there are various free e-mail addresses available that are sustained by advertising. Popular sponsors of free e-mail accounts include Yahoo.com and Hotmail.com. Service providers have different means of accessing the free e-mail. Some require an Internet service provider and others prefer members to log in directly to a proprietary computer network. The advantages of using a company with a national network is that members can log in from anywhere in the world.

Individuals can write letters to a business or individual that is the focus of an action via the Internet or via email. The big assumption is that the target will read the e-mail. A way to increase the probability that the e-mail is not ignored is to follow up by mailing a traditional

letter or making a phone call. Neglecting to read e-mail is a problem that affects the people you are organizing as well as the representatives of a targeted dispute.

According to Julie Reiskin, an online activist I interviewed:

> Often we get several e-mails a day from national groups asking for some action that is urgent—call or write today or else. After so many of these people [contact us], we begin to shut down. I find it most valuable when used judicially. I do one e-mail a week with sections—local, state, national—so people can choose what they want to respond to. [But] we are most effective when our leaders all get on the horn and call people—personal contact still wins all the time (Reiskin 2002).

Summarizing the information into weekly action alerts is an effective way to keep the interests of busy cyber activists. Reminding people by telephone increases the likelihood that they will follow though on the necessary actions.

> We should not forget that the Internet and the Web came from the academic world, and not all uses are commercial. For public bodies, political parties, campaigning bodies, and elected representatives, the Web can provide a new way of working, one that is both more inclusive and more fluid than traditional forms of organization or activism. Some models being developed, like the moderated mailing lists with the Web-based archive, have proven to be ideal for debating the finer points of policy. Others, like chat rooms, are great for holding committee meetings. And others, like well-designed encrypted mailing lists, are perfect tools for organizing direct action (Thompson 1999).

Even if they are utilizing the Internet effectively, however, there can be problems for overwhelmed activists and others. E-mail messages sent to businesses or representatives can be left unread or even ignored. If several days have gone by without a response, New York State Senator Rick Dollinger suggests that there might be drawbacks to relying on e-mail for corresponding with constituents:

> E-mail is not the most comfortable way to communicate with the voters because, at least in my district (which includes large parts of the City of Rochester), many people do not have computers and hence, lack access to the Internet. In addition, many senior citizens lack technical knowledge of the Internet. It is a good tool for those under 40 or 50 but not such a good tool for those over that age. Prior to the Internet, I used the standard methods: mailings (paid for by government), personal contact, and other means to contact voters (Dollinger 2001).

Other issues that might deter politicians from responding to e-mail is the existence of antiquated systems. One example of this is used in the capital of New York State, Albany:

> I am not sure how many messages I receive each week but, because of retrieval difficulties, I am not sure how they are answered. [. .] The process for retrieving e-mail in the Senate is arcane. I am not even sure that I fully understand the process but, when last briefed on the question, it took at least nine to ten steps to get the messages downloaded and was not worth the trouble. [. . .] My alternative system is simple: I give people my e-mail address in my law office or home for communication (Dollinger 2001).

Senator Dollinger has an alternate e-mail address so he can keep in contact with people in his district. Anyone trying to contact their representatives should be aware that if they are sending an e-mail message, it might not be received. It is a good safety net to have an additional e-mail address. Following up with a phone call is the best way to ensure that the message got through.

George Everitt of the Illinois State Rifle Association (ISRA) is convinced that using electronic communications is effective:

> "We use the proven concept of communication between our many units statewide that was used by Samuel Adams in Massachusetts before the American war for independence. [. . .] Legislative alerts are sent to clubs and individuals who make copies and post them at gun shops, fraternal group halls, and other suitable places. [. . .] We can alert members almost immediately and at low cost [. . .] often only days are available. Printing and mailing would provide information too late. In April 1994, we learned onerous bills were being heard on April 7th. We had to get a crowd to the state capital. Two hundred ISRA members were waiting when the hearing room opened. The same thing happened on April 14th, and again on April 21st. The presence of those members was not lost on our legislators. [. . .]" However don't get the idea that electronic communications is a panacea. ISRA also sends faxes and phones a "tree" to key activists who don't have computers. They first tried their own BBS, but in-state toll charges worked against it. The Association discontinued their BBS and now does the program on their Web site (Clede 1998).

With the convenience that e-mail brings to organizing online it is important to remember that electronic messages are not a secure medium of communication. The ability to encrypt confidential e-mail messages could provide added security. As online activism becomes more mainstream, any intervening server could scan for message content. Benjamin Varadi, a sweatshop labor protester, boldly stated in the e-mail questionnaire, "there is some evidence that we have used e-mail encryption in the past, but my assumption is that the learning curve and questionable security of PGP [Pretty Good Privacy] simply weren't worth the effort. There may be some other reason, but basically, we have nothing to hide. If anything, our work is about exposing the secrets of others" (Varadi 2002). Currently only one of the agencies that I interviewed, Greenpeace, actively uses encryption with e-mail messages that are sent internally. According to Kevin Jardin, "we occasionally use PGP encryption internally in Greenpeace but we've never used it for a public campaign. I mean organizing people online, no. Not yet—it doesn't mean that we wouldn't in the future" (Jardin 2002). However, encryption can be used to ensure safe fundraising techniques. For example, Habitat For Humanity uses " [. .] encryption on our donation page" (Self 2002). Most of the people interviewed did not feel it necessary to include encryption as an e-mail security measure.

As mentioned above, PGP, is free software that can help with the potential invasion of privacy. Pretty Good Privacy is legally and freely distributed internationally. The International PGP home page, http://www.pgpi.org/, supplies support and products for encryption.

Discussion Groups/Listservs

During the interviews I used the phrases *discussion groups*, *listservs*, and *newsgroups* to mean information that is disseminated via e-mail on a daily basis. Subscribers to this form of

information are able to respond with e-mail to other posts so that other subscribers are able to read the information and respond.

Mailing lists/discussion groups can be a valuable source of information. Typically people who subscribe to these services have interest or experience in the topic. It can be an inexpensive way to share information, research issues, and network with professionals. One chapter of the National Organization for Women (NOW) just began depending on this type of online technology to increase interaction between its members, provide greater flexibility for employees, and save money. According to women's rights activist Joanne Tosti-Vasey:

> Just recently, I started using [a] restricted Yahoo Group listserv. For the local NOW chapter, this has meant that all the officers can send out messages—not just me. It reduces the bottleneck that occurred before when I was the lone holder of the membership e-mail list. At the state, regional, and national organizational levels, this has provided us a way to communicate between each other without having to constantly change who is receiving the e-mails. Also, phone bills have been drastically reduced (2002).

In addition, Greepeace International activist Kevin Jardin speaks of added conveniences for those who participate :

> Users can decide how the information will be delivered to them, such as individual e-mail messages or a daily digest of each listing. There is also the added convenience of messages being archived and a searchable online database. In addition, mailing lists and listservs can handle large numbers of members and significant volumes of information. Greenpeace International has experienced an increase of members posting in the past three years. We

have on the Web a discussion center called act.greenpeace.org that gets about 50 or 60 postings a day. Since we started it in November 2000 we've had about 18,000 postings (Jardin 2002).

There are numerous types of online technologies that can help people communicate and learn about each other. Newton's Telecom Dictionary best describes two commonly used types communication tools:

> **Mailing Lists:** a group of people to whom users can refer by a common name, for example a mailing list called "marketing." When users address a message to a mailing list all members of the mailing list receive the same message. It is based on e-mail technology (Newton 452).
>
> **Newsgroups:** a place on the Internet where people can have conversations about a well-defined topic. Physically it is composed of the computer files that contain the conversation elements to the discussion currently in progress on a specific topic. It is based on the NNTP [Network News Transport Protocol] protocol (Newton 509).

Bulletin Boards

As the Internet has become more widely used by the general public, the use of the dial-up electronic bulletin boards (BBS) has often decreased. An electronic bulletin board is an "electronic messaging system running on a micro computer. [Users can] call up, leave, and read messages. Currently, bulletin boards are simply Web sites running discussion group software mimicking the functionality of BBS of the dial-up era before the Internet became popularized. The system resembles a physical bulletin board in practice" (Newton 114).

It appears that traditional electronic bulletin boards might, for all practical advocacy purposes, be extinct. Many of the functions, such as real time messaging and chat rooms, can be replicated through the Internet without incurring dial-up costs. Greenpeace International previously used BBS:

> [. . .] bulletin board systems before the Internet, but now it's not very practical because now we have cyber-activists, as I said, from more than 200 countries, so having one telephone number doesn't make any sense. We use the Internet for that, but we do have a discussion center, which has many of the same features that a bulletin board system would have had when that technology was used, which was about a decade ago (Jardin 2002).

Some online advocates whom I interviewed, who, it seems, arrived later on the electronic activism scene, never used BBS. Internet capabilities have absorbed BBS tasks more efficiently and less expensively.

Chat Rooms

Online activists can find flexibility with technology while using the World Wide Web. Subgroups within organizations can easily adapt to software that is compatible with their expertise and computers. Chat room software is one such technology. "Real-time chat services are offered by many Internet information service providers such as AOL. Supporting two or more participants they act much like a teleconference although on a text basis. Private rooms are those that can be entered by invitation. Public rooms allow anyone to participate" (Newton 152). This is convenient and cost saving because not everyone in the group needs to learn the equipment or have hardware that is up to date to interact. The ability to easily switch software depending on location, computer upgrades, or financial constraints is appealing to online

advocacy specialists. If chat rooms are being used it is important that everyone in them who is expected to participate has access to the technology that support such software systems.

Greenpeace International is able to use online technology to maximize their organization's mission. They have restructured their communication office to encompass the versatile conveniences offered by online technologies. According to Kevin Jardin, the New Media Specialist for Greenpeace:

> We don't use chat rooms too much at the international level. Some of our national offices do use them, but the reason that we don't internationally is that our cyber-activists are spread across 24 different times zones, so we prefer to use discussion software that allows people to post messages when they want to and then people can have a conversation that's more extended than you would get in a real time chat situation. Having said that, some of our cyber-activists have asked for chats so we could maybe get our western European cyber-activists talking to each other or our North American cyber-activists talking to each other. We are looking into that kind of technology, but we're not using it right now (Jardin 2002).

Instant Messaging

Instant Messaging, commonly referred to as "IM," is a direct person-to-person electronic messaging system. Different from e-mail, mailing lists, or newsgroups, it is real-time. It differs from chat rooms as it is meant for one-on-one communication, not requiring a central server. According to women's rights activist Joanne Tosti Vasey: "I use Instant Messenger periodically to do short messaging between myself and other officers in the organization in order to reduce

phone costs. The one problem here is that not everyone uses Netscape IM and/or I don't have their screen name to add to my address book" (Tosti Vasey 2002).

Instant messaging is flexible, cost efficient, and in some cases more convenient than traditional communication with individuals who are hearing impaired. Julie Reiskin, a disability rights advocate, states that she" [. . .] use[s] IM with hearing impaired colleagues (I hate relay)" (Reiskin 2002).

Similar to Instant Messaging is the use of cell phones text messaging to send short, concise messages at times when it is necessary to contact others quickly and efficiently.

> Technology also spreads word of rallies to countries where free expression is limited. In Singapore, where the government does not allow demonstrations at the American Embassy, cell phone text messages went out, exhorting recipients to gather at the embassy anyway. The text messages, which work like mass e-mail messaging to mobile devices, attracted at least a half dozen placard-carrying demonstrators at the gates at the appointed time (Lee 2003).

Web Pages

Many activists rely on Web pages for information. A Web page can serve as a simple electronic business card or as a complex brochure with literally thousands of pages. It's a terrific way to conduct research. It's also a great way to introduce others to the mission of your agency. Web pages give activists the ability to refer individuals, groups, or the media to a central location where they can review information. Phone numbers, addresses, and maps are available online. A Web site can supply background information, contact information, calendars of events, additional resources, etc. In more common usage it refers to individual sets of Web pages that

can be visited with Web browsers. The front page of the Web site is called the home page (Newton 822).

Disability activist Tim Wheat explains the importance of logically designed and organized web pages, and how they can be used effectively by activists:

> The Web page and digital media provide me with the voice that I use to involve advocates and publicize our issues. On one hand I use the Web to encourage the actions that inform advocates and reward members for their participation. On the other hand I use the Web to attack community targets where we feel change should take place. Furthermore, I use the Internet's interactive features (like ASP) to encourage community participation and collect information. The Web site designed for users of the Memphis paratransit system [a service designed by the Memphis Area Transit Authority to meet the transportation needs of people with disabilities in the Memphis urbanized areas], www.MATAplus.com, asks individuals to document their learned experiences. The site also provides riders with interactive features like faxing a complaint from the Web site (the transit providers require written complaints) and recording complaints and complaint responses. Users of the Web site also may add links and submit articles (Wheat 2002).

Lindsay Stark from Action without Borders agrees that the simplicity of a Web site can add meaning, organization, and added value for those researching a topic or an organization.

> It's again really a spot where non-profit organizations from all over the world can post their events, the resources and services they provide, volunteer positions, and internship positions or job positions that they have available.

> It's a place where individuals for any reason who are interested can come to the site and see what's going on and match whatever they're looking for—if they're looking for events or jobs or whatever. We also have a lot of other resources and different tools for organizations, pointing them in different directions or funding or managing their volunteers or whatever they're looking for. The career center services individuals. We have a kid's and teen's part of the site which is aimed for teachers and children who want to get involved in volunteering or doing good in their communities. The site is currently in Spanish and about to be launched in French and Russian (Stark 2002).

Women's rights advocate Joanne Tosti-Vasey relies on the Internet as a multi-use tool, a phone book, a map, and an encyclopedia. "I use the net surfing to find information that I don't already have on hand—talking points, background information, phone number and address look-up, directions so I can get to places where actions are occurring, etc." (Tosti-Vasey 2002).

Voice-over-IP

Voice-over-IP is defined as:

> The technology used to transmit voice conversation on the Internet using the Internet protocol (IP). Such data network may be the Internet or corporate intranet or managed networks. Used typically by long or local service traditional providers and ISPs that use VoIP. There are several potential benefits to moving voice-over data networks using the IP. First you may save some money. You may also achieve the benefits of managing a voice and data network as one network. Third, if you have IP phones, moves, adds, and

> changes will be easier and cheaper. Fourth, a key attraction of IP telephoning is added integrated new services, including integrated messaging, bandwidth on demand, voice mails, development of voice portals on the Web, and the much simplified setup and tearing down and transferring of phone calls (Newton 810).

It seems that "newer" technologies such as voice-over IP are not as readily embraced by most of the people I interviewed. The delay in acceptance may be attributable to cost, complexity of use, and familiarity with older methods of technology. Many advocates still prefer the traditional telephone to the Internet, even if it means higher cost. Disability advocate Margaret Staton relays on the tried and true stand-by: "Voice-over IP—don't use it. I would rather use my telephone" (Staton 2002).

Digital Photos

Digital photographs are the computerized binary forms of physical images. They are often used instead of film. This allows for easily manipulation, presentation, and transfer of images. These types of photos can quickly share information. Even a digital picture can be worth 1000 words. However, ff the end user cannot access these files the information contained within will be useless. Margaret Staton, a disability activist, recognizes the inability of everyone to access digital photos. "Digital photos—yes. Primarily for my personal use and enjoyment. Many of my friends don't have the 'computing power or ability' to open them" (Staton 2002). Digital photo technology has not yet evolved to a point where it can be widely used by a public that is able to enjoy sending and receiving these as attachments.

Digital Audio (archive or real time stream)

Similar to digital photos, this technology creates the binary form of physical sound. It allows for easy manipulation, presentation, and transfers. As with digital photos, it presents the same constraints for digital audio apply. Margaret Staton also stresses that comfort with existing technology plays a factor in the use of this evolving technology. "Sometimes, would rather read than listen to information" (Staton 2002).

Digital Video (archive or real time stream Web cam)

This format is similar to digital photos, and is the binary form of physical moving images. As with digital photography and audio, it allows for easy manipulation, presentation, and transfers.

Marsha Katz, a disability advocate, acknowledges the usefulness of digital photos but recognizes that sharing communications using "newer" media will not become fully effective until everyone in her organization has the equipment capable of transmitting digital technology.

> Currently we are using primarily e-mail, along with Web pages/digital photos. As we increase our own technical capabilities we will likely add streaming video and audio (although some of that has happened for NDY [Not Dead Yet], it hasn't yet happened for ADAPT [Americans Disabled for Attendant Programs Today). Also, as time goes on and we can get Web cams for everyone in the ADAPT leadership group (maybe 30 clusters of folks nationwide), I expect we will begin to have strategy meetings by videoconferencing instead of teleconferencing (Katz 2002).

Another disability advovate, Margaret Staton points out the technology will only be considered useful if a cross-disability accessible approach is taken: "Video—no. Usually not accessible" (Staton 2002).

Multimedia uses any combination of Voice-over IP, digital photos, digital audio (archive or real time stream), and digital video (archive or real time stream Web cam). Slowly advocates are beginning to experiment with this latest use of the Internet. Human rights activist Lucie Bernier is beginning to incorporate multimedia into her advocacy repertoire. "At the moment, I have never used multimedia for being too costly (broadband). We will be developing some congress archives for a congress in the coming months including digital audio and digital video" (Bernier 2002). Soon, it is projected that these more advanced digital forms of information will be as accessible and achievable for everyone as e-mail is today.

Online Petitions

The next step after sending out e-mails could be to collect signatures from a group of individuals supporting an issue. A petition outlines the position and is a document signed by a large number of people requesting some action from the government or another authority. A petition is an effective way to bring attention to the issue and rally additional support.

One interesting implementation of technology is the free hosting of public online petitions for responsible public advocacy groups offered by PetitionOnline (http://www.petitiononline.com):

> Our free online petition system automatically formats your petition for the Web, hosts the petition here on fast, secure Web servers, and collects, displays, and maintains the all-important petition signatures [. . .] Each petition here is self-contained and functionally complete. [. . .] PetitionOnline

> is like an automatic signature-collecting clipboard, that can be everywhere at once, never gets rained on, never runs out of signature forms, collects every signature instantly, and always has an accurate up-to-the minute count of your progress (Petitiononline.com 2003).

Electronic petitions can be a great way to rally support for any issue. In New York State the legislature has begun to use online technology to gather support of their constituents. In an interview with Senator Rick Dollinger, he expressed his interest in the use of Internet technologies:

> I note that we did use the 'e-petition' for the repeal of the marriage tax penalty in 2000, collected more than 5,000 signatures and presented it to the Senate which passed the legislative change. In addition, in 1999, we did a substantial e-petition process—gathering more than 80,000 signatures—to create a new law that would prevent a convicted felon from changing his name while in prison, in the wake of the disclosure that Kali Poulton's killer was trying to change his name in prison. The use of e-petitions to gather signatures could be extremely valuable in garnering political support for changes in the law. This process could be very effective for disability issues, as it would give disabled persons the ability to sign a petition—for the Medicaid buy-in program, for example—and then present those signatures, with e-mail addresses attached, to elected officials. That should be a very effective tool for political activism" (Dollinger 2001).

However, organization should compare the characteristics offered by the online petition services. Not all online petitions offer the same types of "bells and whistles" for data from the signers.

Before deciding on which online petition to use, advocacy groups should take into consideration the types of useful information-gathering tools the site can offer. An outline of needs can help in the development of the precisely worded petition. Other key issues to consider are how the information will be displayed, validation of signatures, forwarding of information to outside sources, and providing e-mail notification to supporters on the progression of the petition.

> Particularly when the petition has just been posted, the legitimacy/credibility of the petition is strengthened by information about the parties behind it. [. . .] The petition maker inputs the petition text; usually selects the category (political, education, business, animal welfare, etc.) for the petition; and determines the opening and closing petition-posting dates. [. . .] Petition hosting sites offer different features. The petition maker should evaluate several sites to decide which one best advances the petition. [. . .] Petition hosting sites mandate certain signer information for all petitions but may offer additional fields at the petition maker's request. If the site offers additional fields, the petition-maker can define those fields and decide whether they are required or optional. [. . .] In terms of information displayed on the Internet, petition makers usually expect that signers' names will be published, but even that may be at the petition maker or signer's choice. If names are not displayed, then the site generally shows a tally. [. . .] In comparing sites, petition makers should consider whether certain other personal information, such as the signer's occupation and age (in addition to name, city, and state), should be requested and displayed (Paris 2001).

Advocacy In A Box: Promoting Your Organization/Message Through A Paid Internet Communications Firm

If a grassroots organization has a generous communication budget allocation, perhaps looking into a communications firm that specializes in online activism could be a way to delegate the work of office staff or volunteers and at same time give a professional polish to their message. Some organizations have begun to invest in Internet-savvy technology that allows specific targeting of online supporters. Harnessing the power of the Internet can be a key component in any successful campaign. The Internet can recruit individuals who have never organized grassroots campaigns before. Online movements based entirely on word of mouth have sparked a phenomenon called "flash campaigns." "Flash campaigns focus on hot news topics and making use of e-mail chain letters and online petitions. [. . .] Though crises have always boosted the visibility of advocacy groups, cheap online mobilization changes the equation. With the Internet, anyone can be an advocate" (Fairley-Raney 1999).

Traditional grassroots organizations need to find ways to compete with the onset of ad hoc Internet advocacy campaigning. It is uncertain if flash campaigns threaten or encourage established grassroots groups but it seems that every one has caught on to the idea. "However, there's more to going online then throwing a few pages onto a Web site, adding an e-mail address and claiming to be part of the digital revolution. Most businesses have found that Web publishing is a complex, time consuming, and expensive way of promoting their activities" (Thompson 1999).

According to an article from the online edition of The New York Times (June 3, 1999), one example of a flash campaign was developed in the living room of a married couple in California who had little experience in grassroots organizing but who invested $89.50 for a Web

site. The Web site, titled MoveOn.org, began with a hundred e-mail messages and an online petition. In several months the couple had collected 500,000 names and significant donations for congressional candidates who supported their cause. This flash campaign generated extensive media coverage but ironically the majority of people who supported the petition heard about it via the Internet (Fairley-Raney 1999).

The same article in The New York Times (June 3, 1999) describes a pre-existing organization, the Libertarian Party, that began tackling online campaigning issues. In March 1999, people sent a flood of e-mail to the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation, which prompted the dropping of a proposal that too closely monitored customers' financial transactions. After this successful flash campaign, another online campaign was launched, this time with its own URL, stopthewarnow.org. According to the national director of the party, Steve Dasbach, "in the past, the Libertarians had issued press releases stating their positions, but they had no ability to do more until the Internet came along. [. . .] the site provides a phone number or fax number for the local congressional office" (Fairley-Raney 1999).

"Advocacy in a box" is another growing trend used by established organizations to survive. Online activism is going commercial. Internet strategic communication companies that use targeting software can boost support for online campaigning. Even lobbyists have it easier. They can keep track of detailed information from electronic filing services. In 1999, Issue Dynamics Incorporated was recruited by educational groups to bring attention to the renewal for federal subsidies for Internet connections in schools and libraries. Supporters generated 11,000 e-mail messages in support of financing the program. When the traditional media covered the story, traffic to the Web site soared. The outcome had a successful two-fold result. They gathered a list of future supporters—those individuals who were willing to contact their representatives in

support of similar issues. "This potential for immediate mobilization could change the way established advocacy groups work," according to the vice president of Issue Dynamics, Ken Deutsch. "It changes what you can do grassroots work on. [. . .] issues get made in [congressional] committees, and the advocacy world never knows what's coming up until the last-minute. There's no time to create a new Web site and mobilize supporters" (Fairley-Raney 1999).

Other Web sites have tried to focus strictly on activism for profit. The high cost of producing content is one of the biggest obstacles organizations must overcome. Relying on foundation grants is extremely difficult. Hoping to lure activists at the local level with its easy-to-use cybertools, the co-founder of Grassroots.com, David Chiu, says:

> The site [. . .] wants to help politicians and voters talk to one another, increase political participation, empower grassroots movements—All the while making money. [. . .] Apart from offering non-partisan information on candidates in issues, the site will be a place for "two-click activism." [. . .] With the first click, users get information. The second click lets them act on that information, and every news item features a take action link. They can send a letter, create a group, or sign a petition. My aim was to give grassroots groups the tools to become really effective, but when we looked into it, the costs of hardware and software and money required to do public relations were just staggering. Unable to keep up with rising costs, the Center for Governmental Studies sold democracy.net, a voter education Web site, to grassroots.com. By charging candidates for Web hosting advertising and offering fund-raising

> services for local campaigns with small-scale budgets, grassroots.com will finance its "open access" principles (Fairley-Raney 1999).

There is sophisticated advocacy management software available to track the impact of an issue a grassroots organization is addressing. An example of online technologies that would be utilized by a well-funded organization can be found at grassroots.com:

> Grassroots Multiplier (application service provider (ASP)) galvanizes action by your supporters, tracks their responses, and delivers real-time reports on the progress of your advocacy campaign. You'll quickly learn what motivates people to get more involved because the software automatically records their interests and actions into a database accessible to you from anywhere 24 hours a day (Grassroots.com 2001).

Awards for Online Activism

Online agencies are beginning to honor Web sites for governmental and social activism. The awards can be given to groups such as campaigning organizations, lobbying firms, and corporate affairs departments. Awards for net activism are springing up internationally to encourage understanding of the issues with the goal of changing the climate of public opinion.

One example of an online award series that honors Web sites is The Webby Awards, (http://www.webbyawards.com/) presented by The International Academy of Digital Arts and Sciences. The Webby Awards are the leading international honors for achievement in technology and creativity. Web sites are nominated on the basis of content, structure, navigation, visual design, functionality, interactivity, and overall experience. The functionality aspect is composed of three parts. First, there is how well the site works. For example, they check to see if all the links are working. There is a universal component that takes into consideration how well the Web site can be used in another country. This might consider if the Web site is allowed in another country, or if the information will be helpful to others outside of the country in which it originated. Finally accessibility, as it relates to people with disabilities, when used with major Internet browsers, is taken into consideration.

> Universal design, or inclusive design, is a holistic approach to design that recognizes the diversity of users and strives to create environments and products that are usable by the majority of individuals, regardless of age or level of ability. It's designing for the end user, understanding that the end user is not the typical white 25 to 30 year old educated techie who's designing the product (Margolin 1996).

Although mandatory World Wide Web accessibility for people with disabilities was a hard-won victory in the 1996 Telecommunications Act, inaccessibility for Web sites is still a concern.

> A clause requires telecommunication companies to make hardware and software accessible and usable by people with disabilities. [. . .] The realm of computers in the net is also fraught with barriers. Graphical user interfaces are not accessible to blind people, who generally rely on screen readers (the software utility) who will read aloud any text written on the computer, but can't read graphics, like icons [. . .] previous technological innovations for users were initially canceled out by GUIs (Margolin 1996).

"Usability guidelines can substantially improve the matter by making Web sites and intranets support task performance for users with disabilities. [. . .] With current Web design practices, users without disabilities experience three times higher usability than users who are blind or have low vision" (Nielsen 2001). Accessibility is taken seriously and Webby Awards organizers insist that winning Web sites meet international accessibility standards.

The idea for the Webby started in 1996 with the then-new magazine, The Web, from the technology publisher IDG (although activism as a category was not honored until 2000). The publisher stopped publishing The Web in 1998 but continued with the Second Annual Webby Awards. The awards are hosted in San Francisco and have corporate sponsorship from such companies as Intel, Hewlett-Packard, Entertainment Weekly, and Time magazine. This event has drawn international attention from customers and the press and has grown to 27 categories. Each year the awards banquet has a theme. Acceptance speeches are limited to five words or less.

The general public online community is invited to vote on the nominees and determines the winners of The People's Voice Awards by voting for the best sites in each category. The activism category is for political change, social movement, human rights, public education and reform, or revolution. The focus is with groups that primarily organized either on or offline but use their Web site as a way to distribute information and recruit members. During an interview, David Michel Davies, deputy director of The Academy for The Webby Awards and the driving force behind adding the activism award category, said:

> The Web is a tool for cultural and political action. In 1999, we recognized that major organizations such as the ACLU, Environmental Action Network, AdBusters etc. were using the Web in new and innovative ways to facilitate action among their already formed communities. [. . .] We do extensive research, evaluate public support, and contact members of our community when deciding to implement a new category. [. . .] As an organization that seeks to honor and highlight the best practices and people of the Web, it was a natural step (Davies 2001).

Future Outlook for Online Activism

Cyber activism has become a significant political force. Online technologies will evolve and assist individuals and groups that have been underrepresented in the past. For now online activism is building a strong foundation of support on the Internet. It's going to take a lot of work from grassroots organizations to keep up with "flash campaigns" and prevent timely issues from turning into a "flash in the pan."

One-stop shopping for grassroots organizations that can afford it can help outsource the labor-intensive work of keeping the Web site current with issues and attracting members to carry on the mission. As multimedia becomes more user-friendly on Internet browsers, video clips will be included increasingly to help explain an issue or to show current activities of an organization. Many of the online news affiliates use clips to show current events. "The future of community-based online networks will be determined by the manner in which these networks are organized and by the selection of technical interfaces through which these networks will be accessed. These first steps will be crucial in convincing a community that such a network will be inclusive and useful" (Hunka 2002). With eager online communities competing for funds, an agency can be creative when describing its aim. Successful activism campaigns must be able to organize the integration of online and offline activities. While the Internet has become a tool that belongs in every grassroots agency's toolbox, it is most effective when used in conjunction with traditional techniques. Currently, the online advantage is for advocacy groups that are well funded. They have the capability to use the power of both online and offline organizing.

Organizing online is not always "all work and no play." Beginning in July 2002 Flash mobs started making their first appearances. This phenomenon has appeared on every continent so far except Antarctica. Flash mobs are sudden gatherings of people at a predetermined location

and at a predetermined time. People in flash mobs usually perform according to a written script, then disperse quickly. Flash mobs can be for many purposes though most groups consider them a novel, fun activity (Flashmob.com 2003). Similar to organizing an advocacy issue, flash mobs recruit people via Internet Web sites and newsgroups, encouraging hundreds of individuals to congregate at a designated area and remain there for several minutes. Participants are instructed to perform lighthearted acts, such as clapping, singing, or whistling in unison for brief span of time (usually several minutes) and then disband. The locations are common meeting spots such as stores, restaurants, and museums. It will be interesting to see how flash mobs evolve and if this trend continues to parallel the techniques of its online Advocacy cousin.

Advocacy now offers employment opportunities in the private sector. Corporations are starting to recruit a new breed of college graduates. Companies realize that many college advocates are socially aware and in tune with politics around the nation and the world. These companies can tap into these intrinsic resources for their own monetary benefits. Corporate headhunters are looking for people with activist experiences and are willing to pay for their college educations in some cases. The Web site www.idealist.org lists job opening for non-for-profits jobs. John Challenger of the outplacement firm Challenger, Gray & Christmas says some companies look for activist types, especially as internal watchdogs. "It's kind of like hiring the hacker to come in and build the security. If a company knows where its fault lines are, it can be stronger in fixing those areas of weakness and in building strength around them"(Challenger 2003).

The Internet is a tool. Depending on who is distributing or using the information and for what purpose will determine which social problems get resolved, which ones linger, and which ones get ignored. The goal of an advocate is to defend the cause and replace a social injustice

with equality. When advocates begin using online technology to replace traditional advocacy efforts something wonderful begins to emerge. Although not always seamless, effective advocacy has gotten easier with the removal of many barriers, the biggest of these being cost and geographical location. While technology presents new challenges such as platform compatibly and training issues, the ability to organize quicker and reach significantly more peoples offers significant improvement over traditional methods.

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