

APPENDIX 3. WORKING WITH BLOGGERS

Based on Online Politics 101: The Tools and Tactics of Online Political Advocacy Retrieved August 2, 2008 from: <http://www.epolitics.com/2006/07/03/blogs-and-blogger-relations/>

RSS

First, you should have an RSS feed for your site if at all possible. Many bloggers use RSS feed aggregating software or web pages to keep track of articles from many sources from a single place, and having your own feed lets them add your content as well.

Issue monitoring

You should definitely be using blog search tools to keep an eye on your issues and to look out for any mentions of your group, candidate or campaign. Google (email) Alerts can be a great way of finding stories in blogs (and publications) you don't normally follow.

Blogads

If you're promoting an issue or candidate, consider advertising on blogs. Blogads are usually quite inexpensive for the number of people they allow you to reach (though prices on popular blogs have gone up significantly in the past couple of years), and they're putting you before a targeted audience: activists on a red-meat wave-the-bloody-flag political blog, pacifists on a peace-oriented site, enviros on a green energy blog, and so on. Candidates have used blogads for fundraising, advocacy groups to build their email lists, authors and publishers to promote books, and campaigns of all stripes to publicize their positions and to help launch viral campaigns.

Sites like Blogads.com list potential advertising targets by their readership and by cost; you'll usually pay by the week. Pick your blogs carefully and try to balance the breadth versus the selectivity of the their audiences: a popular political site may have more readers, but a site the focuses on your topic may have readers more primed to respond to your ad.

Blogger Relations

Another way to work with bloggers is to contact them directly to promote your issues, just as your press team works with the reporters who cover your beat at major newspapers and the tv networks. Like most writers, bloggers are hungry for fresh topics, particularly if they're among the first (or absolutely the first) to write about them, and a good number will be eager to hear from you.

To contact blogs, you'll need to find them first. blogs.yandex.ru is the best way to start, and Google could be effective as well. Start by searching your topic or topics along with the word "blog" and begin reading sites and keeping notes. Not every blog will have contact info, but grab email addresses where you can. I've found that a big spreadsheet can be very useful for keeping track of sites and for breaking them down by the topics they tend to cover.

Some cautionary notes: before you contact a blog, make sure you've read enough posts to know that the author actually might be open to your story — he or she's going to ignore off-topic pitches and may think you're an idiot for making them. Craft your messages carefully, since you want each email to be a personal contact and not a form letter. ANY time you contact a blogger, write professionally and keep in mind that your message may end up in front of his or her entire audience verbatim.

Also, ALWAYS let bloggers know that you're with a group or campaign. You may get away with hiding your affiliation for a while, but if you're found out, your credibility and that of your campaign will be shot — and often skinned alive in public. Paying bloggers to post stories is completely out of bounds.

Once you get coverage, you'll want to keep track of it, both to help fine-tune your blog-relations project and to justify its existence to higher-ups. Again, Technorati and a spreadsheet can be useful tools. As you work with bloggers, you'll begin to build the kind of journalist-source relationships that good P.R. people treasure. Note that a serious blog-relations project can take an enormous amount of time, as you've probably already guessed.

Niche Political Blogs

A growing consideration in blogger outreach is the continuing strength of niche blogs, often (in the political world) tied to particular cities, states or regions. Niche political and/or issue blogs have often turned out to be fruitful ground for political candidates and issue campaigns alike — their audiences may be small, but they're by-definition HIGHLY targeted. And stories in niche political sites may climb the communications food chain and get much wider distribution.

